

University of Alberta

The Regional Roots of the Executive Branch: An Analysis of Regional
Representation Within Recent UK Cabinet Committees

By

Tyson Chase Brown

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts (Honors)

In

Political Science

Department of Political Science
Tyson Brown
Supervised by Dr. Feodor Snagovsky
Spring 2024
Edmonton, Alberta

ABSTRACT

Cabinet committees are critical components of the executive in the United Kingdom. This paper examines regional representation in UK cabinet committees by analyzing cabinet committee assignments and how the different regions of the UK are represented. Employing a dataset of four cabinets from four different first ministers in the past decade, I examine all twelve regions of the United Kingdom and highlight those that have been either underrepresented or overrepresented within cabinet committees based on the population of each region and the distribution of the governing party caucus across these areas. Analyzing the regions that MPs on committees originate and how many committees they serve on reveals how they are represented within this executive structure. Tracking the composition and evolution of populations within regions and seat share of the governing party over the past ten years reveals those regions which receive more representation than others and provides contributions to analysis on chronic underrepresentation within executives for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, contributing to the ongoing debate regarding devolution and the role of the executive in representing these regions. This analysis highlights an often-neglected yet critical decision-making structure within the UK government and attempts to trace the regional roots that underpin recent compositions of the executive branch.

Acknowledgements

As I approach the end of my journey through the exhilarating challenge of undergraduate studies, numerous individuals deserve recognition for their assistance in developing this project. First, I sincerely thank Dr. Feodor Snagovsky for his time, resources, stewardship, and guidance as I tackled the challenges of writing this thesis. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Kenny Ie from the University of British Columbia for helping me grasp the subject material for this project. Thanks to Dr. Greg Anderson and Dr. Rob Aitken for being memorable mentors and their unmatched ability to illuminate how students can grow academically, professionally, and personally. To the honours cohort of 2023-2024, it has been a fantastic few years getting to know everyone, sharing ideas, and collectively completing our projects in stride - thank you for being excellent peers to work with.

Three individuals, in particular, have been beacons of light in my academic development throughout my life. I would like to dedicate this thesis to Jane Gusdal, Russ McBride and Gail Mastel, three teachers who, throughout my educational endeavours, have gone out of their way in an (often) thankless profession to push me beyond my comfort zone as a scholar and have ignited my passion for pursuing an undergraduate degree within the humanities. They have assisted in forming the pillars of my intellectuality, writing skills, and desire to learn everything there is to know about the world - and more.

Finally, I want to express my sincerest love and gratitude to my family. Their time, commitment, support, and patience have helped me become the student I am today. They have laid the foundation for my success in education, employment, and life's fantastic journeys.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>LIST OF FIGURES</i>	v
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY	5
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	17
ANALYSIS	22
<u>Regional Representation by Population</u>	22
<u>Representation based on Party Seat Share</u>	27
<u>Geographical and Caucus Representation</u>	31
DISCUSSION	33
CONCLUSION	42
<i>REFERENCES</i>	46

List of Figures

Figure One: Over/Under for Geographical Representation Within Each Region 2014-2024.....**23**

Figure Two: Over/Under for Geographical Representation 2014-2024 (By Ministry).....**26**

Figure Three: Over/Under for Each Region Based on Conservative Caucus' Regional
Distribution 2014-2024.....**28**

Figure Four: Over/Under for Each Region Based on Conservative Caucus' Regional
Distribution 2014-2024 (By Ministry)

30

INTRODUCTION

In 1975, former United Kingdom Minister Richard Crossman began publishing his memoirs that chronicled his time serving as a cabinet minister within the executive. In his recollection of his time in office, the politician cited instances where the regional interests of members of parliament (MPs) arose in cabinet committee proceedings, exemplifying how these institutions were avenues for other ministers to bring the concerns of their constituents to the executive. Although nearly fifty years have passed since their original publication, Crossman's diaries provide critical insight into Westminster institutions and how UK politicians represent their respective regions in executive decision-making structures. The insight the former minister offers inspires quantitative research that explores how the UK population is represented by population across the state's twelve regions and how these areas are represented in cabinet committees based on the number of cabinet committee assignments allotted to ministers from the different regions.

Quantifying how regional interests are reflected in cabinet committees is challenging due to cabinet confidentiality. Given the secrecy of cabinets, this analysis method makes it difficult to unpack and scrutinize executive institutions within the UK. Cabinet confidentiality, as a critical pillar of Westminster politics, hinders political scientists from peering into the functions and relationships within executives—specifically, cabinet committees. This study attempts to overcome this hurdle and provide a more nuanced understanding of regional representation within UK cabinet committees by employing a dataset consisting of MPs from the past four UK ministries (except for Elizabeth Truss's) that examines their region of origin, how many committee assignments they are allocated, and how reflective the assignments are of that region's inhabitants in the context of the broader UK population.

There has been limited research on regional representation in Westminster cabinet committees. Scholars have recently begun quantifying cabinet committee composition based on measurable attributes. Ie (2021) has built off of existing scholarship to study the influence a minister's gender and the region they are from within Canada has on ministerial influence within the cabinet. By constructing a dataset that examines the allocation of cabinet committee assignments and assessing cabinet committee membership based on regional representation, the author highlights how regional representation is expressed within cabinet committees. This leads to the question: How are regions of the UK geographically represented via cabinet committee assignments, and how does the distribution of the governing party's caucus across all regions impact geographical representation in committee assignments? Analyzing and quantifying cabinet committee assignments and tracking the regions that UK ministers belong to can provide insight into the degrees of regional diversity within cabinet committees. By constructing a dataset based on the past four ministries in the UK, this study examines the allocation of committee assignments based on geographical representation and the impacts that the distribution of the governing caucus across the UK has on geographical representation. Furthermore, this study assesses these components separately to illustrate how the twelve regions are represented at face value based on these two metrics. This study plans to explain the disparities or levels of over/underrepresentation between different regional areas by analyzing these variables.

This study is critical for expanding existing literature exploring how cabinet committees serve as decision-making arenas representing the broader UK public. These are just one executive structure within the broader executive body that makes critical decisions that impact the entire UK population. The posed research question attempts to gain insight into some

mechanisms that cause over and under-representation, subsequently granting the reader access to why disparities exist regarding representation within particular regions. The research also exemplifies how the constituents of semi-autonomous regions, including Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, are represented within the executive, contributing to ongoing debates surrounding devolution in the UK.

I hypothesize that caucus distribution across the UK explains why regions concerned with devolution, including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, experience lower levels of geographical representation; there is a lack of ministers from the governing party that get elected to these regions, and this subsequently may explain why they are chronically underrepresented based on committee assignments. Furthermore, based on the UK's traditional cabinet structure of including more ministers from Southern areas of the country and closer to London and core hub cities, I also hypothesize that those ministers closer to the southern UK and London (not regarding London itself, as the city has traditionally been dominated by the Labour Party which is outside the research's focus) are granted more positions within cabinet committees. It would make more sense for first ministers to select their cabinet and form committees with ministers from more densely populated areas; executives are decision-making arenas that receive high degrees of the public spotlight. Thus, more ministers from constituencies with higher population levels may have a greater chance of serving on one or more committees, given that these areas have more voters.

To test my hypothesis, analyzing cabinet committees across time is critical to assess how regionalism is reflected within cabinet committees. The study can exemplify whether regionalism has evolved or devolved by analyzing four cabinets from the past decade - one instance of committee membership for each first minister under Cameron, May, Johnson, and

Sunak. This approach allows regional representation to be assessed across different committees under other first ministers with differing leadership dynamics and cabinet compositions over time. Numerous factors influence why first ministers structure their committees in a particular way. Thus, this study will avoid the normative and political motivations underpinning committee assignments and focus more on the outward geographical representational aspect and the impact of the governing party's caucus distribution on this metric.

The author found that the semi-autonomous regions, including Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, experience chronic levels of underrepresentation by population based on the distribution of committee assignments across the UK. However, measuring representation by examining the distribution of the governing party caucus revealed more balanced levels of representation due to a significant absence of governing party MPs from these regions between 2014 and 2024. For eight of the twelve regions analyzed, cabinet committee assignments allocated to ministers from different regions more closely reflected the population of these regions as compared to the UK as a whole. Chronic levels of overrepresentation based on population were seen between 2014 and 2024 in the South East and between 2016 and 2024 in East of England. Apart from the semi-autonomous regions under study, examining representation based on the distribution of committee assignments and the distribution of the governing party caucus across all regions was not as reflective as committee assignments by population. The data suggests that in this study, the distribution of the conservative caucus across the regions was not a direct explanation for all levels of over or underrepresentation by population.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

This chapter will discuss key theoretical concepts and literature relevant to the study of regional representation in Westminster cabinet committees. Engaging with existing scholarly works that have shaped collective understandings of representation within the United Kingdom's cabinet committees assists in the ongoing exploration to discern patterns, trends, and debates that have shaped our understanding of executives. Ie (2021) has explored regional representation under Canada's past three Prime Ministers: Justin Trudeau, Stephen Harper, and Paul Martin. His insights raise questions about the role of regional representation in cabinets in other cabinet committees in Westminster systems. Cabinet committees are critical executive bodies that "[coordinate]...the governmental policy-making process" (Barbieri and Vercesi 2013, 527). This study will build off existing scholarship by quantifying and analyzing regional representation within the UK and discussing trends and patterns regarding representation within this critical piece of the executive branch.

