



# Ethnic Minorities in Politics, Government and Public Life

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Ethnic minorities make up over 10% of the population in England and Wales but are generally under-represented in politics and government. Following the 2010 General Election there were 27 black and minority ethnic MPs, 12 more than before the election, but less than 5% of all MPs.

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# 1 The population of the United Kingdom

The 2001 census shows 8% of the UK resident population in non-white groups and 92% white. It is the most reliable source for information on the make-up of the United Kingdom 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The Census is, however, out of date and is likely to understate the current minority ethnic population. Estimates for mid-2009 put the non-white population of England and Wales at 12%, up from 9% in the 2001 census.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years progress has been made in increasing the representation of black and minority-ethnic groups in many areas of public life. After the 2010 General Election the number of minority ethnic MPs was 27; this is 12 more than the previous Parliament.

## 2 Parliament

### 2.1 The House of Commons

#### Into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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.

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>2</sup> Lionel Rothschild was the first practising Jew to sit in the House of Commons. He was first elected in 1847 but refused to take the traditional Christian oath of allegiance. Rothschild was elected five times 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>3</sup>

The history of non-white Members of Parliament probably begins with David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, who was of mixed European and Indian descent. In 1841 he was elected as a Radical-Liberal to the seat of Sudbury, in Suffolk. In 1842, however, Parliament overturned

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, [Population estimates by ethnic group](#), May 2011

<sup>2</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.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Jews and Parliament, see [The Greville Janner Jewish Tour of Parliament](#)

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>4</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>5</sup>

### After 1945

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 non-white candidates have been elected by all three major parties, including the Liberal Democrats, whose candidate Parmjit Singh Gill was successful in the 2004 Leicester South by-election (he lost the seat to Labour in the 2005 Election). Non-white MPs currently represent around 4% of the total, around one-third the proportion for the population as a whole:

Ethnicity of MPs elected at General Elections 1987 to 2010					
	LAB	CON	LD	Other	Total
<b>White</b>					
1987	225	376	22	23	646
1992	266	335	20	24	645
1997	409	165	46	30	650
2001	400	166	52	29	647
2005	342	196	62	31	631
2010	242	295	57	29	623
<b>Non-white</b>					
1987	4	0	0	0	4
1992	5	1	0	0	6
1997	9	0	0	0	9
2001	12	0	0	0	12
2005	13	2	0	0	15
2010	16	11	0	0	27
<b>Total</b>					
1987	229	376	22	23	650
1992	271	336	20	24	651
1997	418	165	46	30	659
2001	412	166	52	29	659
2005	355	198	62	31	646
2010	258	306	57	29	650

Source: House of Commons Library Research Papers 08/12, 10/36

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

<sup>4</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004

<sup>5</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>

28<sup>6</sup> non-white MPs elected to the House of Commons<sup>7</sup> which is 4.3% of all 650 MPs. If the non-white population were represented proportionally in the House of Commons, there would be some 78 minority ethnic MPs.

#### Minority ethnic Members of Parliament (Jan 2012)

Name		Constituency	Party
1	Abbott Diane	Hackney North & Stoke Newington	Labour
2	Afriyie Adam	Windsor	Conservative
3	Ali Rushanara	Bethnal Green & Bow	Labour
4	Chishti Rehman	Gillingham & Rainham	Conservative
5	Grant Helen	Maidstone	Conservative
6	Gyimah Sam	East Surrey	Conservative
7	Hendrick Mark	Preston	Labour
8	Javid Sajid	Bromsgrove	Conservative
9	Khan Sadiq	Tooting	Labour
10	Kwarteng Kwasi	Spelthorne	Conservative
11	Lammy David	Tottenham	Labour
12	Mahmood Khalid	Birmingham, Perry Barr	Labour
13	Mahmood Shabana	Birmingham Ladywood	Labour
14	Malhotra Seema	Feltham & Heston	Labour
15	Nandy Lisa	Wigan	Labour
16	Onwurah Chi	Newcastle Central	Labour
17	Patel Priti	Witham	Conservative
18	Qureshi Yasmin	Bolton SE	Labour
19	Sarwar Anas	Glasgow Central	Labour
20	Sharma Alok	Reading West	Conservative
21	Sharma Virenda	Ealing Southall	Labour
22	Singh Marsha	Bradford West	Labour
23	Ummuna Chuka	Streatham	Labour
24	Uppal Paul	Wolverhampton SW	Conservative
25	Vara Shailesh	North West Cambridgeshire	Conservative
26	Vaz Keith	Leicester East	Labour
27	Vaz Valerie	Walsall	Labour
28	Zahawi Nadhim	Stratford upon Avon	Conservative

