



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH



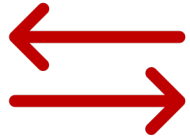
What and how do parliaments know? Examining relationships between democracy and knowledge use

Dr Marc Geddes (marc.geddes@ed.ac.uk)

School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

University of Bergen, 6 June 2024

Democracy, knowledge and decision-making



Renewed questions over mis- and dis-information in democratic societies, rise of so-called 'post-truth' politics, etc.



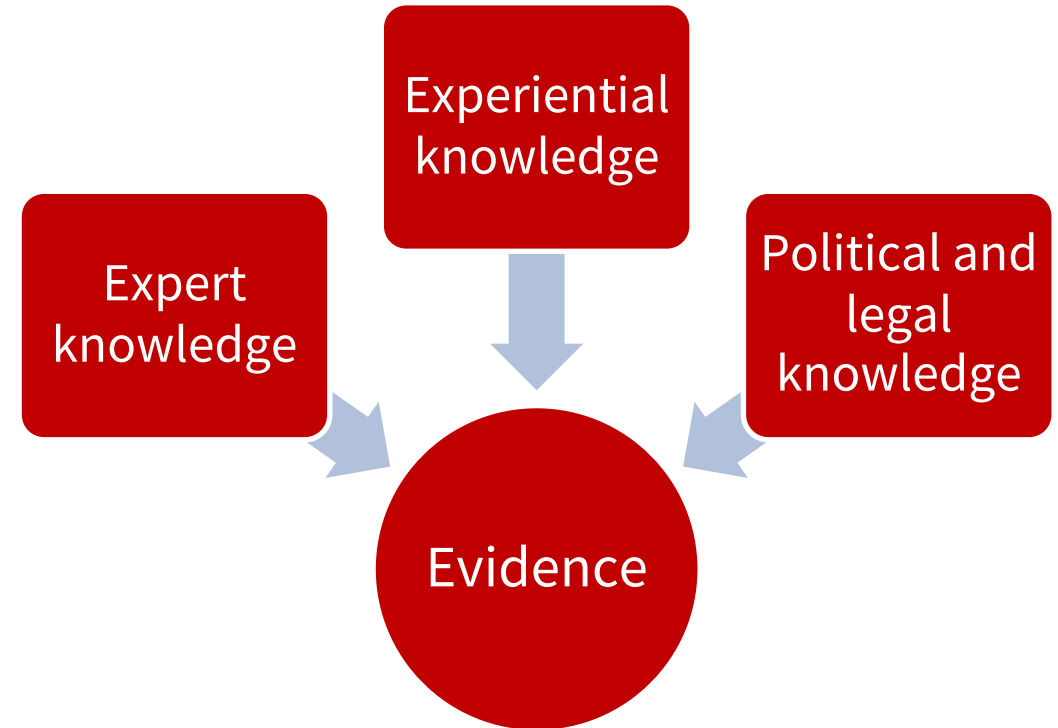
Public satisfaction in political institutions in decline, with some warning political systems at risk



Policy challenges increasing in scale and urgency: Covid-19, climate crisis and social and economic inequalities

Research on knowledge and politics

- Philosophy: different ways of knowing and interpreting realities,
- Science and Technology Studies (STS) and constructions of ‘science’
- Policy studies: how policy-makers handle different types of research





What about parliaments?

- Research less well-developed and perhaps somewhat fragmented, even though:
 - The importance of ‘information’ has been long acknowledged (Krehbiel 1991)
 - And parliaments offer various research-related services
- Existing research focused on:
 - Science and technology assessment (Karaulova and Edler 2023)
 - Institutional access by interest groups (Binderkrantz et al. 2015)
 - Smaller scale and single case studies (Crewe 2017; Turnpenny et al. 2012)
- More has begun to emerge in recent years

A map showing mechanisms used by
parliaments around the world to access and
harness academic research

2,473 views

Published on 9 December 2022

SHARE

Map of mechanisms

All items

Developed by Vicky
Ward and Mark
Monaghan

<https://ipen-network.org/global-mapping/>

Made with Google My Maps



Map data ©2023 Terms 1,000 km

Google My Maps

Keyboard shortcuts



THE Times Higher Education

Home News Rankings Jobs Study abroad Events Resources

News Home Latest Opinion In-depth Le

Dutch MPs trial new 'gold standard' for scientific scrutiny

Parliaments routinely seek scientific advice, but a Dutch pilot goes one step further, asking academics to directly critique what the government is proposing

September 29, 2020

David Matthews

Twitter: @DavidMJourn

Academics have been brought in to directly scrutinise Dutch legislation, chiding the government for vague policy goals and aiming to offer lawmakers evidence-based alternative policies.