Regional representation within the United Kingdom refers to the advocacy and recognition of distinct regional identities that require representation on different political levels. Given the diverse social and political landscape across the UK, Garside (2000) defines regional representation as "a collective consciousness that can be used as an organising platform for political and administrative form based upon cultural affinity" (141). Here, the author unpacks how the different cultural elements that underpin a need for diverse representation of interests based on regions. Although the term relates to historical, cultural, and religious factors, this study will focus on regional representation by assessing how the population is represented within UK cabinet committees. The UK has twelve regions, including Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Although these three regions have their parliamentary bodies for their respective

jurisdictions, they still have officials elected to the parliament of 650 elected representatives. Thus, exploring how all regions have been represented within the UK executive over the past decade is still necessary. In this study, regionalism refers to an MP's specific constituency and the composition of cabinet committees to reflect the population. Specifically, this study will look at traditionally underrepresented regions and see if first ministers have attempted to address regional disparities within the cabinet. Keating and Wilson (2014) offer an alternative definition of regional representation, noting it as a form of political recognition that enables elected officials to meet the country's diverse needs (37). The UK's population is scattered broadly across the country, which is the cause for potential regional cleavages and differences between geographical areas, whether urban-rural or North-South (Fai & Tomlinson 2023, 25). Based on the geographical and population differences across the country's landscape, regional interests are a national concern that the executive body should reflect. Even though the proceedings of cabinet committees are private, Gregory (1980) argues there is still a chance for voices across the UK to make their way into this executive body and reflect the needs of a diverse population (69). The different cleavages and divides across the UK signify a need to ensure at least outward regional representation on cabinet committees to reflect the diverse interests across an evolving state.

Frameworks exist to analyze the composition of cabinet committees based on ministerial affiliation to regions within the UK. Curtin (2015) has assessed how regionalism is critical in the selection and projected image of cabinet committee systems in federal systems, especially in Canada. There is a lack of analysis on the role of regionalism within UK cabinet committees, and building off of Curtin and Ie's analysis can shed insight into the interplay between regionalism and committee membership within the state. Smiley (1977) has demonstrated that regional representation within Canadian executive bodies is a mechanism for intrastate federalism and

directing regional-based interests through executives (78). Conti (2019) has written extensively on the role of regionalism in UK institutions and has traced the evolution of representation within the cabinet over time, highlighting that arranging institutions to represent the public is a critical component of democracy (255). In the broader debate on representation in executives and how a minister's presence on a committee can impact public perceptions of executive politics, Ie (2021) argues how cabinets are normative and symbolic reflections of representation, building on Conti's analysis of representation to illustrate why assessing who receives cabinet committee assignments is critical for understanding how the make-up of these committees outwardly represent the UK.

There is an absence of scholarship that explores regional representational disparities in the United Kingdom's executive. To the author's knowledge, a comprehensive breakdown of committee assignments based on an MP's region within the UK has yet to be constructed and analyzed. The first step to unpacking how regional interests are reflected within UK executives is to study how they are represented within cabinet committee structures. In Westminster parliamentary institutions, no quota or accountability system within the executive ensures that voices from every region are heard within cabinet committees, and prime ministers are the main architects of distributing committee assignments and structuring their cabinets (Ie 2019, 466). Voter choice during elections, which determines the composition of the legislative branch, could be a direct cause for underrepresentation. A region can be deemed underrepresented if no MPs from the governing party have been elected to that region. Stolz & Linhart (2022) argue that a lack of representation in the UK can hinder a governing body as it seeks to "connect meaningfully with English voters, thus adding to grievance and political disenchantment in the dominant nation of the UK" (479). While the current UK system suggests it is up to voters to

address this disparity, the idea of a region receiving executive representation based only on a member winning the election within their riding raises concerns that representational inequality could appear where regions do not elect governing party members.

One particular instance of such a disparity occurred during the 1997 general election, and Mitchell and Gallagher (2005) highlight that caucus distribution can lead to underrepresentation in both parliament and the executive, resulting in inequalities regarding the popular vote and proportional representation (161). They argue that when the governing party in 1997 did not win a seat in Scotland or Wales, “the Jenkins Commission described such outcomes as a form of geographical ‘apartheid in the electoral outcome’” (161). The authors discuss that a lack of ministerial representation in semi-autonomous regions is a source of tension for many who feel levels of chronic underrepresentation. This problem again reiterates how an absence of elected officials from particular regions in an executive is a challenge due to first ministers being in charge of structuring committees as they choose (Ie 2019, 466).

The channels from voter’s candidate preference, to elected representative, and finally to cabinet minister is quite an intricate process within Westminster executives. Along the way, many voters may be underrepresented from particular regions if their preferred candidate is not elected to the legislature. Mitchell and Gallagher (2005) unpack how caucus distribution across the country is a critical metric for observing representational disparities across the country. These levels of representation are not strictly limited to the legislative branch in the UK Parliament, as one of the only avenues into the executive is to be a member of the governing party elected to a constituency. The authors also highlight the importance of observing how caucus distribution spans across the different regions and the necessity of observing how many committee assignments are granted to members of specific regions (161). Thus, this phenomenon underpins

why this study focuses on caucus distribution across the UK and its associated impacts on regional representation.

Another challenge that stands in the way of exploring regional representation within cabinet committees is the stipulation of cabinet confidentiality. Cabinet committees are virtually invisible to the public, given that legal barriers only allow the UK to unseal some cabinet documents after thirty years (d'Ombrain 2004, 332). Thus, an external approach to analyzing their composition is one of the only feasible methods for understanding how regions are represented within these executive institutions (Ie 2019, 467). How each minister approaches their post in the cabinet based on their regional ties largely remains a mystery, as scholars and the public have just begun peering into these structures and the MPs the committees comprise. Regional representation is one measure of executive accountability and connects strongly to ideas surrounding executive accountability to the population. Ie (2021) argues that “regional representation in cabinet appointments is primarily symbolic and normative rather than a substantive way of empowering regional interests” (621). In a state as diverse as the United Kingdom, with particular interests within regions including Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, regional representation is one method to ensure diverse voices are established and heard within cabinet committees, as scholars are yet to have access to current documentation from the executives that demonstrates how cabinet committees reflect regional representation (Laffin & Thomas 1999, 97).

Another motivation for exploring cabinet committee assignment structure is to illustrate disparities regarding regional representation within the executive branch and raise awareness for the general public to understand how their elected officials represent their interests beyond the legislative branch. Pearce et al. (2008) highlight the importance of evolving the ongoing

discourse regarding representation within Westminster institutions, noting that “citizens might slowly become more aware of the powers and influence exercised at the regional level...[c]ultivating a more effective form of regional government in England” (460). The authors unpack how governance and decision-making still extend beyond the scope of the general public’s eye, and more insight or reflection into cabinet committee structures and how the UK population is represented within the executive is necessary for providing a comprehensive and digestible analysis of how the population is represented within this structure. This acknowledgement is a way for the general public to understand better the institutions around them and how they can serve to reflect their interests. Highlighting potential regional disparities or areas of underrepresentation illustrates shortcomings where policymakers or constitutional scholars can collaborate to formulate solutions to challenges regarding underrepresentation, which Garside (2000) argues can be beneficial for the UK economy and social cohesion of the country (166). Ensuring the voices of the UK population are heard within the intricate and confidential nature of executives is an essential component of a healthy democracy. Awareness of representation within government institutions is critical for social development and ensuring the general public has a nuanced understanding of the institutions that reflect their interests (Hazel, 2006).

Some qualitative research has revealed that a minister’s relationship with their constituency can impact their behaviour within the executive, particularly within cabinet committees. Richard Crossman’s diary was one of the first detailed accounts of the life of a cabinet minister since the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945. In his writings, he describes region-specific policy issues debated by the cabinet, with MPs from particular regions impacting their position on the executive’s challenges (Crossman 1975; Theakston 2003, 20). As

a diary, it is difficult to substantiate the validity of many of these claims due to the challenge of cabinet confidentiality. However, the insight ministers have provided into the inner workings of executive politics, including Crossman, reveal that regional interests can be a source of concern for ministers serving on committees. Gregory (1980) asserts that “a minister with a strong constituency interest may himself be among the decision-makers...[they] may sometimes be involved in taking a ‘constituency specific’ policy decision” (69). This deduction was based on Crossman’s accounts of cabinet proceedings, and analyzing the observations within his writing is a more qualitative approach to exploring regional representation within cabinet committees.

Similarly, Grube and Killick (2021) explore through firsthand interviews with UK cabinet members how contemporary cabinets and cabinet committees within the UK have become increasingly centralized, cultivating an environment prone to the perils of groupthink. These analyses suggest that there are subjective agendas that ministers bring into executive decision-making structures as agents seeking influence, power, and avenues to channel interests within executive politics. Interviews conducted by the scholars also suggest that the convergence of ideas in tight-knit groups can result in an inner circle of influence that can impact policy outcomes (227). These qualitative sources, taken together with Crossman’s accounts of regional interests, suggest that regional interests matter in a decision-making arena with a small number of members. Both quantitative and qualitative methods should be considered in the ongoing debate to understand regional representation within the executive. However, scholars should proceed with caution due to the often politicized nature of this form of documentation due to selection bias and historical accuracy (Lustick 1996, 605). It is essential to consider these reflections when addressing how regional and constituency interests impact decision-making at the federal level within the country.

