



# Ethnic Minorities in Politics, Government and Public Life

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Ethnic minorities make up about 8% of the population of the United Kingdom, but are generally under-represented in politics and government. This note sets out the latest figures for elected bodies, the Government and other public organisations.

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# 1 The population of the United Kingdom

The 2001 census is the most reliable source for information on the makeup of the United Kingdom's population.

## Ethnic makeup of the United Kingdom (%)

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
White	90.9	97.9	98	99.3	92.1
All ethnic minority groups	9.1	2.1	2	0.8	7.9

Source: Equal Opportunities Commission, data from Census 2001

The Census is, however, somewhat out of date and can be assumed to provide a conservative figure for the minority ethnic population. If the 2001 minority-ethnic population grows in line with the trend, then forecasts for the next Census in 2011 would predict nearly 7 million non-white Britons, 11–12% of Great Britain's projected population of approximately 60 million.<sup>1</sup> Estimates for mid-2006 put the non-white population of England at 11.3%, up from 9% in the 2001 census.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years progress has been made in increasing the representation of black and minority-ethnic groups in many but not all areas of public life; the subject remains controversial. In an interview after the victory of Barack Obama in the US presidential election, Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, said that a black man could not become Prime Minister in Britain. He said that it was no coincidence that there were only 15 minority-ethnic MPs:

Here, the problem is not the electorate, the problem is the machine. [...] The parties and the unions and the think-tanks are all very happy to sign up to the general idea of advancing the cause of minorities but in practice they would like somebody else to do the business. It's institutional racism.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Parliament

### 2.1 The House of Commons

Struggles by religious minorities to gain representation in Parliament in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century have parallels with minority ethnic groups' efforts to increase their representation today. Daniel O'Connell was elected Member for County Clare in Ireland in 1828, but was unable to take his seat, as a Catholic. In 1829, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed, which allowed Catholics to sit in the House of Commons (but drastically cut the Irish electorate by increasing the property qualification).

Jews have traditionally considered themselves a religious group rather than an ethnic one, and it was religion that stood in the way of Jews wishing to enter Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Lionel Rothschild was the first practising Jew to sit in the House of Commons. He was first elected

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Racial Equality, *Ethnic minorities in Great Britain*, Factfile 2, March 2007

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Population estimates by ethnic group*, August 2008

<sup>3</sup> 'Brilliant as he is, Obama would not have got into Downing Street', *Times*, 8 November 2008

<sup>4</sup> This is controversial, however. A [report](#) of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research recommended in 2005 that British Jews should present themselves as an ethnic minority.

in 1847 but refused to take the traditional Christian oath of allegiance. Rothschild was elected five times by the voters of the City of London but it was not until the House changed its rules and allowed him to swear on the Old Testament, as a Jew, that he finally took his seat.<sup>5</sup>

The history of non-white Members of Parliament probably begins with David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, who was of mixed European and Indian descent. He was adopted son of Begum Sombre, ruler of Sardhana, a semi-autonomous state in India, and would have inherited the state had it not been seized by the East India Company in 1836.

He came to England and in 1841 he was elected as a Radical-Liberal to the seat of Sudbury, in Suffolk. In 1842, however, Parliament overturned the result citing 'gross, systematic, and extensive bribery' during the campaign, and he and the other Member for the Sudbury division, Frederick Villiers, lost their seats.<sup>6</sup>

Dadabhai Naoroji, born near Mumbai in 1825, became the first Indian Professor at Elphinstone College in Bombay, and was a partner in the first Indian firm established in Britain. He was elected Liberal MP for Finsbury Central from 1892 to 1895. Naoroji was a critic of British rule in India and prominent pro-British Indians decided to put up their own candidate, Mancherjee Bhownagree (later Sir Mancherjee). He was elected and represented Bethnal Green North-East from 1895 to 1905: the second Indian of unmixed parentage and the first minority ethnic Conservative to sit in Parliament. They were followed by Shapurji Saklatvala who was a Parsi born in Bombay and represented Battersea North for Labour from 1922 to 1923 and as a Communist from 1924 to 1929.<sup>7</sup>

