Ethnic Minorities in British Politics: candidate selection and clan politics in the Labour Party

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Abstract

In increasingly diverse polities, the question of how minorities engage with national and local political processes is important. In the UK, the Labour Party has traditionally benefited electorally from ethnic minority communities, often through ethnicity-based voting blocs. However, little attention has been paid to how the Party's candidate selection process, for local and national elections, is influenced by strategic party membership and nomination. We argue that community clan or kinship (biraderi) networks found amongst British Pakistanis have been mobilised for this purpose. We examine the cases of Bradford and Birmingham with respect to the nominations for Prospective Candidates at both parliamentary and local council level. We show the continued importance of biraderi connections in spite of Labour Party attempts to 'clean up' selection contests through impositions of the National Executive Committee (NEC). Such practices favour the selection of candidates with strong biraderi links and, as such, often marginalise female candidates.

Key Words

biraderi, ethnic minority politics, candidate selection, Labour Party, kinship networks

Introduction

As the population of Europe becomes more ethnically diverse through, amongst other factors, patterns of migration, this diversity influences the political processes and institutions of nation-states in significant ways. Minority communities, who often have very little political, economic or social capital except the right to vote, may collate this scarce resource and attempt to secure a voting bloc to lobby politicians and political parties (Akhtar, 2017). In the British context, there is historical research on how minority communities have impacted the political sphere, for example on Irish Catholic communities in places like Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester – especially for the Labour Party (Gallagher 1987, Fielding 1993, Smyth 2000). This

makes minority communities a constituency of interest for political parties, especially if they are settled in concentrated enclaves in majoritarian electoral systems.

More broadly, there is a well-established literature on how the democratic process in Europe, specifically electoral mobilisation, is influenced by diversity (Martiniello, 2005; Morales and Giugni, 2011; Kraal and Vertovec, 2017). Within the scholarship of minority political mobilisation in Europe, it is possible to identify two key strands. On the one hand, there is a body of work which focuses on how state level political opportunities and structures facilitate, or indeed constrain the political incorporation of minorities at the national and local levels (Koopmans et al 2005, Bloemraad, 2006, Cinalli and Giugni 2016). On the other hand, there is a focus on the internal organisational structure of minority communities themselves in shaping political mobilisation (Michon and Vermeulen 2013, Pilati and Morales 2016). This research shows that the organisation of an immigrant group is crucial in allowing members to make the most of its political opportunities.[1]

It is to this latter body of work concerning 'ethnic mobilisation' that we wish to contribute by going beyond the role played by formal minority associations in the political process in determining the extent and nature of minority political mobilisation. Instead, we consider how the internal dynamics of a minority community can influence political decision-making from within, and how this in turn can directly influence who ends up in political office both at the local and the national level. We take as our case study Pakistani migrants and their descendants in Britain and investigate the extent to which internal kinship or 'biraderi' networks can influence community political mobilisation. Biraderi literally translates as 'brotherhood' and is a system of kinship networks found in communities in South

Asia that functions as a system of welfare. Biraderi networks provided important social, psychological and political capital for Pakistanis who migrated to Britain (Akhtar 2013). We are interested in the role of biraderi in selection contests for those who seek public office. This is an aspect of local democracy that has received little attention in the literature but is nevertheless important. Our research question is: to what extent have biraderi links been utilised to secure preferred election candidates at the selection stage of local council and national elections? As one of the largest and most-visible minority communities in the UK, the Pakistanis and their British-born descendants have for many years successfully mobilised around ethnicity-based voting blocs to influence the election of candidates whom they believed would be sympathetic to their social and political needs. However, research is yet to focus on how these minorities can mobilise to influence the initial candidate selection process.

This is a surprising yet understandable gap in the literature. Biraderi networks are, by their nature, difficult to study with their existence verified through consequences rather than observation. The early anthropological literature on British Pakistanis first highlighted the importance of biraderi structures in the diasporic public sphere (Khan 1976, Shaw 1988, Werbner 1990, Lewis 1994). In Political Science, the importance of biraderi was picked up much later, although there is now an emergent literature on how biraderi networks impact elections (Akhtar 2013, Baston 2013, Heath *et al* 2013, Electoral Commission 2014, Fisher *et al* 2014, Peace and Akhtar 2015, Sobolewska *et al* 2015, Martin 2016, Hill *et al* 2017). Within public policy discourses, the importance of biraderi in diaspora politics was highlighted in two recent reports. The Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life, chaired by the Conservative MP Domic Grieve QC, described the role of biraderi networks as playing a 'fundamental role' (2017: 46) in the politics of

South Asian communities. Second, Dame Louise Casey's (2016) government appointed review on integration in the UK also noted the use of biraderi structures in electoral politics, going on to criticise the response of political parties:

> National political parties seem to consider such activities outside of their concern…and not in their interests to curtail where it is not obviously illegal or fraudulent, is bringing large numbers of votes for minimal effort and is considered acceptable practice locally (Casey, 2016: 164)

This article contributes to this growing literature with primary research from the case studies of British Pakistanis in Bradford and Birmingham to examine how, and to what extent, mobilisations around kinship can influence candidate selection – thereby invariably also affecting who is elected at the local council and parliamentary level.

