

Party strategies and the descriptive representation of ethnic minorities:

The 2010 British general election

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Abstract:

2010 proved to be a critical election for ethnic minority representation in Britain. The number of minority Members of Parliament reached an unprecedented high. Furthermore, the virtual monopoly of the Labour party on minority parliamentary representation ended. In explaining this development, I move away from the traditional discussion of disadvantages facing minority candidates and turn to the role of the political parties. I argue that a new commitment to increased minority representation exists and show, on the basis of new data, that in the 2010 election both Labour and Conservatives employed a variety of strategies for increasing ethnic minority representation. The strategy to select more minority candidates in ‘white’ seats was not only a key to increasing the numbers of minority parliamentarians but also signals a departure from the traditional pattern of ethnic minority politicians being elected by ethnic minorities.

Keywords: descriptive representation, candidate selection, British politics, 2010 British General Elections.

I. Introduction

2010 was a critical election for ethnic minority representation in Britain. While minorities in the UK are still under-represented, the number of ethnic minority Members of Parliament (MPs) almost doubled, reaching an unprecedented high. In addition, the virtual monopoly of the Labour party in minority representation was ended. Finally, the long-standing pattern of minority politicians representing seats with high minority populations has been broken for good, with the large increase of minority MPs now representing almost exclusively ‘white’ seats (See Table 1).

In explaining this change, this article proposes a new approach. Most of the existing literature that focuses on minority under-representation in Parliament has approached this issue by examining the barriers that minority candidates face, including at the level of parties. The obstacles facing the parties themselves have also been discussed, mostly in terms of a lack of supply of suitable minority candidates and electoral calculus dictating limited demand for these candidates, but little attention has been given to the way that parties - rather than candidates - overcome these problems. However, 2010 was an election that offered unusual opportunities to parties: a large cohort of incumbent MPs were retiring and there was a promise of a large electoral swing. Therefore this article asks: was the increase in the number of minority MPs simply a function of the opportunities that opened to new candidates in 2010, or was it the result of successfully implemented party strategies?

[Table 1 about here]

This article will proceed as follows. First, I argue that British parties took the need for greater representativeness in 2010 more seriously than in the past. The Conservative Party, in particular, saw this issue not only as a traditional matter of attracting minority voters, but as a wider effort to decontaminate their ‘nasty’ image with the general electorate. Second, I

discuss the opportunities and difficulties parties faced in achieving this aim, for the first time focusing on how parties responded to their existing opportunity structure. To this end I identify strategies available to the British parties to increase representation of ethnic minorities. In the third section I examine empirical data on ethnic minority candidates in the 2010 election, to establish to what extent each party implemented its available strategies. The data include detailed information on the political and demographic characteristics of constituencies where minority candidates stood in 2010, and the characteristics of the minority candidates themselves. I find that in 2010 both Labour and the Conservatives successfully implemented a variety of strategies for increasing representation, and these strategies were responsible for the unprecedented improvement in minority representation. I also highlight strategies that were under-used by the parties. Nevertheless, despite the improvement in Conservative minority representation, the Labour party remains the leader in minority representation in Britain. In conclusion, I suggest that the new strategy of selecting minority candidates in predominantly white seats, as well as the traditional seats of large minority concentration, used by both Labour and the Conservatives, signals a change of a previously dominant pattern of British political life within which minority politicians were largely confined to representing areas of geographical concentration of minorities (Saggar and Geddes 2000, Geddes 2001).

II. Increasing ethnic minority representation - a strategic goal?

Is it in the parties' interests to increase or facilitate minority representation? It was clear in the run up to the 2010 elections in the United Kingdom that the opportunity was there, as was the incentive. The 2010 election promised a large electoral swing (away from Labour) and saw a record number of 149 retiring incumbents of the three main parties: 102 Labour, 37

Conservative and 10 Liberal Democrat (Criddle 2010: 307); many new MPs were thus expected to enter parliament in 2010. As I will argue, the main British parties also took minority representation more seriously than ever before, for both general and individual reasons. Generally, the increasing salience of fair representation was reflected in the 2008 formation of a special all party parliamentary committee - known as the Speaker's Conference – to hear evidence on the issue. The Speaker's Conference report (House of Commons 2008) was followed by public commitments from all three parties to set internal targets for the improvement of representation (BBC News 2010, OBV 2009). Individually, the parties had different incentives to act on this commitment: the Conservative leadership saw the issue of representation as a way to overhaul their party's image, while Labour and the Liberal Democrats mostly reacted to the changing structure of party support among minority voters and to general social pressure to increase the diversity of their MPs.

