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# Mobility and Representation: Legislators of Non-European Origin in the British House of Commons, 2001–2015

**Abstract:** *While the share of immigrants as a percentage of the UK population has increased steadily since the 1950s, it was not until the early 2000s that the descriptive representation of such new citizens in the House of Commons became more proportional. Focusing on Members of Parliament with a “Black or Asian Minority Ethnic” background in the three Parliaments between 2001 and 2015, we examine the extent to which these legislators’ parliamentary behaviour was influenced by their party membership, legislative experience, “immigrant generation” and constituency demographics. Based conceptually on a sociological “mobilities” framework and Fenno’s work on “Home Styles” in the US Congress, we perform a dictionary-based content analysis of over 23,000 parliamentary questions for written answer. Comparing first-generation immigrants and the immediate descendants of such immigrants, we find that the content of questions reflects a relatively strong concern for transnational mobility amongst the former and a stronger focus on questions of social mobility in the UK in the latter group.*

Having been the origin of significant levels of emigration to non-European destinations in previous centuries, European states have become the destinations for large-scale immigration from non-European societies since the Second World War. Great Britain is a case in point: the number of foreign-born residents – so-called “first-generation immigrants” – in England and Wales nearly quadrupled from approximately 1.9 million (4.5 per cent of the “usually resident” population) in 1951, the first census after the Second World War, to around 7.5 million (13 per cent of the population) in the latest census of 2011.<sup>1</sup> While the arrival of a large number of people with transnational biographies is not extraordinary, Great Britain differs from many other European countries in one crucial respect: most of its early post-war immigrants arrived from Commonwealth States and therefore had full citizenship rights on arrival, including voting rights and the right to stand for

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics. Non-UK Born Population of England and Wales Quadrupled Between 1951 and 2011 (17 Dec. 2013), in: *Census Analysis, Immigration Patterns of Non-UK Born Populations in England and Wales in 2011*. URL: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/immigration-patterns-and-characteristics-of-non-uk-born-population-groups-in-england-and-wales/summary.html> (13 June 2015).

election. Nevertheless, it was not until 1987 that the first four Members of Parliament (MPs) claiming a “Black or Asian Minority Ethnic” (BAME) background were elected to the House of Commons. At the time this “Gang of Four”<sup>2</sup>, all members of the Labour Party, constituted approximately 0.6 per cent of all MPs. When the Commons met for the first time after the general election of 2015, this share had increased approximately tenfold to some 6 per cent of all 650 Members (Table 1).

Despite this increase in “descriptive representation” (see below), the political underrepresentation of BAME groups in the United Kingdom continues, as is the case in other liberal democracies. The present study seeks to explore aspects of, and differences among, the behaviour of MPs with a BAME background in the Parliaments elected in 2001, 2005 and 2010 (i.e. between June 2001 and May 2015). Empirically our study is based on the content of parliamentary questions for written answer, which many MPs generate in large numbers. They will serve as indicators of the issues MPs promote in the chamber, or emphasise in their oversight activities *vis-à-vis* the government. Our aim is to highlight variations *within* the group of BAME MPs rather than focusing on similarities and differences between this group and MPs of European descent. Therefore we are not comparing MPs with a BAME background to MPs without such a background. This shifts the analytic focus to some biographical factors such as “immigrant generation” or parliamentary experience on the one hand and elements of the political opportunity structure in which the BAME MPs operate on the other (e.g. MP’s party membership or socio-demographic composition of the electoral district).

The emphasis of this study is not on single legislators and their individual life stories but on a few group characteristics that will be used for exploratory statistical analyses. The advantage is greater generalisability, the drawback is a loss in biographical granularity. Our data is far from carefully reconstructing the life-courses especially of the “first generation” of non-European immigrants in the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it carries some key information on the personal experiences, political preferences and structural factors empowering or constraining BAME MPs, which have been found to be significant influences on parliamentary behaviour: This includes the fundamental distinction whether the MPs are immigrants themselves, or whether they are the sons or daughters of immigrants, as the latter often display weaker affective ties to their ancestral “home-

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<sup>2</sup> These were Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng, Bernie Grant and Keith Vaz.

<sup>3</sup> Some data connecting the politicians’ biography in their home countries with their career in their countries of residence will become available for the United Kingdom and seven other European countries (Belgium, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain) in 2017 when “PATHWAYS” ([www.pathways.eu](http://www.pathways.eu)) a large comparative research project delivers some more finely granulated data on personal backgrounds.

lands” than their parents.<sup>4</sup> We also use information about the party an MP represents. After all, political parties are the primary contexts of political socialisation, provide and constrain opportunities for political careers and select those who represent them in Parliament. Not least, our exogenous variables include the context of electoral competition and the type of demands directed at MPs, which is partially shaped by the socio-demographic makeup of their constituencies.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to other studies in this volume, we find that the institutions in the new country of residence constitute very powerful constraints creating strong incentives for MPs with a BAME background to maintain a clear local or national focus. Although we may discover traces of “rooted cosmopolitanism”<sup>6</sup> in the parliamentary speeches of minority MPs with a BAME background, they clearly constitute a contrast to the artists, bankers and other groups analysed in this volume where ambiguity may, on occasion, have been an asset. Cases where British BAME MPs overtly or covertly represent the interests of ethnically related foreigners or receive foreign donations from such countries are highly exceptional and may be drawn to the attention of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.<sup>7</sup>

## Migration, Representation and Mobilities

The present study is in the tradition of work that treats the migratory and ethnic background of MPs as consequential for their behaviour in the legislature, in

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<sup>4</sup> The importance of the difference especially between immigrants and the “second generation” of their descendants is well documented in sociological and historical research. In sociology, see Richard Alba and Victor Nee (eds.): *Remaking the American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA 2005; Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut: *Immigrant America. A Portrait*. Oakland, CA <sup>4</sup>2014. In historical research, see, amongst many others, Eric L. Goldstein: *The Great Wave. Eastern European Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1880–1924*, in: Marc Lee Raphael (ed.): *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*. New York 2005, 70–92.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the last two variables, see, for example, Thomas Saalfeld: *Parliamentary Questions as Instruments of Substantive Representation. Visible Minorities in the UK House of Commons, 2005–10*, in: *Journal of Legislative Studies* 17 (2011), 271–289.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Tarrow: *Rooted Cosmopolitans and Transnational Activists*, in: id. (ed.): *Strangers at the Gates. Movements and States in Contentious Politics*. Cambridge 2012, 181–199.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Emily Dugan: *Keith Vaz Reported to Parliamentary Standards Commissioner over Lobbying Visa Officials for Controversial Cricketing Tycoon*, in: *Independent* (25 July 2015), URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/keith-vaz-reported-to-parliamentary-standards-commissioner-over-lobbying-visa-officials-for-controversial-cricketing-tycoon-10303541.html> (7 Aug. 2015).

their electoral district or *vis-à-vis* the wider attentive public.<sup>8</sup> MPs of immigrant origin bring an element of strong “mobility”<sup>9</sup> to deliberations in the chamber. This experience of mobility – or “motility” as outlined in the introduction to this volume – affects BAME legislators in the House of Commons in at least two ways: First, immigrant MPs have personally experienced “horizontal” trans-border mobility, involving the arrival in a new social, economic and political environment. In this context they often had to overcome “historical political subordination” (e.g. as residents of former British colonies), “low de facto legitimacy”<sup>10</sup> and possibly discrimination – not only in the work place, but also within organisations such as political parties or trade unions.<sup>11</sup>

If their background matters at all to their political attitudes and behaviour, they face a complex task once they stand for elected office: they are only likely to get selected as candidates by their parties and elected by a plurality of the voters in their respective districts, if they can claim to represent *all* residents of their *locally* defined constituencies. This leads to different strategic options for “handling” their ethnicity: at one end of a representational continuum they may have incentives to suppress their own background;<sup>12</sup> at the other end of that spectrum they may define themselves as representatives of minorities throughout the UK reaching beyond their local constituency. For the latter type, representation may even include transnational elements, if they retain links with politics or organisations in their ancestral homeland or concern themselves with global diaspora or faith communities. The House of Commons offers limited institutional opportunities for transnational activity beyond party politics, namely in the so-called “All-Party Parliamentary Groups” that seek to foster exchange with various countries. In 2015, for example, the Conservative MP Rehman Chishti, who was born in Pakistan, served as the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> In short, their horizontal mobility may introduce a trans-constituency

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**8** Other works especially on the United States Congress or state legislatures in the US have examined the effect the legislators’ ethnicity has on constituent attitudes and behaviour – or indeed the patterns of conflict and cooperation in Congress. For a review, see John D. Griffin: When and Why Minority Legislators Matter, in: *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014), 327–336.