While lawmakers the world over routinely get advice from academics, the Dutch pilot scheme, which aims to become a "gold standard" for scientific scrutiny, goes a step further and asks researchers to directly analyse new legislation.

"What is very new here is that with this ap policymaking process," said Pieter Duisent

nature

Explore content About the journal Publish with us Subscribe

nature > news > article

NEWS | 18 December 2018

Spain to establish parliamentary office of science

Nation's parliament has budgeted for a new office next year, following push from grassroots scientists' movement.

Michele Catanzaro



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Role of Research in the UK Parliament



Dr Caroline Kenny
Research Associate, Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy, UCL (UCL STEaPP) and Social Science Adviser, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)

Dr David Christian Rose
Lecturer in Human Geography, University of East Anglia and former Research Associate at UCL STEaPP

Dr Abbi Hobbs
Senior Research Associate at UCL STEaPP and Head of the Social Science Section, POST

Dr Chris Tyler
Director of Public Policy, UCL STEaPP, Co-Investigator and former Director of POST

Dr Jason Blackstock
Head of Department, UCL STEaPP and Principal Investigator

Volume one

Parlament Österreich
Parlamentsdirektion

First „Austrian Day of Parliamentary Research“

Announcement and call for contributions

February 2023

Dept. 3.2 – Research and Support in Parliamentary Matters

parlamentsforschung@parlament.gv.at

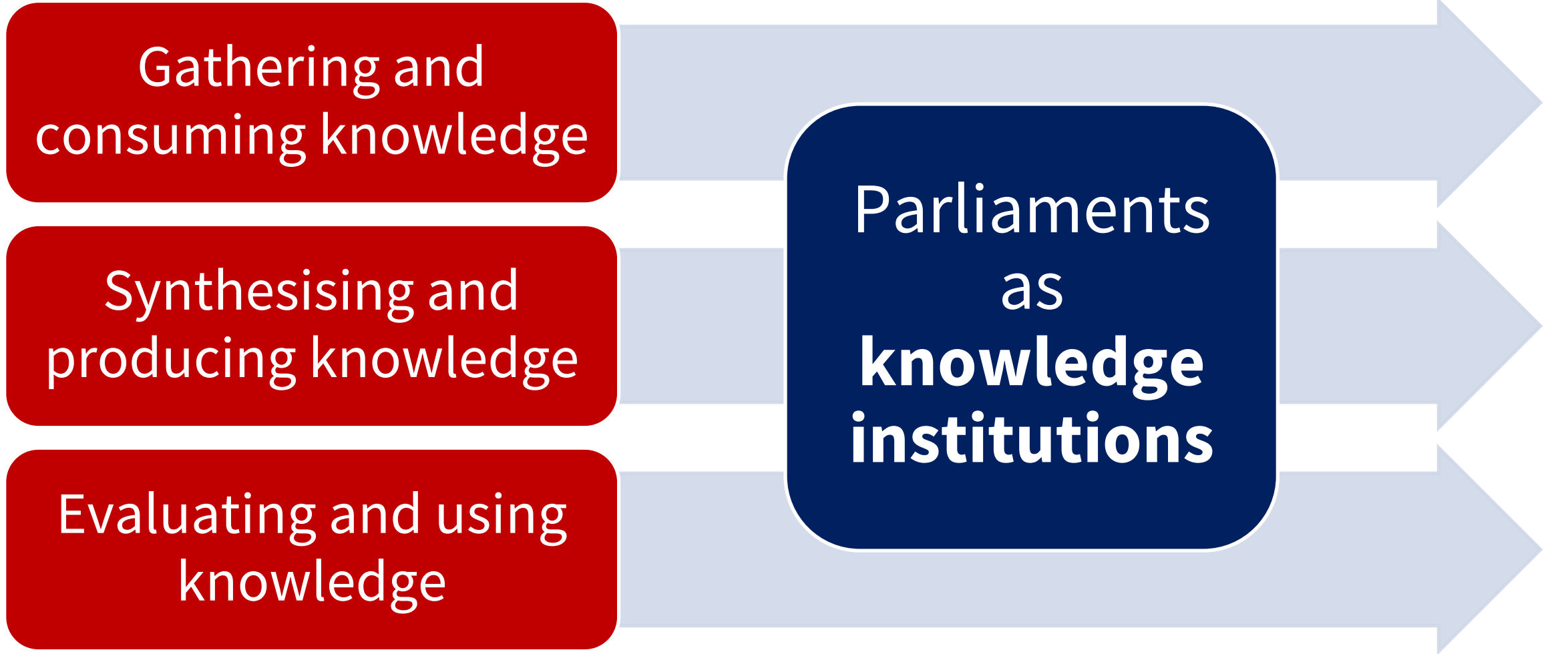
+43 1 401 10-2668





What about parliaments?

- Parliaments are foundational to democratic politics and play separate role to governments
 - Representation of the people and interests
 - Accountability of government
 - Scrutinise and pass legislation
- Parliaments are influential in decision-making
