

Review Essay: Race and Electoral Politics in Britain

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Abstract

This article analyzes the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain through some of the major works in this field starting from late 1980s to the present, written mainly from sociological and political science perspectives. The prime focus of these studies is to understand the dynamics of electoral participation and representation of racial minorities in Britain, chiefly Asians and Afro-Caribbeans as the largest ethnic minority groups. They examine the trends in electoral participation and representation of ethnic minorities, seek to identify the socioeconomic and political factors that have been shaping the electoral participation of minority populations, and investigate the relationship between mainstream political institutions in Britain (such as the major political parties) and policy interests of ethnic minorities, in particular, vis-à-vis electoral involvement. This article presents the major strengths and findings of the literature, followed by a discussion of some of the key debates that are still unresolved. It then discusses the substantive theoretical and methodological weaknesses of the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain, and concludes by suggesting unexplored research areas for future research.

Keywords: Race, Minority, Britain, Electoral Politics

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Introduction

Race and electoral politics in Britain have long been a topic of interest for scholars, generating a plethora of literature in all branches of social science. In this article, I analyze the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain through some of the major works in this field starting from late 1980s to the present, written mainly from sociological and political science perspectives. The prime focus of these studies is to understand the dynamics of electoral participation and representation of racial minorities in Britain, chiefly Asians and Afro-Caribbeans as the largest ethnic minority groups. They examine the trends in electoral participation and representation of ethnic minorities, seek to identify the socioeconomic and political factors that have been shaping the electoral participation of minority populations, and investigate the relationship between mainstream political institutions in Britain (such as the major political parties) and policy interests of ethnic minorities, in particular, vis-à-vis electoral involvement.

I first present the major strengths and findings of the literature, followed by a discussion of some of the key debates that are still unresolved. I then discuss the substantive theoretical and methodological weaknesses of the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain, and conclude by suggesting unexplored research areas for future research.

Major Strengths and Findings of the Literature

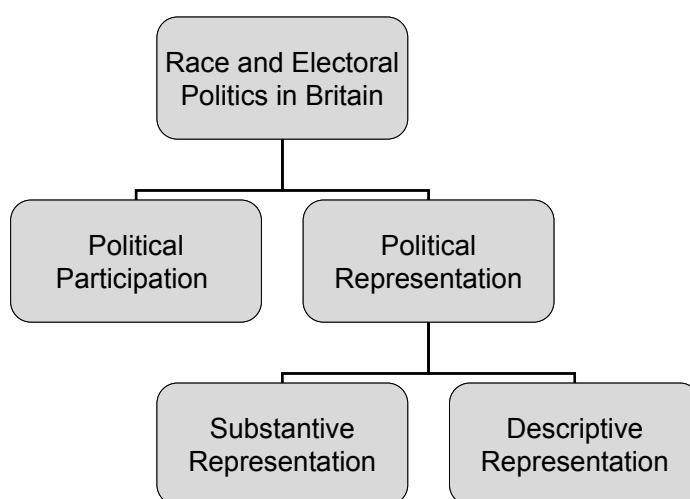


Figure 1. Race and Electoral Politics in Britain

As Figure 1 depicts, the broader literature on race and electoral politics in Britain can be subdivided into two main areas of research; namely, political participation and political representation. Scholarship on political participation investigates trends in registration rates, voting turn-out at local and national elections, party identifications and actual voting rates for parties, and changes in these trends over time and across ethnicities (Anwar 1986; FitzGerald 1987; Messina 1989; Goulbourne 1990; Saggar 2000). Literature on political representation, on the other hand, refers to those studies that analyze issues of descriptive representation (how many elected officials of ethnic minority communities get elected or are appointed to councils across Britain and to the House of Commons, European Parliament, or the House of Lords), as well as the role of political parties in the election of ethnic minority candidates (Fielding and Geddes 1998; Geddes 1993, 1995; Solomos and Back 1995; Garbaye 2005). Another less explored, branch of political representation research focuses on substantive representation, i.e. whether or not, and to what extent, the interests of ethnic minorities are represented at important decision-making bodies, through ethnic minority elected representatives and/or non-ethnic minority elected officials (Adolino 1997; Solomos and Back 1995).

The strength of the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain lays in its key findings. These major findings can be analyzed under four categories: trends in political participation of ethnic minorities, political parties and race, political representation of ethnic minorities, and the benefits of political participation on integration.

