Race Equality First

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to make equality a reality"

The Under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Women in Politics in Wales

By

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Introduction & Purpose of the Research:

The under-representative nature of politics is an issue that has saturated political discourse for decades and is still an important topic dominating political debate today. Westminster is often accused of having too few MPs from minority groups and under-representing other groups in society such as women, ethnic minorities, the working class, the disabled as well as people of differing sexual orientations and from differing faiths or religions. Therefore, on behalf of Race Equality First I have been conducting research into the under-representation of black and minority ethnic (BME) women in politics in Wales, speaking to local councillors, and Assembly Members, as well as BME women in the communities in Cardiff, to find out their views. The under-representation of BME women in politics is an important issue that needs addressing: so that Parliament and the devolved legislatures in the UK are more representative of the UK population and so that issues faced by the BME population are better represented in Parliament and in UK politics as a whole. This research focuses on why there is this under-representation of BME women in Welsh politics; and the specific barriers to entry into politics for BME women. I have also considered the concept of intersectionality, which stems from the idea that inequalities can accumulate, and how this can play an important role here.

The Current Literature and Debate:

I will now assess the current literate and debate on this topic area. A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), on Racial Equality has outlined that, although the 2015 General Election saw an increase in the proportion of MPs who are from an ethnic minority background, ethnic minorities are still massively under-represented in both national and local politics[1].

Furthermore, BME women are under-represented not only in politics, but in a number of both public and private sector professions and tend to be at a disadvantage in the labour market. Research conducted by the Women's and Equality Committee supports this notion as they have stated that Muslim women are some the most economically disenfranchised members of society and that many Muslim women face what they have termed as a "triple

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[1] Equality and Human Rights Commission, (EHRC)., 2016. *Report on Racial Equality: Healing a Divided Britain: the Need for a Comprehensive Race Equality Strategy – "Is Britain Fairer?" Evidence for Race*

penalty," being women, being BME and being Muslim, and that this has a massive impact on their employment prospects[2]. Muslim women can be considered as a key example of intersectionality here: being female, facing gender inequalities, being BME, facing racial inequalities and being Muslim, they may face religious and/or cultural barriers as well as possibly facing issues involving Islamophobia. The Women's and Equality Committee has stated that, "the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women should not be underestimated[3]". In support of this, the Women's and Equality Committee explains how Tell MAMA's research found that, "Islamophobic hate crime disproportionately affects Muslim women as those who wear headscarves or other religious dress are more identifiably Muslim when compared with Muslim men[4]."

The Women's and Equality Committee's report also suggests that English Language skills continue to be a barrier for some, although due to lack of data it is not known how widespread this issue is[5]. Alongside this, it is important to note that, "one third of MPs are from fee-paying schools," and, "around three quarters of MPs elected in 2015 are university graduates[6]." This suggests that education does play an important role when it comes to getting into politics and suggests that language barriers could also be one of many factors explaining why there is a significant lack of BME people in UK politics. In support of this, the Women's and Equality Committee have also stated in their report that, "one significant factor in economic inactivity rates for some Muslim women is participation in full-time education[7]."

The Women's and Equality Committee's report also explains how witnesses such as the National Alliance of Women's Organisations stated that even once Muslim women had secured a job, many continued to experience negative stereotyping which affected their career progression[8]. Additionally, the need for mentors across a life experience, throughout education and employment has been highlighted by the Muslim Women's Network UK[9]. They have stated that mentoring schemes are useful, "not only in schools and universities, or when you start your career, but when you are within your career because then you have a mentor to help you progress further," and to achieve your goals[10].

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[2] Women's and Equality Committee., 2016. *Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK: Supporting the Aspirations of Muslim Women*

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid

[6] Audickas, L., 2016. *Social Background of MPs: 1979 – 2015*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper

[7] Women's and Equality Committee., 2016. *Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK: Supporting the Aspirations of Muslim Women*

[8] Ibid

[9] Ibid

[10] Ibid

The Current Figures:

According to the Office of National Statistics[11] around 13% of the UK population are from a BME background. However, (as of the 2015 General Election), just over 6% of MPs are BME; 3% of which are BME women[12]. With regard to the current picture in Wales, it is important to first note the Welsh demographic, as 93.2% of the population are white and only 6.8% are from a BME background[13]. To achieve proportional representation in the National Assembly for Wales, 4.1% of AMs would need to be BME. The National Assembly is not far from that figure with 3.3% of AMs, equating to 2 out of the total 60, being from a BME background currently. Despite this, neither are female; and the real question is, do the diverse communities in Wales feel like they are represented in Welsh politics and decision-making?