 - Significant policy actor overall (e.g. Russell and Cowley 2016)
 - Significant impact on legislation (e.g. Russell and Gover 2017)
- **Parliaments often conceived as ‘political’ and ‘democratic’ institutions**





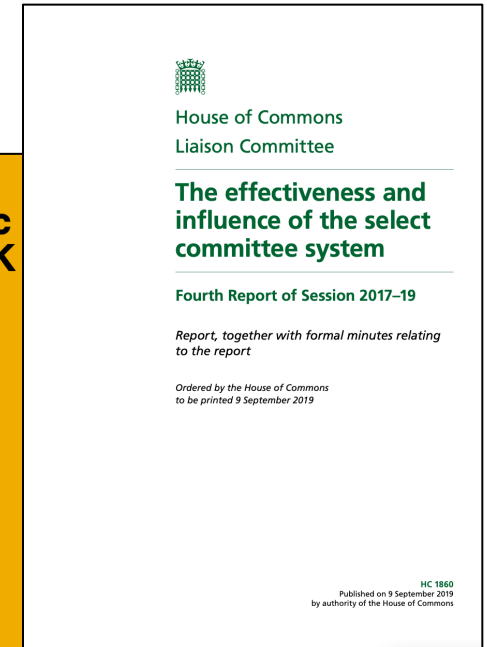
Case study: the UK Parliament and its structures

- Bicameral system made up of the House of Commons and House of Lords
- Fulfils main three functions:
 - Representation through first-past-the-post and public engagement initiatives
 - Law-making through an extended process including bill committees
 - Accountability through PQs (written/oral), debates and select committees
- Traditionally perceived as an adversarial political institution
 - Emphasis on debating and oratory
 - Explanatory accountability an important dimension



Case study: the UK Parliament and knowledge providers

- Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology
- House of Commons Library
- House of Lords Library
- MPs, peers and their offices
- All-Party Parliamentary Groups
- Political parties
- Bill committees
- Select committees





Case study: select committees in the House of Commons

- Structure and organisation:
 - Cross-party group of between 9-18 MPs per committee (supported by 6-8 staff)
 - Chairs directly elected by the whole House by secret ballot
- Tasks and powers:
 - To ‘examine the expenditure, administration and policy’ of government
 - May ‘send for persons, papers and records’ (PPR powers)
- Hold inquiries with terms of reference, gathering evidence and publishing reports
- Recommendations are advisory – no government is forced to accept changes
 - In practice government accept around 40% (Russell and Benton, 2013)

Committees

[UK Parliament](#) > [Business](#) > [Committees](#) > [Environmental Audit Committee](#) > [Technological Innovations and Climate Change: Negative Emissions Technologies](#) > Ca...