Trends in Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities

An abundance of surveys have been conducted and data have been collected on trends in the political participation of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in the post-World War II era, and the changes therein. For example, some of the major findings of the literature on the participation of ethnic minorities in British electoral politics are reported in FitzGerald's *Black People and Party Politics in Britain*, which is a Runnymede Research Report published in 1987. The report presents research results from several surveys conducted in Britain during the early 80s, primarily the GLC 1984 Political Attitudes Survey conducted in six London boroughs among Asians, Afro-Caribbeans and whites. It documents ethnic minorities' (Asians and Afro-Caribbeans) overwhelming support for Labour, which is nevertheless not static. According to FitzGerald, the political activity and involvement of the first

major wave of black immigrants to Britain (late 1940s) was rather constrained due to several reasons: their main priorities were economical (to settle down, make enough money and bring their families), there were language barriers, and “there was also the crude but inadequately recognized fact that British political institutions were no more welcoming than employers or landlords” (FitzGerald 1987, 9)...etc. Hence, the first organizational activities of black immigrants manifested itself through social or religious community organizations at the local level (which were then incorporated into the Community Relations Councils – the CRCs). Local governments funded the CRCs and saw them as means to mediate the views of the black population. However, FitzGerald argues that this institutionalization of black ‘political potential and energy’ through the CRCs has effectively ‘killed’ the black cause, and CRCs have been criticized for being failures in the later decades. Other voluntary black organizations and activities were largely single-issue based, hence not contributing to the overall trend of political integration successfully.

Political Parties and Race

There is also a consensus among most of the scholars about the role of the political parties in the post-World War II era vis-à-vis race issues, and the change in these trends in the 1980s. In *Race and Party Competition in Britain*, Messina “attempts to explain the obvious motivations of the major political parties, the methods they employed to keep race-related issues off the political agenda, and the ultimate consequences of their actions” (Messina 1989, 2). She argues that Britain’s competitive electoral arrangements seemed dysfunctional and the two-party competition obscured the public agenda (Messina 1989, 3). One of the central assumptions of the book is that electoral competition is ‘the linchpin of democratic politics’ (Messina 1989, 4). There are different definitions of what electoral competition indicates. One definition suggested by Downs and Schumpeter only emphasizes the element of free choice between two or more parties, whereas the second definition also includes the requirement that these different parties offer divergent policy courses. Messina argues that British party politics can be considered intensely competitive according to the first definition, yet would fail the test by the standards of the second definition, precisely because for most of the post-war period British politics has been marked with ‘consensual politics’, that the two main parties either had policy convergence or withdrawal from multiple salient issues that the public was highly concerned about (i.e. commitment to NATO, nuclear defense, creation and maintenance of a welfare state, and race issues). Messina argues that there was a “tacit agreement of

the Conservative and the Labour parties to exclude certain issues from the national political agenda” and she focuses on the strategies they used to depoliticize race issues. Why did the parties avoid these issues that were of prime importance to the voters? She responds that: these issues were highly charged and threatened internal divisions within the party and disturbances to the swing vote; hence the parties, assuming that most voters are ‘center-inclined political moderates’, sought to depoliticize those issues that could “undermine their centrist image and destabilize their broader political consensus” (Messina 1989, 14).

FitzGerald (1987) makes the same argument as Messina about the consensus among the main political parties to keep the race issue off the agenda, yet notes that this consensus has just broken down and the ‘race’ card has started to be played again in British politics. She presents the data that at least one third of the supporters of any main political party has self-identified as racially prejudiced, as evidence that political parties pay attention to this group of voters and do not risk to lose their votes (FitzGerald 1987, 40-1). The argument is that simply there are far more white votes at stake than black votes.

Along with the arguments of Messina (1989) and FitzGerald (1987), Solomos and Back (1995) also argue that issues of race have been shut out from national politics up until the 80s. They state that it is precisely this strategy of the political parties to exclude race from national politics that made race an issue for local political institutions. They argue that race has been a political issue since the arrival of large number of immigrants beginning in the 1950s, yet the political process has opened up itself to minorities only in the 1980s, and “in recent years... minority groups are playing an increasingly active role in the shaping of political and policy agendas within national and local political institutions” (Solomos and Back 1995, 3). They contend that the reasons have to do with ideological battles within parties, and their realization that they were increasingly dependent on the ethnic votes (Solomos and Back 1995, 68). The authors’ normative position on the importance of the role of minorities in political institutions is presented clearly: “After all, how can a society claim to be [a] truly multicultural one if minorities do not feel included in its political institutions?” (Solomos and Back 1995, 205).