**9** Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry: Editorial. Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings, in: *Mobilities* 1 (2006), 1–22; Mimi Sheller and John Urry: The New Mobilities Paradigm, in: *Environment and Planning* 38 (2006), 207–226.

**10** Jane Mansbridge: Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent “Yes”, in: *Journal of Politics* 61 (1999), 628–657, esp. 628.

**11** Randall Hansen: *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain*. Oxford 2000.

**12** In the US context, this phenomenon is referred to as “deracialization”. See Joseph McCormick: The November Elections. The Politics of Deracialization, in: *New Directions* 17 (1990), 22–27.

**13** URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/register/pakistan.htm> (6 Aug. 2015).

and transnational element into the process of territorial, district-based representation in the UK.

Secondly, many descendants of immigrants as well as immigrants in politics experienced a spectacular process of upward (vertical) social mobility in the UK. While the descendants of non-European immigrants may (or may not) have encountered as much discrimination on their path to the political elite as “first-generation” immigrants,<sup>14</sup> their transnational links to the politics of their ancestral homelands are often weaker. Nevertheless, family ties and the compression of geographic space through new internet-based media may have compensated for the biographical distance. While technical advances certainly created the conditions for continuous links between the MPs and their ancestral homelands, it remains an empirical question whether there is actually any evidence for attempts to be part of some “imagined community”, to borrow Anderson’s phrase.<sup>15</sup> In short, the research problem at the heart of this study is the extent to which various – horizontal and vertical – “mobilities” add a new transnational dimension to democratic representation in the United Kingdom (and, by extension, other European countries).

Ethnicity and the opportunity (or the need) to move between different “worlds” open up strategic options.<sup>16</sup> To what extent do differences in the life-courses of MPs with a BAME background shape their behaviour in the chamber – and, not least, towards his or her constituents, whether local, national or even transnational? After all, MPs have choices in the way they perform their roles as legislators.<sup>17</sup> They may find it wise to prioritise tasks assigned to them by their parliamentary parties; they may aspire to ministerial office or to so-called “mega seats”<sup>18</sup> such as committee chairs – and hence do everything to avoid the impression of representing what might be perceived as narrow group interests; or they may see themselves as local constituency representatives. The present study focuses on the legislative behaviour of the 37 MPs of non-European origin who served in the House of Commons between 2001 and 2015 (Appendix 1). In

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**14** Indications of racism experienced by second-generation immigrants can be found in various autobiographies, including Parmjid Dhandra: *My Political Race*. London 2015.

**15** Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London 2006.

**16** Thomas Saalfeld, Karen Bird and Andreas M. Wüst: Epilogue. Towards a Strategic Model of Minority Participation and Representation, in: eid. (eds.): *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities. Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*. London 2011, 266–275.

**17** Donald Searing: *Westminster’s World. Understanding Political Roles*. Cambridge, MA 1994.

**18** Royce Carroll, Gary W. Cox and Mónica Pachón: How Parties Create Electoral Democracy. Chapter 2, in: *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 31 (2006), 153–174.

particular, it aims to demonstrate the variability of behaviour *within* this group of MPs. Variability may be induced by factors such as party, pre-parliamentary socialisation (which may depend on the country of birth of ethnic-minority MPs and their continued dedication to “homeland politics”), socialisation in their party and in the chamber (experience) or strategic incentives arising from the demographic composition of the constituency.

## Theoretical Framework

Representation is an ambiguous concept spanning several dimensions. In Hanna Pitkin’s words “representation means, as the word’s etymological origins indicate, *re-presentation*, a making present again. [...] Representation, taken generally, means the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact.”<sup>19</sup> One of the most fundamental further distinctions in this context is the one between “descriptive” and “substantive” representation. Descriptive representation refers to a “shared characteristic linking the governors and the governed”.<sup>20</sup> Ethnicity or gender can be such characteristics. Substantive representation, by contrast, refers to “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” without *necessarily* assuming a link between personal characteristics and policy responsiveness.<sup>21</sup>

Building on this definition, Jane Mansbridge refines the basic distinction between descriptive and substantive representation further. First, her notion of “gyroscopic representation” highlights an important aspect of descriptive representation by describing a mechanism whereby “the representative looks within, as a basis for action, to conceptions of interest, ‘common sense,’ and principles derived in part from the representative’s own background.”<sup>22</sup> Second, the notion of substantive representation can be based on three mechanisms: In Mansbridge’s terminology, “promissory representation” refers to “the idea that during [electoral] campaigns representatives made promises to constituents, which they then kept or failed to keep.” Acting in the interest of the represented can also be based on “anticipatory representation”, which “flows directly from

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<sup>19</sup> Hanna F. Pitkin: *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley, CA 1967, 8–9. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>20</sup> Griffin, *When and Why*, 328.

<sup>21</sup> Pitkin, *The Concept*, 209.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Mansbridge: *Rethinking Representation*, in: *American Political Science Review* 97 (2003), 515–528, esp. 515.

the idea of retrospective voting: Representatives focus on what they think their constituents will approve at the next election, not on what they promised to do at the last election.” In these two mechanisms the candidate’s personal characteristics are neither irrelevant nor central. Given comparable electoral incentives, promissory and anticipatory representation may affect the way of ethnic majority and minority MPs in similar ways and electoral competition should establish a more or less close alignment between the voters’ preferences and the MPs’ behaviour as representatives. “Surrogate representation”, by contrast, does depend on the MP’s personal traits (like gyroscopic representation): it “occurs when legislators represent constituents outside their own districts”<sup>23</sup>, and when this occurs because legislators share some other personal trait with those groups.