The first minority ethnic MPs since 1945 were elected in 1987: Diane Abbott (Hackney North & Stoke Newington), Paul Boateng (Brent South), Bernie Grant (Tottenham) and Keith Vaz (Leicester East). Diane Abbott was the first black woman MP. Since 1987 the number of non-white MPs has slowly risen, and all non-white candidates who went on to be elected have been selected by all three major parties, including the liberal Democrats, whose candidate Parmjit Singh Gill was elected in a by-election to the seat of Leicester South in 2004 (he lost the seat to labour in the 2005 Election). Non-white MPs still represent a very low proportion of the total, as the following table shows:

**Ethnicity of MPs elected at General Elections 1987 to 2005**

	White					Non-White					Total				
	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
Labour	225	266	409	400	342	4	5	9	12	13	229	271	418	412	355
Conservative	376	335	165	166	196	0	1	0	0	2	376	336	165	166	198
Liberal Democrat <sup>i</sup>	22	20	46	52	62	0	0	0	0	0	22	20	46	52	62
Other	24	24	30	29	31	0	0	0	0	0	24	24	30	29	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>645</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>646</b>

Sources: *Dod on Disk, Butler and Kavanagh: The British General Election of 1997*

*Operation Black Vote*

*House of Commons Library Research Paper 05/33*

Notes <sup>i</sup> Includes the SDP in 1987

Analysis of ethnic minority representation is difficult, because ethnicity is both sensitive, and difficult to define. Work such as this generally relies on self-definition. At present there are 15

<sup>5</sup> For more information on Jews and Parliament, see [The Greville Janner Jewish Tour of Parliament](#)

<sup>6</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004

<sup>7</sup> Biography of Shapurji Saklatvala *The Fifth Commandment* Sehri Saklatvala, Shapurji's daughter, originally published in the UK in 1991 by Miranda Press – available at <http://www.maze-in.com/saklatvala/index.htm>

non-white MPs elected to the House of Commons,<sup>8</sup> which represents about 2.3% of the 646 MPs from all parties. If the non-white population were represented proportionally in the House of Commons, there would be 51 MPs.<sup>9</sup>

### Minority ethnic MPs

Member	Party	Constituency	Ministerial or shadow post (if any)
Adam Afriyie	Conservative	Windsor	Shadow Minister for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Ashok Kumar, Dr.	Labour	Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland	
David Lammy	Labour	Tottenham	Minister of State for higher education and intellectual property, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Dawn Butler	Labour	Brent South	Assistant government whip
Diane Abbott	Labour	Hackney North & Stoke Newington	
Keith Vaz	Labour	Leicester East	
Khalid Mahmood	Labour	Birmingham, Perry Barr	
Mark Hendrick	Labour/Coop	Preston	
Marsha Singh	Labour	Bradford West	
Mohammed Sarwar	Labour	Glasgow Central	
Parmjit Dhanda	Labour	Gloucester	
Sadiq Khan	Labour	Tooting	PUSS <sup>i</sup> , Department for Communities and Local Government
Shahid Malik	Labour	Dewsbury	PUSS, Ministry of Justice
Shailesh Vara	Conservative	North West Cambridgeshire	Shadow Deputy Leader of the House
Virendra Sharma	Labour	Ealing, Southall	

Source: Operation Black Vote; Cabinet Office, *List of Ministerial Responsibilities*, November 2008

<sup>i</sup>Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

It has been noted that, despite the almost doubling of the number of non-white MPs at the 1997 election, Labour may not have been more successful at changing its selection processes than other parties. The Fabian Society has reported that Labour's increase in minority ethnic MPs in 1997 was simply reflective of the overall Labour landslide:<sup>10</sup> less than 2% of Labour candidates who were not already MPs were non-white. More recently Trevor Phillips, the head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said in an interview that the Conservative Party had been more successful at selecting non-white candidates than Labour because is "less democratic" and "happier to impose candidates on the local parties." He went on to say that the Labour Party is too tied up with:

<sup>8</sup> Based on the list given by [Operation Black Vote](#)

<sup>9</sup> Based on the current estimated UK population of 60.6 million of whom 7.9% are non-white, according to the 2001 census: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/index.html>. More recent estimates of the non-white population can be higher, and estimates for a representative number of minority ethnic MPs may vary: the report for the Government Equalities Office [How to achieve better BME political representation](#), published in May 2008, put the figure at 58.