By 2010, the Conservative party had recognised that a fundamental reform to their image was needed to rebuild support, after three successive defeats. David Cameron won the Tory leadership elections campaigning heavily on this issue (Evans 2008). The party leadership agreed that the party's failure to reflect the wider society set them back in the eyes of an electorate that did not see the Conservatives as concerned with their interests or representing them (Green 2010). Opinion polls had shown that since 1997 the voters rated the Conservatives consistently poorly on questions of whether the party: 'Looks after interests of people like us', 'Represents all classes' and '[is] Concerned about people in real need in Britain' (MORI 2010). An influential study by the party's biggest donor, Lord Ashcroft, analysing the 2005 electoral defeat identified the low representation of women and minorities as one of the drivers of the Conservatives' image as old fashioned and elitist (Ashcroft 2005: 6,19,21,26). According to the report, British voters:

‘unambiguously welcomed Britain’s racial, cultural and religious diversity [...]. In these broader questions the poll revealed differences– and sometimes gulfs – in attitude between existing Conservative voters and most of Britain.’ (Ashcroft 2005:19).

The most famous line of this report neatly summarized the need for change: ‘The problem was not that millions of people in Britain thought the Conservative Party wasn’t like them and didn’t understand them; the problem was that they were right.’ (Ashcroft 2005: 111).

Openly addressing the issue of women’s and minorities’ under-representation in public became part of a wider effort to ‘develop a “softer”, more inclusive image (Quinn 2008; 2011). Some of the most prominent of David Cameron’s speeches contained clear and strong expressions of commitment to this cause. In 2007 in his key note speech to the Conservative Party conference he demanded more active efforts, making a reference to the One Nation Toryism, which has been in the past a source of previous, unsuccessful efforts on the part of the Conservatives to address the issue of minority representation and attract minority voters (Rich 1998: 99-102):

‘If we are really the One Nation Party, the Party for opportunity for everybody, it’s not enough to just open the door and say ‘please come in’. We have to get out amongst Britain’s ethnic minority communities and find the brightest, the best and the most talented and get them in.’ (BBC News 03.10.2007)

The sincerity of David Cameron’s commitment to the goal of increasing representation was shown in his controversial attempt to force the local Conservative Party Associations to select candidates from a centrally drawn “A-list” of priority candidates separate from the established list of all pre-approved candidates. This list was gender balanced and contained seven ethnic minority candidates out of around a 100. This strategy

was heavily criticised by local Conservative Associations and was ultimately abandoned (Evans 2008), but its symbolic impact remained- sending a clear message to the party, and the wider public, that the issue of representation was being taken seriously.

In 2010, in a press release of a speech closer to the election in 2010, he addressed a source of main internal criticism of his policy of active encouragement for women and minority candidates:

‘And just in case there is anyone out there who still thinks that the work we've done to get more women candidates, more black and minority ethnic candidates.....that this is some kind of political correctness that Conservatives should avoid. I would say no. You're wrong. It is in the best traditions of our Party.....the One Nation tradition of Benjamin Disraeli, and it should inspire us again today. Unless you can represent everyone in our country you cannot be a one nation party. And that one nation tradition lives on in the Conservative Party not just in the candidates we're selecting but in the issues that we're addressing too.’ (States News Service 15.02.2010)

Labour and the Liberal Democrats also had their reasons to take minority representation more seriously in the 2010 elections. In all post-war elections prior to 2005, ethnic minority groups voted overwhelmingly for the Labour party – between 60 and 80 per cent (Saggar 2000, Electoral Commission 2005). Yet the number of minority Labour MPs and candidates was still low relative to the share of minorities among Labour's members and supporters (Norris *et al* 1992: 105), leading commentators to accuse the party of taking minority voters for granted (Lé Lohé 1998). In the 2005 election, as a result of Labour's unpopular decision to go to war in Iraq, Muslim voters defected in large numbers to the Liberal Democrats and a single-issue Respect party, which explicitly campaigned against the war (Curtice *et al* 2005), highlighting the perils of taking minority support as given. The

sustained Conservative campaign to attract voters of Indian origin, as the most economically successful and culturally conservative ethnic minorities (Saggar 1998), looked a lot more threatening in this context, and the dangers of losing minority voters loomed large for Labour in 2010.¹ Losing a loyal core constituency would have been disastrous for the party at a time when they were already very unpopular.

The Liberal Democrats became more popular with British Muslims after 2003 as a result of their lone opposition to the Iraq war. Building on this, their first ethnic minority MP was elected in 2004, and in 2005 the party registered a large increase in support in Muslim areas (Curtice et al 2005). In 2010, they had a strong incentive to convert these gains, which left them in second place in a number of Labour seats, into increased parliamentary representation.