The specific *focus* of different types of representation may vary. Richard Fenno conceptualises representation as “a never-ending process whereby the politician works at building and maintaining supportive connections with some proportion of his or her constituents.”<sup>24</sup> His empirical studies show that “[a]ll House members are goal seekers. They have ambitions; they want to accomplish things.”<sup>25</sup> Thus their representational activities tend to be in line with goals such as “getting reelected, making good public policy, accumulating influence in the House, building a political party locally, performing a civic duty, and helping individuals with their problems.”<sup>26</sup> Crucially for our present argument, “reelection subsequently becomes the first-order goal of almost every incumbent House member”, although “election is not the only goal that drives the aspirant toward politics in the first place, and reelection is not the only goal that keeps the member in politics afterward.”<sup>27</sup> Crucially for the purposes of our study, Fenno assumes

that each Representative perceives not a single home constituency, but a set of constituencies that nest, like a series of concentric circles, within one another. The largest circle, the district, contains all the residents of the legally prescribed geographical constituency; the next smaller, the reelection constituency, contains all voters who support or might support the member, and the smallest, the primary constituency, consists of their most active and most reliable supporters. African American members [...] perceive a fourth constituency to which they respond, one beyond the district – a national constituency of black citizens who live beyond the borders of any one member’s district, but with whom all black members share a set of race-related concerns.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> All quotes in this paragraph are taken from *ibid.*

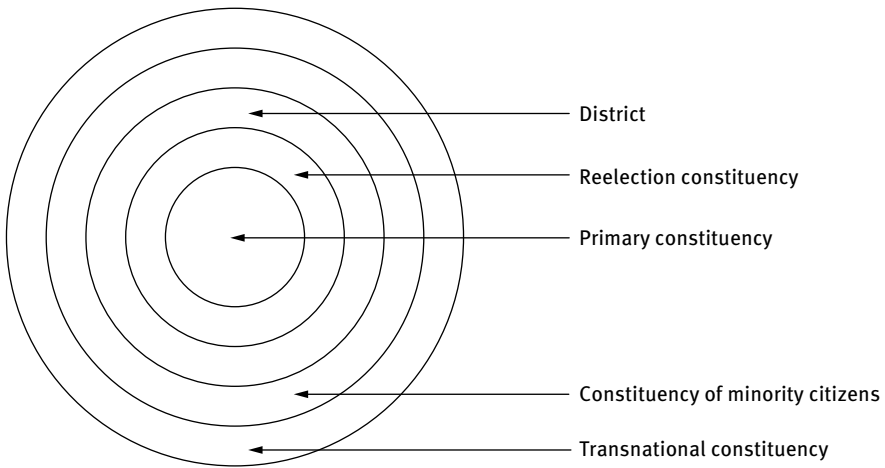
<sup>24</sup> Richard F. Fenno: *Going Home. Black Representatives and Their Constituents*. Chicago 2003.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



**Figure 1:** Concentric Circles of Ethnic-Minority Representation (inspired by Fenno)

A modified version of this model of “concentric circles” could be applied to British MPs with a BAME background: The smallest circle, Fenno’s “primary constituency”, would be the party activists who decide over the MP’s reselection and play a crucial role in mobilising the resources for a successful local campaign. Around this core, there would be a second, “reelection constituency” comprising the MP’s (and his or her party’s) likely voters in the district. The third, “district” circle would include all potential voters – and, indeed, residents – in the MP’s territorially defined electoral district. This is appropriate, because a backbencher’s reputation depends, amongst other factors, on the visibility of his or her constituency casework on behalf of all residents in the district regardless of their citizenship status or political allegiance. We know from qualitative work that some – but by no means all – BAME MPs may consider themselves as representing a fourth circle, namely the “constituency of minority citizens” beyond their immediate electoral district. For example Bernie Grant, one of the first four BAME MPs elected to the House of Commons after 1945, stated: “I’m an African MP. I’m quite happy working on race issues.”<sup>29</sup> Paul Boateng, elected in the same cohort of minority MPs in 1987, took a more differentiated approach: “I am an MP who is black. I am not a black MP. I am an MP with a wide variety of interests and who has had portfolios

<sup>29</sup> Bernie Grant MP, quoted in Jaqi Nixon: *The Role of Black and Asian MPs at Westminster*, in: Shamit Saggarr (ed.): *Race and British Electoral Politics*. London 1998, 202–222, esp. 207.



which are not race-specific but who has a commitment and a responsibility to the struggle for racial justice.”<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Fenno’s Black Congressmen and Congresswomen, some of the British BAME MPs are not only members of a minority, they are immigrants themselves and maintain close links with their ancestral home countries. Such MPs may well be responsive to a fifth, “transnational” constituency that may, however, have close interconnections with their local constituency. One – unusually striking – illustration for the transnational character of political representation in the first immigrant generation is Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar, who was born in Pakistan in 1952, immigrated to the UK in 1976, made a personal fortune as owner of a successful retail chain and served as Labour MP for Glasgow Govan (later Glasgow Central) between 1997 and 2010. Throughout his tenure as MP, he maintained close personal and business links with organisations in his ancestral homeland. Amongst other activities, he established a Pakistan-UK Forum to promote dialogue between Pakistani and UK parliamentarians. He was critical of the Blair government’s foreign policy in relation to Iraq and to aspects of its anti-terrorism legislation. He combined his transnational role with his membership (2004–2010) and chairmanship (2005–2010) of the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee. In 2013 he renounced his British citizenship to take up the position of governor of Punjab, initially representing the conservative Pakistan Muslim League. He resigned from this position in 2015.<sup>31</sup> The fact that his son, Anas Sarwar, was able to secure the Labour Party nomination for his father’s seat and was subsequently elected as his successor as MP in 2010 suggests that the family had established – and retained – a high level of local political capital in the constituency even after Mohammad Sarwar’s retirement in 2010. While Mohammad Sarwar may be an untypical case, his political biography shows some aspects of the “rooted cosmopolitanism” referred to above and in the introduction to this volume.

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**30** Paul Boateng MP, quoted *ibid.*, 207.

**31** Profile of Mohammad Sarwar, URL: [http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10528/mohammad\\_sarwar/glasgow\\_central#profile](http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10528/mohammad_sarwar/glasgow_central#profile) (13 June 2015); Andrew Buncombe: UK’s First Muslim MP Mohammad Sarwar Becomes Governor of Pakistan’s Punjab Province, in: *The Independent* (5 Aug. 2013). URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/uks-first-muslim-mp-mohammad-sarwar-becomes-governor-of-pakistans-punjab-province-8746743.html> (13 June 2015); Abdul Manan: Governor Punjab Chaudhry Sarwar Resigns after Making Anti-Govt Remarks, in: *The Express Tribune with the International New York Times* (29 Jan. 2015), URL: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/829511/governor-punjab-chaudhry-sarwar-resigns/> (13 June 2015).

Justin Grimmer shows how US Senators actively seek to influence their own visibility and their constituents' evaluations of their activities as legislators.<sup>32</sup> "Representatives strategically use presentational styles to subtly suggest the terms that constituents should use when evaluating their members of Congress."<sup>33</sup> Legislators' speeches in the chamber, activities in the electoral district and press releases are part of this attempt:

Legislators provide information about work in Washington – selectively highlighting activities to cultivate support with constituents. Legislators also provide explanations – clarifying how and why their work in Washington is valuable. Legislators provide both information and interpretation about work in Washington to build support among constituents.<sup>34</sup>

Grimmer demonstrates that the political make-up of the constituency matters a great deal in this context: Legislators who are ideologically out of step with their constituents (e.g., Democratic legislators representing predominantly Republican districts or *vice versa*) highlight non-ideological activities as advocates of local interests. Legislators who are well-aligned with the political majorities in their districts, by contrast, tend to highlight their involvement in national policy debates.<sup>35</sup>

Works such as Grimmer's show that the socio-demographic and political composition of electoral districts matters for legislative behaviour and the communication between voters and constituents. In the European context there is still a dearth of studies on how ethnic-minority legislators communicate with their constituents. In the context of the UK House of Commons, MPs use parliamentary questions for written answer as a signal to voters and attentive members of the public, to use a term similar to Ralf Dahrendorf's distinction between "active" members of the public who participate in political life, "passive" members who are recipients of political communication and "latent" publics consisting of politically apathetic persons who are disinterested in political signals of any kind.<sup>36</sup> The parliamentary questions asked by UK MPs are reported by internet-based monitoring platforms like TheyWorkForYou (<http://www.theyworkforyou.com>) along with Members' biographies, voting records in the chamber, expenses,