As regional representation within cabinet committees is only one measure that exemplifies how the UK represents its population's diverse needs, it is essential to unpack why scholars analyzing the UK would specifically examine the merits of a more regionally diverse cabinet. Executive institutions serve as substantive and symbolic beacons for implementing policy, exemplifying a broad array of ministers across different regions in the UK, an essential component of the "mirror" model of politics, which reflects the population who brought that government into power (Conti, 2019). Within this model, the composition of legislatures and other parliamentary institutions reflects the socio-demographic nature of society. In this case, structuring cabinet committees to reflect the composition of the UK outwardly is a way through which citizens can symbolically interact with the executives.

Since the 1990s, with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), and the Northern Ireland Assembly, there has been a significant shift in the UK's constitutional framework and a call from citizens to see broader representation within government (Garside 2000, 139). The UK has historically experienced a push for greater devolution and regional autonomy, particularly in these three regions. To address regional disparities and foster inclusivity, cabinet committees may include members representing different regions, providing a platform for diverse perspectives. However, there remains an ongoing debate on regional devolution and the role of localized governments for many regions instead of relying on representation for these regions within the UK legislature and executives (Mackinnon 2015, 47). This approach ensures that the decision-making process considers the challenges and opportunities faced by various parts of the country. Some Scottish MPs' earliest positions in the cabinet were symbolic and substantial acts of devolution that suggested a more

inclusive level of integration for the region and the broader UK executive (Keating and Loughlin 2001, 7).

As cabinet committees are avenues for implementing policies across all diverse regions, the first positions obtained by ministers from traditionally underrepresented regions were symbolic acts that showed a new dynamic level of integration. Dingle and Miller (2005) trace the history of devolution and the 1997 referendum that resulted in a “quasi-federal arrangement for the United Kingdom” (96). Here, the scholars highlight that while regional autonomy remains a highly politicized and contentious issue, and conversations on constitutional reform for the UK continue to reflect the diverse needs of all regions, cabinet committees and the executive are still an avenue for outward representation for these regions, despite the volatility. The representation of different regions in cabinet committees reflects a commitment to recognizing the unique governance structures and policy priorities associated with devolved governments, contributing to a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to policymaking at the highest levels of government (Mackinnon 2015, 48).

Advocates of devolution argue that enhanced regional representation at the cabinet level is essential for ensuring a more nuanced and responsive governance approach that considers the unique needs and aspirations of individual nations and regions (Bradbury 2008, 5). This push reflects a broader recognition of the diverse socio-political landscapes across the UK. It seeks to address regional disparities by involving regional representatives directly in high-level policy discussions. The evolution of the UK's constitutional structure, which politicians and policymakers continue scrutinizing to ensure regional voices in the cabinet, underscores an ongoing commitment to fostering a more inclusive and regionally sensitive approach to governance (Crawford 2010, 89).

Tracing back through archives into past cabinets, the author can collect and track the membership of cabinet committee members and the specific region of the United Kingdom from which the MPs originate. Taking four cabinet committees between 2014-2024, the author can analyze, assess, and reflect on how regionalism is observed in UK cabinet committees. Borgatti and Everett (2000) have used network theory to determine coreness and centrality, assessing the level of connections a minister has within a network and how prominent that minister is based on their connections, respectively. Ie (2019) employed a similar study and is one of the first scholars to utilize network theory within cabinet committee systems. Using this system, scholars assess the number of assignments or “ties” between ministers to exemplify representation or level of influence within cabinet committees. Kerby (2009) has assessed determinants of ministerial appointment in Westminster institutions and has worked to begin quantifying metrics on how ministers are appointed. Ward et al. (2011) have also made progress in applying network theory to political science by mapping influence within decision-making structures and illustrating how connections within hierarchical structures can influence decision-making (257). Assessing how ministers are connected across executive portfolios and their regional ties is one of the only tools political scientists have to evaluate influence within the confidential executive institutions academics have seldom explored.

Network theory is critical to the more significant challenge of analyzing cabinet committees externally. It is one of the only methodological adaptations available for assessing a minister's ties to others and their influence within committee structures (Ie 2021, 120). Although network theory can highlight the number of total ties a minister has within cabinet committees, it is only a “strong indicator of potential influence” (Ie, 2019) within these systems. Thus, highlighting the overlap of ministers across committees is not an explicit measure of more or less

influence within cabinet committees; it is one theoretical measure of those members that sit across numerous committees and could have subsequent higher degrees of ministerial influence. Thus, tracing the number of committee assignments ministers have out of a total of possible assignments and comparing it to regions and party membership is a feasible method for exemplifying representation, borrowing heavily from ideas stemming from network theory to understand these confidential institutions. This study will employ a similar method elaborated in the methods chapter. This adapted system is one of the only available theories to measure regional representation in cabinet committees. The ongoing challenge of unravelling the intricacies of the executive continues as cabinet confidentiality stands as a hindrance to academics.

The UK is not the only country that experiences regional cleavages that challenge traditional executive structures or cabinet committee assignments. Lupul (1981) discusses that in Canada, there were no official mechanisms in the Privy Council Office or Prime Minister's Office to ensure that multiculturalism was reflected in the executive (135). The author highlights that multiculturalism as a form of representation and plurality of voices within the cabinet was never mandated, and there were no systems to ensure a broad array of voices were present at the decision-making table. This challenge exemplifies how many Westminster institutions suffer from ensuring regional representation across the executive and illustrates a gap where traditional institutions may be falling short in addressing the diverse needs of the public.

The following research plans on to tie all of these components that assess representation in cabinet committees and apply them to committee membership. Mackie and Hogwood (1984) argue that in these decision-making structures, all ministers have a role in “defining the issues and narrowing the options for the full cabinet” (298). Here, one’s position within cabinet and the

number of committee assignments they have can influence policy outcomes. The authors also discuss that informal relationship dynamics and normative behaviours through committee membership influence the proceedings of cabinet committee meetings (297). Thus, tracing individual committee assignments is necessary for highlighting regions that could have higher levels of influence.

The available literature on cabinet committees and regional interests exemplifies an area that needs to be expanded on: how committee membership relates to regional representation. Committee compositions must continue to be examined as to how they reflect on broader populations in Westminster institutions. The following sections discuss a methodological system for analyzing committee members and how findings contribute to debates on representation and devolution within the United Kingdom.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to analyze the relationship between regional representation in UK cabinet committees based on two key factors: population by region and regional caucus distribution for the governing party. These two factors are critical for understanding how the population within each region of the UK is reflected through committee assignments. For the following analysis, data from four cabinet committees under four different prime ministers were collected between 2014 and 2024 to exemplify how regional representation is demonstrated within cabinet committees based on the number of committee assignments for each minister. Two main independent variables are being considered for this study. First, the population share of each region as a percentage of the total population exemplifies how each region of the UK is represented by its population. Second, the other independent variable under analysis is the distribution of the conservative caucus from each region as it relates to the total number of members. Population size is measured as the total population of each region. At the same time, regional caucus distribution is operationalized as the percentage of conservative MPs in the caucus that come from each region. While political, strategic, and age factors contribute to committee membership, this study is more concerned with providing a snapshot of the ideal geographical and caucus distribution modes of representation in cabinet committee structures based on these metrics across different governments. These variables form the basis for exploring how sums of the UK population have traditionally been over or underrepresented, and including the party seat share exemplifies a piece of the political explanation for why cabinets are composed the way they are among the state's different regions.

The dependent variable under study is the number of committee assignments granted to ministers on cabinet committees. The number of committee assignments refers to the number of

committee positions ministers hold. Each committee assignment represents an opportunity for regional representatives to participate in the government's decision-making processes and influence policy outcomes. This analysis focuses on understanding how variations in population size and caucus distribution relate to variations in the number of committee assignments across regions and highlighting any disparities against what would be considered within an expected range based on the independent variables. These insights can raise further questions about political equity, democratic governance, and power allocation within Westminster executive structures.

One cabinet for each government was surveyed for David Cameron, Elizabeth May, Boris Johnson, and Rishi Sunak. Options for selecting cabinet committees to survey were complex based on scarcely available archived data. Internet archives of cabinet committee assignments only extend back to February 2014, which formed the basis for the first ministry surveyed under the Cameron government (Gov.UK, 2024). The committee assignments surveyed were selected around one year after each government was elected. Sunak's government in February 2024 was surveyed to provide a contemporary snapshot of current cabinet committee assignments. Given former Prime Minister Elizabeth Truss's short tenure in office, her ministry was excluded from this study. The dataset includes the constituencies of all MPs on cabinet committees. It tracks each of their committee assignments, as made available from gov.uk, a United Kingdom public sector information website. Each member's region is also tracked on the UK Parliament website, which the author used to collect all of the data on what region each MP's constituency falls under (UK Parliament, 2024). All twelve regions of the UK are included: the South East, South West, London, North East, North West, East of England, West Midlands, East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Census data

was available through Eurostat and Statista, which estimated the population levels of each region at the time of each ministry (Eurostat 2024; Clark 2024). Archived election records from gov.uk contain data on how many MPs from the ruling party are in each region, which is conservative for all four governments. As the study is concerned with modelling regional representation based on an MP's connection to their constituency, only committee assignments granted to elected MPs who represent a constituency were included. Members appointed by the Crown, from the Queen's Council or other representatives not tied to a region through the electoral process were not considered.

Each region's percent share of the total UK population was estimated to compare the number of assignments ministers have from different regions of the UK and how more ministers from some regions obtain more committee assignments. Each region's population was calculated as a percentage of the total UK population and compared to committee assignments across the regions or the regional distribution of the conservative caucus. The same system was used to calculate the distribution of the caucus regionally. All governing party MPs from each region were tallied and divided by the total conservative caucus in the parliament. These calculations were done for one cabinet each under Cameron, May, Johnson and Sunak.