Political Representation of Ethnic Minorities

Third major finding is about the levels of representation at the local level, and the analysis of the reasons for under-representation. In “Asian and Afro-Caribbean Representation in Elected Local Government in England and Wales” (1993), Geddes

presents the results of ethnic minority councilors in England and Wales to explore whether the British local politics system is becoming more representative of the make-up of society. He finds that even though the number of ethnic minority local councilors has been increased at a greater pace, under-representation still prevails (1.6 % of councilors – 342 out of 21,065- are Asian or Afro-Caribbean compared with a 5 % population). Most councilors are from urban areas, with 52.3 % elected in London (and 9.4 % of all councilors in London are from ethnic minority communities). The gender bias that is prevalent among all councilors is also true for ethnic minority councilors where only 6 % of the 342 are women. There is a strong Labour presence with 85 % of all ethnic minority councilors representing the Labour Party. The higher political participation rates (in particular higher voter registration rates) among Asians are reflected in the higher ratio of Asian councilors (70% of ethnic minority councilors are of Asian origin). He argues that these findings can be interpreted in two ways to support both the liberal and the radical view to race relations in Britain. Increasing numbers of ethnic minority councilors support the liberal view, whereas prevalent under-representation support the radical view.

Likewise, in *Race and Representation* (2000), Saggar also uses the 1997 survey data to shed light on issues of political representation of ethnic minorities. He draws a crucial distinction between 'representation of ethnic minorities and ethnic minority interests' and 'representation by ethnic minorities', which has implications for "first, the role of representation in an ethnically diverse society, and secondly, the adaptation of British traditions of party-based politics and government to changing circumstances and new challenges" (Saggar 2000, 11). He presents the resource mobilization approach (arguing that supply-side factors such as lack of key resources – language skills, education, money and time, access to social and political networks – are primarily responsible for the under-representation of ethnic minorities), and political opportunity structure approach (emphasizing the internal party politics hindering or facilitating increased representation of ethnic minorities) as tools to analyze this phenomenon.

As for the question of desirability of ethnic minority representation, Saggar references two previous surveys: 1991 Harris Survey where only 17 per cent of Asian respondents reported that they would be more likely to vote for a candidate from their ethnicity, and 1997 MORI Survey where the per cent increased to only 27. Saggar argues that there are two problems to be noted. First, the position assuming that ethnic minorities automatically desire candidates from their ethnicity assumes a homogenous political outlook for the ethnic minority communities. Secondly, "claims

that ethnic minority politicians taking up fixed and anticipated positions enhance the representation of discrete issues are often far from accurate" (Saggar 2000, 211). In particular, party loyalties and strong party whip play an important role in shaping the political behavior of elected representatives both at the local and the national levels. His own data from the 1997 survey suggests that there is support for the 'more is good' slogan across ethnic minorities, with the Pakistani community demonstrating the highest levels of support (Saggar 2000, 213-4). Moreover, on average, one-third of all ethnic minority groups support the need for separate ethnic minority political parties, while about 40 per cent do not accept the proposition at all.

On a related debate on the expectations placed on ethnic minority representatives and their capacity and willingness to represent ethnic minority political interests versus their constituency at large, Saggar notes four distinct positions: 1) to represent ethnic minorities exclusively; 2) to identify with and represent certain political issues; 3) to promote specific positions on certain political issues (which seems quite similar to the previous position); 4) the mainstreamer position which argues that "distinctive interests can be defended across a number of issues that have no immediate racial or ethnic dimension" (Saggar 2000, 218). Saggar argues that neither ethnic minorities nor ethnic minority representatives have a coherent political agenda; therefore, the claim that ethnic minority representatives would exclusively represent ethnic minority issues cannot hold true.

On the other hand, Rao's findings in "Representation in Local Politics: A Reconsideration and Some New Evidence" (1998) raise new questions about the representation debate. In this article, Rao explores the notion of representation at the local politics in Britain. He uses survey data accumulated over a 30 year period to observe the changes in the concept of representation. He argues that the evidence from the survey data suggest that representativeness – defined as 'resemblance' or 'symbolic identification' (in other words having elected officials from one's group, community defined by various characteristics) - is no longer a relevant expectation of local electors. What replaced the expectations for representativeness is demands for responsive and responsible local government. According to Rao, this change in the notion of representation may have been caused by the restructuring of government levels in 1972 when the number of councilors was halved, increased the 'representative ratio'. He argues that as the number of electors per councilor has increased, personal knowledge is less possible and party labels play an even greater role. Rao claims that voters care about what councilors do and how they do them rather than who councilors are, and they think that councilors should care

about what the electors want rather than follow their own opinions. Further research is needed to explore whether or not this argument holds true for ethnic minority or religious minority candidates. It is questionable since name recognition on the ballot is a rather easy way to vote for representatives from one's own community, without the need for further personal knowledge of the candidate. Also, it demands further studies to investigate if, rather than a replacement of the 'older' version of symbolic representation with responsive and responsible government, symbolic representation has been coupled with the demand for responsive and responsible government. It is probable that voters do still want representatives from their community, but they also demand that once elected, these representatives respond to their needs and serve their interests.

