

Parliamentary candidates not picked to fight "winnable seats" in areas with less tolerance

January 11 2021

VOTE

YES NO



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The study found a "systematic and quantifiable pattern" of political

parties officers opting against fielding minority candidates where they perceive that their non-white appearance might prevent a win. This includes constituencies already held by the party, and those within reach, requiring just a small swing in the vote to change hands.

Dr. Patrick English, from the University of Exeter, who carried out the research, said: "This combination of public opinion and party strategy is one of the most significant blockages to electing parliaments which fully reflect the ethnic diversity of their populations, and works in tandem with and drives other exclusionary forces.

"Though much research has focused on potential voter discrimination, focusing on the behavior of voters alone misses any discrimination which might occur prior to elections."

There would need to be around non-white 95 MPs would need to "reflect" the size of the minority-ethnic British population—estimated at around 14.5 percent in England and Wales, according to the most recent Annual Population Survey results. As it stands, only 65 MPs currently fit this profile.

Traditionally, Labor and Conservative candidate selection for British General Elections is handled by local branches and organizations of political parties, with applicants approved and vetted through national processes.

Dr. English used [regression analysis](#) to show the relationship between [election](#) candidates and public opinion since 1997, using a specially created database. Candidate ethnic minority status was determined using online visual information, including [social media](#), candidate pages and news articles. A seat was considered winnable at a given election if the party already holds the seat or it required less than a 5 percent swing to change parties.

Local public opinion on diversity was measured by combining questions about race and immigration from five different sources: the European Social Survey, the British Election Study, the British Social Attitudes survey, and the European and World Values studies.

There was a rise in the total number of ethnic minority candidates fielded in British General Elections over the study period, with a particularly sizeable jump between 2010 and 2015. The Labor Party provided more opportunities than their Conservative counterparts in four out of seven of the elections in the study, including in 2017 and 2019.

London was far ahead of all other regions in terms of the percentage of seats there 'opened up' for minority representation. Opportunities were also relatively high in the South East and the West Midlands. There were very few "winnable seat" opportunities given to minority candidates in Wales, the North East, the South West, or the East Midlands.

Attitudes in London and Scotland towards immigration were more positive than other regions, while—with the exception of recent years—attitudes in regions such as Wales and the North East are much less positive on average. Some regions did not see such a dramatic change in recent years as others, with Yorkshire and the Humber, the South West, and the North West remaining fairly low on the scale compared to others such as the South East and the West Midlands in later years.

Dr. English said: "Sadly this analysis suggests opportunities for BAME candidates wanting to stand for parliament are not equal, and processes for selecting candidates do not treat everyone fairly. This means electoral success is too often biased away from too many.

"Political parties are charged with being 'gatekeepers' to representation, and while they ultimately provide the vast majority of representational

opportunities, they can also create punitive pressures on prospective candidates from 'non-traditional' backgrounds seeking to become representatives."

More information: Patrick English, High rejection, low selection: How 'punitive parties' shape ethnic minority representation, *Party Politics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1354068820973851](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820973851)

Provided by University of Exeter

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