Methodology and case studies

Obtaining data on biraderi politics is notoriously difficult. It is a taboo subject which many do not want to discuss, not least because it feeds into an already negative discourse around Muslim communities. There is also a sense in which talking about these issues is, as one of our interviewees put it, 'washing our dirty linen in public', that meant talking down about their community. Discussing biraderi and its use in politics has also been used as a way of de-legitimising the authority and achievement of those who have been elected to office.[2] In order to gather information on this phenomenon, we conducted interviews with political activists, local councillors and sitting MPs in Bradford and Birmingham, the two cities with the strongest and most influential British-Pakistani communities in terms of local politics. The original focus was Bradford as part of a previous research project (Peace and Akhtar 2015) but through our interviews it was clear that similar practices were taking place in other regions and Birmingham was the city which was mentioned by over 90% of our

interviewees in Bradford. These two cities also hosted a variety of personal contacts that could facilitate the research and act as gatekeepers. Previous research conducted by the authors on issues of British Pakistani political participation in these two cities also meant that the authors had a bank of personal contacts to draw upon.

The interviews, conducted by both authors using a semi-structured interview script, were transcribed and analysed using grounded theory. The most salient themes from the interviews were identified, coded and cross-referenced to ensure reliability. Interviewees were chosen via selective sampling and subsequent snowballing. All elected representatives in the two cities were initially contacted and after each interview suggestions for further contacts were requested. It was clear early on that biraderi was central to the narrative of candidate selection and we directly asked the interviewees about their experiences of it. A total of 30 people were interviewed and recorded specifically for this research in 2013, 2015 and 2016. This relatively small sample size is a reflection of the hesitancy to speak about this issue with researchers.[3] The majority of politicians who accepted our request to be interviewed were of Pakistani origin and represented the Labour Party either as councillors, Members of Parliament or as party activists. It is for this reason that we focus on the Labour Party, though we want to stress that the use of biraderi mobilisation does not just happen within the Labour Party, as noted in our previous research (Peace and Akhtar 2015) and others such as Dancygier (2017). We also conducted interviews with politicians who were not of Pakistani origin and those representing other parties. We have not, in most cases, identified those we have interviewed as many only spoke to us on condition of anonymity.

The interviews were supplemented with ethnographic research conducted at candidate campaign launches and general election hustings in 2015. Attending these

political meetings and gatherings, mostly in Bradford, facilitated the interview process. Many informal conversations at such gatherings also inform our analysis. Due to the nature of the research, we found individuals were much more willing to talk informally but were often reluctant to be recorded. In addition to the primary data, we have also drawn on secondary sources including interviews that have appeared in the national media. In such cases, the names have been identified as this material is already in the public domain. Clearly this is not the kind of phenomenon for which quantitative data is available. We recognise the limitations of such a study and the impossibility of quantifying the extent to which clan politics affects candidate selection. Nevertheless, there is now a sufficient body of evidence to indicate that these issues are very salient in British politics. Some of this research looks specifically at the issue of electoral fraud (Wilks-Heeg 2008, Hill *et al* 2017) but this is not our focus or concern. Although the practices we discuss may be questionable from a democratic standpoint, and were criticised by interviewees, they are all legal and within the electoral law. We first discuss how candidate selection operates in the UK and particularly for the Labour Party. We then provide an overview of how biraderi networks operate and their involvement in the British political process. We then turn to our empirical findings that discuss the use of biraderi in selection contests, the specific issues this creates for potential female candidates and how the Labour Party has responded to this situation.

Candidate selection in the UK

Candidate selection tends to receive less attention in the literature on elections than that of campaigning once candidates have been chosen despite it having 'important consequences for the quality of the democratic political process' (Krouwel 1999).

Gideon Rahat argues that 'candidate selection methods are important for democracy in the same sense that electoral systems are important. Both are links in the chain of the electoral connection that stands at the centre of modern representative democracy' (2009: 68). Unlike countries such as the US, which have rules about candidate selection incorporated into election law, the processes of candidate selection in the UK are internal to the parties. The selection of parliamentary candidates usually takes place locally, by a committee of party members, the process is thus de-centralised to the constituency level. In their seminal study, Norris and Lovenduski (1995: 2) argued that the party electorate is crucial because, while in a marginal seat who gets into parliament is determined by voters, in safe seats 'the selectorate have a de facto power to choose the MP…In choosing candidates the selectorate therefore determines the overall composition of parliament, and ultimately the pool of those eligible for government'. The constituencies that we have studied have been consistently safe seats for Labour (except for a rare by-election win for the Respect Party in Bradford West in 2012).