While there are numerous factors to control for why cabinet committee assignments may be preferentially given to some ministers over others, this study is more concerned with highlighting over and underrepresentation within UK cabinet committees based on the number of committee assignments and mapping where these assignments are coming from on a regional level. The dataset created by the author is one of few attempts at constructing a contemporary model of how regional representation occurs within cabinet committees in the UK in the past decade.

Once the calculations for the percent population share or distribution of the governing caucus were completed for each region, they were compared to the percentage of committee assignments from each region and expressed as a percentage of how far they were from the ideal target under each metric. For example, if one region's population is 14% of the entire UK population and the total committee assignments from that region are 16% of the total number of committee assignments, the region could be said to be overrepresented by 2%. Chapter four discusses the formulas and the subsequent analysis from each region and government in more detail.

Two formulas were used to illustrate levels of regional representation within the cabinet committees. Subtracting the region's estimated population as a percentage of the total UK population by the percentage of cabinet assignments of MPs from each region is one method of measuring over or underrepresentation. The following formula exemplifies the calculation used for representation based on specified region and population for each of the four cabinets surveyed for this study:

$$N = \left(\frac{\text{Committee_Assignments}_\text{Region}_i}{\text{Total_Committee_Assignments}} - \frac{\text{Population}_\text{Region}_i}{\text{Total_UK_Population}} \right) \times 100$$

Where:

- “N” is a total value expressed as a percentage, representing the net difference between the committee assignments from a specific region and the estimated population percentage of that region within the UK. This value is expressed as an “over/under” percentage.

Other than solely observing geographical representation according to the population of each region and the subsequent number of committee assignments from each region, subtracting the region's estimated population as a percentage of the total UK population by the distribution of the governing party's caucus across the UK is another method for forming a nuanced approach to understanding regionalism within UK cabinet committees. Examining the

conservative caucus distribution across all regions can illustrate the disparities within representation by population. The following formula exemplifies another calculation used to exhibit representation based on the distribution of the conservative caucus across the regions while considering committee assignments from each region:

$$N = \left(\frac{\text{Committee_Assignments_Region}_i}{\text{Total_Committee_Assignments}} - \frac{\text{Conservative_MP}_s\text{Region}_i}{\text{Total_Conservative_Members}} \right) \times 100$$

Where:

- “ N ” represents the ideal or desired balance between the representation of a specific region in committee assignments and its representation among Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs).

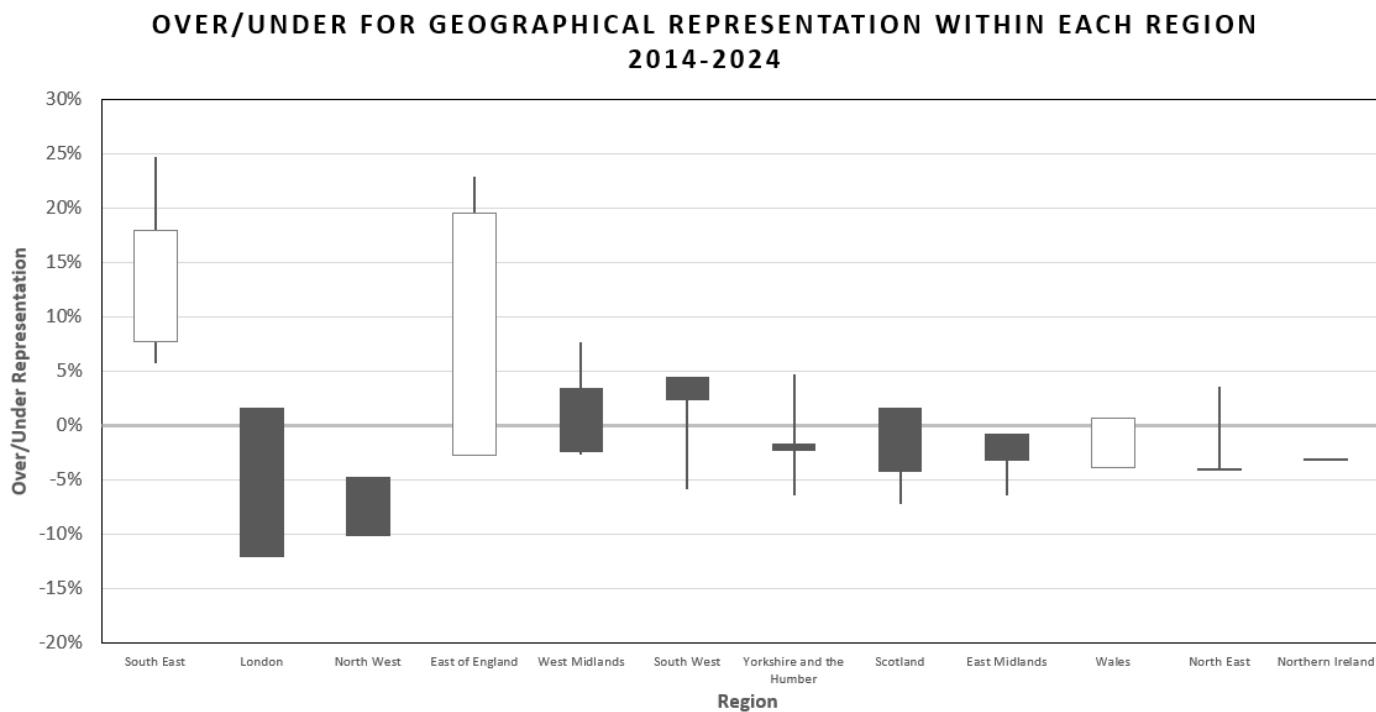
Thus, the formula grants the ability to exemplify how committee assignments are assigned based on the number of conservative MPs from each region, expressed as an “over/under” percentage. It calculates the net percentage difference between the proportion of committee assignments from a region and the proportion of conservative MPs from that region within the total conservative membership.

ANALYSIS

Regional Representation by Population

The first formula reveals definite overall changes regarding geographical representation across committee assignments. First, the percent range of over and underrepresented regions has increased significantly over the past decade. “Range” is the difference between the minimum and maximum values under each ministry within the dataset. The range of over/underrepresentation within the Cameron committee assignments surveyed from 2014 was 12% and drastically shifted under the past three leaders, where the range has been broader. Under Elizabeth May in 2016, the range was 33%, Johnson’s was 31%, and Sunak’s was 32%. The data exemplifies that committee assignments used to be more reflective of the UK’s population by region under the Cameron government but have transformed with more regions being outliers compared to 2014. The disparity in representation under the last three governments has collectively been 2.66 times greater than the Cameron government. This data illustrates that the range across the ministries jumped between 2014 and 2016, and has held at high levels since.

On a regional level, numerous outliers reflect a more considerable disparity than the ideal percent of representation by population. The following OHLC candlestick plot exemplifies the over/underrepresentation in UK regions in the past decade under four governments, illustrating the overall change between the Cameron government to the Sunak government, and can show the net change in representation in the past four years:

Figure One:

Each line or “stick” represents the total range of over/underrepresentation over the four governments surveyed. A white bar shows a total positive change (i.e. a net increase in representation between 2014 and 2024) to exemplify how geographical representation in cabinet committees has evolved. A grey bar shows a net negative change (i.e. a net decrease in representation between 2014 and 2024) in the level of representation between the Cameron and Sunak governments. Most regions surveyed over the period fall within 10% above or below zero for geographical representation. With nine of the twelve regions falling within this range, this snapshot of geographical representation under all governments suggests that geographical representation is nearly reflected plus or minus ten percent in most regions. However, there are some outliers in the graph that deserve attention.

First, the South East averages being overrepresented in cabinet committees under all governments, with the highest being 25% under the May government. The other overrepresented

outlier that stands out is East of England, peaking at 23% overrepresentation under the Johnson government. These two regions have a higher-than-average population compared to all others. However, the number of committee assignments within those regions is significantly higher than expected according to the populations of the two regions. The regions suffering from representational disparity according to their population are London and the North West. London was overrepresented in the Cameron government by 2%, but it dropped under each government until it was geographically underrepresented by 12% under the Sunak government.

Northern Ireland and the North East are other regions that deserve statistical attention within this particular analysis. Northern Ireland comprises, on average, three percent of the UK's total population, yet in the past decade, no ministers from the region have sat on any cabinet committee and, subsequently, have not obtained any assignments. This phenomenon is because no conservative MPs were elected within the region under all four governments surveyed for the study. Thus, its level of underrepresentation has sat stagnant at -3% over the past ten years. Regarding representation by population, there have been no changes in Northern Ireland to the level of geographical representation under any government. Over the past four years, the North East has been underrepresented by -4% each year, except under the Johnson government, where they were overrepresented by 4%. Only two ministers from the region have ever gained the privilege of sitting in cabinet and obtaining the committee assignments that were surveyed.