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<sup>32</sup> Justin Grimmer: *Representational Style in Congress. What Legislators Say and Why It Matters*. Cambridge 2013.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>36</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf: *Aktive und passive Öffentlichkeit. Über Teilnahme und Initiative im politischen Prozeß moderner Gesellschaften*, in: Wolfgang R. Langenbacher (ed.): *Politische Kommunikation. Grundlagen, Strukturen, Prozesse*. Wien 1993, 42–51.

speeches and other information.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, MPs actively communicate their questions via their own personal websites. Labour MP Diane Abbott, for example, maintains tabs on her personal website informing visitors about her parliamentary speeches, questions, press releases and other publications.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the Conservative MP Adam Afriyie prints the text of press releases on his personal website including, for example, a press release about a parliamentary question he tabled in relation to his Windsor constituency: “Adam Afriyie keeps fighting for flood defences [...] The MP for Windsor, Adam Afriyie was behind a recent Parliamentary Question, asking how many homes would be protected by new flooding defences.” In the same press release, he reports the response of the Conservative government minister: “The Minister who replied, Dan Rogerson, said that the Government’s plans would protect 400 homes in Windsor and Maidenhead and up to 3,000 in total around the Thames Valley.”<sup>39</sup>

From a wider comparative-politics perspective one important question in this context is whether candidate-centred electoral systems enhance (a) the descriptive and (b) the substantive representation of ethnic-minority interests, if minorities are concentrated in particular districts. Every candidate who wishes to win a seat in the House has to run in one of the country’s 650 territorially-defined single-member districts as his or her party’s sole candidate and will attain this seat only if he or she gains a plurality of votes in that district against all other parties and their candidates. As a result, the UK’s electoral system for Westminster elections is often seen as a “candidate-centred” system that creates strong incentives to cultivate a personal vote.<sup>40</sup> These incentives, some authors argue, translate directly into their responsiveness towards constituents’ demands.<sup>41</sup> At least in marginal seats MPs perceive themselves as being highly accountable to their voters, because voters need to monitor the performance of just one MP (as opposed to many MPs in multi-member districts), and because voters possess the necessary means to punish their representative in the next general elections individually and retro-

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**37** Similarly, the web portal The Public Whip. URL: <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk> (13 June 2015).

**38** See Diane Abbott’s personal website. URL: <http://www.dianeabbott.org.uk/> (31 May 2015).

**39** Adam Afriyie Keeps Fighting for Flood Defences – Posted by Adam Afriyie – Press Release (25 Mar. 2015), URL: <http://adamafriyie.org/> (31 May 2015).

**40** This interpretation of the British first-past-the-post system is not uncontentious. John M. Carey and Matthew S. Shugart (Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote. A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas, in: *Electoral Studies* 14 (1995), 417–439) do not attribute a strong incentive to cultivate a personal vote to it. Sven-Oliver Proksch and Jonathan B. Slapin (*The Politics of Parliamentary Debate. Parties, Rebels and Representation*. Cambridge 2014), by contrast, do.

**41** Richard F. Fenno: *Home Style. House Members in their Districts*. Boston 1978; Bruce E. Cain, John A. Ferejohn and Morris P. Fiorina: *The Personal Vote. Constituency Service and Electoral Independence*. Cambridge, MA 1987; Carey and Shugart, Incentives.

spectively.<sup>42</sup> As a result, there should be favourable conditions for Mansbridge’s “anticipatory representation” to operate. Thus, if the assumption holds that MPs are mainly motivated by their desire to seek re-election,<sup>43</sup> MPs will anticipate their electoral vulnerability and align their parliamentary actions with the perceived demands of their constituents. While MPs are seen as “agents” of their electoral “principals” in such models, they simultaneously have incentives to use all means of communication available to them to influence the expectations and perceptions of their constituents, that is, their “reelection constituency” in Fenno’s terms. Therefore we would expect higher shares of “non-white” residents in a constituency to increase the likelihood of MPs submitting parliamentary questions that refer to immigrants and ethnic minorities in a supportive manner.

However, this seemingly straightforward effect may be causally very intricate for three main reasons: First, when selecting candidates for the electoral race in a district, parties might take the district’s socio-demographic composition into account and nominate BAME candidates to stand in constituencies with a high share of “non-white” voters, or they might select “white” candidates with a reputation of being highly committed to issues of ethnic diversity. Correlations between district demographics and legislative behaviour may therefore be the result of a selection effect rather than incentives and mechanisms that are typically attributed to the first-past-the-post electoral system. Second, MPs will use the parliamentary arena – as any other public forum available to them – to “manage the expectations” of their constituents and shape their perceptions.<sup>44</sup> Thus there may be an element of reverse causality. Finally, there may be situations where the first-past-the-post electoral system actually dampens the incentives to be responsive to constituency demographics. Despite a slowly growing attractiveness of the Conservative Party especially to British Asian voters,<sup>45</sup> Britain’s minority voters overall still have a strong preference to cast their vote for the Labour Party.<sup>46</sup> These voters typically reside in urban areas, which are often Labour strongholds, or “safe La-

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**42** James D. Fearon: Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians. Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performances, in: Adam Przeworski, Susan Stokes and Bernard Manin (eds.): *Democracy, Accountability and Representation*. Cambridge 1999, 55–97; Audrey André, Sam Depauw and Matthew S. Shugart: The Effect of Electoral Institutions on Legislative Behaviour, in: Shane Martin, Thomas Saalfeld and Kaare W. Strøm (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*. Oxford 2015, 231–249; Mansbridge, Rethinking Representation, 515–528.

**43** David R. Mayhew: *Congress. The Electoral Connection*. New Haven, CT 1974.

**44** See Grimmer, Representational Style.

**45** Anthony F. Heath et al.: *The Political Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*. Oxford 2013.

**46** Thomas Saalfeld: Party Choices in Comparative Perspectives. 3.3. United Kingdom, in: Bird, id. and Wüst, Political Representation, 73–76.

bour seats”.<sup>47</sup> Hence, the incentives for BAME MPs to exhibit strong responsiveness to such voter groups might in fact be diminished, thus encouraging “shirking strategies”<sup>48</sup> due to the perception of being elected to a safe seat. In short, because districts with a high share of immigrants and minorities are in many cases “safe” constituencies for BAME MPs, the electoral incentive to be responsive to immigrant and minority demands might be reduced rather than enhanced. In these cases, MPs may have incentives to focus on their careers in parliament, government or other areas of public life.

## Research Design and Data

The present study is based on a sample consisting of data on all 37 MPs with a BAME background that belonged to the Parliaments elected in 2001, 2005 and 2010 and submitted at least one parliamentary question for written answer during this period. These MPs were identified using the database of Operation Black Vote,<sup>49</sup> the Parliamentary Candidates UK website<sup>50</sup> and the sources given at the bottom of Table 1.

Table 1 gives the number of MPs with a BAME Background in the UK from the general election of 1987 to the general election of May 2015. It demonstrates that the vast majority of MPs with a BAME background between 1987 and 2010 belonged to the Labour Party. It was not until the general election of 2010 that a larger number of Conservative MPs with an ethnic-minority background were elected to the House of Commons. The Parliaments studied in this contribution are shaded in grey.

Our dependent variable seeks to capture these MPs’ legislative communication and oversight activities using the number and content of questions for written answer they submitted. Earlier studies used a variety of alternative indicators (e.g., select-committee membership, voting or texts of personal websites), but revealed that parliamentary questions for written answer are a relatively valid indi-

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Mitchell: The United Kingdom. Plurality Rule under Siege, in: Michael Gallagher and id. (eds.): *The Politics of Electoral Systems*. Oxford 2005, 157–184.

<sup>48</sup> Kaare W. Strøm: Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies, in: *European Journal of Political Research* 37 (2000), 261–289.

<sup>49</sup> URL: <http://www.obv.org.uk/> (16 June 2015).