Within the Labour Party, parliamentary candidate selection has a long and contentious history, often aligned to ideological battles. In the 1970s for example, 'candidate selection became a focal point for the left-right struggle for control of the party' (Bochel and Denver, 1983: 45), so that different factions within the Constituency Labour Party (CLP) utilised candidate selection to alter the ideological composition of the National Party (Berrington, 1982). The tensions around candidate selection can be more broadly aligned to the different foci of local/national policies, so that 'whilst the national party is keen to ensure the (s)election of loyal members with expertise who can contribute to the Parliamentary Party at Westminster, local associations are more concerned with selecting a candidate who will work well

locally and fit in with the local party' (Evans and Harrison 2012: 195). The conflicts between the local CLPs and the national party intensified with the ascent of Tony Blair to the leadership which saw their autonomy coming under increasing pressure. Indeed, the introduction of One Member One Vote (OMOV) to selection contests meant that the traditional power of the regional officials and their trade union allies had been weakened. It also 'added to the momentum towards the selection of local candidates with established personal connections' (Minkin 2014: 373).

This democratisation of the candidate selection process was welcomed by many in the Labour Party as it signalled the end to trade union dominance.[4] It did, however, also open up the possibility to influence candidate selection through sheer weight of paid up members. This had significant implications, not least in providing a huge incentive for aspiring candidates to mobilise individuals to sign up for party membership. In constituencies with large South Asian populations, it did not need an especially savvy strategist to view the benefits of kinship mobilisation. For politicians hoping to secure selection, encouraging biraderi members to become party members so they had the right to vote and thus select the party's candidate was an obvious move in the political game. As Dancygier (2017: 147) notes, assessing 'whether candidates are adept at mobilizing the minority vote' becomes an important consideration for the party selectors.

Another innovation under Blair was the introduction of postal votes for parliamentary selection contests which were provided without any need for proof of the reasons for not attending the vote in person. As with the introduction of postal voting on demand for public electoral contests, this gave biraderi leaders the ideal opportunity to flex the muscles of their following within a community in order to influence who was selected as a candidate (and by extension, who would be likely to

win the subsequent election in many safe seats). A third factor which favoured the role of biraderi was the fact that most constituencies with large South Asian populations were, in fact, safe Labour seats. This meant that the national leadership and the National Executive Committee (NEC) were less likely to intervene as they would regularly do in marginal seats where getting the 'right candidate' who would appeal to the broadest spectrum of voters was seen as more crucial. The NEC has the responsibility to prepare shortlists for by-election contests although its favoured candidate does not always win selection (Minkin 2014). Concerns over who votes and why has, therefore, been a feature of Labour selection contests for many years. The most noted being the practice of registering for the party with the unique aim of influencing a particular selection contest. Such strategic party membership is embedded within the party at every level of selection and election, from local council to national parliament.

Biraderi and politics in British-Pakistani Communities

Within the sphere of politics, biraderis were used as a network for electoral mobilisation as bloc community votes. A relationship of patronage emerged between biraderi leaders and politicians, whereby the biraderi leaders promised bloc community votes in return for community status or localised political power. The patronage-based political landscape which developed in constituencies with significant numbers of Pakistanis in the 1970s has altered significantly over the past forty years. Patronage politics in the early days took place largely between White politicians and Pakistani community elders (viewed as gatekeepers to impenetrable communities) whereas now the politicians are also often Pakistanis. The practice of leaders signing up members of their community to a particular political party was

established long ago. The Labour Party has been the main, if not the only, beneficiary of this practice.

Indeed, contentions around irregularity in Labour Party membership in relation to Pakistani communities are even recorded in Hansard. In the early 1990s, the then Labour Party MP for Birmingham Perry Bar, Jeff Rooker, raised the issue of the potential misuse of urban renewal grants in systems of patronage whereby help was given to residents with filling out the grant forms in return for membership of the Labour Party and voting in Labour candidates. On 9th of February 1995, he raised the issue in Parliament arguing that this was 'building up ethnic tensions in the city and creating social fragmentation'.[5] In March that year, the issue was once again debated in the chamber, where Dame Jill Knight argued that allegiance to the Labour Party and votes were being bought with taxpayers' money:

> I want to touch on the extremely unequal way in which money allocated by the Government to Birmingham is distributed in what certainly appears to be a blatant attempt to buy votes. Out of 841 grants to voluntary bodies, the lion's share goes to those parts of Birmingham that elect Labour councillors and Members of Parliament: Aston, Handsworth, Nechells, Small Heath, Soho, Sparkbrook and Sparkhill with Ladywood at the top of the list, receiving more than 100 grants totalling some £7 million'.[6]

Those with a knowledge of Birmingham's geography will be aware that these wards were not only home to Labour councillors but also the largest concentrations of Pakistani communities. During this same debate, Sir Norman Fowler noted that: 'as a direct result of those charges, no fewer than four Labour constituency parties have been suspended'.[7] In more recent times it has been suggested that the withdrawal of political parties from certain areas has 'enabled biraderi networks effectively to take over many of the political roles of the parties, including candidate selection and electioneering' (Hill et al 2017: 784).

