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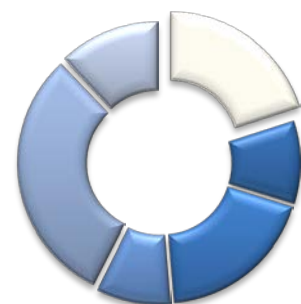
Thomas Saalfeld and Daniel Bischof:

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Minority-Ethnic MPs and the Substantive Representation of Minority Interests in the House of Commons, 2005-2011

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Abstract: Black, Asian and minority-ethnic (BAME) citizens are under-represented in the House of Commons. Nevertheless, the Chamber's ethnic composition has become more reflective of the general population as a result of the 2005 and 2010 parliamentary elections. The paper seeks to map and explain variations in the extent to which BAME Members of Parliament (MPs) use the Chamber to articulate issues relevant to minority constituents. We compare the content of all parliamentary questions for written answer asked by BAME MPs between May 2005 and December 2011 to the questions asked by a matching sample of non-minority legislators. We find that BAME MPs ask more questions relating to the problems and rights of ethnic minorities in, and immigration to, the UK. However, we also find that all British MPs are responsive to the interests of minority constituents where these are geographically concentrated. Building on theoretical predictions derived from sociological and rational-choice models, we discover that the MPs in our sample respond systematically to electoral incentives, especially in the politically salient area of immigration policy. While these findings are in line with a rational-choice model, the sociological model is better suited to explain the larger number of questions on the interests of ethnic minorities asked by Labour MPs.

The numerical underrepresentation of Members of Parliament (MPs) from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds in the House of Commons has led to concerns that, as a result of highly selective political recruitment processes, MPs are

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increasingly divorced from the life experiences of their constituents (House of Commons, 2010: 19). A great deal of scholarship has focused on barriers to proportional 'descriptive representation' and on the 'structure of political opportunities' facing potential candidates from minority backgrounds in the political parties as well as the electoral arena (Banducci et al., 2004; Geddes, 1998; Kittilson and Tate 2004; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Sobolewska, 2010). The parliamentary behaviour of BAME MPs, by contrast, their responsiveness to concerns of ethnic-minority voters ('substantive representation'), has been neglected. Nevertheless, many normative arguments are based on the assumption that substantive representation in a parliament will benefit from more descriptive representation (Mansbridge, 1999). The present article seeks to help closing this gap. The main questions are, firstly, does the increasing descriptive representation of minorities in the Chamber make a significant difference to the Chamber's agenda, or are new minority MPs smoothly co-opted into the parliamentary parties' organizations and the parliamentary machinery? Secondly, are there differences between minority and non-minority MPs? Thirdly, are there significant differences amongst minority MPs? Finally, and most importantly, what factors might explain these differences?

1. Research Puzzle

In the normative debate about representation, there is often an implicit or explicit presumption that adequate substantive representation requires more proportional descriptive representation (e.g., Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995). Yet empirical research on representative behaviour in the United States suggests that only some minority legislators appear to highlight issues of ethnicity in their political work. Many others pursue deliberate strategies of 'deracializing' their political signals (McCormick and Jones, 1993) – or adopting sophisticated strategies of 'toggling' between 'racialized' and 'deracialized' signals in different arenas and contexts (Collett, 2008).

The conditions for representative behaviour in the British House of Commons lead to similarly ambivalent predictions: On the one hand, a number of institutional features of UK politics work against a representative strategy emphasizing personal factors such as ethnicity: All MPs, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, need a plurality of votes in their constituencies to be (re-)elected. Even where minority ethnic

groups form a majority of the voters in a constituency, they are unlikely to have homogenous preferences. The best strategy for vote-seeking candidates may, therefore, be to de-emphasise ethnicity in the Chamber as well as in campaigns. In addition, it is likely that MPs promoting narrow ethnic interests would isolate themselves within their own parliamentary parties (Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou, 2011: 232-3). Thus, increased descriptive representation may not necessarily lead to the stronger substantive representation of minority interests. On the other hand, sociological research on backbench roles in the House of Commons (Searing, 1994) suggests that an emphasis on ethnic-group interests in parliamentary activities could be legitimately linked to widely accepted backbench roles such as 'policy advocate' (specialising in a particular policy area and scrutinising government policy in that area) or 'constituency member' (seeking to promote the welfare of his or her constituents by influencing policy making and implementation). In some instances, therefore, the increased number of MPs from BAME backgrounds may be reflected in more visible substantive representation of relevant issues.