Benefits of Political Participation on Integration

Although the claim is based on mostly normative arguments, there is an implicit agreement among scholars about the benefits of political participation of ethnic minorities for increased integration. The prime example of this debate is Anwar's *Race and Politics: Ethnic Minorities and the British Political System* (1986). The main focus of this study is the interaction between ethnic minorities, namely Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, and political parties particularly in the context of elections. The book is in fact based on a set of normative claims about the mutual benefits of conventional ethnic minority political participation for ethnic minorities, political parties, and society as a whole. Some of the benefits Anwar enlists are: first and foremost integration into the mainstream British political system, feeling of acceptance as full British citizens, influencing political decisions, highlighting issues of concern to them through voting and through access to decision-makers, and overall benefits for the society through improving race relations and equal opportunities (Anwar 1986, ix). Some of the evidences he points out are that voter turnout among ethnic minorities is increasing and that their political views resemble that of whites, in some areas parties other than Labour started to engage the ethnic vote, white attitudes towards non-whites are improving, and that more non-white candidates are selected. However, he highlights that this is possible only through effective representation and involvement not just token participation. Evaluating Anwar's arguments after two decades, it seems like his analysis was more in the form of predictions that are only emerging today, yet still very slowly. Ethnic minority political representation is gradually increasing; however there are still very few studies that systematically analyze the positive (or negative) outcomes of this phenomenon. Anwar's study is more a list of normative claims about

the importance of minority political participation and use of survey data to back this up, but the link between the data and the claims is rather ambiguous.

Another work that addresses the issue of integration is Adolino's *Ethnic Minorities, Electoral Politics, and Political Integration in Britain* (1997). Diverging from Anwar (1986)'s focus on integration of the masses, Adolino's main goal in this book is to understand the extent of political integration of ethnic minorities. She particularly focuses on the 'extent to which the perceptions of ethnic minority councilors imply a preference' for political integration or other alternatives. To assess the degree of political integration among ethnic minority councilors in Britain, she uses five sets of indicators: "their role orientations, their political goals or objectives, their attitudes and behaviors regarding political strategies and forms of participation, their perceptions of their experiences on local councils, and their impressions of the British political system overall" (Adolino 1997, 3). In order to explain variation in perceptions, she also takes into account other variables such as 'councilors' class backgrounds, partisan histories, associational ties, and their status on local councils'; attitudinal variables such as 'political objectives, perceptions of political competence, and basic feelings about the political system', as well as comparing across ethnic groups. Adolino provides useful definitions and indicators to assess political integration of elected minority officers. For instance, Benyon and Solomos (1988) suggest that "the political integration of ethnic minority elected elites in Britain would be evidenced by a broad consensus among them as to the perceived legitimacy of the regime and its agents, to the need for and the value of institutional participation and to the effectiveness of the system's outputs for their communities" (Adolino 1997, 169); whereas Anwar (1980) emphasize the participation of ethnic minorities in the decision-making system as effective and not just nominal members. To these, Adolino adds a list of criteria, mostly based on the perceptions of the ethnic minority politicians, which she measures through her indicators. She finds that the role types adopted by ethnic minority councilors had positive implications for their political integration. They do not emphasize ethnic or racial separateness, or narrowly pursue interests of a single constituency, but balance the representation of the broader community. Ethnic minority councilors' political objectives reflect a desire for full participation of their communities in the mainstream British politics and integration into British society. She states that "There was wide spread affirmation of the effectiveness of those political behaviors that are widely considered to be key indicators of political integration and support for democratic politics" (Adolino 1997, 172). She also reports that "Ethnic minorities perceived themselves to be incorporated into local decision-making processes" (Adolino 1997, 172), and see

themselves as effective members and not just as tokens, and they work with all councilors and not just other ethnic minorities. However, ethnic minority councilors do not readily describe political institutions beyond local councils as responsive to ethnic minorities, and they do not demonstrate trust and pride in societal institutions. Also, Adolino finds that ethnicity is the strongest source of variation in ethnic minority councilors' perceptions. Her findings suggest that Asian councilors are better politically integrated than Afro-Caribbean councilors.

Likewise, Saggar (2000) uses numerous indicators to measure political integration: electoral involvement, party support and affiliation, the influence of social class on party vote, and relation of political attitudes with ethnic and non-ethnic concerns. He finds that there are evident signs pointing to increasing political integration of black and Asian minorities, yet these are not to be generalized across all ethnic minority groups without qualification.