Call for Evidence

Technological Innovations and Climate Change: Negative Emissions Technologies

In this strand of its inquiry, the Committee will look at the potential contribution of negative emissions technologies (NETs) to achieving the Government's net zero ambitions and in mitigating the effects of carbon emissions more generally.

Negative emissions technologies are attempts to absorb and store carbon and other atmospheric greenhouse gases (GHGs). Alongside nature-based solutions,^[1] NETs are one of the proposed tools within greenhouse gas removal (GGR) techniques to reach the overall net zero target.

The UK Government is a signatory to the Paris Agreement (2015) which aims to limit average global warming to well below 2°C, ideally to below 1.5°C. In order to do this, the UK Government has committed to reducing carbon emissions (a key cause for global warming) to 'net zero' by 2050.^[2] This means that any carbon emissions, predominantly from CO₂, must be as low as possible and ideally at absolute zero.

For some sectors, reaching net zero is very difficult. This includes several 'energy-intensive industries' (EIIs), such as agriculture, aviation, iron and steel production, cement production and other industries.^[4] These are sometimes known as 'hard-to-decarbonise' sectors. In these cases, the development of GGR techniques could off-set carbon emissions to reach zero emissions. According to most climate models, large-scale deployment of GGR technologies are needed to meet Paris Agreement obligations.^[5]

The Climate Change Committee considers that at least 5 million tonnes of CO₂ (MtCO₂) per year by 2030 are needed to be captured through GGR,^[6] and that between 75 and 175 MtCO₂ will need to be stored annually by 2050.^[7] Similarly, the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) has concluded that the Government should commit to the wide-scale deployment of new GGR technologies by 2030 in order to be able to meet its net zero obligations.^[8]

The UK Government has indicated that NETs (specifically BECCS and DACCS) will play a role in reaching net zero, but has not given a firm commitment on their role or published a GGR strategy.^[9]

There are two proposed technologies that are considered to be most viable:^[10]

- Bio-Energy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS). This combines biomass with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technology, whereby biomass (plant matter or organic waste) is used for energy generation, and the resulting CO₂ is then stored underground to prevent it from entering the atmosphere.^[13]
- Direct Air Carbon Capture and Sequestration (DACCS). This technology has been proposed to remove significant quantities of CO₂ by

- Direct Air Carbon Capture and Sequestration (DACCS). This technology has been proposed to remove significant quantities of CO₂ by placing large volumes of air in contact with chemicals known as sorbents. These chemicals capture CO₂ (through absorption or adsorption) and will be stored in the ground.^[14]

BECCS and DACCS are currently at an early stage of development. There is currently one BECCS power station being trialled in North Yorkshire (Drax)^[15] while a DACCS plant has been proposed in Scotland (Storegga and Carbon Engineering).^[16] Other projects are being, or have been, trialled in Switzerland, Canada, and elsewhere. Other early-stage DACCS projects focusing on marine carbon capture, such as SeaCURE (Sea Carbon Unlocking and Removal), also have the potential to support the UK Government's net zero goal.^[17]

Although there is a significant predicted role for NETs, there are uncertainties, concerns and challenges around their widespread use, such as the ability to develop and deploy technology at scale, ecological impacts or, in the case of BECCS, available land and access to sustainable biomass.^[18] There are additional questions about the storage of CO₂ once it has been captured, specifically around the available options for storage onshore (such as salt caverns or disused mines) and offshore (such as disused oil and gas wells).

The role that NETs are expected to play is premised on modelling that makes a number of assumptions about the future, including stable economic growth, lower costs for successfully developing GGR technologies and that GGRs will be accepted and used across social systems.^[19] These are known as climate change models and Integrated Assessment Models (IAMs). There is growing concern that some of these assumptions may not come to fruition, raising questions what contribution NETs can realistically make.