Table 1 near here

The empirical record for the UK reflects this ambivalence. In her study of role perceptions among ethnic-minority MPs, Nixon (1998: 207-8) found that some minority MPs did seek to act as advocates of minority interests. Others emphatically rejected this role. Our own analyses underscore Nixon's findings. Table 1 provides some descriptive information on the number of parliamentary questions (PQs) for written answer each MP in our sample of 90 legislators asked between 2005 and 2011. For the purposes of this study, we counted, for each MP in our sample, the annual number of PQs explicitly referring (a) either to the problems and rights of ethnic minorities in the UK or (b) to problems arising from immigration (see below). The main statistic in Table 1 is the arithmetic mean of the number of such PQs asked by each MP in our sample in each calendar year. Thus the table is based on 438 'MP-years' with multiple annual counts for most MPs (depending on their length of service). On average, MPs submitted approximately one question about the problems and rights of ethnic minorities and just under two on immigration and its risks. BAME MPs asked considerably more questions on both varieties than the two control

groups in our sample.[3] However, there is considerable variability amongst minority MPs. Whether or not a BAME MP asks any questions about minorities and immigration seems to depend on the context. Our main goal is to establish key properties of this context.

Our analysis builds on existing studies but extends knowledge in a number of ways: Firstly, it is based on a larger, richer dataset than previous studies. The growing number of BAME MPs in the Commons provides us with an opportunity to conduct a quantitative study including appropriate comparisons with a matching sample of non-minority MPs. The design chosen for the purposes of this study also allows us to model time-varying effects such as the parliamentary experience or stage in the electoral cycle. In terms of theory our study places a stronger emphasis on explanatory mechanisms than previous work (see below).

2. Mechanisms and Theoretical Predictions

Hedström and Swedberg (1998: 7) argue that valid explanations in the social sciences should go beyond the search for systematic covariation between variables or events. Unlike so-called 'black-box explanations', mechanism-based research seeks 'to specify the social "cogs and wheels" … that have brought the relationship into existence' (ibid.). These mechanisms are usually unobserved theoretical constructs. In the past decades, the discussions amongst legislative scholars have revolved around two classes of testable models that specify such mechanisms: sociological and rational-choice models.

The analytic mechanism underpinning *rational-choice accounts* of representative and legislative behaviour is a cognitive process in which instrumentally rational actors evaluate the expected utilities of alternative strategies in relation to their goals – and to their competitors' anticipated moves. These goals are determined by trade-offs between policy-seeking, office-seeking and vote-seeking motivations (Strøm, 1990). Since re-election is a necessary condition for the realisation of office and policy goals, the focus of our argument will be on electoral incentives. Research

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[3] We conducted an analysis of variance and various further tests demonstrating a statistically significant (at the one-percent level) means difference between BAME MPs on the one hand and the two control groups on the other.

shows that MPs often use PQs to enhance their individual reputation and 'show concern for the interests of constituents' (Russo and Wiberg, 2010: pp.217-8, *verbatim* quote p. 218). Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume a necessary discrepancy between individual candidate's motivations and their party's strategies. Variations in questioning patterns may, in fact, be a result of differences in party strategy as parties increasingly target specific voter groups (Strömbäck, 2009), amongst others by offering popular and/or credible candidates in clearly defined communities. As campaigning is said to have become more 'individualized' in modern democracies (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008), individual candidate characteristics such as gender or ethnicity have become more important cues for voters in 'low-information elections' where voters can establish the policy differences between the parties only at a very high cost (for the US see McDermott, 1998).

If PQs are a valid indicator of substantive representation of voter interests, what expectations would be derived from rational-choice framework in the context of the present paper? There are at least five implications:

1. an MPs' use of PQs can be expected to be responsive to the socio-demographic composition of their constituencies. We would expect MPs representing constituencies with a high share of minority residents to be more likely to articulate the interests of minorities.

2. An MP's responsiveness to minority interests can be expected to be more pronounced, if the MP representing a constituency with a high percentage of BAME residents additionally holds a marginal seat, which is vulnerable to a weak or moderate swing to another party at the next general election.

3. The behaviour of vote-seeking MPs should also vary across the electoral cycle. We would expect MPs to focus on activities in the constituency and outside the Chamber in the run-up to a general election. There should be generally fewer questions (including those relating to minority-related issues) in this period.

4. We would expect government MPs to ask fewer questions than opposition MPs. Government MPs generally have relatively strong incentives (and good chances) to focus on office and policy goals. Therefore, they will tend to focus on broad, national issues rather than relatively narrow group-specific policy

problems. In opposition, there should be more scope for individualised representation.

5. The electoral incentives crucial for the rational-choice model should apply quite independently of the MP's own ethnic background and of the political party the MP represents. For example, non-minority MPs representing districts with a high share of BAME voters would be expected to be equally sensitive and responsive to associated policy issues as minority MPs as both major UK parties compete for the vote of ethnic minorities.