<sup>50</sup> URL: <http://parliamentarycandidates.org/2015-candidates/bme-mps-elected-at-2015-general-election/> (6 Aug. 2015)

**Table 1:** Backbenchers with a “Black or Asian Minority Ethnic” Background in the UK, 2001–2015

	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015
Conservative Party	0	1	0	1	2	11	17
Labour Party	4	5	9	12	15	17	23
Liberal Democrats	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Other parties	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total per Parliament	4	6	9	14	17	28	41

Sources: John Wood and Richard Cracknell: *Ethnic Minorities in Politics, Government and Public Life*. London 2013 (House of Commons Library, SN/SG/1156); Tim Carr and Iain Dale: *The Politicos Guide to the New House of Commons 2015. Profiles of the New MPs and Analysis of the 2015 General Election Results*. London 2015 (Google e-book, no page number).

Note: The data for 2001 were corrected to include MPs who retired, died or joined the House of Commons in a by-election during the respective Parliament.

cator available for empirical study in the UK.<sup>51</sup> The first reason is the very nature of parliamentary questions: given some standardised formal requirements laid down in rules of procedure and parliamentary practice they are relatively short, precise and unambiguous pieces of text. Second, as Martin points out, parliamentary questions are an appropriate measure “to verify the role behaviour of legislators more independently”<sup>52</sup> than, for instance, elite interviews that may lack validity and reliability due to profiling tendencies of interviewees. A third reason is that their use is less constrained by parliamentary leaderships than, for example, speeches on the floor of the House or votes. Therefore parliamentary questions form a more informative and reliable indicator of the legislators’ priorities than others.<sup>53</sup> Finally, parliamentary questions can be a cost-saving way for an MP to express immediate constituents’ concerns and helping him or her to gain a personal reputation, whether in subject-, focus-, or role-specific terms.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, they are used in relatively large numbers, lending themselves to quantitative analysis.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Saalfeld and Kalliopi Kyriakopoulou: Presence and Behaviour. Black and Minority Ethnic MPs in the British House of Commons, in: Bird, Saalfeld and Wüst, *Political Representation*, 230–249.

<sup>52</sup> Shane Martin: Using Parliamentary Questions to Measure Constituency Focus. An Application to the Irish Case, in: *Political Studies* 59 (2011), 472–488, esp. 474.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Stefanie Bailer: People’s Voice or Information Pool? The Role of, and Reasons for, Parliamentary Questions in the Swiss Parliament, in: *Journal of Legislative Studies* 17 (2011), 302–314; Federico Russo: The Constituency as a Focus of Representation. Studying the Italian Case through the Analysis of Parliamentary Questions, in: *Journal of Legislative Studies* 17 (2011), 290–301;

First analyses of questions<sup>55</sup> also showed that MPs typically ask two types of questions with slightly different connotations: (a) questions on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities in the UK and (b) questions about immigration and the social and political risks associated with it.

The 23,197 parliamentary questions were extracted via <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>. This website is maintained by UK Citizens Online Democracy, a registered charity that takes open data from the House of Commons and presents it in such a user-friendly way on its website that citizens are able to keep track of their MPs' parliamentary activities. Besides its service to UK citizens, the website also provides an Application Programming Interface (API) that can be accessed to retrieve data stored in the website's database.<sup>56</sup> In our case, we were exclusively interested in the parliamentary questions for written answers section, which TheyWorkForYou has recorded for every MP since the early 2000s. However, it is worth mentioning that much more information on MPs can be requested from the API, for instance parliamentary debates or biographical background.

For the web scraping procedure, we used the statistical software R, which also allows many programming operations. In order to perform the operations necessary for data retrieval a first step was to identify all 37 MPs with a BAME background and their TheyWorkForYou IDs. We followed largely the instructions given in Munzert et al.<sup>57</sup> and used the R packages RCurl (to communicate with the web server from *theyworkforyou.com*), jsonlite (to read content in JSON format and convert it to R objects) and stringr (to clean the raw texts from HTML-tags).<sup>58</sup> Based on these steps we were able to compile a dataset containing the texts of all 23,197 parliamentary questions for written answer (irrespective of content) submitted by the 37 MPs in our sample between June 2001 and May 2015. Unlike earlier studies,<sup>59</sup> we do not use a contrasting sample of non-BAME MPs. Instead, we seek to highlight variations within the population of MPs with a BAME background. For each question we created a series of dummy variables registering, for example,

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Shane Martin: Parliamentary Questions, the Behaviour of Legislators, and the Function of Legislatures. An Introduction, in: *Journal of Legislative Studies* 17 (2011), 259–270.

55 Saalfeld, Parliamentary Questions.

56 Yet, it remains important to say that the access to the database is not unlimited and that users should read the “Terms of usage”. URL: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/api/> (13 June 2015).

57 Simon Munzert et al.: *Automated Data Collection with R. A Practical Guide to Web Scraping and Text Mining*. West Sussex 2015.

58 This procedure yielded also the answers of ministers, which were removed during preprocessing.

59 Saalfeld, Parliamentary Questions; id. and Daniel Bischof: Minority-Ethnic MPs and the Substantive Representation of Minority Interests in the House of Commons, 2005–2011, in: *Parliamentary Affairs* 66 (2013), 305–328.

whether the question explicitly referred to ethnic minorities in, or immigration to, the United Kingdom. Further dummy variables record whether the question made explicit reference to the MP's local constituency, national policy, ancestral homeland or problems of social mobility in the UK. These questions were identified by using a series of "dictionaries", which can be found in Appendix 2.

Independent variables are the MP's party, the time of his or her first election to the House of Commons, the percentage of "non-white" residents in the MP's constituency and whether the MP was a non-European immigrant ("first-generation immigrant") or the immediate descendant of at least one non-European immigrant ("second-generation immigrant").<sup>60</sup> Biographical data were extracted from the MPs' personal websites and Wikipedia entries.<sup>61</sup> Each MP has an extensive Wikipedia page. The information was verified using further information that could be retrieved via the platform TheyWorkForYou.<sup>62</sup> The contextual variables about constituency demographics were extracted from the British Census of 2001 and 2011.<sup>63</sup> We used the percentage of "non-white" residents, which is documented by parliamentary constituency.<sup>64</sup> Constituency demographics for the 2001–2005 Parliament were taken from the 2001 Census. We used the results of the 2011 Census for the 2010–2015 Parliament and calculated the arithmetic mean of the 2001 and 2011 Censuses to estimate an approximate measure of ethnic constituency composition for the 2005–2010 Parliament.

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**60** One MP was the granddaughter of immigrants from the Caribbean.

**61** URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

**62** URL: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

**63** Data on constituency composition ("non-white ethnicities, per cent of the population") extracted from Census 2001 and 2011. URL: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html> (13 June 2015); *Census 2001 – Report for Parliamentary Constituencies. National Statistics Publication, Crown Copyright*. London 2003.

**64** The census data for 2001 and 2011 are not perfectly aligned. In the 2001 Census we used data on "all ethnic groups except all sub-categories of White and Irish Traveller (Northern Ireland only)". Source: Census 2001 – Report, 34 (footnote 2). In the 2011 Census the format of the question on ethnic groups in England and Wales was more detailed than in 2001, mainly to reflect changing needs and the dynamic profile of different ethnic groups. Consequently, new response categories for "Gypsy or Irish Traveller" and "Arab" were introduced (footnote 13). URL: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/how-our-census-works/how-we-planned-the-2011-census/questionnaire-development/finalising-the-2011-questionnaire/index.html> (13 June 2015). We used the information from the "final recommended questions 2011 – Ethnic group". URL: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/the-2011-census/2011-census-questionnaire-content/final-recommended-questions-2011---ethnic-group.pdf> (13 June 2015).