The Committee is inviting written submissions to inform two forthcoming evidence sessions on NETs, predominantly but not exclusively looking at BECCS and DACCS. Written evidence submissions should focus on, but need not be limited to, answering the following questions:

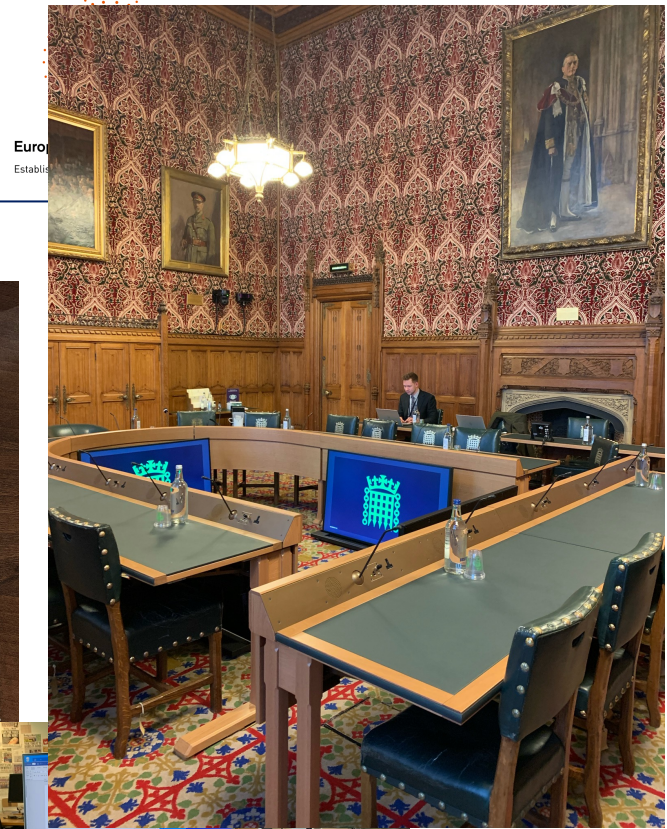
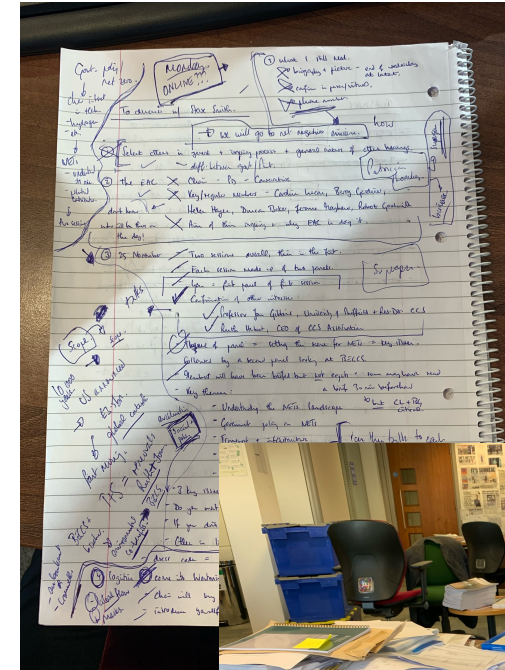
- What contribution could NETs (through DACCS, BECCS, and/or other NETs) make to achieving net zero by 2050?
- Which 'hard to decarbonise' sectors could benefit most from NETs, and which should be prioritised?
- At what technological stage are current NETs, and what is the likely timeframe that will allow NETs to be operational at scale in the UK?
- What are, and have been, the barriers to further development of NETs? How can such barriers be overcome?
- What, if any, are the links and co-benefits to other technological innovations, such as sustainable aviation fuel or sustainability in the energy sector?
- What are the trade-offs between availability of land and availability of sustainable biomass to make NETs a viable option in and beyond the UK?
- What are the options for the storage of captured carbon, whether onshore or offshore?
- What other drawbacks for the environment and society would need to be overcome to make NETs operational?
- Given the proposed role of NETs in climate change modelling, is there a danger of over-reliance on these technologies in net zero strategies?
- How should the UK Government support the further development of NETs?
- What policy changes, if any, are needed to ensure the UK gains a competitive advantage and remains at the cutting edge of this sector?
- The Government has indicated it will publish a Biomass Strategy in 2022, including the role of BECCS. What should be included in this strategy?