Research Design and Methodology:

Firstly it is important to note that this is a small scale research project, therefore with a small sample size; data for this research was gathered from conducting one to one interviews with a total of 18 participants altogether. 22% of participants were male and 78% were female. Two sets of questions were designed and posed to participants, who were split into two different categories, with 9 participants in each. Each category was asked a different set of questions, with some overlaps. The first category encompassed professionals and ex-professionals, notably those who have been, or currently are working in politics. The second category targeted the everyday person, not currently involved in politics and not necessarily having an interest in politics, mainly focusing on BME women in the BME communities in Cardiff. From here on in and in future sections I will refer to the first category as those with a political background and to the second category as those without a political background.

A fixed set of questions, incorporating a mixture of both open-ended and closed questions were used in the interviews conducted with participants, although the interviews can be described as semi-structured as the majority of questions allowed for further questioning and for participants to elaborate on their answers. Also, in a handful of interviews, follow-up questions were added.

In terms of evaluating the method used to gather data for this project: large amounts of detailed and in-depth information were generated and the method of a semi-structured interview that was used is relatively flexible as it allows participants to elaborate upon their answers. Despite this, it is very important to note that we cannot guarantee the honesty of

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[11] Office of National Statistics., 2011. *Annual Population Survey*
[12] Audickas, L., 2016. *Ethnic Minorities in Politics and Public Life,* House of Commons Library Briefing Paper
[13] Office of National Statistics., 2011. *2011 Census: Key Statistics for Wales*
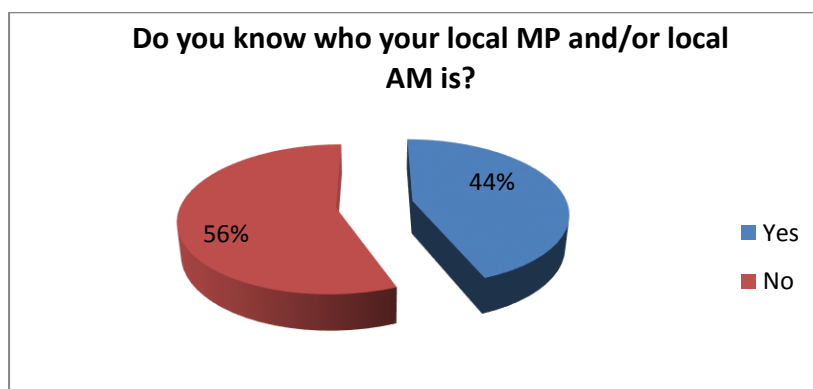
participants, as there is the possibility that they may give socially desirable answers. With the aim of counteracting this I assured participants that these interviews were fully confidential and that they would be completely anonymised and not identifiable by any of the information that they wish to share with me that I may include in this document. Furthermore it must also be noted that we cannot make any generalisations from this study mainly as a very small sample size was used. Therefore in the future, alongside using interviews to gather data, it may be a consideration to design a survey that can be distributed to participants on a much larger scale.

Key Findings:

The findings from this research indicate that there is a significant lack of BME women, not only in Welsh politics but in national politics also. In this section I will analyse the answers given by participants in both categories to a number of key questions, mainly focusing on what barriers to entry participants from both categories identified for BME women going into politics and what they thought are the necessary skills to have in order to go into politics, as well as whether the participants from the category of those with a political background perceived there to be hostility surrounding politics in the UK and what advice they would give to BME women wanting to go into politics. I also asked this category of participants what their views are on the use of diversity quotas in politics and whether they think the number of BME women in politics needs to increase. Alongside this I have also included a few pie charts to display the data gathered from a handful of other questions posed to the category of participants who do not have a political background, the results of which can be seen directly below.
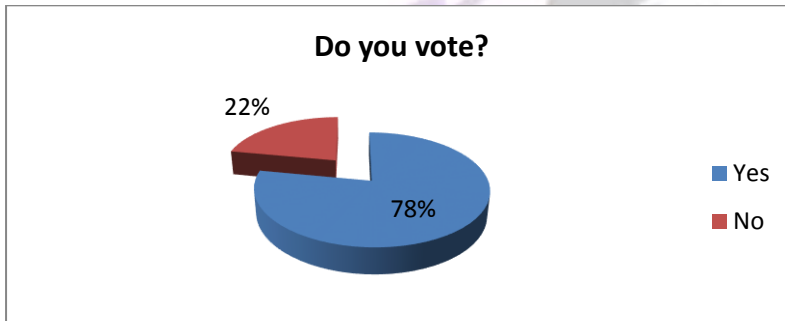
Awareness of Local Representatives