Women from ethnic minorities have been particularly under-represented at Westminster. Prior to 2010, there were only two black women Members, and no Asian woman had ever been elected. The 2010 General Election saw the first Asian women MPs. The total number of minority ethnic women MPs increased by 7 in 2010 and, a subsequent by-election in Feltham and Heston, puts the current total of minority ethnic women MPs to 10<sup>8</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:

<sup>6</sup> 27 elected at 2010 General Election, plus December 2011 Feltham and Heston by election winner, Seema Malhotra.

<sup>7</sup> [Operation Black Vote](#)

<sup>8</sup> 2 Conservative and 8 Labour.

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>9</sup>

The first Indian peer, and probably the first non-white peer, was Sir Satyendra Sinha, created Baron Sinha of Raipur, an hereditary peerage, in 1919.<sup>10</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.

Based on information from various unofficial sources, including Operation Black Vote, there are currently 42 minority ethnic members of the House of Lords.<sup>11</sup> This is 5% of the total of 826 Members.

**Minority Ethnic Members of the House of Lords by gender and party**  
1.12.2011

	Men	Women	All
Conservative	4	2	<b>6</b>
Crossbench	9	4	<b>13</b>
Independent	3	1	<b>4</b>
Labour	10	4	<b>14</b>
Liberal Democrat	1	3	<b>4</b>
Bishops	1		<b>1</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>42</b>

The individuals included in this analysis are shown overleaf:

<sup>9</sup> House of Lords Hansard, 26.07.00, 616 c67WA

<sup>10</sup> *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Columbia University Press, 2008

<sup>11</sup> Based on information compiled by the campaigning group [Operation Black Vote](#) supplemented by other on-line sources (includes peers on leave of absence)

### Minority Ethnic Members of the House of Lords (1.12.11)

Peer	Party
1 Lord Adebawale	Crossbench
2 Baroness Afshar	Crossbench
3 Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon	Conservative
4 Lord Ahmed	Labour
5 Lord Alli	Labour
6 Baroness Amos	Labour
7 Baroness Benjamin	Lib Dem
8 Lord Bhatia	Independent
9 Lord Bhattacharyya	Labour
10 Lord Bilimoria	Crossbench
11 Lord Chitnis	Crossbench
12 Lord Darzi of Denham	Labour
13 Lord Desai	Labour
14 Lord Dholakia	Lib Dem
15 Baroness Falkner of Margrave	Lib Dem
16 Baroness Flather	Crossbench
17 Lord Hameed	Crossbench
18 Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick	Crossbench
19 Baroness Howells of St Davids	Labour
20 Baroness Hussein-Ece	Lib Dem
21 Lord Kakkar	Crossbench
22 Lord King of West Bromwich	Labour
23 Lord Morris of Handsworth	Labour
24 Lord Ouseley	Crossbench
25 Lord Parekh	Labour
26 Lord Patel	Crossbench
27 Lord Patel of Blackburn	Labour
28 Lord Patel of Bradford	Labour
29 Lord Paul	Independent
30 Lord Popat	Conservative
31 Baroness Prashar	Crossbench
32 Lord Rana	Crossbench
33 Baroness Scotland of Asthal	Labour
34 Lord Sheikh	Conservative
35 Lord Taylor of Warwick	Independent
36 Baroness Uddin	Independent
37 Baroness Vadera	Labour
38 Baroness Verma	Conservative
39 Baroness Warsi	Conservative
40 Lord Wei	Conservative
41 York, Archbishop (John Sentamu)	Bishops
42 Baroness Young of Hornsey	Crossbench

## 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>12</sup>

In the 112<sup>th</sup> US Congress (2011-2012) of 435 members of the House of Representatives, 82 (6%) were minority ethnic as were 4 (4%) of the 100 Senate members.<sup>13</sup> The 2010 US Census found for people reporting one race alone, 75 percent was white (3 percent reported more than one race).<sup>14</sup>

### **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 one Cabinet Minister (Baroness Warsi) from an ethnic minority. There are two other minority-ethnic government ministers, both Government Whips, in the Lords, Baroness Verma, and in the Commons, Shailesh Vara.