Written evidence should be submitted through the Committee's web portal by **Thursday, 28 October 2021 at 5pm. Respondents need not answer all the questions and evidence need not be limited to addressing the questions listed above.** Submissions should be not more than 3,000 words but shorter submissions are welcomed and encouraged.



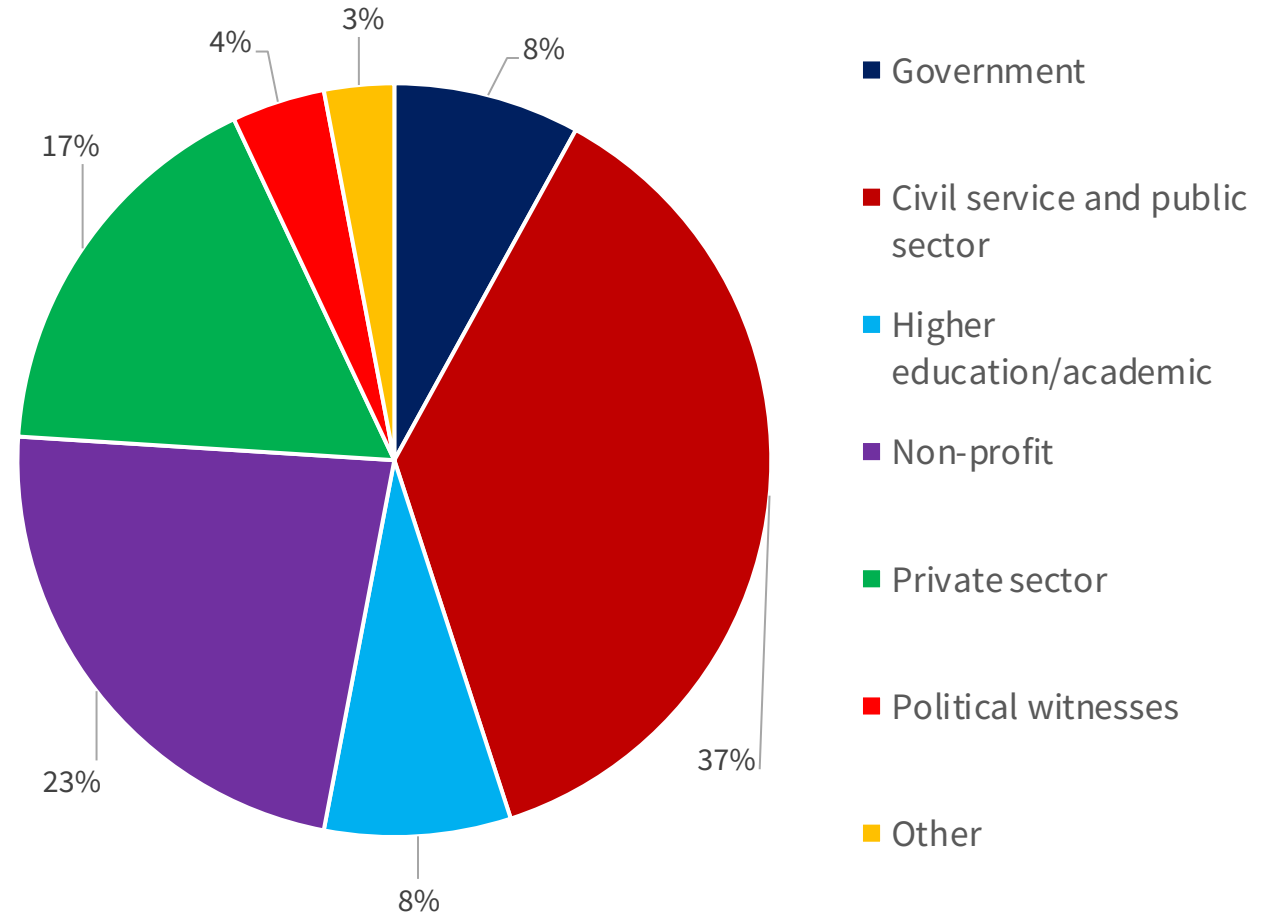
Questions, data and methods

- Motivated to find out more:
 - What are the patterns of knowledge use?
 - How do actors interpret ‘knowledge’?
 - How does it affect parliamentary work?
- Data and methods:
 - Ethnographic fieldwork through Academic Fellowship (2021-22)
 - Semi-structured interviews (50+)
 - Stakeholder database (2013-14 and ongoing)