I asked the category of participants who did not have a political background if they were aware of whom their local MP and/or local AM are. The pie chart below displays the results:

Do you know who your local MP and/or local AM is?

44%

56%

■ Yes
■ No

The results show that participants were roughly split in half, with 56% of participants unaware of who their local MP or AM is and 44% of participants knowing who their local representatives are. Those who answered no largely stated that this was due to their lack of interest in politics whereas those who answered yes stated that this was as a result of receiving flyers and leaflets through the door as well as experiencing local representatives knocking door to door.
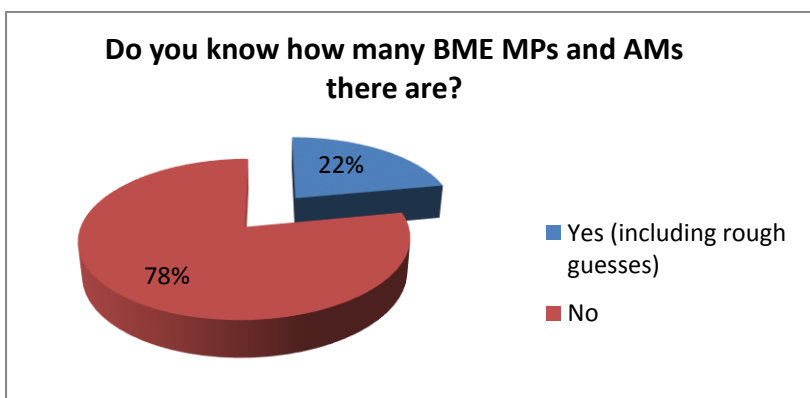
Voting Behaviour

I also asked this category of participants if they vote in UK local and national elections. The pie chart below displays the results:

Do you vote?

22%

78%

- Yes
- No

The results show that the majority of people asked, (78%) do vote in UK local and national elections, with only 22% stating that they do not vote. One of the participants who claimed that they do not vote did state they did however vote in last year's EU referendum.

Awareness of Current BME Representation:

Lastly I asked participants in this category if they were aware, roughly of how many MPs in Parliament or AMs in the National Assembly for Wales are from a BME background. The pie chart below shows the results:

Do you know how many BME MPs and AMs there are?

22%

78%

- Yes (including rough guesses)
- No

The results show that the majority of participants (78%) did not know how many BME MPs or AMs there currently are at the moment. A few participants were not able to guess a number or percentage but stated that they would think that there would be very few BME representatives in politics at the moment. 22% of participants asked however did have a general idea of how many BME MPs and BME AMs there are currently, with one participant stating that they would guess that around 5% of MPs in Westminster are from a BME background, which is very close to the actual 6.3%. And another participant stated the correct answer of two AMs in the National Assembly for Wales, also being aware of the fact that both of which are male. Furthermore, for Westminster, they placed their figure at there being around 45 to 50 MPs from a BME background which is fair to say is not far off the actual figure of 41.

Opinions and Issues

I also asked this category of participants, with no background in politics, if they felt that their opinions and issues were represented in political institutions in the UK. Many of them said no. Participants stated:

"If the BME population is not represented then how can my issues be represented; only I know my needs."

Participants also detailed that there is not just one BME community, there are several, and they all have different needs. Different people from different BME backgrounds have different needs; they have different cultures and different religions. Other participants talked about how they felt that Theresa May and the Conservative Party do not understand BME issues.