Already in the late 1990s, researchers were able to show how ethnic minority candidates, particularly British South Asians, were more likely to be selected in areas with a large ethnic minority population through a form of 'ethnic entryism' (Fielding and Geddes 1998, Saggar and Geddes 2000). The reality of biraderi influencing candidate selection has certainly been an issue since this time. Until relatively recently, the biraderi system only had influence over the selection of candidates for local elections. These selection contests were seen as easier to influence as less was at stake. Biraderi leaders were often very influential at the ward level whereas parliamentary constituencies are usually more ethnically mixed, with the associated imperative of finding a candidate who can appeal beyond one particular community. Indeed, due to the intensity of local rivalries between families, it was sometimes seen as more favourable to avoid parliamentary candidates with strong support from one particular clan so as not to split the 'Asian vote.' Over the last 10-15 years, it has become axiomatic to select South Asian candidates in parliamentary constituencies which have a significant South Asian population. Recent research using the Ethnic Minority British Election Study (EMBES) data from 2010 (Fisher *et al* 2014, Martin 2016) shows the effectiveness of such a move as Pakistani voters tend to favour Pakistani candidates and are also more likely to vote when a Pakistani candidate stands (if they represent the Labour party). This has been interpreted as 'evidence for biraderi or clan voting' (Martin 2016: 18). Goodhart (2013: 192) also argues that the clan system has a 'big influence on the selection of candidates for council, and to a lesser extent, parliamentary seats'. What evidence is there, then, for biraderi influencing candidate selection?

Biraderi politics in candidate selection

A number of existing studies and reports hint at the importance of kinship in the selection process. Philip Lewis (1997: 132) noted 'the accusation that Labour local ward parties have been packed by members of the respective 'clans' (kindred groups or *biraderi*)'. In a similar vein, Kingsley Purdam (2001: 153), claimed that Muslim politicians (mainly Pakistanis) have 'mobilised and in some cases secured candidacy entirely through Muslim support…Muslim party activists have been forced to recruit/encourage members in order to support their campaign for selection.' In constituencies with significant numbers of Pakistanis, bringing in new party members was a common method of using kinship networks in the candidate selection process. This issue was picked up by David Ritchie in his report following the 2001 race riots in Oldham which heavily criticised the local political parties:

> The Panel received quite a number of representations, including from well-placed sources in the Labour Party, that the relationship of the Party to the Pakistani community…had for some time been over dependent on links to one particular clan. The suggestion was that, in return for delivering a sizable vote for Labour, candidates for Council seats would be chosen from the clan, and the community leaders would be the principal source of Council influence within the Pakistani parts of the town...large numbers of new members have been registered shortly before some ward selection meetings and although they apparently comply with Labour Party rules on eligibility to vote, our informants had good grounds to question their allegiance to the Party (Ritchie 2001: 63).[8]

Such tactics have been employed in a number of areas up and down the country and was confirmed by our interviews in Birmingham and Bradford.

According to those we interviewed, the local CLP in several locations is dominated by key biraderis and candidate selection is influenced by the mobilisation of members who are signed up to the CLP to ensure they have a vote in the selection process. Biraderi members have been signed up for party membership purely to get a

particular candidate selected. Indeed, a report for the Electoral Commission stated that candidate selection processes 'seem to reinforce the influence of kinship networks' which can lead to a 'lack of access for ethnic minority candidates from outside the networks and increased vulnerability to fraud' (Sobolewska *et al* 2015: 7). The use of biraderi in the process of candidate selection, in particular key individuals influencing this process through mass recruitment, was the single most important reoccurring issue in our interviews with political activists. One interviewee claimed that at times a 'single cheque would be used to pay for large numbers of new party members.'[9] In our interviews with elected officials in both cities it was acknowledged that 'buying in members' was a standard practice, with the selection for the Bradford West Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) in 2012 being an oft cited example.

Examining this particular episode in detail is instructive as the selection of Imran Hussain to represent Labour for the 2012 Bradford West by-election appears as a rather typical example of the influence of biraderi in the candidate selection process. He was first elected to Bradford city council in 2002 and his father Altaf had also served as a councillor in the city. He was in pole position to succeed Marsha Singh and become Bradford's first Pakistani Muslim MP and was the designated candidate of the largest and most influential Biraderi clan, the Bains. [10] At the selection meeting for Bradford West on 11th March 2012, Imran Hussain won very comfortably in the first round of voting with 233 votes from the nearly 300 members (Labour List 2012). It has been noted that 'the apparently united Labour verdict in favour of Hussain at the meeting did not reflect a real consensus, and reveals problems with the standard ways that parties do candidate selection' (Baston 2013: 26). According to those we spoke to, the majority of the members who attended the selection meeting were from the Toller ward where Imran Hussain was a councillor. Several interviewees in

Bradford claimed that these members had been brought there (with their membership paid for by others) in order to create a bloc vote in favour of Hussain. His selection was described by one observer as a 'coronation' given that the result was never really in doubt.[11] This choice spectacularly backfired as the Bradford West by-election led to a shock result as maverick Respect Party candidate George Galloway was swept to power with a 10,000 strong majority on the back of pledges to clean up Bradford politics (Akhtar, 2012; Peace and Akhtar 2015).[12]

It must be stressed that the influence of the biraderi system on selection contests does not only involve British South Asians. White politicians have been complicit in exploiting this situation. When discussing a former (white) leader of Birmingham City Council, one former councillor described the process of selecting candidates in relation to Biraderi:

> Whenever he [leader of the council] selects a candidate to stand for the Council, the first thing he looks at is where he's from [in Pakistan]. Has he got any weight [votes] behind him? Can he bring any benefit to the party? He would never give a normal person a chance. In [area X] you have a clear example. In the last election we had [M]. He has got a good biraderi vote. A lot of Labour Party members are his friends. Against him at the selection meeting there was an Asian girl, from [area Y], and she's a lawyer. She did an amazing speech on the night of the selection about why she was standing. Then we had [M], who could barely speak English, do his speech. [M] got selected and that young girl, educated to degree level and working as a lawyer, didn't get selected.[13]

The assumption therefore is that by selecting a candidate with strong biraderi credentials, who can guarantee a substantial number of votes, the seat on the council will remain in the hands of the Labour Party. It is worth remembering that such selection decisions are not limited to Labour and instances were also cited from the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party. Examples were given when candidates have been deliberately selected by these parties in order to 'split the biraderi vote' and weaken the Labour candidate. However, on many occasions these outsider candidates,

who are often much younger, have been 'persuaded to step down in order save the honour of the extended family.'[14]

Another issue that was prevalent was the notion of how belonging to the 'wrong biraderi' could hinder one's progress, no matter how much political influence one had. Hierarchy is an important feature in ordering biraderis and as Hill *et al* (2017) note, 'some biraderi networks [are] considered to be superior to others'. Labour Peer Lord Nazir Ahmed has cited this as the reason he was unsuccessful in becoming an elected Member of Parliament: 'It does not matter what their politics is, when it comes to voting, they will vote for their own. This is what happened during my Parliamentary selection. People said "Well, he's a Jaat so we won't vote for him."' (cited in Goodhart, 2013: 192). Speaking with local Labour politicians in Bradford West, several interviewees mentioned the example of former Lord Mayor, Muhmmad Ajeeb. Although it was expected that he would succeed Max Madden as MP in 1997, he was not selected as the PPC, partly by virtue of Ajeeb being from an artisan caste, and therefore lower down the biraderi hierarchy.

In an interview conducted with Naz Shah MP (who waived her right to anonymity), she stated that the selection process is unsatisfactorily dubious in wards with a high volume of Pakistani residents. She suggested there was a 'culture of gatekeeping' in the Labour Party around candidate selection and spoke about trying to get talented young people to try to stand for local council office only to be told by these 'gatekeepers' that certain council seats had already been promised to 'chosen' candidates, in effect leading to a situation where those seats were not open to the democratic process because deals had been done to decide who would run. Shah pointed to scenarios whereby gatekeepers decide they're 'going to select one person and this is who it's going to be and that's a done deal. I can't accept that, because

that's not democracy, that's not based on merit'.[15] The issue of biraderi influence in candidate selection seems to affect women candidates in a particularly negative way.

Problems for female candidates

According to several of our interviewees, including Labour Party elected representatives, biraderi connections may be used not only to facilitate candidate selection, but also specifically to block female South Asian candidates. Our interview with a British-Pakistani Labour MP revealed that in 2004, when all wards were up for election for Birmingham city council, certain councillors[16] in the inner city area were opposed to female candidates on the grounds that women 'would not manage to bring in the votes'. This despite the fact that it was NEC policy that if there were two male candidates in a ward, the third candidate should be a woman. It was argued that males in the Pakistani community would not vote for women. Our interviewee claimed that many Labour activists in these areas were sexist and that in the name of 'honour and that sort of stuff' they opposed the selection of women candidates to run for local council office. Their argument was that 'no good upstanding woman from a Muslim community would stand for election'.[17] Whereas this Labour Party official from Birmingham was clear that such practices do not take place in this city anymore, others we spoke to in Birmingham disagreed, stating they believed that this was still prevalent but disguised as an issue of resources.

Allegations of 'mysognytic practice' by South Asian men against women from within their own community in the Labour Party had been made by several women who we interviewed. These issues were also brought to light in 2016 as part of an investigation by the BBC Newsnight programme.[18] In our interview with Shaista

Gohir, from the Muslim Women's Network, she argued that aspiring and standing South Asian women councillors were fearing for their lives, saying they were getting harassed and even threatened with violence. In constituencies across the UK with large South Asian populations, male Labour party officials were blocking 'vocal independent Asian women from entering local government' or trying to 'de-select' those who had gained office. Councillor Arooj Shah (Labour, Oldham Council) stated that 'there are Labour Party members who will accept my two colleagues, Asian men, but support anyone but me.'[19]

Such allegations of male misogyny against women from within their community are not new and date back at least 30 years. Prominent testimonies can be found from our city case studies including Najma Hafeez, the first Muslim woman on Birmingham City council.[20] Similarly in Bradford, when the then Bradford West MP Max Madden decided to retire he declared that Bradford should return a woman under All Women Shortlists (AWS).[21] This idea of imposing such a shortlist was, however, overturned 'amidst rumours of intimidation' and 'some unpleasantness' (Lewis 1997: 131). Whilst the Labour Party NEC has tried to increase the presence of women in local government, the CLPs have found ways to circumvent these measures, specifically in relation to Muslim women, by claiming there are no good candidates thereby barring women from standing. Our interview with Bradford West MP Naz Shah shows that even when women make it into office, they are expected to abide by the rules of patronage:

> As the selection processes started coming up [for 2016 council elections] I was encouraging one of my staff to try and become a councillor and I took a phone call from my neighbour and he said to me "You can't do that," and I said, "Why not?" he says, "Well we've told [Y] that he's going to get it"… and then he slammed the phone down on me.[22]

Defending community tactics and the response of Labour

The practice of 'buying members' to win selection contests by individuals was defended by some of our interview partners as merely a tactic that was within the rules of the game. One Labour MP justified such actions as a typical first generation migrant phenomenon, whereby people would naturally want to stick together and select a candidate from the same clan. Explanations for such actions were given in cultural terms, arguing that South Asian communities are 'very organised' and it just so happens that these recruitment processes happen within certain clans.[23] Although admitting that it was against the spirit of democracy, and not their preferred method of selection, this MP pointed out that each party is allowed to set its own rules for selection contests and therefore if those rules are not being broken, one cannot accuse people of misdeeds. Indeed, this parliamentarian believed that there was unfair scrutiny on South Asian communities:

> What I'm worried about sometimes is this narrative that if a bunch of [South] Asian people over here are organized for the purposes of the election then that's bad, but everybody else gets to organize and recruit additional members as much as they like. There are racist connotations there which I have an issue with.

Such a defence of the status quo was rare and most interviewees focused on the steps that have been taken by the Labour Party to address issues with clan politics. In the wake of the 2012 Bradford West by-election disaster, then leader Ed Miliband addressed an audience of Muslim Women in Bradford and described this election result as a 'big wake-up call for the Labour party'. He subsequently tasked Sadiq Khan (now Mayor of London) to head an NEC panel to carry out an investigation into the failings in Bradford West and make recommendations for the future.[24] Khan stated that:

> We produced a report with recommendations which are being implemented, including a Future Candidate's Programme for Bradford, which is designed to find a new generation of potential Labour candidates who are leaders in their community. The selection process is changing, there are women and young people's forums being established, and Labour is determined to be a strong voice for people of Bradford on the issues that matter to them (Labour List 2013).

The Labour Party has openly admitted that it faces particular challenges in certain areas regarding selection and in 2013 it was revealed that a number of Labour CLPs were in 'special measures' meaning that they were controlled by the party in London because of suspicions of wrongdoing. [25] These included the Birmingham constituencies of Hall Green, Hodge Hill, Ladywood and Perry Barr.

As a result, the Labour Party in Birmingham has done a lot to tighten up the rules in selection contests. A Labour MP argued that whilst signing up members to influence selection was fairly common until quite recently, the Labour Party has 'changed quite significantly its rules, particularly in Birmingham inner-city areas'.[26] One of these rule changes was to ensure that new members had to use their own bank details. This was an attempt to end the practice of mass membership paid for by a few key individuals (who would then instruct the new members how to vote). In addition to this, the power of key community/biraderi leaders has been declining, with one MP stating that 'those days of some man saying he can bring 500 votes are long gone, certainly in Birmingham and certainly in the last ten years or so'.[27] In our interviews with South Asian councillors in Birmingham, most acknowledged that that there had been problems in the past, but insisted that such issues have been resolved.

There was a consensus amongst our interviewees that, in Birmingham at least, biraderi-based practices are becoming rarer because politicians from the second generation behave in ways that are different from their parents. Most claimed that the influence of biraderi has been waning over the years and that 'young people don't

care about biraderi, they are more likely to vote on merit and who they think will do a good job for the area'.[28] The contrast with Bradford was regularly invoked, with one MP claiming that:

> Bradford is totally different from Birmingham. I just don't see any comparison whatsoever with my own constituency which has two large ethnic minority groups, … It's just a different culture that we've got, I think.[29]

The increased cultural diversity of Birmingham has led to a situation that is different from Bradford. Possible tensions between the Afro-Carribbean and Pakistani communities were highlighted when the longstanding MP for Birmingham Ladywood, Clare Short, decided not to run for the seat at the 2010 general election. The fight for the designation as the Labour Party PPC between Shabana Mahmood and Yvonne Mosquito was mired in controversy.[30] This led to the CLP being temporarily split on race lines between Asian and Afro-Caribbean factions, demonstrating the complicated ethnic tensions at play in some UK constituencies.