<sup>10</sup> Sunder Katwala, '[A British Obama would now get a fair chance](#)', Fabian Society, 2 November 2008

the trade unions, the socialist societies, the left intelligentsia, and until you get them to accept that they have got a responsibility to do something it is almost impossible for the party leadership to make progress.<sup>11</sup>

Women from ethnic minorities are particularly under-represented. At present there are only two black women Members, and no Asian woman has ever been elected. The Fawcett Society calculated that at the present rate of change it would be more than three centuries before Parliament represents Britain's population of women from ethnic minorities.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 The House of Lords

Information for the House of Lords is more difficult to collate, and no definitive list of ethnic origins exists. In July 2000, The Earl of Listowel asked Her Majesty's Government for a breakdown of Lords membership by ethnicity. Baroness Jay replied as follows:

This information is not collected at present. In order to collect personal information such as this, the Information Office of the House of Lords would need the authority of a domestic sub-committee or the Offices Committee itself. It is for these committees whether they wish to consider the matter.<sup>13</sup>

The first Indian peer, and probably the first non-white peer, was Sir Satyendra Sinha, created Baron Sinha of Raipur, a hereditary peerage, in 1919.<sup>14</sup> The first peer of African descent is widely reported to have been the Trinidadian cricketer and lawyer Learie Constantine, created Baron Constantine of Maraval and Nelson in 1969. At present there are some 31 non-white members of the current House of Lords.<sup>15</sup> This is around 4% of the total of 746 peers. They are:

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<sup>11</sup> 'Brilliant as he is, Obama would not have got into Downing Street', *Times*, 8 November 2008

<sup>12</sup> Fawcett Society, '[Ethnic Minority Women: Routes to Power](#)', Government Equalities Office, May 2008

<sup>13</sup> House of Lords Hansard, 26.07.00, 616 c67WA

<sup>14</sup> *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Columbia University Press, 2008

<sup>15</sup> Based on information compiled by the campaigning group [Operation Black Vote](#)

**Minority ethnic peers**

Name	Party	Ministerial post (if any)
Adam Hafejee Patel, Lord Patel of Blackburn	Labour	
Amirali Alibhai Bhatia, Lord Bhatia	Crossbencher	
Ara Darzi, Baron Darzi of Denham	Labour	PUSS <sup>i</sup> , Department of Health
Bhikhu Chotalal Parekh, Lord Parekh	Labour	
Bill Morris, Lord Morris of Handsworth	Labour	
Herman George Ouseley, Lord Ouseley	Crossbencher	
John Taylor, Lord Taylor of Warwick	Conservative	
Kamlesh Kumar Patel, Lord Patel of Bradford	Labour	Government whip
Kumar Bhattacharyya, Lord Bhattacharyya	Labour	
Lola Young, Baroness Young of Hornsey	Crossbencher	
Lydia Dunn, Baroness Dunn	Crossbencher	
Meghnad Jagdishchandra Desai, Lord Desai	Labour	
Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester	Non-affiliated	
Mohamed Sheikh, Lord Sheikh	Conservative	
Narendra Babubhai Patel, Lord Patel	Crossbencher	
Navnit Dholakia, Lord Dholakia	Liberal Democrat	
Nazir Ahmed, Lord Ahmed	Labour	
Patricia Janet Scotland, Baroness Scotland	Labour	Attorney General
Pola Manzila Uddin, Baroness Uddin	Labour	
Pratap Chidamner Chitnis, Lord Chitnis	Crossbencher	
Raj Kumar Bagri, Lord Bagri	Conservative	
Rosalind Patricia-Anne Howells, Baroness Howells of St Davids	Labour	
Sayeeda Warsi, Baroness Warsi	Conservative	
Shreela Flather, Baroness Flather	Conservative	
Shriti Vadera, Baroness Vadera	Labour	PUSS, Minister for economic competitiveness and small business (joint with the Cabinet Office), Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
Swraj Paul, Lord Paul	Labour	
Tarsem King, Lord King of West Bromwich		
Usha Kumari Prashar, Baroness Prashar	Labour	
Valerie Amos, Baroness Amos	Labour	
Victor Adebawale, Lord Adebawale	Crossbencher	
Waheed Alli, Lord Alli	Labour	