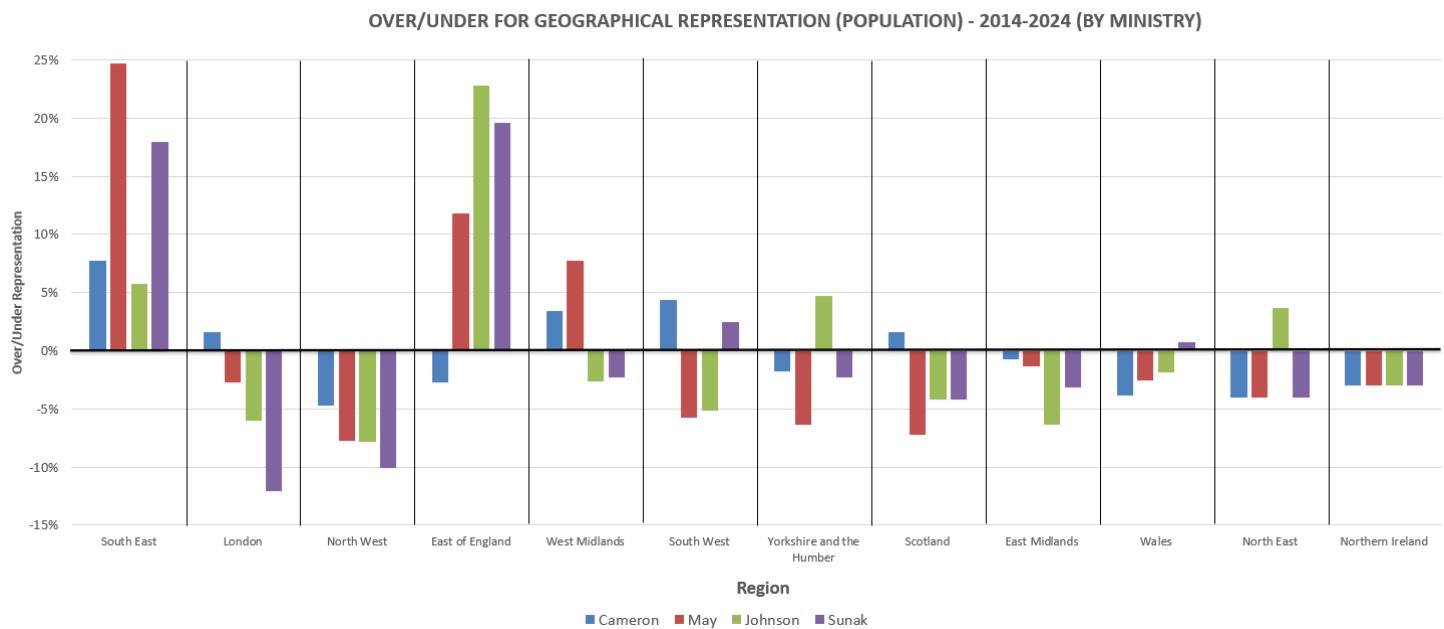
Under three of the four governments surveyed in the past decade, seven percent of the UK's population (correlating to over four million people), composed of Northern Ireland and the North East, has not had an MP from their region sit on a cabinet committee, which results in a lack of regional perspectives MPs could bring to committee discussions on policies that impact their constituents. Furthermore, there has been no net positive change for either of these regions

in addressing the regional disparity, except under the Johnson government, which saw the North East being overrepresented by 4%. Again, this is only based on population alone, and the following analysis will provide a more comprehensive overview of why these regions have not had elected officials make it into vital decision-making channels of the executive in the past ten years.

Although it falls just inside the range of being underrepresented by 10%, aside from Northern Ireland, the North West has suffered underrepresentation under all governments. This region has lacked geographical representation over the past decade yet constitutes the third-highest population in the UK, which has held steady at approximately eleven percent in the past decade.

One region that has seen a dramatic population shift within the past decade is the West Midlands. While the geographic density of this region has increased in recent years, the level of representation it receives in cabinet committees has dwindled. Between 2014 and 2024, the region grew from just four percent to nine percent of the UK population. Under the 2014 Cameron and May governments, the West Midlands were overrepresented population-wise by 3% and 8%, respectively, yet only comprised five percent of the total population. In 2024, following the increase in the region's population, representation decreased, as they were underrepresented by -2%. These findings suggest that as censuses evolve over time and regional populations shift, a positive correlation will not always exist between population increase and representation within committee assignments.

Along with viewing the net change in representation across all regions, the following illustration breaks down how geographical representation differs across the regions in each ministry surveyed:

Figure Two:

Here, all ministries show levels of overrepresentation within the South East and East of England, except for the Cameron government for the latter. These outliers illustrate that overrepresentation within cabinet committees based on population has occurred under all ministries except one. Of the total 48 “bars” that signify each particular region’s level of representation on cabinet committees via geography, only seven fall outside the ten percent range. These outliers exemplify unusual levels of over and underrepresentation. From another perspective, 85% of the bars fall within a 10 percent range, demonstrating that only a handful of regions surveyed fall outside. 63% of the bars fall within a five percent range, suggesting that more than half of the regions surveyed for the study have levels of representation expected based on this metric. Viewing how most of the graph fits close to the “zero” line exemplifies that committee assignments based on population are distributed relatively evenly within most regions. Cameron's ministry was the most geographically representative of the four governments surveyed in the past decade, demonstrating representation levels that would be expected in

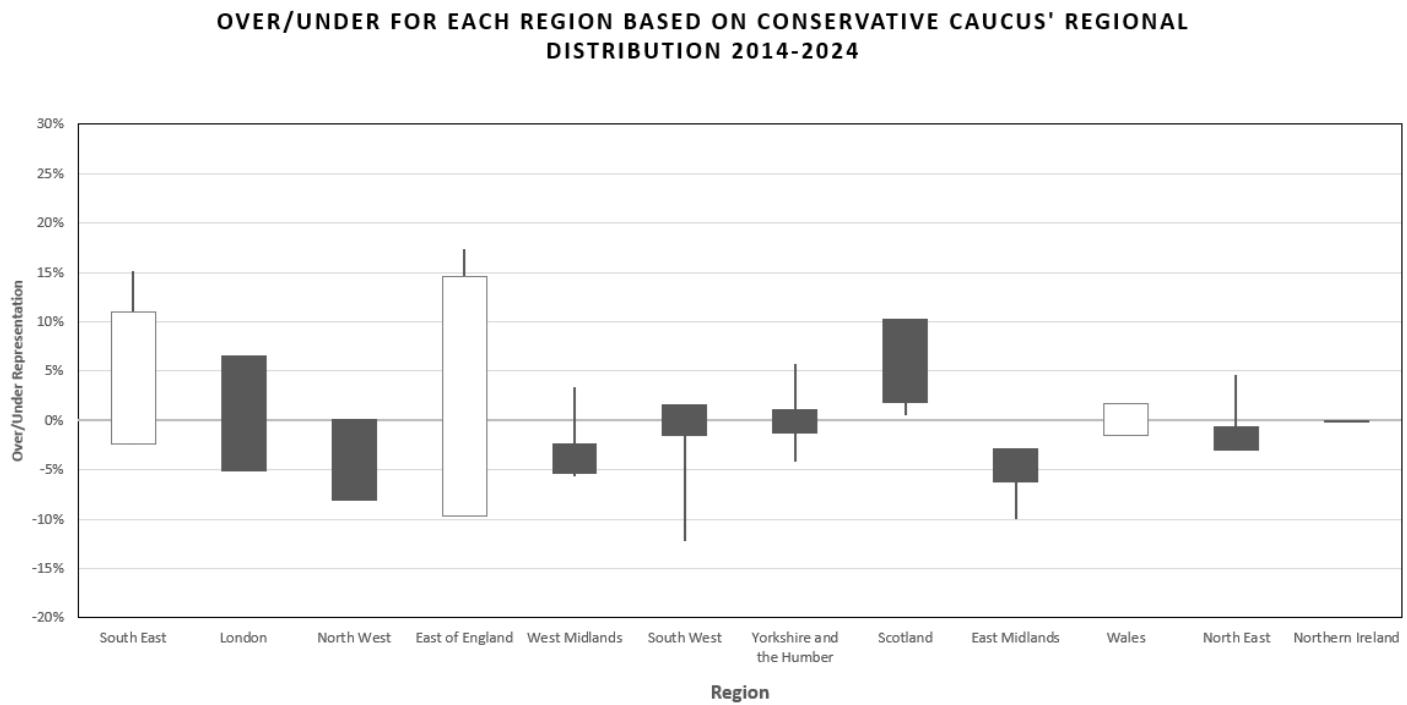
comparison with the other governments in eight of the twelve regions. The second highest performer was the Sunak government, performing equally or better in geographical representation than the other governments in five of the twelve regions. As these First Ministers were the first and last ministries in office for the survey, the data illustrates that geographical representation within cabinet committees has not necessarily improved between 2014 and 2024. Of the surveyed ministries, Cameron's line fits closest to the point of zero, which signifies accurate geographical representation within cabinet committee assignments.

Representation based on Party Seat Share

Incorporating the distribution of the governing party's political party seat share is a critical component of the analysis, as it may be impossible to represent some regions of the UK if no ruling party ministers are MPs within the underrepresented region. Geographical distribution is not the only model for explaining underrepresentation; examining caucus distribution reveals new explanations for representation by population. Thus, voters who have elected minimal or no MPs could expect fewer MPs of the ruling party to sit in the cabinet from these regions.