## Data Analysis

In the following sections, we investigate whether parliamentary questions for written answer, which can be seen as a signal MPs send to the “active” public, are firstly used to highlight the MP’s position in partisan national policy debates as compared to, secondly, local matters relating to the MP’s electoral district in the UK. In addition we examine the extent to which MPs engage, thirdly, in “surrogate representation” in Mansbridge’s terms and appear as representatives of ethnic minorities in the UK as a whole. Finally, we assess whether, and to what extent, MPs in our sample appear as representatives of their ancestral countries or countries that are the ancestral homeland of many of their constituents.

An illustration of the first type of general policy question would be the question tabled by Labour MP Chuka Umunna as Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to the Minister he shadowed on 23 March 2015: “To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, what recent discussions he has had on the EU Accounting and Transparency Directives; and what steps he is taking to ensure compliance with those Directives.”<sup>65</sup> An example of a narrower constituency matter raised in a parliamentary question would be a question asked by Jonathan Sayeed, Conservative MP for Mid Bedfordshire on 5 April 2005: “To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which soldiers who have served and been injured in the recent Iraqi conflict live in the constituency of Mid Bedfordshire.”<sup>66</sup> On occasion, MPs use parliamentary questions to ask about particular constituents, like Labour MP Keith Vaz on 1 September 2003: “To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 13 January 2003 from the hon. Member for Leicester, East to the Minister for State, Citizenship and Immigration, P1048812, concerning his constituent, Mrs. Patel.”<sup>67</sup> An example of the third representational focus, which Mansbridge termed “surrogate representation” would be the question by Labour MP Ashok Kumar, tabled on 17 December 2008: “To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether his Department has commissioned research into mental health problems amongst Asian women in England; (2) what steps his Department is taking to address the stigma attached

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<sup>65</sup> House of Commons Debates, 23 Mar. 2015. URL: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2015-03-23/228761> (13 June 2015).

<sup>66</sup> House of Commons Debates, 5 Apr. 2005. URL: [http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmhansrd/vo050405/text/50405w17.htm#50405w17.html\\_wqn11](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmhansrd/vo050405/text/50405w17.htm#50405w17.html_wqn11) (13 June 2015).

<sup>67</sup> House of Commons Debates, 1 Sept. 2003. URL: [http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030901/text/30901w71.htm#30901w71.html\\_wqn3](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030901/text/30901w71.htm#30901w71.html_wqn3) (13 June 2015).

to mental health problems in the Asian community.”<sup>68</sup> Finally, an example of the fourth representational focus, a transnational focus on the MP’s ancestral homeland, would be the question tabled by Pakistani-born Mohammad Sarwar, MP for Glasgow Central on 24 June 2003: “To ask the Minister of State, Department for International Development what progress has been made with the Department’s support for tuberculosis (a) vaccination and (b) treatment in Pakistan.”<sup>69</sup>

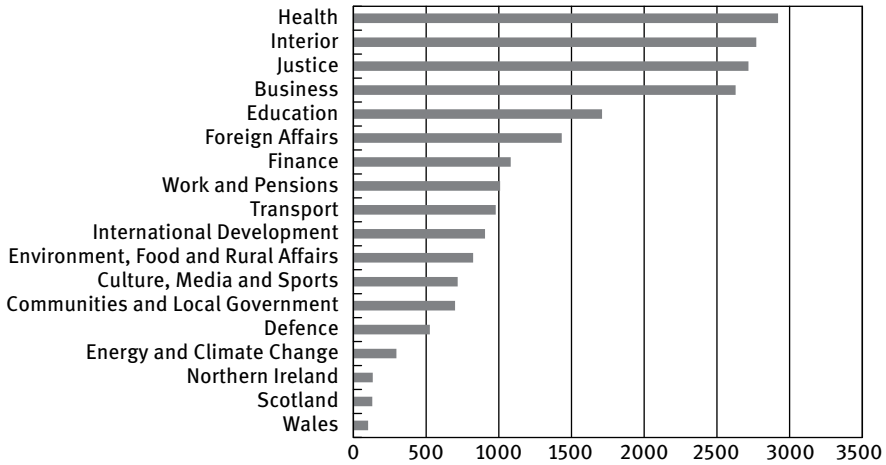
## Policy Area and Party

Our first strategy of identifying the representational focus of our questions is to examine the policy areas covered by the parliamentary questions. These are relatively easy to establish as each question is addressed to a particular minister. Rather than formulating strict hypotheses, we will rely on “observable implications” or theoretical expectations. In other words, if MPs saw their role in predominantly contributing to national or partisan policy debates, we would expect a large number of their parliamentary questions addressed to those secretaries of state responsible for broad national policy issues such as finance, business, foreign affairs, defence or justice. If MPs sought to act predominantly as “appropriators” of government funds for their local constituents, or for wider minority constituencies, we would expect the bulk of their questions to relate to social affairs, health, education, agriculture, transport and other departments responsible for welfare issues and targeted local or group-oriented benefits. If they wished to demonstrate concern for developments in their own ancestral homeland, or the homelands of their constituents, we would expect an emphasis on questions about overseas development and, crucially for immigration issues, home affairs. At this exploratory stage, our analyses will be univariate and bivariate only.

Figure 2 plots the number parliamentary questions for written answer asked by MPs with a BAME background in the three Parliaments between 2001 and 2015. The horizontal bars provide a breakdown by government department. These data do not provide a very clear picture in the sense of the observable implications referred to above. The largest number of questions was addressed to the ministers of health, the interior, justice and business. Education and foreign affairs were also frequent matters covered in such questions. Some of these policy areas cover larger questions of national policy (such as justice or foreign affairs), others might

<sup>68</sup> House of Commons Debates, 17 Dec. 2008. URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm081217/text/81217w0034.htm#081217112001751> (13 June 2015).

<sup>69</sup> House of Commons Debates, 24 June 2003. URL: [http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030624/text/30624w10.htm#30624w10.html\\_wqn6](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030624/text/30624w10.htm#30624w10.html_wqn6) (13 June 2015).

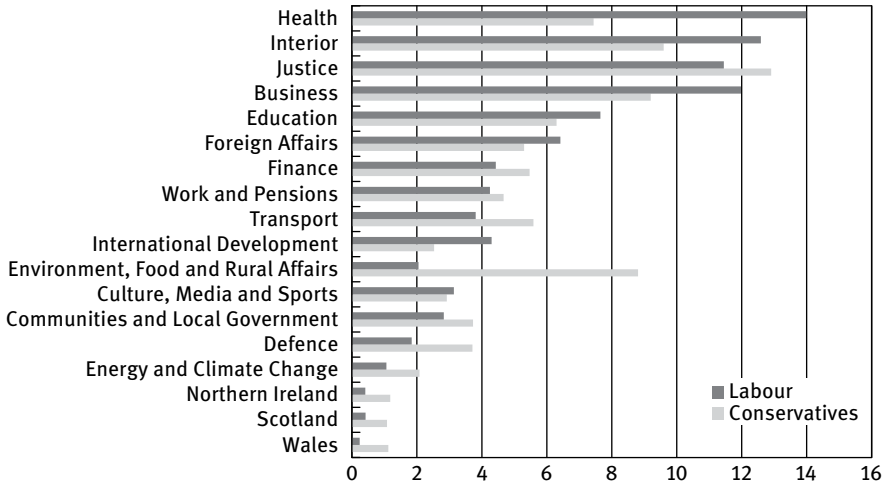


**Figure 2:** Number of Parliamentary Questions for Written Answer Submitted by BAME MPs in the UK 2001–2015 by Department (N = 23,197)

Source: Extracted by the authors from <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

be conceived of as dealing with welfare issues relevant to immigrants and ethnic minorities as well as other groups in UK society (such as health, education or work and pensions). Yet another category might be seen as being particularly relevant to immigrants (interior) or homeland politics (overseas development).