Considering Politics

"I am not academic enough"

I also asked participants from this category if they have ever considered going into politics. All participants with the exception of one answered no. This participant stated that they would love to get involved as they would like to change society, but nevertheless hinted at the presence of obstacles and barriers in their answer stating that however politics is a completely different world and that the degree of thinking is on a different level. The rest of participants who answered no to this question stated reasons such as not wanting to join a political party and therefore having to follow the party line which could involve them having to compromise their values and beliefs at times and having to vote for things or agree to

things that personally they do not want or agree with. Other participants reasoning included that when they lived back home, they had no interest in politics mainly because it is very corrupt and dishonest and although they are aware that politics is different in the UK, that viewpoint has nevertheless stayed with them regardless as politics for them is associated with favouring your own people which is not fair. Another participant mentioned how they would not want to work in politics as they would not like to be in the limelight. Another participant stated that they believe to be in politics, you need to be committed and to give your time in order to do the job properly; they felt that they would not be able to do this however as they have to go to work to provide for their family. Other answers included participants claiming that they are not devious enough, alongside feeling like they are not academic, or intelligent enough, as well as feeling not qualified to do the job and not able to speak articulately.

Obstacles

I also asked interviewees for this category if they felt anything has held them back from going into politics. Participants stated that despite them not actively trying to get a job in politics, they still felt that there are obstacles in the way. They stated that BME women are not encouraged to think of themselves as leaders. They thought that BME women should get the opportunity to shadow current politicians or to take part in some sort of mentoring scheme. Other participants stated how the working hours would not be compatible with their lifestyle as they have younger children. Another point raised was how they like to have a private life and wouldn't want any aspect of that in the public domain. Additionally, other participants answered similarly, stating that they wouldn't like to be in the limelight.

Barriers

"BME women are not encouraged to think of themselves as leaders; BME women are led to believe that their place is in the home"

I also asked this category of participants if they thought that BME women face certain barriers to entry into politics that other members of society do not necessarily face. Participants' answers detailed that BME women might feel daunted and that politics isn't the same game for white women as it is for BME women as culture and religion both come into play and therefore need to be taken into consideration. Participants also mentioned that BME women like any women may have children and that this might be a factor causing them to be more hesitant to go into politics. Other participants talked about how BME

women tend to be kept at home and how they are led to believe that their place is in the home. Several participants from this category noted the hijab and niqab as barriers for Muslim women; they explained how they felt that there was a stigma attached to it and how by wearing it they felt that they were immediately labelled as extremists and likewise. Additionally, participants outlined how going into politics is likely to mean that women would have to attend meetings that may often take place in the evenings and involve liaising with male colleagues, which may also put off BME women from going into politics. It was also detailed how these barriers can often come into play for BME women not only in terms of going into politics, but also regarding employment overall as well.

I also asked those participants from the other category, those with a political background, if they felt that BME women faced certain barriers to entry that other members of society do not necessarily face, and many thought so. Participants stated that:

> *"As a BME woman, you have got a double barrier to being able to access opportunities and to being accepted as the representative voice of people."*

Other participants stated that BME women can face barriers from within their own culture, for example with the prevalent convention that men are the leaders in their communities. Participants raised the important point that BME women often worry about how they are going to be perceived within their own communities and that they tend to think that they are not good enough. In addition to this other participants flagged up barriers relating to confidence and how BME women often tend to think that they can't do something because they haven't been to a good school or because they haven't got access to certain things or people in society. Participants stated that this links into the cultural side of things as many BME women feel like they cannot go into politics as it is so demanding. These statements made by participants in this category very interestingly line up to the answers given by the BME women I spoke to in the other category, outlined above.

Other participants stated:

> *"Muslim women are some of the most disenfranchised in the country and have significant barriers to just employment."*

It was mentioned that BME women also have barriers to accessing the outreach programmes that are trying to reach them. Other participants drew upon the point that having a family and most notably, having young children, could be a barrier for BME women. In support of this another participant stated that being a mum and wanting to be there for your children really does come into it and not knowing where to park that when you are trying to go into, and do well in, politics is another issue. Furthermore, participants also stated that language barriers exist, even for those whose English is acceptable on a day to

day basis; this point links into how many participants viewed being able to speak articulately as a very important skill to possess with regard to going into politics which is something that is discussed later.

Other participants detailed how BME women face certain issues which are different to the issues that white women or women on the whole face, one of which could be equal pay for example. Participants detailed that BME women on the other hand, some are being forced into marriages and some have issues involving FGM and these aren't issues for white women. Other participants flagged up issues involving education and referred to an "educational deficit" with regard to the way in which BME communities are taught as well as the way they have lived in communities where poverty is rife and how this has an impact. Participants argued that those BME women, who are in politics at the moment, are not BME women who are from a working class background, they are well educated for example and have had a support structure to help them gain access into politics; they have never lived in poverty for instance.