The causal mechanisms characteristic of the *sociological research programme* are based on the assumption that actors following a 'logic of appropriateness' rather than a 'logic of consequences' (as rational-choice models do). Rather than comparing the expected utility of different strategies, actors in sociological institutionalism 'seek to fulfill the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation' (March and Olsen, 2004: 3). The notion of social 'role' has always been an important component of sociological theories of representative behaviour (see Blomgren and Rozenberg, 2012). 'Roles' could be defined as 'a set of norms (obligations or expectations) attached to an individual's social position, occupation, or relationship status' (Weber, 1995: 1134). For the British House of Commons, Searing's (1994) inductively develops an empirically rich typology of legislative norms. He distinguishes between institutionally constrained 'positional' or 'leadership' roles and so-called 'preference roles' which many MPs choose to adopt. The most important of these preference roles are:

'… checking the executive (Policy Advocates); monitoring institutional structures (Parliament Men); making ministers (Ministerial Aspirants); and redressing grievances (Constituency Members). Backbenchers make their roles with a view to making themselves useful in the established framework of rules that they find at Westminster. They pass over some of these roles, adopt others, and then interpret and modify them to suit their preferences. They certainly do make their own roles, but they make them in and for Westminster's world' (Searing, 1994: 16).

The crucial mechanism by which these roles and 'the established framework of rules' at Westminster (and other parliaments) is transmitted is 'socialisation'. Legislative socialisation could be defined as 'the process by which newly elected members of a legislature become acquainted with the institution's rules and norms of behaviour. This process may, to a significant degree, shape their attitudes towards the legislature and their role and behaviour in it …' (Rush and Giddings, 2011: 56). It involves 'learning the rules and procedures of the legislature' and consciously or unconsciously adapting their attitudes and behaviour to legislative norms and their roles as a member (ibid.). Non-compliance with roles is largely seen to be the result of role conflicts where individuals belong to a variety of social groups with different norms. Since socialisation is largely perceived to be a process involving the gradual internalisation of social norms, it is not surprising that the length of institutional membership is often considered as the most appropriate operationalization of legislative socialisation (Mughan et al., 1997). A sociological framework would explicitly allow for an 'ethnic effect' as ethnic differences between MPs could be the result of group membership.

In applying a sociological model to the number of PQs on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities and on immigration, we would expect MPs

1. to be particularly active, if they have acquired the role of 'policy advocate' or 'constituency member' in Searing's (1994) terminology.
2. 'Ministerial aspirants' or MPs in 'position roles' are generally more constrained and considerably less likely to ask any questions in the Chamber. This applies to all MPs irrespective of their ethnicity.
3. In such a model BAME status could plausibly be hypothesized to be a significant factor shaping representational behaviour, as it is likely to influence MPs' pre-election socialisation. The personal experience of being an immigrant, or a descendant of recent (especially non-European) immigrants, may shape the way the rules of institutionalised politics are perceived.
4. This effect should be strongest amongst MPs who are immigrants themselves ('first generation'). MPs whose parents or grandparents were the first immigrant generation can be expected to share more social, educational and political experiences with non-minority MPs.

5. Pre-election socialisation is also shaped by the norms prevalent in, and advocated by, political parties. Historically, the Labour Party has offered BAME immigrants and their descendants more opportunities to organise and get selected for leadership positions than the other British parties. Therefore, we would expect BAME MPs belonging to the PLP to be more active and visible in promoting the rights of immigrants and minorities than MPs from other parties.

6. The more experienced a backbench MP is, the more likely he or she should be to adopt one of the preference roles identified by Searing. Newly elected MPs can be expected to be in an institutional learning process. If they stay on (or return to) the backbenches as their legislative career progresses, they should be more and more likely to articulate the interests of minorities, if they adopt the roles of policy advocates or constituency members.

3. Research Design and Data

The present study is a first attempt to operationalize and test propositions based on the two sets of mechanisms outlined above. It is based on a quasi-experimental design. The sample consists of data on all 34 BAME MPs who belonged to either of the two Parliaments elected in 2005 and 2010. The representative behaviour of these MPs is compared to an equal number of non-minority MPs. The latter were selected randomly, although the sample was stratified in such a way that the non-minority MPs drawn matched the BAME MPs in terms of party membership and the share of 'non-white' residents in their constituencies (for a more detailed description of a similar design see Saalfeld, 2011). In addition, we collected data on 10 European immigrants and the immediate descendants of such immigrants. They were also matched with an appropriate number of autochthonous non-minority MPs following a similar strategy. This led to a total sample of 90 MPs. As mentioned above, data were collected on each MP for each year he or she belonged to the Commons between 2005 and 2011.[4] Thus the time variables do not reflect the parliamentary cycle