Despite the various changes that were introduced after 2012, the selection of Labour prospective parliamentary candidates for the 2015 general election demonstrated the continued importance of biraderi in Bradford and the failed attempts of Labour's NEC to 'clean up' politics there. As chair of the Bradford West CLP, Imran Hussain was well placed to receive the nomination again, despite losing to George Galloway in 2012. The NEC wanted to avoid this situation at all costs and so imposed an AWS for the Bradford West and Bradford South candidate selection processes. Strangely, such an imposition was not made for the Bradford East constituency, held by Liberal Democrat David Ward since its creation in 2010 after Bradford North had been abolished. Hussain therefore simply switched constituencies and stood as a candidate in Bradford East. He was easily selected in November 2014

in scenes reminiscent of his 2012 selection. Hussain trounced the other candidates, including the union-backed candidate Mohammed Taj, to become Labour PPC and easily won in the first round of voting. He was subsequently elected MP for Bradford East in May 2015 (and re-elected in June 2017)

For the 2015 candidate selection in Bradford West, many in the CLP were unhappy with the interference from London and imposition of the AWS. Amina Ali, a Somali-origin candidate and councillor from Tower Hamlets, was originally selected but subsequently resigned after 72 hours citing personal reasons. It was widely believed, however, that her decision was made after it became clear that her selection had been a showcase by the CLP to show the NEC 'not to mess with them'.[31] The claim, also picked up by *The Guardian* newspaper, was that because the clan leaders' preferred candidate, Shakeela Lal, had not made the shortlist, a decision was made to back Ali.[32] In so doing, they hoped that she would subsequently lose to George Galloway, thereby bloodying the nose of the NEC and strengthening their hand for the selection next time around. Eventually Naz Shah was selected as the Labour candidate for Bradford West, despite coming last in the original contest. She comfortably won the seat back for Labour with almost 50% share of the vote, increasing this to 65% in 2017. Despite the efforts of the Labour Party NEC to clean up selection in Bradford, it was forced to take over the local council candidate selection in six wards for the local elections of 2016 (all of which were in Bradford West). Concerns remained about the candidate selection process and this decision was delegated to a panel of the NEC.[33] Naz Shah (2016) wrote that in supporting the above move she had 'unleashed a systematic campaign by the gatekeepers of local Labour politics to not only challenge the Labour Party and the NEC but also to malign and attempt to denigrate me and my character'.

Conclusion

In this article we have sought to explain how internal community structures can be used by minorities communities to influence both local and national level selection practices. We have shown how ethnic minorities can successfully mobilise to influence the initial candidate selection process, often through strategic party membership. Our case study has been on the biraderi or kiship networks of British Pakistani communities who have been particularly successful in electoral representation at local and national level. Biraderi links have been utilised to secure preferred election candidates at the selection stage and because the local constituency party is often dominated by one particular clan, selection can easily be handled through the mobilisation of members who are signed up to the CLP. While not against the rules, the use of biraderi has led to a situation where there is the possibility of the disenfranchisement of significant proportion of the local electorate (particularly women). Shaista Gohir from the Muslim Women's Network UK has argued that the biraderi kinship system operates like an old boy's network and that 'they don't like women to be heard, to be empowered because we will challenge the status quo, challenge misogyny' (Gohir, 2016).

The Labour Party itself has recognised that action needed to be taken and insisted on reform in the wake of the Bradford West debacle in 2012. Certainly in Birmingham, the power of clans appears to have been curbed as a result of several rule changes imposed by the NEC. Increased diversity within the city also makes it harder for them to wield the same kind of power as their counterparts in Bradford, where biraderi connections are still very important (as demonstrated by the events of 2015 and 2016). Indeed, there are those who think that the Labour Party has not done

enough to combat the issue. If genuine reform does not take place, it not only jeopardises the democratic process but also risks de-legitimising the political campaigns and mandates of all British-Pakistani politicians whether or not they have benefited from biraderi connections in the selection process. The use of such kinship networks can, therefore, have both a detrimental impact on candidate selection and the perceived legitimacy of Pakistani candidates (Akhtar, 2015).

Yet our research has also highlighted that change is happening in British-Pakistani communities. A generational divide on these issues was very clear in our interviews. Biraderi based practices are often shunned by the younger members of the community and the result in Bradford West in 2012 demonstrated an appetite for change. Politicians are now becoming more vocal about how traditional practices are harmful for the community and democracy more widely with representatives now openly denouncing suspect practices in the media. So this could be a turning point although further research is needed to substantiate the extent and persistence of biraderi influence, or indeed other forms of community organising. Scholars should also be encouraged to discover whether this phenomenon can be found amongst other diaspora communities outside of the UK. This is, then, just the start of what should be an emerging research agenda for ethnic and migration studies in Europe.