Unresolved Issues in the Literature

Despite the plethora of data available on issues related to the political participation and representation of ethnic minorities, there are substantive issues that are yet to be resolved by scholars analyzing these trends.

Party Identification and the Role of Ethnicity in Political Mobilization

For instance, there is still a lack of consensus on what determines the party identification of ethnic minorities; and to what extent ethnicity is an important (or the only, or the dominant) factor shaping electoral behavior of ethnic minorities. Saggar (1998) suggests that regardless of what is factually true, what is significant is that mainstream political parties in Britain have acted (during campaigns and elsewhere) 'as if' ethnicity counts for ethnic minority voters. He also adds that this is a novel phenomenon because "ethnicity has long counted for little in British party competition" because of the "traditional class basis of modern political mobilization" (Saggar 1998, 27). Given this political reality, Saggar discusses what characterizes the common interests of ethnic minorities in Britain (that can be utilized by political parties to mobilize this group), and identifies three approaches: 1) Social class where *"the interests and motivations of ethnic minority voters can be described in socio-economic terms based on class membership and accompanying party identification"* (Saggar 1998, 33), 2) Issue voting where *"ethnic minority party choice can be viewed in strictly rational terms based on accurate knowledge about, and willingness*

to act on, the issue preferences of non-white voters" (Saggar 1998, 36), 3) The cultural thesis, which states that *"the central motivation behind ethnic minority political outlook can be reduced to cultural forces, albeit ones that are operating in a wider British political and social landscape"* (Saggar 1998, 40).

Likewise, FitzGerald's report addresses the issue whether or not "a class-based political system can ever adequately accommodate interests based on 'race' or ethnicity" (FitzGerald 1987, 11). She reports that the survey "confirmed that 'race' considerations appear to play little part in black people's perception of the political parties" (FitzGerald 1987, 12); hence they vote for Labour for instance because of its general image or because it supports the working class. The survey results support Anwar's argument that ethnic minorities' priorities or concerns when voting are not markedly different than that of whites (Anwar 1986, 14). FitzGerald also argues that the survey results renders the 'alienation' explanation (that "implies a notion of disaffection based on a sense that British politics is irrelevant to black people" (16)), too simplistic. She states that class seems to explain the lack of political involvement among blacks as well as whites, and that Afro-Caribbeans are the least active of the three groups.

Moreover, Solomos and Back's research in Birmingham shed light to the overall issue of the interrelationship between race and politics. They ask "how can we explain the power of ideas about race and ethnicity in shaping political mobilization and participation[?]" (Solomos and Back 1995, ix). The authors argue that this question can be best answered through a contextualized approach; hence they examine the "political discourses, institutions, mobilizations and policy changes" in Birmingham (which is the largest local government unit with a population of approximately one million), starting from 1950s to present (1995). However, they also posit that their findings are pertinent to a broader set of cases. In particular they look at three main process: i) processes that produced the current (and changing) understanding of race that in turn influence the political culture and institutions; ii) mechanisms employed by ethnic minorities to politically mobilize; iii) responses of political parties and institutions to questions of race (Solomos and Back 1995, 3). From one aspect, they focus on individual level analysis by bringing in the active roles of certain political figures. From another aspect, they focus on institutional level analysis looking at political institutions at the local level. From yet another aspect, they employ a structuralist approach by looking at social structures in relation to race and changes in racial politics. The authors defend the 'new times thesis' emphasizing the need for new conceptions of race, 'culturally defined racisms', moving away from

the class based analysis of race (Solomos and Back 1995, 30). They argue that even though minorities are increasingly present in the Labour and Conservative parties, it is wrong to assume that they all share a common political ideology. They suggest that race is not the only element forming their identity in general or their political identity, and that gender, religion, ethnicity and class should also be taken into consideration.

Ethnic Agenda

Also, due to the lack of systematic empirical data and divergence in analytical and conceptual frameworks, there is no consensus among scholars as to whether there is an ethnic agenda (issues that are of concern exclusively to ethnic minority populations), and if there is one, what it is, and how it is different than the issues concerning the majority population. Saggar's chapter "Analyzing Race and Elections" in *Race and Electoral Politics*, discusses these conceptual uncertainties and offers the spectrum of possibilities in each case. As to whether or not an ethnic minority agenda exists, he lists four distinct possibilities: 1) A separate "race agenda", 2) Similar agendas albeit different priorities, 3) Parallel agendas where the same agenda issues have a race or ethnicity linkage for ethnic minorities, 4) The same agenda writ small (variations of issue salience), meaning "the issue agenda of ethnic minorities amounts to the same as that for the white electorate, but writ small" (Saggar 1998, 23). Saggar concludes that from the existing data, scholars can only "report the degree of overall similarity that is shown up by survey research, and secondly, draw modest generalizations about whether race-specific issues *seem* to play a significant part in the priorities of ethnic minority voters" (Saggar 1998, 23-4).