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[4] A total of 34 BAME MPs and 10 MPs with a European migratory history (i.e., the MPs themselves or rat least one of their parents were immigrant to the UK) were initially matched with 44 (34+10) autochthonous MPs. A few by-elections affecting our sample eventually increased the total sample to 90.

traditionally starting with the Queen's speech but calendar years.[5] As a result, the dataset includes a total of 438 records ('MP-years') for the 90 MPs, with 146 records (33.3%) capturing the questions and time-varying contextual variables for the 34 BAME MPs between May 2005 and December 2011, 65 records (14.8%) for non-minority MPs with a migratory history and 227 records (51.8%) for the contrast group of non-minority autochthonous MPs.[6] This allows us to compare minority and non-minority MPs while holding immigration-related constituency characteristics and party membership constant.

Our dependent variable, substantive representation, was operationalized as the number of questions for written answer each selected MP submitted. Earlier studies used a variety of alternative indicators (e.g., select-committee membership or voting), but revealed that PQs are a valid indicator available for empirical study in the UK (Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou, 2010). First analyses of questions (Saalfeld, 2011) also showed that MPs typically ask two types of questions with slightly different connotations: (a) questions on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities in the UK and (b) questions about immigration and the social and political risks associated with it. A fairly typical example of the first type of question is:

> "To ask the Minister for Women and Equality what steps the Government are taking to address inequalities faced by ethnic minority women in the workplace; and if she will make a statement.' (Diane Abbott MP, HC Deb, 18 June 2007, c1448W)

Questions regarding the problems and rights of ethnic minorities predominantly scrutinise the government's record in promoting and safeguarding equal opportunities. Questions on immigration, by contrast, are frequently critical of the risks perceived to be associated with immigration. The following question should suffice as an example:

> To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to increase the number of UK ports which are manned by

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[5] The reason for not starting with the Queens speech ist he data structure of the 2005-2010 dat-set.

[6] The deviation from a ratio of 50:50 arose from relevant by-elections and a number of BAME members that died or resigned during a Parliament, or were elected in by-elections.

immigration staff 24 hours a day.' (Adam Afriyie MP, HC Deb, 7 December 2005, c1365W)

We compiled a dataset containing the texts of *all* PQs (irrespective of content) submitted by the 90 sampled MPs between May 2005 and December 2011. The number of questions asked by these MPs was 16,361 for the 2005-2010 Parliament and 10,041 for the Parliament elected in May 2010 (until December 2011).

For each question a dummy variable was created registering whether the question explicitly referred to ethnic minorities in, or immigration to, the United Kingdom. In order to assure reliability of our coding, we searched all questions using specific key words and subsequently checked the context in which these have been asked. These keywords are listed in Table A.1 (Appendix). The dummy variables were aggregated for each calendar year the MP belonged to the House of Commons (with the year 2005 truncated as our window of observation started in May 2005). These data provide the basis for a pooled analysis with the unit of analysis being an MP per calendar year.

This design allows us to capture theoretically meaningful time-varying effects such as an MP's increasing parliamentary socialisation or variations in parliamentary activity across the electoral cycle.[7] Both indicators measuring the dependent variables in our models (both types of PQs) constitute overdispersed count variables. For data of this type, a negative binomial regression model is the most appropriate specification to estimate the covariation with explanatory variables. Because the annual counts for each MP are likely to be correlated ('intra-class correlation'), we calculated clustered robust standard errors for each parameter estimate. In modelling the behaviour of BAME and non-minority MPs we first fitted a 'basic model' consisting of a dummy variable registering the MP's BAME status: The variable has the value one, if the MP has a minority background and zero if he or she does not. In addition, the baseline model (and all other models) include two control variables, which are statistically important but theoretically trivial. The first control variable is a dummy variable with a value of one, if an MP held ministerial office in the relevant year. Since ministers do not ask PQs, this effect needs to be controlled for. We decided not to exclude ministers altogether, because a number of them were only in office for a part

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[7] In future work, we will conduct a more comprehensive analysis of age, cohort and period effects.

of our window of observation (5 May 2005 to 31 December 2011). In addition we added a statistical control for the Parliament elected on 6 May 2010. Subsequently, we added variables to the baseline model that capture important elements of a sociological and rational-choice perspectives (see below).