A clearer picture emerges, if we break the data down not only by policy areas but also by political party of the questioner. Figure 3 is based on the distribution of parliamentary questions across the main government departments. This distribution is calculated separately for both main parties and represented by a bar for each party. This is necessary, because the number of MPs with a BAME background is strongly skewed towards the Labour Party. As in Figure 2, Figure 3 includes all questions for written answer submitted by all 37 Members of Parliament with a BAME background who tabled such questions during the 2001–2005, 2005–2010 and 2010–2015 Parliaments. For example, the diagram shows that just under 14 per cent of all (17,966) questions tabled by relevant Labour MPs were addressed to the Health Secretary. By contrast, only 7.44 per cent of all (5,096) questions submitted by Conservative MPs with a BAME background were addressed to this minister. In other words, Labour MPs with a BAME background were almost twice as likely to address parliamentary questions for written answers to health ministers as their Conservative counterparts. A comparatively stronger focus by relevant Labour MPs can also be observed for home affairs (“interior”), business, education, foreign affairs and international development. With the exception of



**Figure 3:** Distribution of Parliamentary Questions for Written Answer Submitted by BAME MPs in the UK 2001–2015 by Department for Each Main Party (percentages, N = 23,197)

Source: Extracted by the authors from <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

the relatively higher propensity of Labour MPs to submit questions to the ministers dealing with business and foreign affairs, this pattern is largely consistent with the general ideological profile of the Labour Party as a welfarist party. Conservative MPs with a BAME background, by contrast, were considerably more likely to submit questions on the responsibilities of the secretaries of state in charge of environment, food and rural affairs; for energy and climate change; for defence, for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and for transport. These patterns are more consistent with an interpretation where MPs with a BAME background behave largely in line with their parties' general policy profiles and are therefore more participants in national partisan policy debates than engaging in sending legislative signals to their local constituencies or to the wider ethnic-minority constituency in the country.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> For a study of this type (without reference to MPs' ethnic background), see Kira Killermann and Sven-Oliver Proksch: *Dynamic Political Rhetoric. Electoral, Economic, and Partisan Determinants of Speech-Making in the UK Parliament*. Paper Presented at the 7th ECPR General Conference in Bordeaux, 4–7 Sept. 2013.

## Representational Focus

Our key interest lies in variations in the representational focus of UK MPs with a BAME background along the lines of Fenno's (above) argument. In order to establish this focus all questions were searched automatically using the lists of search words in Appendix 2. We identified all questions submitted by the 37 MPs with a BAME background relating to problems of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom on the one hand and current immigration to the United Kingdom on the other. This distinction has proved to be useful in earlier publications and should help to capture different dimensions of Fenno's fourth circle relating to the interests of ethnic minorities in the country as a whole.<sup>71</sup> In other words, it should capture questioning patterns where MPs with a BAME background engage in "surrogate representation" in Mansbridge's sense. In addition, we sought to capture questions that explicitly referred to the MP's local constituency, national policymaking, the MP's ancestral homeland, and issues of social mobility in the United Kingdom as a problem that migrants face when arriving in a new society. The following tables are based on the number of questions that can be identified as addressing one of the six representational foci named above. The raw counts were crosstabulated by the MP's political party, immigrant "generation", constituency demographics (percentage of "non-whites" in the district) and career stage. The tables report column percentages and allow a first exploration of this new dataset.<sup>72</sup>

### Variations by Political Party

Table 2 demonstrates that Labour MPs with a BAME background clearly have a stronger propensity than their Conservative counterparts to address questions relating to the problems of ethnic minorities in the UK: 3.41 per cent of the 17,966 questions submitted by Labour MPs with a BAME background explicitly referred to issues relating to ethnic minorities in the UK, whereas the corresponding value for the 5,096 questions submitted by Conservative MPs with a similar background was 0.84 per cent. By contrast, the inter-party differences in the percentage of questions dealing with current immigration are statistically significant but minor in terms of magnitude. Whereas the questions of MPs from both parties overwhelmingly had explicit references to national policy making, Labour MPs with a BAME background were slightly less likely to do so than their Conservative counterparts; instead, they were slightly more likely to focus on

<sup>71</sup> Saalfeld and Bischof, *Minority-Ethnic MPs*.

<sup>72</sup> Multivariate analyses using appropriate statistical controls will follow in subsequent work.

**Table 2:** Representational Focus of BAME MPs by Party, 2001–2015 (column percentages)

Explicit focus of the question on ... (%)	Party			Total
	Conservative Party	Labour Party	Liberal Democrats	
Ethnic minorities	0.84	3.41	2.96	2.84
Immigration	5.67	5.46	0.74	5.48
Local constituency	9.05	10.29	18.52	10.07
National policy	27.86	24.75	8.15	25.34
Ancestral homeland	0.86	2.87	2.96	2.43
Social mobility in the UK	5.69	8.24	10.37	7.69
<i>Total N</i>	<i>5,096</i>	<i>17,966</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>23,197</i>

Source: Extracted from <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

Note: All  $\chi^2$  tests are statistically significant at least at the five-percent level.

their local constituencies and clearly more likely to submit questions relating to their ancestral homelands. Not least, they were more concerned with problems relating to vertical mobility in the United Kingdom.

### Variations by “Immigrant Generation”

Table 3 follows a similar logic and distinguishes between the 9,586 questions submitted by “first-generation” immigrants (that is, persons who were immigrants themselves) and the 13,611 questions submitted by descendants of immigrants (“second” or, in one case, “third” generation). These data are aggregated across parties. The table shows that MPs who are immigrants themselves are clearly more likely to raise matters relating to the problems of ethnic minorities and current immigration to the United Kingdom in their questions than MPs with a BAME background with at least one immigrant among their parents or grandparents. Immigrants are more likely to highlight issues relating to their own local constituency, to national policy debates and, above all, to their ancestral homeland than minority MPs who are the descendants of at least one immigrant. By contrast, MPs with a BAME background whose parents or grandparents were immigrants are clearly more likely to demonstrate concern for questions of social mobility in the United Kingdom. In other words, the concern for transnational mobility is gradually superseded by a concern with questions of equal opportunity.

**Table 3:** Representational Focus of BAME MPs by Immigrant “Generation”, 2001–2015 (column percentages)

Explicit focus of the question on ... (%)	Immigrant “generation”		Total
	First generation	Second generation	
Ethnic minorities	4.14	1.92	2.84
Immigration	7.14	4.31	5.48
Local constituency	10.98	9.42	10.07
National policy	27.93	23.51	25.34
Ancestral homeland	4.45	1.00	2.43
Social mobility in the UK	6.07	8.83	7.69
<i>Total N</i>	<i>9,586</i>	<i>13,611</i>	<i>23,197</i>

Source: Extracted from <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

Note: All  $\chi^2$  tests are statistically significant at least at the five-percent level.