Knowledge base (OE, 2013-14)

- Organisational breakdown →
- Gender:
 - 24% women
 - 76% men
- Geography:
 - Dominance of London and South England
- **New data collection ongoing**



Source: Geddes, 2018



From sources to ‘evidence’

- Factors that affect knowledge use
 - Who has submitted evidence? → Credibility and types of knowledge
 - Why has somebody submitted evidence? → Political and financial motivations
 - What recommendations does the evidence make? → Impact of evidence
- Evidence is bound up with process and procedure
 - Long-standing tradition for a diversity of viewpoints in committee hearings
 - Evidence is only *one* consideration of many: politics, power, justice, etc.

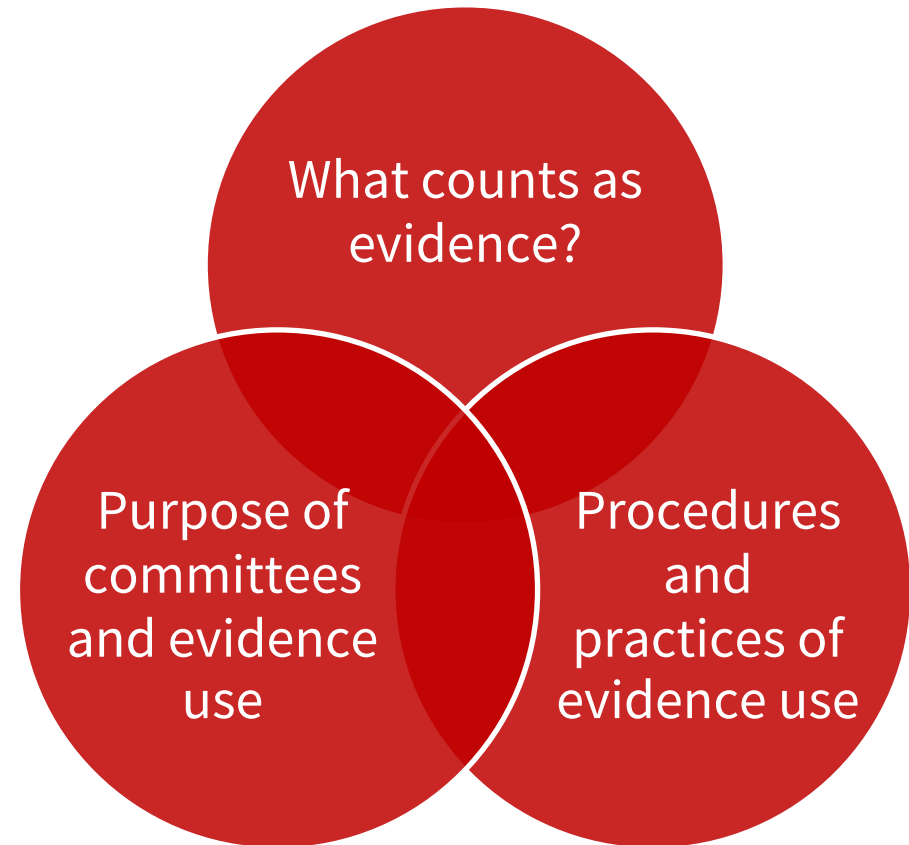


Changing trends, patterns and practices

- Diversifying evidence use: lived experience has grown significantly
 - Incorporated through different formats: written evidence, surveys, focus groups
 - Greater volumes pushing at the limits of what the process is designed to do?
- A growth of emphasis on diversity and inclusion
 - Long-standing tradition for political diversity (Geddes, 2021)
 - A focus on gender- and diversity-sensitive parliaments (IPU, 2011; Childs, 2016)
- Innovations in evidence-gathering: committee visits, focus groups, surveys, use of social media, etc.