With all the major parties having a strong incentive to increase minority representation, it is unsurprising that this election saw an increase in minority MPs elected: from 16 to 27. Table 2 documents this development and shows that this near doubling in the number of minority MPs was only matched in 1997, another large swing election. What sets 2010 apart, however, is that this time these gains came for both Labour and the Conservatives, significantly narrowing the historic gap between them. Were these changes in minority representation merely due to the opportunity of many seats changing hands, or were they an outcome of party strategies to put up minority candidates?

[Table 2 about here]

III. Barriers to increasing ethnic minority representation and party strategies to overcome them

III.1 Candidate selection processes

Despite growing interest in tackling under-representation, there are many difficulties that parties face in achieving this goal. First is the parties' internal organisation. While Kittilson and Tate (2005) argue that representation of minorities in Britain follows a top-down party elite model, in fact the British parties' selection methods do not facilitate implementation of top-down tactics.

Selection is a multi-stage process in the three main political parties in Britain. All three have a nationally approved list of candidates who can apply for local selection. In most cases, the local selection committee draws the shortlist and local party members vote on it.² This makes British candidate selection relatively decentralised (Krouwel 1999:11, 12); decentralized selection limits both legislative turnover and central party's influence on selection (Hazan and Rahat 2010: 69; Matland and Studlar 2004: 107). In more centralised proportional systems voters are presented with party lists of candidates rather than a single candidate per party. It may be easier to increase minority representation by putting more minority politicians on the lists, or by moving minority candidates up the list, either to attract minority voters (Fonseca 2011: 124), or to signal a diverse, inclusive set of representatives (Bird 2003: 13). In some countries, the use of preferential voting has been shown to enable minority voters to move minority candidates higher up the list and increase their chances to be elected (Teney *et al* 2010: 294). Whether this is successfully used or attempted by parties in other countries, this is not an option in British general elections.

The British equivalent to the 'safe' top places on the party list in a PR system is nomination to a 'safe' constituency, i.e. a seat where a particular party is very likely to win. In Britain, the relative safety or its opposite – marginality – of the seat is measured by the size of the majority a party received over its nearest competitor in the previous election. If the

winning margin of votes is over 15 per cent, a constituency is unlikely to change hands and is therefore regarded as 'safe', if it is between 10-15 per cent, the seat is fairly safe, a 5-10 per cent winning majority makes the seat a marginal and anything less than five per cent majority means the seat is ultra-marginal. Safe seats promise long Parliamentary careers insulated from the ebb and flow of electoral support and are therefore the most highly prized by candidates.

The localised nature of the selection process in the UK springs from the character of British electoral campaigns. It is the local party which campaigns for parties' candidates, with members donating their time for free- an important and valuable resource for all parties. Antagonism between local activists and the national party can cost the party this crucial support and even result in lost seats, either because the candidate received little local activist support, or because a locally-preferred candidate stood as an independent and won over the centrally imposed candidate.³ Thus parties take great risks if they try to limit local autonomy with centrally-imposed selection. Nevertheless, top-down interventions are a possibility, and I refer to this as strategy 1: *Centralisation of (parts of) the selection process*.

Thus, the centralisation strategy occurs when national leadership overrides the local prerogative of selection and imposes candidates to ensure wider representation. Indeed, despite the risks of alienating local activists and party members, this strategy has become the norm for Labour in order to increase women's representation.⁵ In the 2010 election both the Tory and Labour leadership attempted to centralise the selection process, and used this centralisation to benefit minority candidates. The Conservatives experimented with the "A-list", and both Labour and Conservatives imposed a shortlist in all constituencies that failed to select a candidate before 1 January 2010 (Criddle 2010: 317).⁶

III.2 Supply of suitable candidates

Historically, the problems facing the parties in achieving greater representativeness were located at the level of local selection and were summarised broadly as problems of supply and demand (Norris *et al* 1992; Norris and Lovendusky 1993, 1995) and as consequences of a broader political opportunity structure, including the internal organisation of the parties (Geddes 1998; Norris 1997b). Norris and Lovendusky (1993, 1995) argued that the major barrier for the Conservatives was the unwillingness of suitable minority politicians to stand as Conservative candidates. For Labour, they identified not only a shortage of suitable candidates, but also prejudice on the part of party selectors that produced minority under-representation. Whereas most of the elements of the opportunity structure, such as the electoral system and party selection, have remained stable over time, these supply and demand factors may have changed in the last decade.

