

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

How do we explain what motivates Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic MPs' voting behaviour?"

There is a surplus of research on why MPs and other elected representatives vote in certain ways such as party discipline (the whip system or the former conservative dirt book) or psychological impacts of party cohesion. However, these elucidations are not necessarily applicable to ethnic minority MPs as it is a generalisation of all MPs where the majority are white and middle class. This fact is even more true with earlier studies and theories (still used in current politics degree programmes) when the number of ethnic minorities was near to none or largely disproportionate.

My main objective is to provide the general public, politics students and Academics up to date research that specifically relates to BAME MPs. It would also apply to other types of representatives such as BAME members of congress and could be used as secondary data for others who want to further research and compare these trends in their own nations. It is increasingly important that this research is completed because as our society is becoming more diverse and our MPs are becoming more descriptively representative, specific research must be done to explain the motivations in voting behaviour. There are examples (sourced from 'theyworkforyou.com') of incumbent high profile BAME MPs who vote overwhelmingly in line with their parties. Sajid David, Priti Patel, Kwasi Kwarteng and Alok Sharma all "voted against investigations into the Iraq war, while most Conservative MPs generally voted for". Diane Abbott also 'consistently voted against the Iraq war, while most Labour MPs generally voted for' as well as this Abbott 'generally voted against Labour's anti-terrorism laws, while most Labour MPs generally voted for'. All of these examples relate to foreign policy, which could suggest a correlation between being a BAME MP and voting behaviour in certain policy areas. BAME MPs are under all the same pressures that their white counterparts are but have even more pressures being ethnic minorities as they may feel the need to represent people of their ethnicities (descriptive representation). This could lead to differences in voting.

First of all, I want to look into the voting records of BAME MPs in from the last two decades, the secondary data is free and readily available.

Once I establish if any topics stand out I would conduct a hypothesis test to prove or disprove that BAME MPs are just as likely to vote on party lines. I will limit the study to conservative and labour MPs because they hold the most seats under our First-Past-the-Post electoral system. If I were to expand it to all parties analysis simply becomes unduly complex and there are not enough ethnic minority MPs to make the research credible. I would find the percentages of both parties' votes for select bills. Then I would test the hypothesis 'the probability is the same regardless of ethnicity' and use a two-tailed test to see if I can disprove this statement. I could then calculate the standard deviations of MPs from party-line and find what is 'normal' (highly probable). I could set my dependent variable to whether an MP deviates from party-line and use regression analysis to see if BAME status is a significant predictor of that, where I could the control for other factors (e.g. length of tenure). I could also use descriptives, simple correlations and then t-tests to compare the averages and lastly use multivariate regression to add further depth to my research.

The next step is to find from my research particular BAME MPs that may have voted differently on multiple occasions or at times where they are in the overwhelming minority. I would try to interview chosen MPs to gain an insight into why they voted in this way.

I would like to interview MPs that are still incumbent or have recently lost their seat to ease contact. I believe that it is probable that MPs will partake in interviews because it progresses what we already know about politicians and allows them to explain how they think and voice the additional pressures they get. I would then compare responses and see if any themes reoccur to explain trends and to see whether the models of voting behaviour are just as applicable to BAME MPs. I wish to understand what values BAME MPs prioritise when they are deciding what they are voting for. I believe that the triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methods is important to understand the full picture.

To summarise, I want to compare data to see where BAME MPs vote differently to their white counterparts, ask the MPs directly why they vote in certain ways and use my findings to either support current theories on MP voting behaviour or create new theory that is specific to BAME MPs.

Sources I used that inspired my research project:

- Benedetto, G. and Hix, S. (2007). "The Rejected, the Ejected, and the Dejected: Explaining Government Rebels in the 2001-2005 British House of Commons". *Comparative Political Studies* 40(7): 755-781
- Cowley, P. (2002). *Revolts and Rebellions: Parliamentary Voting Under Blair*. Politico's. (Chapter 9).
- Kam, C. (2009). *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics*. Cambridge University Press. (Chapters: 1, 2 and 10).
- Russell, M. (2014). "Parliamentary party cohesion: Some explanations from psychology". *Party Politics*. 20(5): 712-723.
- The Data Journalism Team BBC News (Accessed 2019). "Election 2019: Britain's most diverse Parliament" <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50808536>
- TheyWorkForYou (Accessed 2019) <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mps/>