Table 2 near here

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4. Modelling Substantive Representation

In line with the design outlined above, Table 2 presents estimates for three models using the number of PQs on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities as dependent variable. The first model constitutes our baseline model. We are testing for the hypothesis that BAME MPs will ask more questions on the rights and problems of ethnic minorities than non-minority MPs, holding certain background variables (see above) constant without specifying any social mechanism underpinning this expectation. The estimated regression coefficients were transformed into incidence rate ratios, which allow a relatively intuitive interpretation. Controlling for the variable 'ministerial position' and a period effect for the 2010 Parliament, Model 1a shows that the number of questions a BAME MP is predicted to ask on the rights and problems of ethnic minorities in the UK was nearly six (5.91) times higher than the number predicted for an MP from the (White) ethnic majority (the clustered standard error of 3.21 is reported in parentheses). This effect is statistically significant at the one-percent level. Thus, our hypothesis cannot be rejected at this stage. The control variables work in the expected causal direction: If the MP switched from a backbench to a ministerial role in a given year, the number of questions he or she asks would decrease by a factor of 0.03 (in other words, it would decrease by 97% and be close to zero[8]). If the annual count of PQs on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities is conducted for the first two years of the 2010

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[8] The ratio is not exactly equal to zero, because some MPs were backbench MPs for part of the year and therefore asked at least a few questions before they were promoted to ministerial positions, or after they returned to the backbenches.

Parliament, the number would be estimated to decrease by a factor of more than one-third (0.3). The effect of both control variables is statistically significant at the one-percent level. As suggested above, these two effects are not substantively interesting for this paper, but need to be held constant.

The second and third models in Table 2 examine whether the strong positive and statistically significant effect of an MP's BAME status is retained, if sociological and strategic contextual factors are added. A *sociological model* of substantive representation of minority-ethnic interests is specified in Table 2 (Model 2a). In order to analyse the effect of pre-election socialisation a dummy variable registers a value of one, if the MP himself or herself is an immigrant (this includes all immigrants, including those which are ethnically 'White'), a dummy variable taking a value of one, if the MP's parents or grandparents were immigrants and a dummy variable registering a value of one, if the MP belongs to the PLP. Post-election socialisation was captured by three further variables: the first independent variable measures the length of an MP's parliamentary experience in the relevant years. The second independent variable measures the number of questions without reference to ethnic minorities or immigration asked by the MP in a calendar year. This indicator seeks to capture parliamentary roles that are particularly likely to lead to a large number of PQs asked: the roles of 'constituency MP' and 'policy advocate'. The third independent variable represents an interaction of the length of parliamentary service (in years) and the number of PQs not relating to minorities and immigration asked by an MP in a given calendar year. This is to test for the hypothesis that the effect of backbench roles associated with large numbers of PQs should become stronger as the length of parliamentary service increases.

The incidence rate ratios estimated for Model 2a do not correspond to all of our expectations. Holding all other independent variables constant, BAME MPs are estimated to ask almost twice (1.96) as many questions as non-minority MPs, but this effect is statistically not significant at conventional levels. Similar observations can be made for the dummy variables capturing 'immigrant generation'. There is also no effect resulting from longer post-election socialisation: Neither the years of parliamentary service nor the interaction between parliamentary experience and number of questions asked in other policy areas have a significant effect. The strongest impact on the number of questions relating to the rights of ethnic minorities

can be observed for the dummy variable 'Labour Party membership'. If an MP belongs to the PLP, the number of questions on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities is estimated to be almost six times (5.85) as high as the number asked by a Conservative or Liberal Democrat on such matters. The number of PQs *not* relating to minority-related issues is a significant predictor of the number of questions on such rights. In short, if we hold an MP's party and the number of questions he or she asks in general constant, BAME status does not make a significant difference for the number of questions asked on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities. If socialisation matters for PQs in this area, it is related to the norms of the Labour Party as an organisation and the general parliamentary preference roles chosen by backbenchers (e.g., policy advocate or constituency member).

Contrary to theoretical expectations, the *rational-choice model* does not eliminate the statistical effect of an MP's BAME status. The estimates for Model 3c confirm that *all* UK MPs in the sample were relatively responsive to the ethnic composition of their constituencies: With each additional per cent of 'non-White' residents in the MP's constituency, the number of questions relating to the rights of ethnic minorities is estimated to increase by a factor of 1.03 (holding BAME status constant). This effect is statistically significant at the five-percent level. The insignificant estimates for the variables capturing seat marginality (operationalized as a dummy variable registering one, if the MP's electoral majority was less than 10 per cent in the previous election) and the interaction effects of BAME status and seat marginality as well as ethnic composition of the constituency and seat marginality underline the robustness of this effect. The variables capturing the timing of questions in the electoral cycle generally have a statistically significant effect. The reference year for these estimates is the first post-election year (in our window of observation 2006 and 2011). Compared to the first post-election year, the number of questions on the rights of ethnic minorities is significantly lower in the election years 2005 and 2010 (which is trivial, because election years are shorter) but the ratio of 0.25 in the year prior to a general election suggests that MPs switch the focus of their parliamentary activities to the campaign. These estimates will become more meaningful in future investigations as more observations will be added to the dataset. Opposition status has an unexpected negative effect (significant at the ten-percent level) on the number of questions. If PQs are a 'weapon' of the opposition in its

attempts to challenge the government, opposition status should have increased the number of questions asked. This is not the case, which may be an effect of the fact that our sample includes only 20 months of the 2010 Parliament. In the 2005-2010 Parliament, the Conservative Party (with only 2 BAME MPs in their ranks) was on the opposition benches.