Role of Political Parties in Ethnic Minority Participation and Candidate Selection

The relationship between major political parties and ethnic minority voters and candidates raised many controversial debates and left many questions unanswered. For instance, the relationship between the Labour Party and the ethnic minorities, especially the controversies over candidate selection, and the 'ethnic entryism' claims, are one such area of contention among scholars. For example, Geddes' chapter, "Inequality, Political Opportunity and Ethnic Minority Parliamentary Candidacy" in *Race and Electoral Politics* (1998) addresses "the effects of parliamentary candidate selection procedures on ethnic minority under-representation in the House of Commons" (Geddes 1998, 145), via three questions: what are the contributing

factors to under-representation, how can the recent increases in the number of ethnic minority MPs be explained, and what constraints may impede further increase? He uses the resource mobilization approach to address the first question (hence, on the supply-side socio-economic features of the ethnic minority populations is the major cause of under-representation), and uses the resource mobilization and political opportunity structures approaches to address the latter two questions. He argues that, on the demand-side, the candidate selection processes (open to discrimination against ethnic minorities), which differ among the three major political parties, is one of the key factors in determining low or high levels of ethnic minority representation. Geddes also argues that the repolitization of race issues in inter-party debates during the 1970s proved to be positive for ethnic minority participation in the Labour Party, while confirming the anti-immigration status of the Conservative Party. In particular, the “effects of repolitization for the Labour Party was that ‘bureaucratized’ modes of political action were replaced by a more participatory framework, within which ethnic minority activists challenged the paternalistic relationship between (mainly) white, male powerholders and ‘community leaders’” (Geddes 1998, 169). However, Geddes also points to the debates over “ethnically-motivated political allegiances and questions of political (il)legitimacy” (Geddes 1998, 170) that were stirred by increasing ethnic minority party memberships particularly within the Labour Party.

Similarly, in “The British Labour Party and ‘Ethnic Entryism’: Participation, Integration, and the Party Context” (1998), Fielding and Geddes analyze the debate over the ‘ethnic entryism’ claims forwarded at Asians, and in particular Muslims in Britain. Some Labour Party members accuse Asian members by ‘ethnic entryism’, which suggests that the increased Asian membership in local Labour Party branches is ethnically motivated and is aimed at selecting Asian candidates for parliamentary elections (therefore seen as incompatible with the goals and values of the Party). Hence, this claim also calls into question the intrinsic value of ‘political participation’ of ethnic minorities as a means of furthering their social and political integration. Fielding and Geddes argue that the responses of the Labour Party to increased ethnic minority political participation (in the form of ‘ethnic entryism’ claims) has been seen as a sign that British politics has been ‘racialised’. However, Fielding and Geddes argue that the ‘racialization’ argument is not adequate and has to be complemented by an analysis of the institutional context of the Labour Party. To this end, they compare and contrast the responses to the increased Asian and/or black membership within the Labour Party with the Irish case.

The authors identify several factors related to Labour Party's context that

influence the response to 'ethnic entryism' claims or 'collective loyalties' (such as 'ethnic minority' group identities). They point out that, as is written in the Labour Co-Ordinating Committee's 1996 report, the Labour Party has moved away from "collective forms of representation, converting...into a party of individuals" (Fielding and Geddes 1998, 69) when it switched to the one-member-one-vote (OMOV) system to select parliamentary candidates (Fielding and Geddes 1998, 67). The authors also claim that in the Irish case, which might have set a precedence shaping responses to ethnic loyalties within the party,

perceptions of difference play an important a role in defining responses to membership viewed as ethnically motivated. However, the Irish case also suggests that perceptions might be accurate. Irish participation in the Party *was* influenced by the struggle for Home Rule and the later desire to protect the Catholic Church. Although elements in the Catholic Church encouraged adherents to become active within the Labour movement, there is no concrete evidence of Irish 'entryism' into Labour (Keating, 1994). However, as established members or representatives, Labour's Irish cohort used their positions to defend a particular, ethnic interest. By pursuing this interest they endangered Party unity, exposed sectarian differences in the working class and so potentially damaged Labour's electoral prospects (Fielding and Geddes 1998, 70).

Therefore, Fielding and Geddes conclude that

Labour members of Asian and Afro-Caribbean descent face major problems in translating their strong electoral support for the Party into adequate representational expression. These difficulties are filtered through an institutional context where perceptions of racial and ethnic difference certainly have an important influence (Fielding and Geddes 1998, 70).