Other participants, whilst discussing the barriers to entry for BME women into politics, also touched upon other reasons why they thought that there is this prominent lack of BME women in politics on the whole. Participants stated that going into politics takes a level of bravery and that you have got to have broad shoulders in order to put up with the frustration of constantly being called into challenge: "it takes a lot of strength, courage and determination to keep going." It was also stated that BME women have to deal with the relentless pressure of trying to almost be perfect so that no one can find an excuse to not listen to you. Additionally, participants also stated that as a BME woman you know that you have more barriers to crash though in terms of proving your credibility and maintaining it, and asking people to vote for you. BME women may feel like this is an uphill struggle and because of this, participants thought that there are a lot of people who therefore haven't got the appetite for taking part. In support of this, participants mentioned how even in places in the UK like London and Birmingham for example, where there is a much more high profile black community and there are role models, you still don't see many BME women going into politics and this is in a place where people have already crashed through some of the barriers that exist, and you are not going to be the first non-white face, but still you don't see much of it. Furthermore, issues were flagged up regarding the media with participants stating that because of the media, those from BME communities are not seen as people who you can trust. Lastly participants stated that:

"Whatever the glass ceiling is for women, it is always a little bit lower for women from a BME background."

Hostility

"Marginalised communities have not been listened to"

I also asked participants from the category of those with a political background if they perceived there to be hostility surrounding politics within the UK. All participants said yes, stating that they felt there is a lot of cynicism surrounding politics in the UK. Participants also felt that there are too many career politicians and that they are constantly trying to get one over on each other. Other participants stated that they think that people feel like they cannot influence anything and that decision making seems too out of reach. Participants detailed how they think there is a lack of trust. In support of this other participants stated that there have been periods of hostility in the past, like the expenses scandal for example which led to a lack of trust in politicians in Westminster. Furthermore participants stated how they feel that people perceive politicians as too out of touch with what goes on in the UK on a daily basis and feel like politicians don't represent communities.

A number of other participants agreed with this notion. Participants detailed how they felt people from a lower income background in particular feel underrepresented and feel like policies do not apply to them especially as for the past 6 years we have had a Conservative government. Participants mentioned how they felt that hostility existed because people feel very disenfranchised and no longer engaged in political debate and that this has therefore resulted in people completely withdrawing from the debate and not voting for example as they feel like today's politicians do not represent them. Participants also detailed in their answers how they feel this has caused a lot of friction and divide in society. Additional participants made similar comments stating how they believed the hostility surrounding politics came about as a result of austerity and how the recent governments in Westminster have led to cuts all the way to public services and how this has brought out hostility particularly in relation to racism and Islamophobia as well as sexism and homophobia. In support of this other participants also felt that, marginalised communities have not been listened to and as a result of this we have seen a fight back; such attitudes were seen in the Brexit vote as well as with the rise of UKIP for instance.

Participants have also argued that things have become more toxic and hostile since the EU Referendum stating that:

> *"After Brexit we saw an increase in racial violence and racial abuse that wasn't meant to be there but people felt like they had a new found sense of power and that legitimised the way they thought."*

Participants stated that the felt people were espousing the attitude of we have taken our country back and you no longer belong here, further exacerbating the creation of an 'us and them'.

Other participants perceive the presence of hostility to exist deeper than just within politics stating that they thought politics is more of a means of articulating the hostility that exists within society and that they think this is further exemplified by the media. Participants further stated that we live in a 24/7 social media environment and that the media have a lot of responsibility. In support of this participants also stated that if we lived in a society that was genuinely interested in equity and fairness, then we wouldn't have the media that we have and perhaps the politics that we have.