The following results from the formula can be visually exemplified using another candlestick boxplot to show the total range within the cabinet for the metrics and the change between 2014 and 2024. Figure Three exemplifies this relationship:

Figure Three:



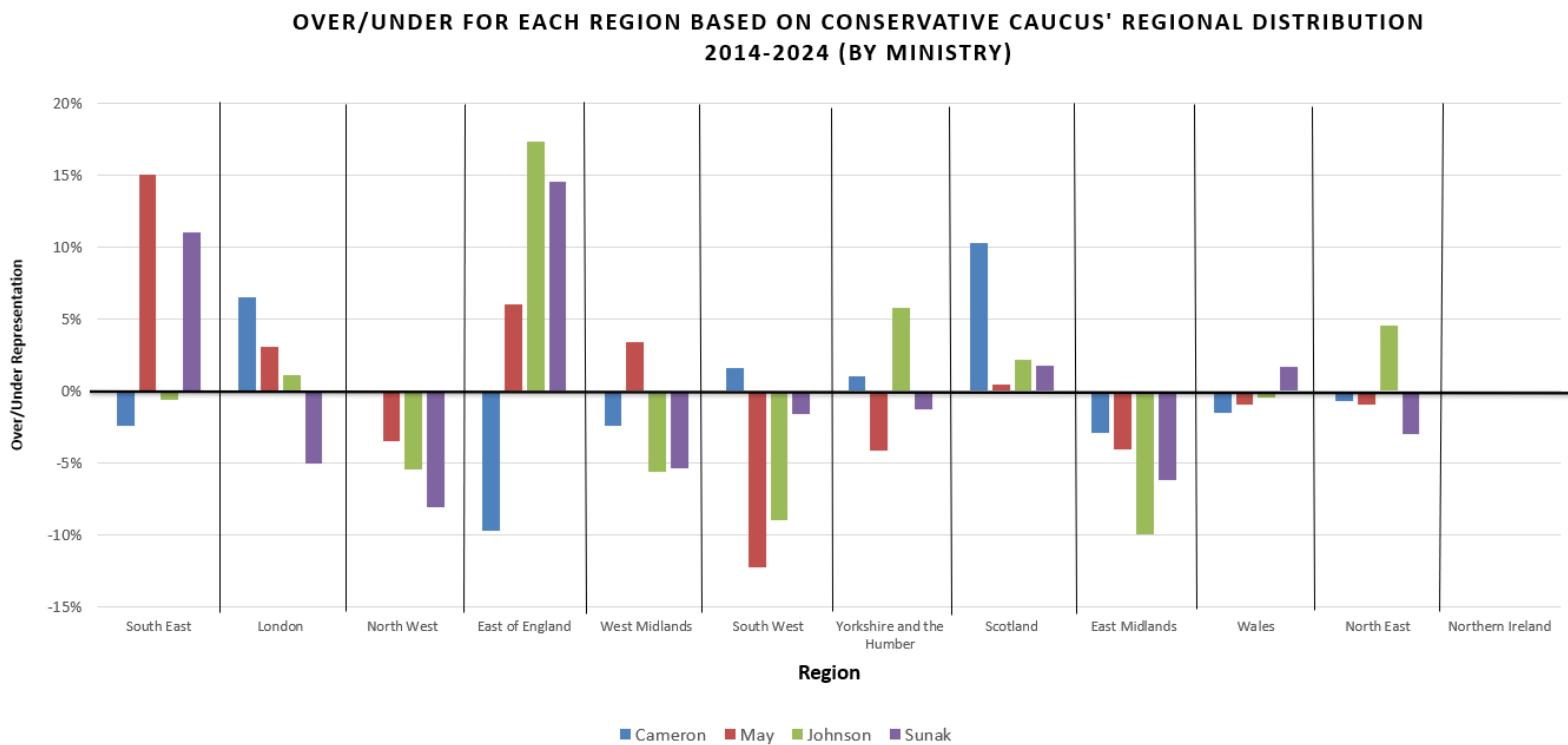
For these observations, eight of the twelve regions span within a range of plus-or-minus 10% over the decade. While there have been fluctuations for all regions, similar to geography, most of the UK has experienced expected levels of representation given the number of conservative MPs representing each region. Also noticeable is that eight of the twelve regions have presented a net decreasing trend regarding committee assignments based on regional caucus distribution (grey boxes).

There are only a few choice outliers that stand out from the graph. Based on the data, according to the regional distribution of governing party MPs across the regions, Northern Ireland has sat at 0% for the past decade, as no conservative MPs have been elected to that region in any of the surveyed periods. Thus, this observation helps explain why the region has sat stagnantly underrepresented at -3% under every surveyed government. With a lack of committee assignments from Wales, North East and Northern Ireland, it would appear on the surface that

these regions are underrepresented. However, based on the number of governing party MPs who have been elected to the regions, along with population levels, their level of representation within cabinet committees is congruent with what should be expected based on these metrics.

According to the regional distribution of the conservative caucus over the period, the two regions that have overrepresentation based on this measure are the East of England and the South East. The candlestick plot exemplifies that East of England went from being underrepresented by -9% to overrepresented in the current cabinet by 15%. Under the Johnson and Sunak governments, the region has had overrepresentation by 17 and 15%, respectively. Both leaders have allocated more committee assignments to members from this region than what should be expected based on the density of caucuses coming from these regions. The data from the South East shows a similar trend. Whereas the region was underrepresented under the Cameron government in 2014 by -2%, it has grown to be currently overrepresented by 11% based on caucus distribution and peaked at 15% under the May government. Another region that deserves attention is the South West. While the region was represented on average according to caucus distribution under cabinet, it fell to -12% under May. However, it has fallen closer to average in recent years, sitting at -2% under the Sunak government.

The net change in levels of representation based on caucus distribution is one way to show trends for cabinet committees from the past decade. The following illustration breaks down how representation based on caucus distribution differs across the regions:

Figure Four:

The graph illustrates that the region that overarchingly experienced the highest levels of overrepresentation based on caucus distribution was the East of England, except for under the Cameron government. Of all the bars that pinpoint the level of over or underrepresentation based on caucus distribution, 88% fall within the ten-percent range. This data illustrates that most ministries distribute cabinet committee assignments within an expected range, aside from a few choice outliers.

The graph also represents trends of representation changing under each government over time. The two regions that show a chronological trend regarding changes in representation via this metric are Wales and the North West. Wales has seen a steady increase in representation over every ministry, working from being underrepresented by -1% to being overrepresented by 2% in 2024. The North West illustrates a negative trend, falling from balanced representation at

0% in 2014 to -8% in 2024. It is critical to raise awareness of these regions as they are ones that have chronologically changed over time.

Of all of the governments surveyed, the graph highlights that the Cameron government has the line of best fit to zero percent, representing accurate representation in cabinet committees based on caucus distribution across the UK. The government performed equally or better in representation based on caucus distribution in seven of the twelve regions. As the oldest government within the dataset, it is worth noting the significance of it performing the best within the study by having a line of best fit closest to zero.

No indications within the data suggest that representation in cabinet committees has improved over the decade, as the lines differ drastically across all governments surveyed.

Geographical and Caucus Representation

Along with geographical representation, the data highlights that the South East and East of England are currently the most overrepresented regions according to caucus distribution. Furthermore, the total range of over/underrepresentation under every minister is the largest for these regions. East of England has evolved from an underrepresented region on both measures to a highly overrepresented region under the current Sunak government. The South East also used to have more balanced representation according to committee assignments under Cameron in 2014 and Johnson in 2020, yet changed drastically under May in 2016 and the current Sunak government. This lack of continuity suggests that the evolution toward overrepresentation is based more on each first minister's strategy than a trend over time. The volatility over time and across both sets of data stands out, as the range for over and underrepresentation for both metrics is the highest out of all other regions.

The North West and East Midlands have been consistently underrepresented according to both standards yearly. The only exception is representation by the Caucus under the Cameron government, sitting at the ideal average. Other than the 2014 cabinet, these regions have yet to see ideal geographic or caucus distribution representation levels in ten years. The fact that neither of these regions has hit the ideal target average for representation under any government exemplifies a potential representational disparity within cabinet committee assignments that has not been addressed under any government in the past decade.

DISCUSSION

The data from this study exemplifies is that in the past decade, according to Figures Two and Four, regional representation within UK cabinet committee assignments is more reflective of the population of each region than compared to the distribution of the conservative caucus across these regions. There is not enough significant data from this study to prove that caucus distribution across the country is an explanation for every region that is under or overrepresented geographically. This assertion means that for all twelve regions, caucus distribution of the governing party was not the underlying cause for geographical over/under-representation across regions. The exceptions to this case are those countries concerned with ideas of devolution, including Scotland, Wales, and North Ireland. Within these regions, representation by population was lower than the target line of zero percent, but the distribution or lack of conservative ministers from these regions explains the disparity of lack of geographical representation within these executive institutions. More elaboration on this particular phenomenon is outlined below.

There are some key takeaways from this study that highlight how the UK population has been represented in the past decade through cabinet committee assignments. First, there is not enough evidence to suggest that geographical representation within cabinet committees has improved over time between 2014 and 2024. If Cameron's ministry was the most representative by population and Sunak's the second, then there is no direct evidence to support the improvement of geographical representation over time. The same phenomenon occurred with representation by distribution of the conservative caucus. There is not enough evidence to exemplify that representation using this metric has improved over time in the past decade.

The two regions that have seen general levels of overrepresentation through all governments surveyed are East of England and the South West. With cabinet confidentiality and

other mechanisms for understanding the UK executive still unavailable at this time due to legal and political barriers, it is difficult to provide a feasible explanation for the levels of overrepresentation within these regions. Ie (2019) argues that as committee assignments are strategies of prime ministerial leadership, there are many external and subjective factors that contribute to committee structuring and the distribution of assignments. The Crossman diaries and Gregory (1980) exemplify that political motivations are key factors underpinning the allocation of committee assignments within cabinet. Thus, more research is necessary to establish a relationship that explores why cabinet assignments are allocated by first ministers. The modelling of committee assignments over the past decade based on population and conservative caucus distribution serves as a springboard for future research on the subject matter.