The problems of supply have been linked to the lower socio-economic resources of minorities, making them unable or unwilling to meet the high costs of standing as a candidate in terms of time, money and career sacrifice (Norris and Lovendusky 1993: 406). In the last twenty years, however, the situation has improved somewhat, as a prosperous minority middle class has grown (Li and Heath 2010, Cheung and Heath 2007). Still, in order to increase the pool of minority candidates, parties may choose to bring in minority candidates from outside the party. I refer to this as strategy 2, *outside recruitment*.

In 2010 this strategy was especially pertinent to the Conservative party's efforts to include more young people, more women and more minorities standing for this party (Green 2010, Evans 2008). This strategy was publicly announced by David Cameron to 'clean up politics' after the 2009 expenses scandal in which so many MPs were accused of abusing the system of reimbursement. As discussed above, the Conservative leadership initially created an official priority candidate list, but following party-wide protests, the list ceased to be obligatory. Individuals brought into the pool of candidates through this list have stayed on

however - on the general approved candidate list - and so they were available to be selected by local Conservative Associations.

III.3 Demand for minority candidates

On the demand side, parties focus on the local electoral appeal of minority candidates. Traditionally, it has been assumed that minority candidates would win most support from ethnic minority voters, and hence minority candidates have historically stood almost exclusively in constituencies with a large proportion of minority residents. Yet it is clear that to date this strategy has been insufficient: more than 40 constituencies have more than 30 per cent minority residents⁴ but the total number of minority MPs is still lower even after the improvements in 2010. This strategy has also been criticised as a de-facto racialisation and ghettoisation of the issue of minority participation and representation (Saggar and Geddes 2000: 27). Most crucially however, there is actually no empirical evidence showing that minorities vote for minority candidates if they are of a different ethnic background (Le Lohé 1998), or if the minority candidate represents a party for which they do not usually vote (Fisher *et al* 2011). Therefore parties that win most of their seats in homogeneously white areas must consider whether ethnic minority candidates can appeal to white voters if they want to diversify their ranks of MPs; fielding more minority candidates in unwinnable, but ethnically diverse, seats will not change the profile of elected MPs. Indeed, as I show below, the shift towards more minority candidates representing white constituencies is part of the significance of the 2010 election.

The perception that ethnic minority candidates lose votes among white voters has traditionally been seen as a major obstacle to their selection (Norris *et al* 1992, Norris and Lovendusky 1995). For the Conservatives this is a major concern because their support mostly comes from white voters in white constituencies. Hence it is often assumed that the

Tory strongholds will select white middle class men (Carlin and Isaby 2006). The Labour party, on the other hand, is vulnerable to the concern that many of its white working class supporters are particularly threatened by ethnic diversity, and may abstain or defect to the far right British National Party rather than vote for an ethnic minority candidate (Biggs and Knauss, 2011; Ford and Goodwin, 2010). In 2010 there were 125 constituencies where the BNP received more than four percent of votes. Out of these, a majority of 88 were Labour held, most of them safely, and 15 were marginal seats (Labour's majority was less than 10%). The cost of defection to the BNP was therefore likely to fall disproportionately on Labour. Conversely, Conservatives held 33 of these seats (eight marginals); and the Liberal Democrats held just 2 of these seats (one marginal).

The significance of an 'ethnic penalty' might be overstated. The negative effect of minority candidate selection is too small to present a significant risk in safe 'white' constituencies (Fisher *et al* 2011, Curtice *et al* 2010: 394, Norris *et al* 1992: 97), and resistance against minority candidates might be a declining problem given a general trend of falling racial prejudice in Britain (Ford 2008). However, selectors' *expectation* of prejudice among the electorate may stop them from selecting minority candidates even if the true risks are small (Ahmed 2010, Norris and Lovendusky 1995: 123-142). Parties must wrestle with this dilemma to employ strategy 3, fielding minority candidates in 'non-minority' seats.

Because of the limited size of the ethnic minority electorate in Britain, estimated recently at eight per cent of the electorate (Heath *et al.* 2011), and its geographic concentration in Labour strongholds, the Labour party was the only party that could select more minority candidates to stand in safe minority seats. The only way for the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to increase minority representation was to put up minority candidates in mainly "white" areas and persuade white electors to vote for them. Indeed, before the 2010 election there was a steady rise in the numbers of minority candidates, but only a small

increase in the number of constituencies in which they stood. This was because minority candidates from several parties stood against each other in the same seat. Running minority candidates against each other means, on the one hand, that such constituencies will elect a minority MP, but on the other hand, most of these multi-minority candidate contests were in safe Labour seats. Given the difficulties the parties faced in recruiting minority candidates, this amounted to ‘wasting’ a scarce resource.