Skills

Additionally, I asked participants from both categories what they thought the necessary skills to have in order to go into politics are. Before posing this question I had come up with a brainstorm of my own with regards to predicting what participants would answer. My ideas included good public speaking skills and the ability to articulate yourself well alongside having confidence, being passionate and being identifiable, so that the general public feel like they can identify with you. Although a few of these points were reiterated in participant's answers, a number of other thoughts were also raised. A large number of participants who have a political background stated that they thought people who go into politics should have lived a life so that they have an association with real life and so that they know what it's like to get something done in society when resources and money are lacking. In support of this other participants also stated:

> *"I think that you need a diversity of experiences in your own life, and certainly an understanding of that in order to gather this you need to have contact with people from different backgrounds instead of talking to people who advocate the same point of view as you all the time."*

Other participants touched on the ability to speak well alongside how they perceived good communication skills as being one of the most important things. Participants detailed how they feel money is also a factor that comes into play here, stating how a lot of people cannot afford to run their campaigns and how they felt that in terms of going into politics, it's as if you already need to be on 'level 4' and if someone is starting at zero, it is very difficult for them.

Others mentioned qualities such as being kind, caring, passionate and altruistic, and others said that they thought people needed to be thick skinned whilst additional participants placed emphasis on authenticity, integrity and honesty. Participants also detailed how they felt that people needed to be in politics for the right reasons and to be motivated for genuine reasons. They also stated that to be in politics:

> *"You need to have an understanding of people's issues; you need to know your area and the demographics."*

Participants felt that it was also needed to have an understanding of communities and how they are made up, alongside an understanding of diversity, which is why participants felt it was important for a representative to be someone who is rooted in the community and not someone who has been parachuted in from elsewhere as they felt that this is something that has broken people's trust in the past. Participants also felt that people needed to be good at campaigning and described it as a craft. Lastly participants stated that they felt people should have a genuine interest in trying to create a more fair and equitable society.

I also asked participants in the other category, those without a background in politics, what they thought the necessary skills to have with regards to going into and doing well in politics were. They also mentioned about having life experiences as well as having an interest in people. Other participants also talked about how they felt people needed to be vocal, having good communication skills alongside being a confident individual. Participants also mentioned about education and how they felt that that was important but only to a certain extent, meaning that they didn't think it was necessary to have a university degree for example. Participants touched upon the importance of having compassion and genuinely wanting to help the local communities: having the caring nature where you actually want to help people out and not just being in it to get the status of being a councillor for example. Alongside this other participants talked about how people need to be passionate, not just about politics, but about people; they need to fight for fairness and they need to be in it for the people whereas at the moment it was felt that a lot of them are in it for themselves. Some participants on the other hand however felt that the skills that politicians have are being two faced and having the ability to twist the truth.

Current BME representation in UK Politics

Also from analysing responses from the category of participants with a political background, it was found that all participants did not think that UK Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales are representative of the UK's diverse society. Alongside this most participants stated that they thought that the number of BME MPs and AMs needed to increase, mainly as the current figures don't reflect the ethnic make-up in the UK today and because, "the

people who decide on our legislation and what amenities we should have in our communities should be representative of the people in those communities." Participants felt that those who make decisions for the BME community don't understand the issues that these people face. They also stated that:

> *"More representation from the BME communities is needed so that the UK benefits from their skills, experience and contribution to society."*

Participants also stated that politics in the UK needs to be more representative of the population otherwise the policies that are made and put forward don't work for everybody and that is not democracy. Other participants stated that the BME communities needed to be engaged and shown that politics is a job for them and they felt that one of the building blocks of achieving this is parties realising that equality is better for everyone.

Participants also raised an important point stating how parties seem to be happy that they have a few members from a BME background, but that these people tend to be from a middle class background also, however they still tick their diversity box. Therefore participants thought that parties needed to recognise intersectionality. In addition to this other participants stated similar views mentioning how there is a risk of actually increasing the exclusion of some women if you just tick the box and say that because we have got a third of AMs who are female for example, we have therefore hit our target and you therefore think that you are hearing that voice. However there is a chance of that voice being even more pushed back as nobody is listening out for it anymore because you have already ticked that box. Participants therefore see it as vitally important to have that representation from the BME community because without it, policy and decisions will be made that affect people's lives and the people who put these policies forward do so without having an understanding of the views, needs and interests of the wider community that they are there to serve.