This study is one of the first comprehensive models to exemplify how cabinet committee assignments in the UK reflect geographical representation or representation based on caucus distribution. Because there has been an overall lack of focus on these two metrics, and only the past decade has been surveyed, much work is still needed to corroborate relationships that underpin why certain regions are over/underrepresented across the country. This study provides an overview of how cabinet committee assignments have been distributed according to these metrics, and hopes to inspire further research to ensure all citizens of the UK are ensured expected representation within different executive structures.

The conducted analysis does not necessarily provide solutions to the theoretical debate regarding how and why first ministers structure their committee assignments. Ie (2021) asserts that it is largely at the discretion of the first minister to distribute accordingly, and there remains little evidence to suggest that first ministers put substantial effort into ensuring geographical representation or representation based on caucus distribution. Once again, cabinet confidentiality

stands as a hindrance to formulating a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, but this study reveals that past governments, such as Cameron's, can strike a balance in allocating committee assignments within a reasonable margin that reflects both the population and the distribution of their caucus.

Another factor for consideration is that this study only assesses conservative governments and excludes a comparative framework for assessing the labour or other parties' ability to strike a balance via these metrics. Scholars must continue working by using available archived data to map committee assignments and reflect on how executive structures result in disparities or overrepresentation within regions. This study could serve as the foundation for a broader comparative study on cabinet committee assignment strategies that differ across parties and the role the first minister plays in distributing assignments to their ministers.

Regarding large outliers in over and underrepresentation, this study illustrates that representation by population and caucus distribution is expected based on a ten percent margin of over or underrepresentation. 85% of the bars from Figure Two that assess geographical representation fall within a ten percent range, illustrating that there are few extreme outliers within the study. Similarly, on the subject of caucus distribution across the UK and the total number of committee assignments, 88% of the bars in Figure Four fall within the ten percent range of over or underrepresentation. The study does not reveal any chronological trend that suggests these numbers will get closer to zero over time. However, of the ministries surveyed for this study, the Cameron government performed the best regarding geographical representation and representation based on caucus distribution within cabinet committees. The fact that no ministry has matched or succeeded the 2014 government on either front exemplifies once again

that representation via cabinet committee assignments has not improved over time across more recent ministries.

On the subject of devolution and representation, this study exemplifies critical findings to consider regarding how Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland are represented by ministers according to conservative caucus distribution and population. According to both formulas used for this study, the three regions have had expected levels of representation via cabinet committee assignments according to both their share of the UK's population and the number of conservative MPs that belong to each region. Because the population of these regions is relatively low compared to the rest of the country, and due to the lack of conservative members who get elected to these regions, it is critical to highlight that cabinet committee assignments are proportionate to these metrics. Thus, this study highlights an illusion within the disenfranchisement debate - where UK citizens or inhabitants of these regions may be skeptical or dissatisfied with levels of representation within cabinet committees on a federal level. However, the study reveals that the low population levels and lack of membership from the governing caucus result in levels of representation that would be expected based on these two metrics.

By suggesting that representation is expected in these three regions based on the variables under scrutiny, this study challenges some ideas and definitions of representation within Westminster politics. An absence of ministers from regions including Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland suggests low or nonexistent levels of representation, but this quantitative analysis challenges that assumption by exemplifying potential underlying conditions for the lack of committee assignments to ministers from these regions. Future scholarship must consider the role that population and caucus distribution across the UK have in the debate on representation within executive decision-making structures in Westminster systems.

Thus, citizens of the UK and policymakers should be mindful of these metrics when examining the role of the executive within the broader debate of disenfranchisement within the UK. The lack of committee membership within particular regions does not necessarily suggest that a region is being underrepresented as a whole. Rather, other factors - in this case, population and conservative caucus distribution within the region - are variables that should be taken into consideration within the broader context of the debate on the subject matter. If citizens from these regions want to see higher levels of representation within the UK executive, more members of the governing party must become elected within these regions.

Two regions from the study that demonstrated chronic levels of underrepresentation in cabinet committee assignments over the decade after considering population and caucus distribution were the North West and the East Midlands. Aside from both regions receiving close to accurate representation by the population under the Cameron government, these regions have been, and continue to be, underrepresented under the Sunak government. These regions have traditionally experienced underrepresentation, and this study illustrates another facet of chronic underrepresentation. Policymakers and first ministers should be mindful of this prolonged disparity when making decisions about executive structures or formulating policies that could assist in addressing this persistent representational gap for these more Northern regions. While the argument persists that Northern regions in the UK are traditionally underrepresented throughout the UK, this study exemplifies two critical findings that add to the debate on the level of attention and representation these regions receive in Westminster politics.

First, Northern Ireland, the North East, East Midlands, Scotland, and the North West have all experienced a net negative change in the level of representation they receive by their population within cabinet committee assignments (Figure One). This implication demonstrates

that representation for these regions has moved in a negative trend over the decade. Juxtaposing 2014 to 2024 provides a snapshot of how representation within these traditionally underrepresented regions has changed over time, but as Figure Four highlights, each first minister structures their committee assignments differently, and the trends may change under new leadership. These regions all sit below average for representation by population, and only two regions have found their way at or above equal levels of representation based on this metric in the past decade (North East under Johnson and Scotland under Cameron). Given all of the factors that contribute to the structuring of cabinet committee assignments, it is rare that these regions will ever hit the perfect equal level of representation under every government. However, this disparity occurring for more of the Northern-situated regions adds to the necessary discussion on traditional underrepresentation within UK executives and politics more broadly.

The same conclusion is drawn regarding cabinet committee assignments based on caucus distribution across the UK. Aside from Scotland and Northern Ireland, over time, the North East, East Midlands, and the North West have also experienced an overall negative trend regarding representation in cabinet committee assignments based on conservative caucus distribution in the past ten years. Again, this is an overall snapshot, and a closer analysis of each ministry's committee assignments (Figure Four) does not necessarily suggest that this negative trend will continue or is increasing under each ministry. The data in Figure Three shows the overall trend between 2014-2024 and is more of a holistic snapshot that assesses how representation has changed over the decade.

There is not enough evidence to suggest that, over time, representation will continue to lag behind in the geographical North within the UK. However, the overall trend based on both variables assessed for this study reveals that lower levels of representation via cabinet committee

assignments have occurred within more Northern regions than Southern ones. Various factors can contribute to this overarching trend; this study emphasizes the importance of highlighting areas of over and underrepresentation to illustrate shortcomings in ensuring equitable representation for regions in the executive, as opposed to drawing concrete conclusions on why phenomena are occurring. The degree of ministers' regional "interests" or agendas being more-or-less catered to in areas of overrepresentation has yet to be unpacked due to cabinet confidentiality. Nothing from this analysis suggests that areas of overrepresentation cause some regions to have special attention within cabinet.

Another critical outlier that is difficult to pinpoint within the dataset is the overall positive trend toward overrepresentation that East of England experienced over the decade. It moved from being underrepresented under the Cameron government to being exceptionally overrepresented under recent governments, including Sunak's. East of England scored the highest in terms of overrepresentation under the Johnson government for caucus distribution and was a close second behind May's levels of overrepresentation in the South East in 2016. The range of the data was also the widest in both datasets (see Figure Two and Figure Four), which ranged from 26 and 27%, respectively. The data did not show caucus distribution affecting overrepresentation by population, as the region had levels of overrepresentation based on both metrics. Under the last two first ministers, committee assignment distributions have been heavily weighted in favour of this representation, leading to some of the highest levels of overrepresentation based on both metrics in the past decade. This outlier is a phenomenon that policymakers, scholars, and first ministers should consider in the debate on distributing committee assignments to ensure regional representation.

The data collected does not suggest that over or underrepresentation in UK regions based on population is affected by the caucus distribution. If this were true, outlier cases, including East of England and the South East, would have had better lines of fit closer to 0% in Figure Four than compared to Figure Two. However, this is not observed. Regarding representation by population, more committee assignments under all first ministers between 2014-2024 have a better line of fit toward 0% than compared to representation by caucus distribution, which exemplifies equal distribution based on the variables under analysis (Figures One and Two). The bars in Figure Four, which exemplify over or under-representation based on the distribution of committee assignments and the caucus share from each region, have a wider range across all ministries compared to Figure Two, which analyzes population.

Based on these observations, this study highlights that cabinet committee assignments in the UK are more reflective of the populations of each region compared to the distribution of the conservative caucus across all of the regions. More research is needed to examine the mechanisms that cause this critical difference between the two metrics, given that there are multiple theories regarding the motivations for first ministers structuring their cabinet committees. The author proceeded with caution by not assuming why this phenomenon occurred within this particular dataset.

Reflecting on the research design, there are areas that could offer more insight into why committee assignments are allocated across the UK. While the population of each region and the distribution of the conservative caucus were the two areas of analysis for this particular research endeavour, one could further explore the impacts of an MP's age, time served in office, gender, or other motivational factors to connect a causal relationship between cabinet committee assignments and representation within the UK. A stronger research design could also include

more ministries from the past and past parties to analyze trends over extended periods of time. However, access to archived records of cabinet committees continues to be a challenge for many scholars. As prime ministerial leadership also differs under each government, it is difficult to pinpoint the particular causes or motivations behind over and underrepresentation within particular regions. Regression analysis and other quantitative methods could serve as guiding compasses for formulating a better understanding of UK executives, cabinet committees and the motivations behind assigning committee memberships.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed how regions are represented across the United Kingdom through the executive structure of cabinet committee assignments. Westminster executives are an understudied decision-making arena, and there has been a lack of focus on how cabinet committees can serve as a channel to represent the broader UK by region. The challenge of quantifying cabinet committee assignments to assess how regions are represented in executive politics was, and continues to be, an ongoing challenge for scholars. The dataset for this study was constructed by the author and is one of the first mappings of committee assignments across the UK in the past decade across four ministries.