### Variations by Constituency Demographics

Table 4 performs a similar analysis distinguishing the questions asked by MPs with a BAME background representing different shares of “non-white” residents. Although we have not identified “majority-minority districts” in this table, it seeks to capture differences in the socio-demographic context of representation: 2,147 questions were submitted by MPs with a BAME background representing dis-

**Table 4:** Representational Focus of BAME MPs by Constituency Demographics, 2001–2015 (column percentages)

Explicit focus of the question on ... (%)	Percentage of “non-white” population in the constituency				Total
	Less than 2.50 %	2.50–9.99 %	10.00–24.99 %	At least 25.00 %	
Ethnic minorities	2.65	0.68	1.32	3.92	2.84
Immigration	1.72	5.94	2.55	6.36	5.48
Local constituency	22.87	8.59	22.73	6.58	10.07
National policy	23.61	27.53	27.36	24.46	25.34
Ancestral homeland	1.44	0.55	2.09	3.34	2.43
Social mobility in the UK	7.50	7.17	6.41	8.12	7.69
<i>Total N</i>	<i>2,147</i>	<i>5,132</i>	<i>2,200</i>	<i>13,718</i>	<i>23,197</i>

Source: Extracted from <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

Note: All  $\chi^2$  tests are statistically significant at least at the five-percent level.

districts with less than 2.50 per cent “non-whites” (based on the UK Census of 2001 and 2011); 5,132 questions by MPs with districts having a share of “non-white” residents between 2.50 and 9.99 per cent; 2,200 questions by MPs representing districts with at least 10 but less than 25 per cent “non-whites” and 13,718 questions by MPs representing at least 25 per cent “non-white” residents. The data shows that MPs representing more than 25 per cent “non-whites” are clearly more likely than other MPs to refer to ethnic minorities or problems of current immigration to the United Kingdom. Other than that, these bivariate data does not provide very clear patterns except that MPs representing constituencies with more than 25 per cent “non-whites” are much less likely to submit questions directly relating to their local constituencies, whereas they are slightly more likely to refer to their ancestral homeland or to problems of social mobility in the UK in general.

### Variations by Career Stage

Table 5 examines the representational focus of questions asked by MPs with a parliamentary career of up to five years (12,009 questions), i.e. members mostly in their first term. It compares the distribution of questions asked by experienced legislators with a legislative service of at least two complete parliaments (more than 10 years, 8,514 questions) and an intermediate category of MPs who served more than one and less than two full terms as MPs (2,674 questions). The theoretical reason is that Fenno’s studies on the detected career-cycle patterns in the

**Table 5:** Representational Focus of BAME MPs by Career Stage, 2001–2015 (column percentages)

Explicit focus of the question on ... (%)	Length of parliamentary service at the time of submitting the question			Total
	Up to 5 years	6–10 years	More than 10 years	
Ethnic minorities	1.54	2.99	4.63	2.84
Immigration	4.58	3.70	7.31	5.48
Local constituency	10.25	8.08	10.43	10.07
National policy	26.84	17.02	25.83	25.34
Ancestral homeland	1.36	1.53	4.22	2.43
Social mobility in the UK	9.24	5.12	6.31	7.69
<i>Total N</i>	<i>12,009</i>	<i>2,674</i>	<i>8,514</i>	<i>23,197</i>

Source: Extracted from <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>.

Note: All  $\chi^2$  tests are statistically significant at least at the five-percent level.



US Congress with Members displaying a stronger local constituency focus in their early years and an increasing tendency to adopt a national policy focus as they get re-elected and are safer in their seats. Questions in the House of Commons do not display such a pattern. This may largely be the result of confounding factors (here: age of the MP), which will be controlled in future multi-variate analyses. In the House of Commons, questions submitted by experienced MPs tend to disproportionately refer to ethnic minorities and immigrants. They are as likely to refer to their local constituencies and to national policy making in their questions as first-term members. There are, again, two differences: Experienced MPs are more likely to refer to their ancestral homelands in their questions; and questions submitted by parliamentary freshers show a stronger concern for problems of social mobility in the UK.

## Conclusions

The horizontal and vertical mobility caused by immigration to the United Kingdom has begun to affect democratic representation in the House of Commons. Whereas the country experienced a strong expansion of non-European immigration between 1945 and 1987, there were no elected MPs who self-identified as having a BAME background on the seat rows of the House of Commons. The 1987 general election witnessed the election of four Labour MPs with a BAME background. The number of MPs with a BAME background increased, first predominantly on the Labour benches; from 2010 we can also observe an acceleration of “descriptive” representation on the Conservative benches. For researchers of democratic representation one of the questions is whether this increase in descriptive representation has also affected patterns of “substantive” representation, be it in policy making or “gyroscopic” as well as “surrogate” representation. Based on content analyses of over 23,000 parliamentary questions for written answer tabled by MPs with a BAME background between 2001 and 2015, we find complex patterns within this group of MPs that require further, multi-variate investigation in quasi-experimental designs with a control group. First and most importantly, UK MPs with a BAME background generally do not operate as policy advocates with a single-minded mission of promoting the interests of ethnic minorities and immigrants. On the whole, they participate in national policy debates as representatives of their parties. Self-selection to and socialisation in their parties is *the* key factor shaping their behaviour. These differences are demonstrable when we compare MPs with a BAME background across different parties. Nevertheless, there are further differences: experienced (usually older) Labour MPs, especially

those who are immigrants themselves and represent urban districts with a high share of “non-white” residents are clearly more likely to refer to the problems of ethnic minorities and immigrants in their parliamentary questions for written answer than their colleagues. They also maintain transnational links with their ancestral homelands, which clearly show up in their questions. By contrast, Conservative and less experienced MPs representing districts with less than one-quarter of “non-whites” have a stronger focus on social mobility in the UK. They seem less concerned with people “arriving” and more concerned with their constituents “getting on”.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix 1: List of MPs with a BAME Background

Abbott, Diane; Afriyie, Adam; Ali, Rushanara; Boateng, Paul; Butler, Dawn; Chishti, Rehman; Dhanda, Parmjit; Gill, Parmjit; Grant, Helen; Gyimah, Sam; Hendrick, Mark; Javid, Sajid; Khabra, Piara S.; Khan, Sadiq; King, Oona; Kumar, Ashok; Kwarteng, Kwasi; Lammy, David; Mahmood, Khalid; Mahmood, Shabana; Malhotra, Seema; Malik, Shahid; Nandy, Lisa; Onwurah, Chi; Patel, Priti; Qureshi, Yasmin; Sarwar, Anas; Sarwar, Mohammad; Sayeed, Jonathan; Sharma, Alok; Sharma, Virendra; Singh, Marsha; Umunna, Chuka; Uppal, Paul; Vara, Shailesh; Vaz, Keith; Vaz, Valerie; Zahawi, Nadhim

## Appendix 2: Keywords Used for the Analysis of Parliamentary Questions

Problems of ethnic minorities	Immigration	Local constituency	National policy	Ancestral homeland	Social mobility in the UK
community	freedom of movement	<names of relevant constituencies>	the government	Jamaica*	social mobility
cohesion	free movement of people	constituencies>	the previous government	Ghana*	upwardly mobile
Black and Asian	language test	my constituency*	government	Bangladesh*	discriminat*
ethnic minority*	points of entry	my surgery	this country	Pakistan*	employ*
Asian, asian	UK border	where I was born	this nation	Nigeria*	entrepreneur*
Black, black	asylum	where I live	British nation	Kenya*	educat*
racial, race	immigra*, migra*	where I grew up	British interest	Somali*	aspiration*
Islam., islam.	traffick*	local	United Kingdom	Guyana*	career*
Muslim., muslim.	naturalis*	constituent	UK national	India*	equal opportunit*
Hindu	refugee	constituency	British	Uganda*	
Sikh	foreigner*		Britain*	Yemen*	
temple	alien*		government,	Iraq*	
mosque	EU citizen		Government		
Urdu	work permit				
Arabic	Schengen				
priest*	single entry				
imam*	multiple entry				
integrat*	worker registration				
terror*	entered the UK				
	Romanian and Bulgarian				
	migrant workers				
	visa*				
	nationals				
	Gypsy and Traveller				
	foreign national				

Note: An asterisk (\*) indicates that the search word was truncated.