Source: Based on lists compiled by Operation Black Vote

<sup>i</sup> Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

## 2.3 International comparisons

In 2007, 0.4% of members of the French National Assembly were from an ethnic minority, compared with an estimated 12.6% of the general population. The figures for Germany were 1.3% of members of the lower house representing 4.8% of the general population, and for the Netherlands 8% and 10.9%.<sup>16</sup>

### Minority ethnic parliamentarians- some international comparisons

	Total	Minority ethnic <sup>a</sup>	%
<b>USA</b>			
Senate	100	3 <sup>a</sup>	3
House of Representatives	435	74	17
Population <sup>b</sup>	299m	104m	35
<b>Canada</b>			
House of Commons	308	24 <sup>c</sup>	7.8
Population	33m	5m	16.2 <sup>d</sup>
<b>New Zealand</b>			
House of Representatives	121	29 <sup>e</sup>	24.1
Population	4.27m	1.66m	32.4 <sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Minority ethnic Congressmen based on list supplied on the Ethnic Majority website  
<http://www.ethnicmajority.com/POLITICAL.HTM>

<sup>b</sup> US Census 2006

<sup>c</sup>Karen Bird, Patterns of Substantive Representation Among Visible Minority MPs: Evidence from Canada's House of Commons, McMaster University, 2008

<sup>d</sup>Statistics Canada, 2006 Cens

<sup>e</sup>Speaker of the NZ House of Representatives, Speech to Race Relations Centre, 18 March 2008. New Zealand has seven reserved seats for Maoris, and representation of that group in Parliament is proportionally slightly higher than in the population as a whole. Other minority ethnic groups are under-represented.

<sup>f</sup>Statistics New Zealand, 2006 Census

## 3 The Government and Cabinet

The first minority ethnic minister was probably Baron Sinha, who, after being the first Indian to serve in the Indian government and the first Indian to take silk and become a QC, was made Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India in the House of Lords in 1919. The first black government minister was Paul Boateng, who went on to be the first black cabinet minister when he was appointed Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 2002.

There is presently no Cabinet Minister from an ethnic minority. There are seven other minority-ethnic government ministers, including the Attorney General for England and Wales, Baroness Scotland of Asthal, who attends Cabinet meetings though not technically a Cabinet minister. Four of the ethnic minority ministers sit in the House of Commons and three in the House of Lords. This gives a total of seven, which is 5.7% of the 122 ministerial posts.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> 'Must the rainbow turn monochrome in parliament?', *Economist*, 25 October 2007

<sup>17</sup> Including Whips but not including Parliamentary Private Secretaries

## 4 Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly

The Scottish Parliament has one minority-ethnic member, Pakistan-born Bashir Ahmad (SNP), representing 0.7% of the 129 MSPs. Mohammad Asghar, also born in Pakistan and a member of Plaid Cymru, is the Welsh Assembly's only minority-ethnic member, representing 1.7% of the Assembly's 60 AMs.

## 5 MEPs

Five of the current 87 UK Members of the European Parliament are from a minority-ethnic background, according to Operation Black Vote: (Nirj Deva (Con), Neena Gill (Lab), Syed Kamall (Con), Sajjad Karim (Con) and Claude Moraes (Lab). This is 5.7% of all UK MEPs. Non-white representation of other member states of the European Union in the European Parliament is lower still. It was reported in 2007 that the total of minority ethnic MEPs was nine, or 1.1%, compared with an estimated non-white EU population of 5%.<sup>18</sup>

## 6 Local Councils and the London Assembly

The 2006 census of local councillors in England showed that 4.1% came from an ethnic minority background and 95.9% were white.<sup>19</sup> The London boroughs had the highest representation at 17.7%. In Wales it was reported in 2004 that 99.2% of councillors were white and 0.8% had an ethnic minority background.<sup>20</sup> A survey conducted in 2001 found that 2.5% of councillors in England and Wales came from an ethnic minority background and 97.4% were white, with the London Boroughs (10.6%) having the highest proportion of councillors from an ethnic minority background and Wales the lowest (1.0%). The proportion from an ethnic minority is lower than the 3% found in the 'First National Census' of local councillors 4 years earlier.<sup>21</sup>