In "The 'Logic' of Positive Action?: Ethnic Minority Representation in Britain after the 1992 General Election" (1995), Geddes discusses the candidate selection processes in the Labour Party and analyzes the relationship between the positive action taken by the Party to increase the representation of women, and the lack of such a strategy to remedy the under-representation of ethnic minorities. Geddes suggests that "as the advocates of positive action contend... increased representation of under-represented groups will change the rules of the game in such a way as to make it more reflective of societal interests" (Geddes 1995, 276). He also analyzes

the demand and supply side of the reasons contributing to the under-representation of ethnic minorities, and provides possible explanations for the lack of such positive action for ethnic minorities. Geddes argues that well-structured and strong organizations have emerged to push for increased representation of women within the Labour Party; the few number of similar organizations advocating increased 'black' representation have been associated with the far left while socialism was no longer a prominent component of the Labour Party; and while women candidates are perceived as vote-winners, ethnic minority candidates are perceived as vote-losers. Conclusively, Geddes argues that the 'logic' of positive action that applies to increasing women representatives should apply to other underrepresented groups including ethnic minorities, and this is the next logical step for the Labour Party.

Conversely, Garbaye (2005) presents a much more positive picture of representation in Britain, and the role of the political parties vis-à-vis ethnic minority candidates. In *Getting into Local Power: The Politics of Ethnic Minorities in British and French Cities* (2005), Garbaye compares and contrasts political participation and representation of ethnic minorities in local politics in British (Birmingham) and French cities (Lille and Roubaix) between 1980 and 2001. He finds that while there has been an increasing presence of ethnic minority councilors (Asians and Afro-Caribbeans) in the Labour dominated Birmingham city council, the number of North African representatives has remained significantly low in Lille. On the other hand, Roubaix constitutes an intermediate case where the number of ethnic minority councilors has been increasing since the 1990s. Garbaye argues that

institutional and political factors, and the ways in which they have combined and created specific local political dynamics, have compounded demographic, legal and sociological factors to reinforce the contrast between the two countries as well as to shape local variations (Garbaye 2005, 13).

According to Garbaye, first, post-war migration had started about 10 years earlier in Britain (it is however doubtful whether or not 10 years would cause significant differences), as well as the earlier start of the inclusion of minorities in local politics. Second, British minority councilors have a political career within local parties prior to their elections, whereas French councilors are "hand-picked among local personalities with little political clout" (Garbaye 2005, 10). Third, ethnic minority councilors' contribution to decision-making is meaningful and irreversible in Britain, whereas French councilors do not share the same experience. Finally, he contends that "The election of councilors was accompanied by the formulation and implementation of anti-discrimination policy agendas in Britain, which is not the case

in France" (Garbaye 2005, 10).

Garbaye attributes the cross-national differences in the inclusion of ethnic minorities to several factors. In particular, he argues that the liberality of the citizenship regime, the early depoliticization of and the 'liberal consensus' on the race and migration issues (in the early 1960s), the implementation of anti-discrimination policies, which led to an alliance between the Labour Party and minority communities, the strong separation between the local and the national levels of government, and the local emergence of a strong left within the Labour Party that "facilitated the access of minorities to elections on councils" (Garbaye 2005, 33), all contributed to the significantly large numbers of minority councilors in Britain. Garbaye's analysis of the Labour Party's relationship vis-à-vis ethnic minorities is highly positive compared to the accounts of Geddes (1995), Fielding and Geddes (1998) and Geddes (1998). On the other hand, Garbaye argues that in France, the majority of the immigrants did not receive citizenship upon arrival and immigration issues became charged with tension during the 1980s due to the National Front. This in turn led the major parties to adopt 'universalist-assimilationist' policies that did not take into account minority interests (Garbaye 2005, 34). Garbaye also contends that the local and national levels of government are inter-related to a great extent in France, leading to immigrant councilors being "passive objects of policy... rather than as active participants in politics who pursue their own interests..." (Garbaye 2005, 34); and political parties do not have any interest in forwarding minority candidates. However, as Garbaye argues, 1997 was a turning point when the right had approved a reformed version of the nationality law drafted by a Socialist government and the relative weakening of National Front. Garbaye states that these circumstances have created "a new political climate favourable to new discussions on the place of ethnic minorities in French society, which in turn encouraged political parties to co-opt minority individuals" (Garbaye 2005, 34).