Table 3 near here

The second set of estimates (Table 3) relates to the dependent variable 'number of PQs on immigration'. These estimates are clearly different from those on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities, corroborating the need for this distinction. The two models do not provide clear-cut predictions for the number of questions on the risks of immigration that BAME MPs are expected to ask. The *baseline model* (Model 1b) suggests that BAME status is not influencing the number of questions in this area as strongly as in the case of questions relating to the rights and problems of ethnic minorities. The incidence rate ratio is much smaller and only significant at the ten-percent level. A comparison of the baseline models in Tables 2 and 3 suggests that BAME MPs are more likely than non-minority MPs to ask questions about both aspects, but they are more concerned with the situation and rights of ethnic minorities in the country than with questions of immigration.

Model 2b specifies a *sociological model* and demonstrates, firstly, that BAME status does increase the probability of MPs asking questions about the risks of immigration almost by a factor of four. The effect is consistent with our theoretical expectations and statistically significant at the five-percent level. Secondly, being a first-generation immigrant decreases the estimated number of questions on immigration significantly by a factor of 0.20. This is consistent with the mechanisms described in socialisation theory as the pre-election socialisation of immigrants differs from experiences made by the descendants of immigrants. Thirdly, MPs who generally ask many questions – in other words, MPs that have adopted the backbench roles of 'policy advocate' or 'constituency member' – will also ask more questions on the risks of immigration. Fourthly, unlike the models estimating the

effect of socialisation on the number of PQs relating to the rights of ethnic minorities, PLP membership is not a significant predictor for the number of questions on immigration. In sum, therefore, the estimates for the sociological model are different from those for PQs on ethnic minorities but largely in line with theoretical expectations.

In the *rational-choice model* (Model 3b), BAME status is not a statistically significant factor in explaining variations in the number of questions on immigration. In other words, holding the other variables in this model constant reduces the effect of minority status to such an extent that it appears spurious. If the percentage of 'non-Whites' is high and the seat is marginal, MPs seem to be more reluctant to raise questions about immigration in the Chamber than under different circumstances. With every percentage point the share of 'non-whites' in a marginal seat increases, the number of questions on immigration decreases by a factor of 0.89. Again, this demonstrates that all MPs – irrespective of ethnic or party background – are responsive to the perceived electoral risks. The estimates for the timing of questions in the electoral cycle are also in line with expectations. While the ratios for the election year (January to May and May to December) can be expected to be low for trivial reasons, the number of questions relating to immigration is highest in the first year after an election (reference category) and declines steadily thereafter. Although these data need to be treated with great caution, one interpretation may be that immigration is a contentious issue that MPs are less and less likely to raise as the general election approaches. In sum, therefore, both the rational-choice model (Model 3b) and the sociological model (Model 2b) are supported convincingly by the data than the models on the rights and problems of ethnic minorities (Models 2a and 3a, respectively). Thus with regard to PQs on immigration and its risks, both strategic and sociological mechanisms seem to be at work.

Figures 1 and 2 near here

Figures 1 and 2 visualise our main findings. Based on the regression estimates above, we used the Clarify software to simulate the effects on the probability of an MP asking one PQ about (a) minorities and (b) immigration of increasing a given statistically significant predictor from its minimum to its maximum value while keeping

the remaining variables constant at their means.[9] Figure 1 represents predictions for the sociological models explaining variations in the number of PQs asked about the problems and rights of ethnic minorities (top half) and about immigration and its risks (bottom half). The bars represent the effect of the statistically significant independent variables (omitting control variables). If all other independent variables in the model are held constant at the mean, PLP membership increases the probability of an MP asking one question on minorities by over 8% (0.082). If the annual number of other PQs (not relating to minorities and immigration) is increased from its minimum in the dataset to its maximum, the number of PQs on ethnic minorities is reduced by 0.3% (-0.003). The diagram illustrates once again that Labour Party membership rather than BAME group membership plays the most important role as agent of socialisation. The bottom part of Figure 1 plots predictions for questions about immigration and its risks. MPs who are immigrants themselves (including European immigrants) are less likely to ask a question in this area, although BAME MPs overall are slightly (but significantly) more likely to do so.