Several participants delved deeper into the issue however, and although they still felt that there is an under-representation of the BME communities in politics, they emphasised the importance of how we need the right people, those who are going to make real change and work with our communities, and are not just there solely to increase numbers of BME people in politics. Participants stated that:

> *"I don't want to see any more people in politics, whether they're male or female, black or white, if they are going to espouse the politics of division, the politics that hurt people or the politics that divides communities."*

Diversity Quotas

"It's like putting a plaster over the real problem"

In relation to the above I also asked participants with a political background their views on diversity quotas and whether they thought that they should be used as a means of increasing the number of BME women in politics. The majority of participants recognised diversity quotas as not addressing the real issue at the grass roots level and therefore thought that diversity quotas should not necessarily be used with regard to increasing the number of BME women in politics. One participant asked did state that they believed that without diversity quotas, the number of BME women in politics won't otherwise significantly increase, whilst also stating that although diversity quotas are unpopular, they do make change. In support of this it is worth noting that when looking at political institutions across the world, where there is a more equal representation of both men and women, some sort of positive action policy has been implemented in order to achieve this.

A number of other participants also touched upon how diversity quotas always cause a lot of controversy as people see it is as everyone no longer being on a level playing field. Alongside this others stated that they felt that it didn't do people any favours. Participants also stated that:

"It's like people are putting their hands up and saying I need extra help and I am not sure that is giving off the right message."

Furthermore participants stated that they don't think quotas work and that they think they are dangerous stating how they believe that quotas actually create a sort of division with the rest of society because it says that it doesn't matter how good you are because you have got a reserve seat. Participants felt that another issue associated with quotas manifests itself in that once the quota is filled, you don't need any more people from that minority group, and participants felt that this is a problem, stating that, "if there are 50 good candidates but there are only 25 places, why can't we have all 50?" Participants also described diversity quotas as too simplistic and stated that they felt it was like putting a plaster over the real problem. Alongside this participants also felt that quotas are addressing the top end of the problem rather than addressing it at its grass roots. Participants felt that assessing the real problem involves shifting people's attitude which is something that isn't going to happen overnight and will take generations.

A number of participants were heavily undecided on their answer to this question stating answers like, "you want to say no because you want people to be there on merit and you don't want people to be able say you are only there because of a quota as opposed to you getting there on the basis of your own competence and what you are able to bring to the

table. But, you wonder if it is going to be a pipedream without it." Additional participants stated that they felt they were being forced to choose between merit or diversity and that although they lean towards merit they also felt it is paramount for people to understand that the certain type of people we want in politics don't have access to good education, the people, the communities or the amenities they need and therefore the real issue boils down to this: the idea of social class.

Other participants detailed about how when the Labour Party introduced All-Women Shortlists (AWS) in 1997, they thought that this was a bad idea. They also described quotas as something that people feel quite uncomfortable about, but in contrast to this they stated that, "at the current speed of change when will we see any change, as if you look ahead in terms of equality and diversity from the AWS in 1997, we have not managed to move that further forward in terms of BME representation in politics." Participants also stated how as a result of the AWS, people are no longer talking about the lack of women in the Labour Party as there was a solution to it and it was dealt with. Additionally some participants think that there might be an argument for shortlists however and that more research needs to be done into this as we need to see change now as BME communities are bearing the brunt of hate crimes, xenophobia and racism for being different. In addition to this other participants have also stated that they believe there is an argument for shortlists as they challenge racism and sexism.

On the other hand however, other participants have stated that they would not advocate the use of quotas but instead would advocate a changing of approach, in terms of identifying mentoring and enabling schemes to enable people to be the best person for the job and for people to get into politics on merit. Additionally participants stated that they wouldn't want to lose valuable existing councillors because that person had to go to replace them with a BME candidate.

Advice

To bring the key findings section to a close I will lastly discuss the answers participants from the category of those with a political background, gave when asked about what advice they would give to BME women who are interested in going into politics. Some participants touched on characteristics that they thought people going into politics should possess stating that you've got to be very focussed and pro-active alongside stating that you will need a core of steel. In addition to this other participants warned:

> *"Be aware of the culture of politics and of how it is inherently sexist and racist."*

Other participants also stated that it is important to have strong social skills and to have a bottom line that you do not let anyone push you below. Lastly with regard to this, participants also stated that, "with any form of leadership you have to live it and be prepared that in this field you are not going to be able to close the door at the end of the day and think about something else."