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[1] This builds on the earlier work of scholars such as Meindert Fennema and Jean Tille on minority organisations and political integration (Fennema and Tillie 1999, Tillie 2004).
[2] This was a point made by a Pakistani female councillor at a public event where one of the authors was invited to talk in Rotherham. She argued that the negative perception around biraderi in candidate selection meant that her own family, who shared her unusually spelt surname, could not sign up to support her candidate selection because this would be perceived as mass recruitment to unduly influence her selection.
[3] During the course of conducting the research, one of the authors was contacted by a researcher for the BBC's Newsnight programme, working on a report looking at how Muslim men were stopping Muslim women from standing as local councillors. Those conversations and a subsequent interview with Shaista Gohir from the Muslim Women's Network, who was crucial in getting the issue in the public domain, also informs the research.
[4] The issue of trade union dominance was revived in 2013 after a dispute regarding the selection process in the parliamentary constituency of Falkirk (Shaw 2013)
[5] Housing Renewal (Birmingham) HC Deb 9 February 1995 vol. 254 cc555-64. Available at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1995/feb/09/housing-renewal-birmingham
[6] Local Government (Birmingham) HC Deb 15 March 1995 vol. 256 cc837-57. Available at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1995/mar/15/local-government-birmingham
[7] Ibid.
[8] Similar concerns were also noted in the Bradford Commission Report (1996) which included some vivid commentary on clan rivalries in local ward elections and the bewilderment of those who were not from the Muslim/Kashmiri community when confronted with such rivalries and slogans which they simply did not understand.
[9] Interview with Birmingham Labour MP
[10] Marsha Singh was the MP for Bradford West from 1997-2012. He was a Sikh who was seen to stand above the various clan rivalries of the (mainly Muslim) Kashmiris. This however did not eliminate the potential for a split in the 'Asian vote' as there was a strong desire to have an MP with background from Mirpur in Kashmir. It was made clear in Bradford Labour circles that Singh's successor would need to fit this bill.
[11] Interview with former Labour activist in Bradford
[12] The nature of the selection of Imran Hussain was mentioned by several local politicians as being the catalyst for the Respect Party campaign which funnelled the anger of many regarding the primacy of biraderi, including former members and supporters of the Labour Party. This wave of anger against the way in which Hussain was selected significantly contributed to Galloway's stunning by-election victory in 2012, one of the first instances of biraderi politics making national news headlines.
[13] Interview with former councillor in Birmingham, names anonymised.
[14] Interview with Labour Party councillor in Birmingham.
[15] Interview with Naz Shah MP.
[16] Later clarified to mean South Asian Muslim men
[17] Interview with Birmingham Labour MP
[18] Newsnight aired three reports on this issue on 8 February, 11 March and 17 March 2016. These can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/newsnight/videos Our discussions with the researcher on this story confirmed that there were many more women affected who did not want to go public. Most of the accusations were against men in the British-Pakistani community. Newsnight reported on 'mounting evidence to suggest that Muslim women are being denied the chance to face the electorate…their route into politics blocked by men in their own communities.' Over 25 women claimed systematic misogyny among Muslim male councillors who attempted to hinder the chances of their female colleagues in the Labour Party being selected as candidates at the local level. Fozia Parveen from Birmingham, for example, claimed her attempts to become a councillor were sabotaged by smear campaigns against her character. Shazia Bashir from Peterborough claimed she was pressured into stepping down because she did not have her father's consent to stand for election.
[19] 'Labour MP 'felt pressured' after speaking out' *BBC News*, 11 March 2016 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35790164
[20] She served between 1983 and 1995 and admitted that she was intimidated by Labour Party colleagues from within the Muslim community and that the Party 'often turns a blind eye when Pakistani heritage members influence the democratic process by packing individual wards with family and friends' (interview with Najma Hafeez broadcast on BBC Newsnight, 11 March, 2016).
[21] The Labour party first introduced All Women Shortlists (AWS) for the selection of parliamentary candidates prior to the 1997 general election and since this time has owned the issue of women's

numerical representation (Cutts and Widdop 2013). Evans and Harrison (2012: 195) argue that the use of AWS by Labour 'is important in terms of understanding shifts in intra-party democracy concerning the candidate selection process'.

[22] Interview with Naz Shah MP.

[23] Interview with Birmingham Labour MP

[24] 'Ed Miliband begins mission to woo back Bradford' *The Guardian*, 10 June 2012

[25] 'Labour reveals 'secret list' as selection row deepens' *The Times*, 3 July 2013.

[26] Interview with Birmingham Labour MP

[27] Ibid.

[28] Interview with Birmingham Labour city councillor

[29] Interview with Birmingham Labour MP. The point about ethnic diversity is also picked up by Tatari (2014) who shows in her study of London boroughs that different political styles are developed dependent on whether or not there is a dominant ethno-Muslim community like, for example, Sylheti Bengalis in Tower Hamlets.

[30] Mahmood won the hard fought selection battle in 2008 but this was only confirmed after a six-month inquiry by the NEC into allegations of foul play. Allegations of fixing and postal vote manipulation were made by supporters of Mosquito, based on the fact that Mahmood's father was chairman of the Birmingham Labour Party. 'Labour NEC rules in favour of Shabana Mahmood in Ladywood selection row' *Birmingham Mail*, 14 January 2009.

[31] Interview with Bradford Labour activist

[32] 'Labour candidate chosen to face George Galloway resigns after three days' *The Guardian*, 25 February 2015.

[33] A statement released by Yorkshire and the Humber Labour Party stated: "After receiving allegations surrounding the process of selecting candidates in wards of the Bradford West constituency to contest the May 2016 local authority elections, the NEC (National Executive Committee) of the Labour Party has today ruled that the selection of candidates in the six wards that make up the Bradford West constituency will be made by a panel of the NEC. Party members continue to select candidates in all other parts of Bradford." (Robinson 2016).