### **4 Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly**

Two of the Scottish Parliament's 129 members (1.6%) elected in 2011 are minority ethnic, Humza Yousaf (SNP) and Hanzala Malik (Labour), both of whom were elected from the Regional List for Glasgow.

The number of minority ethnic Members of the National Assembly for Wales went from one to two following the 2011 elections. Vaughan Gething (Labour) joined Mohammad Asghar (Conservative) who had previously been elected for Plaid Cymru in 2007. Together they are 3.3% of the Assembly's 60 AMs.

### **5 Local Councils and the London Assembly**

The 2010 census of local councillors in England showed that 4% came from an ethnic minority background and 96% were white.<sup>15</sup> The highest representation for ethnic minorities was in London, with 15% of councillors being non-white. In Wales it was reported in 2004 that 99.2% of councillors were white and 0.8% had an ethnic minority background.<sup>16</sup>

Just over 30% of councillors in England are women, but minority ethnic women are particularly under-represented. The 2010 census of councillors found around 2% of women councillors were non-white, this is around half the 4% rate for men.

Of the 25 members of the Greater London Assembly, there are four non-white members (Jennette Arnold, James Cleverly, Murad Qureshi and Navin Shah).

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<sup>12</sup> 'Must the rainbow turn monochrome in parliament?', *Economist*, 25 October 2007

<sup>13</sup> Congressional Research Service *Membership of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress: A Profile* (21 June 2011)

<sup>14</sup> <http://factfinder2.census.gov>

<sup>15</sup> [National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010](#) Local Government Association

<sup>16</sup> [National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2004](#), Welsh Local Government Association

## **6 Civil Service**

9.2% of civil servants in GB are from an ethnic minority<sup>17</sup>, but this proportion is strongly related to grade – for the senior civil service the proportion is 5.0%.<sup>18</sup>

## **7 Other public sector organisations**

### **7.1 Police**

There were 6,615 FTE minority ethnic officers in the 43 English and Welsh police forces as at 31 March 2011, 4.8% of total strength. The forces with the highest representation are the Metropolitan Police, with 9.6% minority ethnic officers, the West Midlands (8.2%) and Leicestershire (6.7%).<sup>19</sup>

Despite the improvement in their overall representation in the ranks of the police, minority ethnic officers remain under-represented in the highest ranks, with only 3.3% of officers at Chief Inspector or above being from an ethnic minority, compared with 5.2% of Constables, the lowest rank.

### **7.2 Teachers**

In November 2010, only 6.3% of all teachers in publically funded schools in England were from non-white ethnic groups, while the equivalent figure for headteachers is 2.3%.<sup>20</sup>

### **7.3 Armed forces**

There are around 12,000 minority-ethnic service men and women in the regular forces, which represents 6.8% of the total. However, only 2.4% of the officer ranks come from ethnic minorities, compared to 7.4% of other ranks.<sup>21</sup>

### **7.4 National Health Service**

The latest figures from the NHS staff census show that 41% of hospital and community service doctors are from ethnic minorities, although the proportion falls to 31% for the highest staff grade of consultant. Likewise 20% of all qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff are from ethnic minorities, but only 6% of nurse consultants and 7% of matrons are from ethnic minorities.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For employees with a known ethnicity

<sup>18</sup> [Civil Service statistics 2011](#)

<sup>19</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin 13/11, [Police Service Strength England and Wales](#), 21 July 2011

<sup>20</sup> DfE [School Workforce in England Nov 2010 \(Provisional\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> Figures relate to July 2010, Source: [DASA Build your own table](#)

<sup>22</sup> NHS Information Centre workforce statistics as at September 2010: <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/workforce/nhs-staff-numbers>