Other participants focused their answers on the importance of the internet and the use of social media. Participants stated that:

> *"The internet is a great tool not only to find local groups or campaigns for example but it is also a great tool to use to put your voice and opinion across and there are so many platforms available for people do so."*

Alongside this other participants stated that they felt it is really important to use social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook and for people to get trained properly on using these social media platforms. Additional participants focused on the importance of finding a good mentor as well as receiving training where available. Other participants talked about how people should get involved in campaigns and something that matters to them, something that they want to change. Other participants simply stated an encouraging message for BME women to stick their head above the parapet and give it a go. Lastly, albeit a slightly different issue, participants also noted how there aren't enough women going into science, technology, engineering and maths for example and how the labour market is very gendered, and therefore women on the whole need to be encouraged more, not only with regard to politics but with regard to a range of subject areas and fields of employment.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

From conducting this research, I have been able to think critically and to formulate suggestions for future action aiming to address this important issue. The findings from this research project indicate that there is a significant lack of BME women, in both local and national politics and that encouraging more people from BME communities, especially BME women, to consider a job in politics is a long-term goal that will require a lot more effort from both government and society.

Recommendations generated from this research include:

Education:
Politics should be part of the school curriculum in the UK, so that politics is compulsory to be taught to children, firstly to educate them from a young age about politics, not necessarily about party politics, but about the basics, notably about how the political system

that we have here in the UK works (both nationally and locally) to encourage children and young girls to take an interest in politics early on in life. Secondly children also should be educated about respecting equality.

More Research:

As this was a small study, more empirical research needs to be undertaken into this topic area and particularly into the experience of BME women so that we can understand their needs and their reality. It is important to look closely at the barriers to entry into politics for BME women from a number of different BME backgrounds so that in the future we can hope to see an increased number of BME women in politics representing their communities. Alongside this I would argue that more research needs to be undertaken into the use of diversity quotas and shortlists. Many have argued that such policies as the All-Women Shortlists and the 'A' List that have been used in the past with the aim of increasing the number of women as well, (for the A-List), the number of other minority groups in society, do not go far enough and have limited impact. There is the argument that simply enforcing increased representation from above with the use of such policies does not actually change attitudes towards women or the environment in which they work which has often been described as hostile, and therefore this needs to be investigated further.

Policy and Attitudinal Change:

From conducting this research I would argue that there is a need for a mix of both policy and attitudinal change. With this comes the important recognition that this is not something that is going to happen overnight; it is a long process. I would argue that it is important to focus on making Parliament and politics a less hostile place and instead a more inviting place for women. An example of this may include bringing the sitting hours of the House more in line with normal business hours for instance and focusing more on childcare despite the fact that in recent years we have seen the opening of Parliament's crèche. However it is important to not get legislation too far ahead of common acceptance so that it doesn't become discredited. Also I would argue that this recommendation links in to the first one on education and about politics being incorporated into the school curriculum and thus made compulsory to school children. I would argue that this is also a paramount policy in facilitating attitudinal change.

Outreach Programmes:

More needs to be done from outreach programmes to reach those women in the BME communities; we cannot just expect BME women to get involved of their own accord. Participants argued that BME women are likely to not have access to such outreach programmes that are trying to reach them, or that it may be easier for men to gain access to these programmes. The time at which these outreach events are scheduled for needs to be

considered so that for example, they are not held at 2pm/3pm on a weekday when some women are usually picking up their children from school for instance. Such outreach programmes therefore need to be made more accessible to all BME women.

More Mentoring Schemes:

A number of participants in political positions at the moment stressed the importance and value of mentoring schemes to those who want to get into politics. Therefore there needs to be more mentoring schemes, and to make those and the already existing schemes more accessible to the BME communities so that BME women can have the opportunity to take part. Alongside this there should be shadowing schemes to give BME women more opportunities to shadow an MP, AM or local councillor so that they can gain first-hand experience and get a taste of the sort of work that they would be dealing with if in this position. We also need to ensure that these schemes would be structured with BME women in mind so that they are accessible and do not exclude a particular community.

Social Media Training:

Another recommendation of this research is to offer training on social media platforms to the BME communities, to up-skill them with this useful tool. This could involve providing people with the skills to use the internet in general as well as a focus on social media platforms as both are very important and useful tools to have. Knowing your way around multiple social media platforms is also very important with regards to politics. For example, when it comes to campaigning and promoting yourself, it is important and useful to be Twitter and Facebook savvy for instance. Alongside this, like with the suggestion for more outreach programmes and mentoring schemes, it is important to ensure that training workshops on social media would also be accessible to all BME women.

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