The extent to which the parties spread minority candidates over more seats and field them in constituencies where no minority candidate has stood before could maximise the symbolic impact of diversifying a party’s candidates, and result in real changes in representation. Selecting, and electing, minority MPs in seats of low ethnic diversity departs from the traditional expectation that minority MPs can only be elected in constituencies with large minority populations.

The fourth strategy I identify responds to the wish to make ethnic minority candidates more acceptable to the electorate by selecting local minority candidates. This strategy addresses the need to achieve a balance between local and national representation. While parties need their MPs to be nationally representative of the population as a whole, due to electoral geography some will have most of their support from almost exclusively ‘white’ areas of the country and in these areas there would be few minority politicians with local roots. Hence a minority candidate would often have to be ‘parachuted’ in and may not be perceived as locally representative in these areas. Thus, making an effort to select any available local minority politicians -- despite limited numbers -- may be an attractive strategy. Some literature shows that minority candidates benefit from appearing less different if they make an effort to ‘fit in’ (Durose et al. 2011), and so a minority candidate in a predominantly ‘white’ seat may be perceived as less of an outsider if they have personal links with the constituency. Also, seeking out a local candidate allows the party to avoid conflict over

‘parachuting’ non-local candidates which often results in tension between local and national parties (Denver 1988: 66).

IV. Data

To examine the implementation of these strategies, I created an original dataset of all ethnic minority candidates from the three main parties, including those of mixed origin. The dataset includes information on constituency demographics (www.ukpollingreport.co.uk; Pippa Norris’ data on www.pippanorris.com), electoral results, and previous ethnic minority candidacy (<http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk.htm>). Boundary changes implemented in 2010 greatly complicated matching information from 2005 to 2010 constituencies, particularly regarding previous minority candidacy. I chose the broadest definition of previous experience with minority candidacy and coded a constituency as having had a minority candidate if any of the previous seats it now encompasses had such history. The marginality and safety of the seats was collated from the Nuffield election series- data kindly made available to me by its authors (Kavanagh and Butler 2005, Appendix 1; Cowley and Kavanagh 2010, Appendix 1)- and constituency-level census data available on www.ukpollingreport.co.uk.

I also gathered information about the candidates’ political background (whether they have been party activists, politicians or party employees); their selection history (whether they stood before, when and where); their current selection (what selection process was used in 2010, whether they were on a priority list and whether any controversy surrounded their selection); their previous employment history; and whether they were a local candidate or not.⁷ Candidate ethnicity was confirmed as minority origin if the candidate was listed as of minority origin on their party’s website or their own website, or if at least two sources

independently confirmed this origin. These data were mostly compiled from candidates' personal campaigning websites, constituency websites, specialist websites centred on candidates and MPs (www.hustings.co.uk, www.theyworkforyou.co.uk and www.ukpolitics.telegraph.co.uk) and the party political websites, all of which had a dedicated page for each of their candidates standing in 2010 elections. To complement the online searches, I performed an archival search of local and national press as well as press agencies between 2000 and 2010 (and before their first election for MPs incumbent in 2010). The newspaper search resulted in the collection of 255 relevant articles.

V. Electoral Opportunities and Party Strategies

Table 3 presents evidence on whether the three main parties succeeded in selecting more minority candidates in their most winnable seats.* Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats ran comparable numbers of ethnic minority candidates in 2010: 47, 45, and 41, respectively. However, Labour placed more of their ethnic minority candidates, 14 out of 47 (30 per cent of the total), in their most safe seats. In contrast, about two-thirds of minority Conservative (29 out of 45) and Liberal Democratic (28 out of 41) candidates stood in unwinnable constituencies. The fact that minority candidates ran in unwinnable seats is somewhat understandable in the case of the Liberal Democrats, for whom most constituencies are currently not realistically winnable. However, the fact that the Conservatives selected more than half of their minority candidates into hopeless seats, despite their vocal commitment to increasing representativeness, may be a reflection of the difficulties in imposing central strategies down to the local level, or raises questions about how serious party leadership were about diversifying their MPs. Even though the Conservatives' performance in the election, worse than anticipated (Green 2010), meant that some Conservative minority candidates who were expected to win were not successful, the party continued to waste the scarce resource of minority candidates on hopeless seats.

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 also presents evidence on minority candidature in the seats vacated by retiring incumbents. The evidence suggests parties made little use of this opportunity to advance minority candidates: Labour and the Conservatives selected 2 and 3 minority candidates respectively, for retirement vacancies, while the Liberal Democrats did not select any at all. This lost opportunity may lead us to question the commitment of the parties to the goal of increasing minority representation. The detailed examination of which parties used which of the available strategies will help establish how committed parties really were to their stated strategic goal to increase minority representation.