Challenges for committees

- Significant growth in the volumes of written evidence
- Unclear what principles underpin the value of lived experience (or how to integrate)
- No consensus about the importance (or not) of representativeness of witnesses
- Pressures on staff: time-poor, under-resourced, training around innovations



Gathering and consuming knowledge

- POST stakeholder interviews
- Research by librarians
- **Committee inquiry processes**
- MPs' and peers' own research

Synthesising and producing knowledge

- POSTnotes
- Library briefing papers
- **Committee reports**
- Parliamentary speeches

Evaluating and using knowledge

- Parliamentary debates
- **Committee recommendations**
- Constituency work
- Informing votes by parliamentarians

The UK
Parliament
as a
**knowledge
institution**

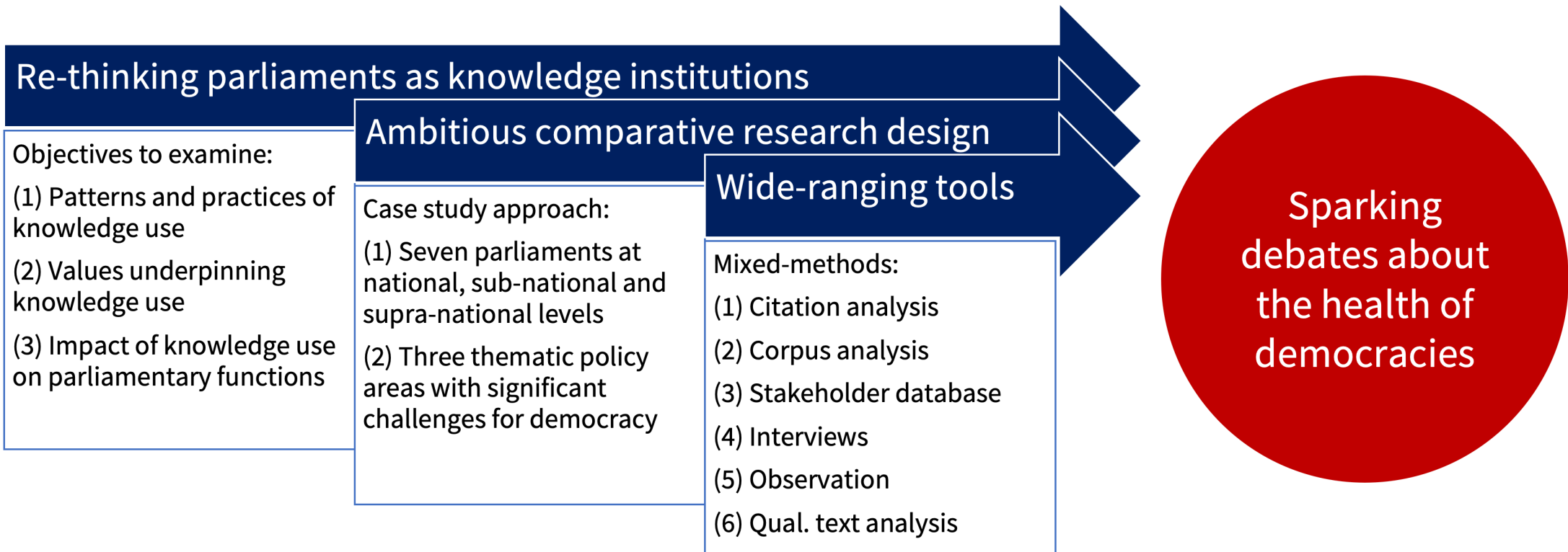


Implications: Understanding ‘good’ evidence?

- What principles should underpin ‘good’ evidence use in a democratic institution, such as a parliamentary committee?
 - What do we mean when we talk about ‘good’ or ‘best available’ evidence?
 - Are these principles unique vis-à-vis other organisations (e.g. governments)?
- What organisational procedures should parliaments (and specifically committees) adopt to promote those principles of ‘good’ evidence use?
 - How does this affect the functionality of committees?

ERC Starting Grant 2024-29

Studying Parliaments and the Role of Knowledge (SPARK)





THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH



UK Research
and Innovation



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



Thank you!

Dr Marc Geddes (marc.geddes@ed.ac.uk)

School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

University of Bergen, 6 June 2024

Influencing the world since 1583