Figure 2 visualises the results for the rational-choice models for PQs about ethnic minorities (top half) and immigration (bottom half). All MPs (irrespective of ethnic status) are clearly responsive to the percentage of 'non-white' residents in their constituencies. If an MP belongs to a BAME group, this effect is even more pronounced. The causal direction of the significant period effects suggest that the probability of asking one question on minorities declines almost monotonously as the next election approaches. This suggests either that other topics become more important for an MP's re-election, or that the emphasis of the MP's activities shifts away from the floor of the Chamber. In the rational-choice model for the annual number of PQs about immigration, the effect of BAME group membership is not significant (as expected). BAME MPs are indistinguishable from their non-minority colleagues in this model. Immigration is a salient political issue that appears to encourage clear responsiveness to electoral incentives, especially to the percentage of 'non-white' residents in marginal seats: If an MP represents a marginal seat, an increasing share of 'non-whites' reduces the probability of asking one PQ more strongly than any other predictor variable in our models. Again, proximity of the next general election also has a predictable negative impact.

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[9] We used the Clarify software downloadable from Gary King's website (http://GKing.Harvard.Edu) to simulate the impact of these predictors. See Tomz et al. (2003).

5. Conclusions and Implications

The main questions pursued in this article were whether the increasing descriptive representation of ethnic minorities in the House of Commons matters for the substantive representation of BAME interests and, if so, why. We used PQs for written answer as an indicator to capture variations in substantive representation. Based on the content analysis of over 26,000 PQs tabled in the 2005-2010 Parliament and the Parliament elected in May 2010 we found that, generally speaking, BAME MPs in the Commons tend to ask more PQs about (a) the rights of ethnic minorities in the UK and (b) immigration issues than a matching sample of non-minority Members. This corroborates the findings of earlier studies that drew on a smaller sample of questions (Saalfeld, 2011; Wüst and Saalfeld, 2011). Hence, there are reasons to believe that measures to boost the proportionality of descriptive representation (such as the measures proposed by the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation 2010) will make a difference for the way minority interests are articulated in Parliament. In the broader normative discussion about democratic representation the results lend qualified support to the advocates of more proportional descriptive representation (e.g., Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995). Our analyses also demonstrate that the electoral incentives at the heart of our rational-choice model (the strong constituency link characteristic of the single-member plurality electoral system) encourage *all* UK MPs (irrespective of ethnicity) to articulate issues concerning the rights and problems of ethnic minorities, if they represent constituencies with a high share of minority residents – and to avoid the more salient and polarising issue of immigration, especially if they represent marginal constituencies with a large share of minority residents. Whether or not this strong responsiveness is unique to the first-past-the-post system needs to be clarified in comparative cross-national studies.

The main purpose of this article was to shed light on the mechanisms that help understand variations within the heterogeneous group of BAME MPs. We started by estimating two baseline models, regressing the number of PQs on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities in the UK (Model 1a) and on the risks of immigration (Model 1b). Holding a few control variables constant, we found that BAME MPs do tend to ask more questions in both areas. Nonetheless, this effect is stronger and statistically more robust for questions on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities.

We expected the rational-choice model (Model 3a) to reduce the effect of BAME status on the number of questions on ethnic minorities to statistical insignificance and hypothesised that variables capturing general electoral incentives would contribute strongly to multivariate explanations of the variation in the number of questions asked. After all, electoral incentives apply to all MPs irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. This prediction was largely confirmed for PQs on immigration, but it has to be rejected for questions on ethnic minorities where BAME MPs ask more questions than others, even if electoral incentives are held constant.

As for the sociological models, we expected BAME status to increase particularly the predicted number of PQs on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities, even if other elements of pre-election and post-election socialisation are held constant. We found that Labour Party membership (party membership being an important element of pre-election socialisation), in particular, reduces the strong bivariate effect of ethnicity on the number of questions on the rights and problems of ethnic minorities. In other words, BAME MPs ask more questions on such issues than their non-minority colleagues, because they were overwhelmingly members of the Labour Party during our window of observation. However, especially the powerful effect of the 'party' variable demonstrates the problems that have traditionally bedevilled empirical investigations of the effects of socialisation. It remains unclear whether Labour MPs with a BAME background were socialised to articulate emancipatory Labour values – or whether they chose to join the Labour Party because it provides a sympathetic environment for minority politics. The estimates for the number of PQs on immigration confirm the need for a qualitative differentiation between this policy area and the concerns of ethnic minorities. Generally, BAME MPs do not shy away from asking critical questions about immigration. Nevertheless (and in line with our sociological model), first-generation immigrants tend to express concern about immigration less frequently than the descendants of immigrants or MPs from the autochthonous population.