The first strategy involves centralisation of candidate selection. A key effort at taking the selection decision partly out of the hands of Conservative Local Associations (CLAs) has been the A-list of top priority candidates. Despite the official repeal of the A-list in January 2009 by the Conservative headquarters, all of the seven ethnic minority names on that list managed to win selection as candidates (see Table 4). Also, four of these candidates succeeded in becoming MPs, thus making the effect of the A-list a positive one for minority candidates. Another effort at taking the selection process away from CLAs was holding open primaries in 116 seats (Criddle 2010: 315), where all registered electors, regardless of partisanship, could vote. Table 4 shows that three of these seats selected minority candidates. One of them went on to become an MP. An open primary was therefore responsible for selecting 3 (6 per cent) of the new Conservative minority candidates, whereas 7 (15 per cent) of these candidates were on the A-list, suggesting that centralisation had had a bigger- if indirect- impact.

In the Labour party, the most prominent centralisation of the selection procedure, aimed at the increased representation of women, has been the all women shortlists (AWS).

Despite the fact that the measure was criticised- most vocally by a minority MP Dianne Abbot- for limiting the opportunities for minority women, four minority women candidates (out of 12 Labour minority women candidates) were selected through AWS and all four became MPs. It thus seems that this centralisation measure- although not aimed specifically at minorities- did benefit minorities in the 2010 election, and perhaps offers an answer to why Labour remained more successful in the field of minority representation. Another instance of centralisation has been the imposition of a short-list of candidates in those constituencies that had not selected by January 2010 (Criddle 2010: 317). Did this move benefit minority candidates? Table 4 shows that out of the 31 new Labour minority candidates (the rest being incumbent MPs) at least five have been selected after this date (the date of selection is missing in two cases). This constitutes 16 per cent of all new minority Labour candidates. Only one of them succeeded in becoming an MP. In some cases, where the description of selection was not available, we can only speculate that the candidates selected in or after January 2010 were from these centrally-imposed shortlists, but overall this strategy has not proved to be of great importance to minority Labour candidates.

[Table 4 about here]

As outlined earlier, parties could also undertake a strategy of *outside recruitment*, making special efforts to increase the pool of minority candidates. Table 5 presents characteristics of the ethnic minority candidates who stood for the three main parties in the 2010 elections. The two characteristics of strategic importance are the candidates' political roots, and their roots in their chosen constituency. Table 5 shows that the Tories brought in more minority candidates from outside their party: 26 out of 45, only just over half of their minority candidates had any political experience with the Conservatives. In fact a few were

former Labour activists and politicians, with one having stood in 2005 as a Labour candidate and one having been a Labour councillor. This is in clear contrast with Labour (35 out of 47) and Liberal Democrat (30 out of 41) candidates, two thirds of whom had party roots. This shows that the Conservatives were more willing to bring in minority candidates from outside traditional channels, whereas the other two parties relied on traditional recruitment channels.

[Table 5 about here]

The pattern of party strategies shifts when we look at the use of strategy 3, the introduction of more minority candidates in a greater variety of seats. Table 6 shows the characteristics of the constituencies contested by an ethnic minority candidate in 2010. As explained earlier, key characteristics are the ethnic composition of the seat and whether a minority candidate was standing for the first time in 2010. The Liberal Democrats stand out for selecting 21 out of 41 (50 per cent) of their minority candidates in highly ethnically diverse constituencies and 25 (70 per cent) in seats where minority candidates had already stood. Given that diverse seats are mostly unwinnable for this party, the Liberal Democratic strategy could be seen as purely a symbolic gesture to increase the number of minority candidates, without actually giving them a chance to win. The Conservatives, on the other hand, selected only 16 out of 45 (about a third) of their minority candidates in ethnically diverse seats. Also, 23 (almost half) of their minority candidates stood in constituencies in which none of the main parties had ever fielded a minority candidate before. I interpret this as evidence of a sincere commitment to increase representation by breaking with historical candidature patterns. Labour also selected 14 out of 47 (only a third) of their minority candidates in highly diverse seats and 26 (55 per cent) minority candidates ran in areas with

no history of minority candidacy. Therefore Labour, too, seemed willing to break new ground in order to increase minority representation.

Extending the range of seats where minority candidates stood, by the two largest parties, is central in explaining the increase in minority representation in 2010. In 2005, only 44 constituencies (out of 650 in total) were contested by an ethnic minority candidate from any of the main parties. In 2010, this rose to 107. Almost 70 per cent of all parties' minority candidates stood in their constituencies as the only minority candidate. Only four constituencies had more than two minority candidates standing against one another, another indication that the parties were running candidates across many sorts of constituencies. In many cases, this ensured that the scarce "resource" of minority candidates was used more efficiently, contributing greatly to minorities' electoral success in the 2010 election.