Specifically, analyzing relationships between geographical representation and the distribution of the conservative caucus highlighted both disparities and levels of overrepresentation within different regions. Caucus distribution proved to be one of the underlying conditions for why Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland have been traditionally underrepresented based on their populations. While this is only one piece of the larger puzzle of devolution and the role of the federal government - and executives - to represent these diverse regions, more research is necessary to illustrate all of the reasons these regions see the levels of representation they do within cabinet committee assignments. This study contributes to the debate surrounding devolution and debunks the illusion that these levels of underrepresentation in these northern states do not have an explanation. An analysis of the past four ministries just scratches the surface of this broadly debated topic on how cabinet committees and other elements of the executive can best reflect the needs of these diverse populations.

Through the compilation of this dataset, other scholars have access to a comprehensive sketch of how committee assignments have been allocated by region over the past decade and

can illustrate disparities or levels of overrepresentation. Analyses like these are critical for ensuring the broader interest of the UK is reflected within executive decision-making. A substantial amount of work remains to build on existing visuals to map committee assignments across different parties and first ministers from different eras. More questions remain than answers, yet the data employed for this study, constructed by the author, is at least one point of departure for further research.

Taking geographical representation and caucus distribution at face value, it appears that the entirety of the UK has more sound levels of representation based on geography than compared to the formula used to highlight representation based on caucus distribution across the country. As a majority of the assignments fall within a reasonable range of under/overrepresentation (+/-10%), there is not enough evidence to suggest that the UK is drastically over or underrepresented based on the population share. Visual representations of the data also suggest those regions that have experienced lower or higher levels of representation over the past decade (Figures One and Three). These illustrations exemplify where the UK has, and continues to have, representational disparities across different regions - especially those with diverse needs.

The formulas used for this study are just one way of demonstrating these relationships; scholars more interested in other explanations behind levels of representation could employ other metrics or variables for a more thorough study. In addition, as more qualitative resources become available through published interviews or accounts of cabinet proceedings become unsealed, there will be new systems for fusing qualitative and quantitative research for peering into these institutions that are difficult to dissect with the challenges of cabinet confidentiality. These executive decision-making structures are vital decision-making arenas within the Westminster

parliamentary systems and deserve scholarly attention to exemplify where executive politics falls short in addressing the many different needs of a diverse state with a small geographical area and a large population density.

This analysis of committee assignments does not account for political norms and the individual dynamics that ministers bring to the decision-making table. The theories and mechanisms that this study employed do not account for a vast array of literature on the study of legislative politics and the role Westminster legislatures have in descriptively representing the public. Furthermore, ministers contest for power within executives and assignments are allocated by first ministers with their own interests (Ie 2019). While focusing strictly on committee assignments, however, it does illustrate how these regions are represented within these executive bodies and provide potential avenues for future research.

Understanding regional representation within Westminster politics has been and continues to challenge policymakers, politicians, and scholars. Mapping geographical representation and reflecting the needs of a population based on the governing caucus distribution is only one method for forming a more robust understanding of these decision-making structures. While the debates on devolution continue, the public and academics should be careful to assess the political and structural motivations that underpin the levels of underrepresentation in executives for Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. While more research is necessary to explore why other regions are over or underrepresented, this study can serve as a starting point for other academics to continue mapping regional representation across cabinet committees and highlight where ministries are falling short in representing the public they are accountable to. While existing scholarship is far from providing a clear answer, the intersection of scholarly starting points with other literature and methods, including this study,

may hopefully one day provide academics, policymakers, and politicians a more sound understanding of his rationale and the broader relationship dynamics within the confidential executive. Cabinet committees and assignment distribution thus remain an ongoing and incomplete puzzle, with many missing pieces and some that have yet to fall into place.

References

Barbieri, Christina, and Michelangelo Vercesi. 2013. "The Cabinet: A Viable Definition and its Composition in View of a Comparative Analysis." *Government and Opposition* 48 (4): 526–547. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2013.1>.

Borgatti, Stephen P. and Martin G. Everett. 2000. "Models of Core/Periphery Structures." *Social Networks* 21 (4): 375–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287517706262>.

Bradbury, Jonathan. 2009. *Devolution, Regionalism and Regional Development: The UK Experience*. New York: Routledge.

Clark, D. 2024. "Population of the United Kingdom in 2022, by region." *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1239046/top-saas-countries-list/>

Conti, Gregory. 2019. "Democracy Confronts Diversity: Descriptive Representation in Victorian Britain." *Political Theory*. 47 (2): 230-257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591718766479>.

Crawford, Bruce. 2010. "Ten Years of Devolution." *Parliamentary Affairs* 63 (1): 89-97. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsp051>.

Crossman, Richard. 1976. *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: 1964-66 Volume 1*. New York: Henry Holt & Company.

Curtin, Jennifer. 2015. "New Zealand: Stability, Change or Transition? Achieving and Retaining Ministerial Office." In *The Selection of Ministers around the World*, edited by Keith Dowding and Patrick Dumont. Abingdon: Routledge.

d'Ombrain, Nicholas. 2004. "Cabinet Secrecy." *Canadian Public Administration* 47: 332-359. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2004.tb01869.x>.

Dingle, Lesley, and Bradley Miller. 2005. "A Summary of Recent Constitutional Reform in the United Kingdom." *International Journal of Legal Information* 33 (1): 71–102. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0731126500004650>.

European Commission. 2024. "Eurostat Database: Population demography of the United Kingdom by Region." <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography/demography-population-stock-balance/database>.

Fai, Felicia M., and Philip R Tomlinson. 2023. "Levelling up or down? Addressing regional inequalities in the UK." *Contemporary Social Science*, 18 (3–4): 285–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2023.2282161>.

Gallagher, Michael, and Paul Mitchell. 2005. *The Politics of Electoral Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Garside, Peter. 2000. *Regional Government in the United Kingdom: Democratic Representation or Economic Success?*. Routledge.

Gregory, Roy. 1980. "Executive Power and Constituency Representation in United Kingdom Politics." *Political Studies* 28 (1): 63-83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1980.tb01233.x>.

Grube, Dennis, and Anna Killick. 2021. "Groupthink, Polythink and the Challenges of Decision-Making in Cabinet Government." *Parliamentary Affairs* 74 (1): 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsab047>.

Hazel, Robert. 2006. "The English Question." *The Journal of Federalism* 36 (1): 37–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjj012>.

Ie, Kenny. 2019. "Cabinet committees as strategies of Prime Ministerial leadership in Canada." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 57 (4): 466-486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2019.1668618>.

Ie, Kenny. 2021. "Cabinet Composition, Collegiality, and Collectivity: Examining Patterns in Cabinet Committee Structure." *European Political Science Review* 14 (1): 115-133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2019.1668618>.

Ie, Kenny. 2021. "Representation and Ministerial Influence on Cabinet Committees in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 54: 615-636. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S000842392100041X>.

Keating, Michael, and Alex Wilson. 2014. "Regions with Regionalism? Rescaling of Interest groups in six EU states." *European Journal of Political Research* 53: 840-857. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12053>.

Keating, Michael, and John Loughlin. 2002. "Territorial Policy Communities and Devolution in the United Kingdom." *European University Institute Working Papers SPS* 2002.1. Florence: European University Institute.

Kerby, Matthew. 2009. "Worth the Wait: Determinants of Ministerial Appointment in Canada, 1935–2008." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42 (3): 593–611.

Laffin, Martin, and Alys Thomas. 1999. "The United Kingdom: Federalism in Denial?" *The Journal of Federalism* 29 (3): 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pubjof.a030039>.

Lupul, Monopoly R. 1981. "The Political Implementation of Multiculturalism in Canada." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 19 (3-6): 133-139.

Lustick, Ian S. 1996. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias." *American Political Science Review* 90 (3): 605-618. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082612>.

Mackie, Thomas T., and Brian W. Hogwood. 1984. "Decision Arenas in Executive Decision Making: Cabinet Committees in Comparative Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 14 (3): 285-312. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400003628>.

Mackinnon, Danny. 2015. "Devolution, state restructuring and policy divergence in the UK." *The Geographical Journal* 181 (1): 47-56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12057>.

Pearce, Graham, John Mawson, and Sarah Ayres. 2008. "Regional Governance in England: A Changing Role for the Government's Regional Offices?." *Public Administration* 86: 443-463. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2007.00699.x>.

Smiley, Donald V. 1977. "Territorialism and Canadian Political Institutions." *Canadian Public Policy* 3 (4): 449-57.

Stolz, Klaus, and Eric Linhart. 2023. "Territorial variation in territorial representation: the local base of Westminster MPs." *British Politics* 18: 459-481. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-022-00205-y>.

Theakston, Kevin. 2003. "Richard Crossman: The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister." *Public Policy and Administration* 18 (4): 20-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095207670301800403>.

UK Government. 2023. "List of cabinet committees." Published in 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cabinet-committees-system-and-list-of-cabinet-committees>.

UK Parliament. 2024. "MPs and Lords: Explore Regions." Published in 2024. <https://members.parliament.uk/region>.

Ward, Michael D., Stovel, Katherine, and Audrey Sacks. 2011. "Network Analysis and Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 245-64.