Minority ethnic women are severely under-represented on English councils. The Fawcett Society pointed out in 2008 that there were 168 women from ethnic minorities sitting on English councils out of almost 20,000 councillors: less than 1%.<sup>22</sup>

Of the 25 members of the Greater London Assembly, there are four non-white members (Jennette Arnold, James Cleverly, Murad Qureshi and Navin Shah). The 2001 Census showed that 29% of the city's population were from a minority ethnic group, leaving the population with about half the representation they could expect.<sup>23</sup>

## 7 Civil Service

In 2002 a survey of civil was conducted to determine how much the civil service is representative of the community it serves. It was found that 7.6% of all civil servants were from a minority-ethnic background, while among senior (SCS level) employees, the figure

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<sup>18</sup> 'Minority report', *Guardian*, 14 February 2007

<sup>19</sup> [National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2006](#), Local Government Association/Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). The next census in this series will be completed in December 2008.

<sup>20</sup> [National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2004](#), Welsh Local Government Association

<sup>21</sup> Local Government Management Board, First National Census, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> [Routes to power: Summary of research](#), Fawcett Society, May 2008, based on Census of Local Authority Councillors 2006.

<sup>23</sup> National Statistics *Focus on London 2003*

was only 2.9%.<sup>24</sup> By 2007, the overall figure had risen to 8.3% and that for senior staff had risen to 4%.<sup>25</sup>

## 8 Quangos (Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations)

Quangos are influential public bodies to which appointments are made by ministers and other people in public life. In 1992, 2 per cent of quango members were from an ethnic minority.<sup>26</sup> By 31 March 2003 this proportion was 5.3%, having fallen from 6.2% a year earlier. 1,201 of 22,464 appointments to boards of all nationalised industries, public corporations, non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies appearing in *Public Bodies* were minority-ethnic.<sup>27</sup> In 2006-07 the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments reported that 9.2% of appointments and reappointments to English quangos were of ethnic minority candidates. This represented an increase on the previous year's proportion of 8.6 per cent.<sup>28</sup>

3.9% of the appointments and reappointments made by the National Assembly of Wales were of minority-ethnic candidates, and increase from the previous year's 1.3%.<sup>29</sup>

In 2007, 3% of board members of Scottish public bodies were from non-white backgrounds, unchanged from 2006.<sup>30</sup>

## 9 Other public sector organisations

Comparison with other major public sector bodies shows a wide variation in outcomes.

### Police

Representing the diversity of the population is considered particularly important in the highly visible police service, and the police have been making well-publicised efforts to represent their local communities more closely. These appear to have been having some effect.

In March 2008 there were 5,813 minority-ethnic police officers in England and Wales, which amounted to 4.1% of all officers and represented an increase over the previous year's figure of 3.9% (calculated on the basis of full time equivalent posts). The proportion of minority-ethnic officers has doubled over the decade since 1999, and the forces with the highest representation are the Metropolitan Police, with 8.2% minority-ethnic officers, the West Midlands (7.4%) and Leicestershire (6.1%).<sup>31</sup>

Despite the improvement in their overall representation in the ranks of the police, minority-ethnic officers are severely under-represented in the higher ranks, with only 2.9% of officers at Chief Inspector or above being from an ethnic minority, compared with 4.4% of Constables, the lowest rank. Research by the Home Office in 1999 found that minority officers were twice as likely as white officers to resign and that the rate of dismissal for ethnic minority officers was two to three times higher than that for white officers. It was also found

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<sup>24</sup> [Ethnic background of civil servants – a statistical note](#), Civil Service, 2002

<sup>25</sup> [Civil Service statistics September 2007](#)

<sup>26</sup> Select Committee on Public Administration, Sixth Report, printed 9 November 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Cabinet Office *Public Bodies 2003*

<sup>28</sup> Commissioner for Public Appointments, [12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 2006/07](#)

<sup>29</sup> Commissioner for Public Appointments, [12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 2006/07](#)

<sup>30</sup> Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland, [Annual report 06/07](#)

<sup>31</sup> Home Office, [Police Service Strength](#), Statistical Bulletin 08/08, 22 July 2008

that promotion at all stages came more slowly for minority-ethnic officers than for white officers.<sup>32</sup>