[Table 6 about here]

In terms of selecting local candidates (strategy no 4), the Liberal Democrats stood out in 2010 with 29 out of 41 (70 per cent) of their minority candidates being local (Table 5). In contrast, slightly over 50 per cent of minority candidates from both the Labour (25 out of 47) and the Conservative (25 out of 45) parties were local. The data used here does not offer a comparison with the proportions of white local candidates selected by each party, however Criddle (2010: 316) points out that for the Conservative party, women and minority candidates were less local in comparison with the white, male candidates; in the 1980s this was also the case for the Labour party (Denver 1988: 66, 67). I find no evidence that the two major parties used a concentrated strategy of searching out local minority candidates to make them more 'acceptable' to local voters.

VI. Conclusions

Has the stated commitment of the British parties to increase minority representation at the 2010 election been genuine? I identified four possible strategies for the political parties to increase the number of ethnic minority candidates: centralisation of the selection process and recruiting minority candidates from outside of the party or among local minority residents in order to overrule local resistance; broadening the range of seats where these candidates stand to ‘white’ seats and seats with no previous history of minority candidacy in order to increase their chances to be elected; and recruiting candidates from outside the party to overcome the problem of insufficient candidate “supply”. Therefore, the question put forth in this article has been: did the parties use these strategies? Were these strategies effective in increasing minority representation?

The evidence presented here supports a qualified yes. On the one hand, I found evidence that Labour and the Conservatives both selected candidates in a broader range of seats than previously and that the Conservatives recruited many candidates with little previous attachment to the party. The Liberal Democrats, in contrast, have not used any of the strategies outlined here, aside from selecting more local minority candidates than the other parties. Selecting minority candidates in safe and winnable seats is more difficult for them considering their limited access to these seats and the much fiercer internal competition for this scarce resource. However, they have also been the most “conservative” party in terms of appointing an overwhelming proportion of their minority candidates in ethnically diverse seats, and in seats with a previous history of ethnic minority candidacy-- seats which they are unlikely to win. On the other hand, none of the parties made full use of the opportunity to select more minority MPs in seats vacated by retiring MPs, a record number of which were

available in 2010. Also, none of the parties successfully centralised the selection processes, with the Conservatives putting in the most visible bid to do so. However, minority candidates for both Labour and the Conservatives benefitted from these efforts, directly or indirectly, and Labour - despite its lower profile - was as successful in pursuing this strategy as the Conservatives. Thus, the increase in minority representation in 2010 would not have happened without targeted efforts by the main political parties. It is not the case that minority representation increased only as a result of an electoral swing and new open seats caused by retirements. Party strategies mattered.

The selection patterns of minority candidates in 2010 departed clearly from the picture drawn in the existing literature. In the past, minority candidates standing in a seat with a small minority population were an exception from the rule (Saggar and Geddes 2000; Geddes 2001). The rule of placing minority candidate in areas with high minority concentration has been seen as deeply ingrained in British race-relations politics and thought to be leading to a negative racialisation and possible 'ghettoisation' of minority politicians (Saggar and Geddes 2000). This pattern has been broken in 2010, and I argue that this change has been led by the Labour party, who despite being more silent on the issue of minority representation during the 2010 election remained the leader in this field. Regardless of the vocal campaign by the Conservatives, who used the issue of minority representation to reform the image of their party as intolerant and privileged, and their huge gains in this area, Labour took the lead on the most crucial strategy used in 2010. They fielded minority candidates in a more diverse range of seats and they were the most adventurous in selecting minority politicians for constituencies where no minority candidate had stood previously. Importantly, they fielded the largest proportion of their candidates in winnable seats, while Conservatives selected more than half of their minority candidates into hopeless seats.

Ultimately, even though Labour lost the general election, they retain the largest group of minority members in Parliament.

With a growing minority population in Britain – in 2010, an estimated 11 per cent of the population was of minority origin – the issue of representing the demographic diversity of the population in the national parliament will continue to be an urgent and significant issue. As this article showed, 2010 saw an impressive increase in the number of ethnic minority politicians elected to the House of Commons, and part of the increase stemmed from concerted strategies undertaken by parties to make parliament better reflect Britain's diversity.

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Table 1 Ethnic minority MPs and ethnic diversity of their constituencies in the last two parliamentary sessions

Per cent of ethnic minority residents		0-10%	10-20%	20-40%	Above 40%	Total
2005-2010	Labour	2	3	2	6	13
	Conservative	2	-	-	-	2
2010-today	Labour	2	3	4	7	16
	Conservative	10	-	1	-	11

Source: Dataset compiled by the author.