Major Weaknesses and Gaps in the Literature

Despite the above mentioned strengths of the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain, there are some major weaknesses that require attention. I will analyze these weaknesses under two categories: theoretical and methodological. However, before doing so, it is noteworthy to mention the lack of cross-referencing from the abundance of literature on the political participation and representation of blacks, Latinos, and women in the U.S. Very few of the studies on Britain borrow from the normative political theory debates on representation of minorities or the

empirical findings. For instance, Guinier's analysis of the reasons of and solutions for the electoral disenfranchisement of minorities in the U.S. are highly relevant for the debates on political participation and representation of ethnic minorities in Britain (Guinier 1994). In trying to answer as to why legislatures fail to respond to minority interests and why minorities are underrepresented, Guinier argues that the majority rule leads to the problem of the wasted votes, and that the failure of public policy can be remedied by procedural reforms, such as in areas of gerrymandering and switching to a proportional representation system. Despite the relevance of these debates for the British case, few scholars incorporate or explore the rich debates in race and representation literature in the U.S.

One exception is Solomos and Back (1995) who often cite research on race and politics in the United States, while also acknowledging the problems of applying American experience to Britain. Although they do not borrow any major theoretical framework from American academics, they give examples of how certain racial discourses and political processes have unfolded in the American context, point out similarities and differences. Even though cross-national comparisons have the potential to add key insights in answering important research questions, in my opinion, the cross-national comparisons in *Race, Politics, and Social Change* contribute very little to the merit of the study because the authors just bring in examples arbitrarily without any systematic comparison between two comparable cases.

Theoretical Weaknesses

One of the most prominent weaknesses of the literature on race and electoral politics in Britain is the lack of theoretical studies, i.e. theory building and testing. A significant majority of the works lack a rigorous theoretical framework on which they build their own studies, as well as a research design that contributes to theory building or testing.² They are either descriptive narratives of highly contextualized cases such as Solomos and Back's analysis of race and politics in Birmingham (Solomos and Back 1995) and Messina's case study of the response of political parties to race issues (Messina 1989); or presentation of survey data with brief analysis such as FitzGerald's *Black People and Party Politics in Britain* (FitzGerald 1987). Even though one might argue that the standards and form of social science in Britain are

² Exceptions are Messina's *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (1989) that rests on some theoretical background of electoral competition and democratic politics; Saggar's *Race and Representation* (2000), which makes reference to several theories of representation.

different than American scholarship, the lack of theoretical rigor in the totality of these works produces a literature with little knowledge accumulation. Despite the fact that individual works may be contributing important knowledge about the subject matter, the literature seems to be a collection of distinct studies that do not progress towards any generalizations or theory building. Also, the studies making up this literature rarely reference important theories, which are highly relevant, such as democratic representation theory or the literature on party cleavages...etc.

Methodological Weaknesses

As has been mentioned above, most of the works (from the 80s as well as recent studies) lack a rigorous research design that is aimed at answering a research question through hypothesis testing. Although there is abundance of data, these data are not systematically analyzed through sophisticated regression models. The descriptive statistics provided are not sufficiently built into a model designed to test a causal relationship. Therefore, what characterizes this literature are qualitative studies based mostly on thick descriptions and disparate use of descriptive survey data, with little or no empirical studies.

Another methodological weakness or gap in the literature is the scarcity of comparative studies. One exception is Garbaye's *Getting into Local Power: The Politics of Ethnic Minorities in British and French Cities* (2005), where he compares and contrasts political participation and representation of ethnic minorities in local politics in British (Birmingham) and French cities (Lille and Roubaix) between 1980 and 2001.

Analysis, Conclusion and Future Research

Although scholarly works situate themselves in the broader literature of 'race and electoral politics in Britain', a substantive majority of them focus only on issues of political participation. Works examining political representation of ethnic minorities in Britain exclusively study descriptive representation, providing numbers of elected ethnic officials at the local and national level or exploring the role of the major political parties in the candidate selection process. The only work that investigates the experiences and perspectives of elected ethnic minority officials is Adolino's *Ethnic Minorities, Electoral Politics, and Political Integration in Britain* (Adolino 1997). Yet, this work does not address issues of agenda-setting and policy implementation through analyzing objective factors. Therefore, dynamics of substantive representation

are highly under-explored. There are no studies that investigate whether or not the election of ethnic minority candidates improves the chances of effective representation of ethnic minority interests. Hence, one crucial research question that waits to be explored is what factors facilitate or hinder effective representation of ethnic minority interests, particularly through ethnic minority representatives. Another important research question that is yet to be addressed through empirical research is whether or not political participation is beneficial for the overall integration of ethnic minorities. Although, most of the scholars base their research on an implicit assumption that political participation ultimately leads to integration, and therefore has to be encouraged by the British government, there has not been any research conducted to demonstrate the impacts of political participation or representation on the socioeconomic and political integration of ethnic minorities.

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