The Home Office has set the police service a target of 7% of minority-ethnic officers by 2009, but the Association of Chief Police Officers has said that it will not be possible to achieve this without a change in employment law to allow 'affirmative action'.<sup>33</sup>

## Teachers

In January 2008, only 5.7% of teachers in local authority maintained schools were from non-white ethnic groups, an increase of 0.3 percentage points over 2007 and an increase of 1 percentage point over the figure for 2006. There were large differences between regions: in Inner London 22% of teachers were non-white while the corresponding figure in the North East was only 0.8%.<sup>34</sup> There are not much data available on the number of black and minority-ethnic teachers in senior positions, but they are widely thought to be under-represented. A number of reports have highlighted the difficulties perceived by minority ethnic teachers trying to gain promotion.<sup>35</sup>

## Armed forces

Ethnic minorities are under-represented in the armed forces. There are around 11,000 minority-ethnic service men and women in the regular forces, which represents 6% of the total. However, only 2.5% of the officer ranks come from the ethnic minorities. Looked at another way, 93.1% of minority-ethnic service men and women are in 'other' ranks and are not officers.<sup>36</sup>

## National Health Service

The National Health Service is quite different from other public sector bodies, having staff from minority ethnic backgrounds well-represented in the most senior levels of clinical staff. 37.5% of all medical and dental staff are from ethnic minorities, but at higher grades the proportions are higher still, with 60.4% of the very senior Staff Grade and 52.1% of Associate Specialist grade coming from minority backgrounds. On the other hand, 13.3% of non-medical staff come from minority ethnic groups.<sup>37</sup>

## 10 Outlook

The next election will probably see a significant increase in the number of minority-ethnic MPs in the House of Commons. According to a report published by the Fabian Society in November 2008,<sup>38</sup> some 10 new minority-ethnic candidates could be successful at the next general election. Both the Labour and Conservative parties are reported to have a number of minority candidates in winnable seats, while the Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, are said not to have achieved this. An increase of this scale would mean that predictions of a 75-year wait until the House of Commons reflects Britain's ethnic mix are too pessimistic.

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<sup>32</sup> Home Office, [Career progression of ethnic minority police officers](#), Police Research Series paper 107, 1999

<sup>33</sup> "Police heads debate ethnic quotas", *BBC News Online*, 19 April 2007

<sup>34</sup> Department for Children Schools and Families: [School Workforce in England \(including Local Authority level figures\), January 2008 \(Revised\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> See for example, [Black and minority ethnic leaders](#), National College for School Leadership, 2005

<sup>36</sup> [Strength of the UK Regular Forces by sex and ethnic origin April 2008](#), DASA

<sup>37</sup> Figures for NHS England at 30 September 2007. Source: NHS Information Centre.

<sup>38</sup> Sunder Katwala, [A British Obama would now get a fair chance](#), Fabian Society, 2 November 2008

Suggesting that a 'tipping point' in fairness for minority ethnic would-be politicians may be in view, the Secretary General of the Fabian Society, Sunder Katwala, said:

It is not so difficult for a political establishment to give up 7.5 per cent of its seats [to ethnic minority candidates]. This can be done by finding those black and Asian candidates who fit the mould – the Oxbridge graduates, lawyers and accountants. Giving up 50 per cent of the seats [to women] is more difficult and may demand more cultural change.<sup>39</sup>

On 12 November the House of Commons voted to set up a Speaker's Conference on diversity in the House of Commons. The conference will be chaired by the Speaker and consist of up to 17 other Members and will:

consider and make recommendations for rectifying the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large; and may agree to consider other associated matters.<sup>40</sup>

Leader of the House Harriet Harman said:

Nothing is off-limits. It is potentially a very radical, historic decision - it moves the issue right up the agenda, and puts something that used to be dismissed as political correctness right to the centre of the political agenda. If the Commons is not representative, it is nothing. This is about parliament saying 'we are not OK to go on as we are'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 'Women lose out in race to be an MP', *Independent*, 6 November 2008

<sup>40</sup> House of Commons, Order of business 12 November 2008

<sup>41</sup> 'MPs to take a look at themselves', *Guardian*, 12 November 2008