Table 2 Minority MPs elected in each electoral cycle since 1987*

	1987-1992	1992-1997	1997-2001	2001-2005	2005-2010	2010
EM MPs elected	4	6	11	12	16	27
Replacing a white MP	4	2	5	3	2	15
Labour EM MPs	4	5	11	11	14	16
Conservative EM MPs	-	1	-	-	2	11
Lib-Dem EM MPs	-	-	-	1	-	-

Source: Dataset compiled by the author (details in the Data section).

*These are the numbers of MPs elected in the electoral cycle-including by-elections. Where one ethnic minority MP replaced another minority MP the total will not change.

Table 3 Seats contested by minority candidates in 2010: safety and incumbency

	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
	Number of seats	Number of seats	Number of seats
Safe held (majority >15%)	13/14*	8	0
Fairly safe held (majority > 10%)	4	0	0
Winnable held (majority <10%)	4/5**	0	0
Winnable challenger (majority <10%)	5	5	2
Unwinnable challenger (3 rd place)	4	3	11
Unwinnable challenger (safe for other party)	15	29	28
Retired incumbent	2 (out of 102)	3 (out of 37)	0 (out of 10)
Total	47	45	41

Source: Dataset compiled by the author, on the basis of the BBC data (Curtice et al 2010).

*Including a notionally safe Brent Central (following boundary changes), which was lost.

**Including a notionally Labour held marginal of Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (following boundary changes) which was lost.

Table 4 Centralisation of selection process and minority candidates in 2010

	Labour	Conservatives
	Number of New Candidates*	Number of New Candidates*
A-list		7
Open primaries		3
NEC emergency shortlists	5	
All Women Shortlists	4	
Total	31	43

Source: Dataset compiled by author. *New minority candidates (excluding incumbent minority MPs).

Table 5 Ethnic minority candidates 2010: candidate characteristics

	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal-Democrats
	Number of seats	Number of seats	Number of seats
Local candidate	25	25	29
Party activist/ politician	35	26	30
Total	47	45	41

Source: Dataset compiled by the author.

Table 6 Seats contested by minority candidates in 2010: seat characteristics

	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
	Number of seats	Number of seats	Number of seats
High diversity seats (>20% minorities)	14	16	21
Safe high diversity seats	10	0	0
Winnable high diversity seats	4	1	1
Seat with history of EM candidates	21	22	25
Single EM candidate	32	30	27
Total	47	45	41

Source: Dataset compiled by the author, safety margins developed from BBC data (Curtice et al 2010).

Notes

- * Data in the tables provide descriptive statistics of the relevant population of minority candidates or elected representatives. Since each party fielded a similar number of ethnic minority candidates, the data should be fairly easy to compare. For ease of interpretation, I discuss the absolute numbers and the proportions when differences in the latter are meaningfully large. Since I am examining a population, rather than a sample, I do not evoke the notion of statistical significance in my comparison of proportions.
1. Evidence from the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study shows that a quarter of the Indian minority supported the Conservative party (Heath et al 2011).
 2. The Tories introduced a number of open primaries in 2010. Additionally, in Labour selection the hopefuls must collect the nominations of the Trade Unions and the local Labour party at the level of wards (a geographical unit of representation for local elections) to be included on the shortlist.
 3. Two famous examples are Cheltenham in 1992 where a minority candidate was imposed by the national Conservative party and lost a safe seat; and Blaenau Gwent in 2005 where an All-Women-Shortlist was imposed by the Labour National Executive Committee and the former Labour (male) incumbent won as an independent.
 4. Since most ethnic minorities, regardless of their citizenship status, have full electoral rights and a reasonably high level of political engagement (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2008, Heath *et al* 2011), they constitute about 8 per cent of the electorate (Heath *et al* 2011).
 5. All-Women-Shortlists (AWS) were first introduced by the Labour party in the 1997 elections. In 1997, following a legal challenge AWS were declared illegal. However, the Labour government passed the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 in

order to make them legal, and used them in subsequent elections. Geddes (1995) and OBV (2008) advocated the use of equivalent measures for ethnic minorities.

6. The Liberal Democrats party conference voted against an obligatory inclusion of at least one ethnic minority candidate on shortlists in winnable seats on 22nd September 2010. The main reason put forward was the unequal and undemocratic nature of such measure.
7. I coded candidates as local if internet search or press archives showed a link between them and the area: whether through work, birth or residence. The many constituencies in London were difficult to code because of the popularity of commuting in London, and so all London-based candidates were coded as local if they stood for election in Greater London.

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