In sum, our analyses show that ethnicity matters when it comes to substantive representation. Yet, MPs' questioning patterns are complex and no single model provides an entirely convincing explanation on its own. Comparing the models, it appears that the parameter estimates for both regression equations using the number of PQs on immigration and its risks (Models 2b and 3b) as dependent

variable are more in line with theoretical expectations than the equations regressing the number of questions on the problems and rights of ethnic minorities on the same variables (Models 2a and 3a). A more strategic approach to parliamentary questioning may be encouraged by the fact that immigration is a more salient, crystallised and potentially divisive issue, whereas the concerns of ethnic minorities are a diffuse matter straddling various policy areas such as labour market, education, health or law and order.

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Parliamentary Questioning by Type of Question and Ethnic Groups in the British House of Commons, 2005-2011: Descriptive Statistics

	Observations	Mean number	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
All MPs in the sample					
All parliamentary questions on immigration or the rights of ethnic minorities	438	2.79	8.01	0	94
Parliamentary questions on the rights of ethnic minorities	438	0.93	4.43	0	59
Parliamentary questions on immigration	438	1.85	4.88	0	37
MPs without migratory history					
All parliamentary questions on immigration or the rights of ethnic minorities	227	1.95	4.37	0	26
Parliamentary questions on the rights of ethnic minorities	227	0.38	1.43	0	12
Parliamentary questions on immigration	227	1.56	3.75	0	26
MPs of European ethnic origin with migratory history					
All parliamentary questions on immigration or the rights of ethnic minorities	65	1.31	3.10	0	16
Parliamentary questions on the rights of ethnic minorities	65	0.29	0.90	0	5
Parliamentary questions on immigration	65	1.02	2.87	0	15
BAME MPs					
All parliamentary questions on immigration or the rights of ethnic minorities	146	4.75	12.38	0	94
Parliamentary questions on the rights of ethnic minorities	146	2.07	7.32	0	59
Parliamentary questions on immigration	146	2.68	6.72	0	37

Note: Unit of analysis is the number of questions per MP and calendar year (May 2005 to December 2011)

Source: Author's own

Table 2: Negative Binomial Regression for the Number of Minority-Related Questions of 90 MPs (2005–11): Incidence Rate Ratios (standard errors in brackets)

Dependent variable: Number of parliamentary questions relating to the problems and rights of ethnic minorities	Baseline Model (Model 1a)			Sociological Model (Model 2a)			Rational-Choice Model (Model 3a)		
BAME MP	5.91	(3.21)	***	1.96	(1.38)		2.85	(1.44)	**
MP is an immigrant (irrespective of ethnicity)	—	—		1.66	(1.34)		—	—	
MP's parents or grandparents were immigrants	—	—		3.10	(2.36)		—	—	
Labour MP	—	—		5.85	(2.99)	***	—	—	
Years of parliamentary experience	—	—		0.97	(0.03)		—	—	
Number of questions not related to immigration or minorities	—	—		1.01	(0.00)	***	—	—	
Interaction experience x number of other questions	—	—		1.00	(0.00)		—	—	
Percentage of "non-whites" in MP's constituency	—	—		—	—		1.03	(0.01)	**
MP holds marginal seat	—	—		—	—		0.41	(0.34)	
Interaction "non-whites" x marginality	—	—		—	—		1.01	(0.04)	
Interaction BAME MP x marginality	—	—		—	—		2.97	(3.13)	
MP member of an opposition party	—	—		—	—		0.51	(0.17)	*
Electoral cycle: election year after election (May-Dec)	—	—		—	—		0.48	(0.13)	**
Electoral cycle: second post-electoral year	—	—		—	—		0.40	(0.11)	***
Electoral cycle: third post-electoral year	—	—		—	—		1.17	(0.57)	
Electoral cycle: pre-electoral year	—	—		—	—		0.25	(0.10)	***
Electoral cycle: election year prior to election (Jan-May)	—	—		—	—		0.17	(0.09)	***
Ministerial position	0.03	(0.04)	***	0.06	(0.07)	**	0.02	(0.03)	***
Control for 2010 Parliament	0.30	(0.12)	***	0.41	(0.15)	**	0.31	(0.13)	***
Constant	0.57	(0.22)		0.04	(0.03)	***	0.81	(0.43)	
Log pseudolikelihood	-378.85			-336.78			-363.05		
N (MP-years)	436			436			436		

Notes: ***: $p < 0.01$; **: $p < 0.05$; *: $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed). Standard errors are clustered robust standard errors. Reference category for variables on the stage in the electoral cycle: first post-election year.

Table 3: Negative Binomial Regression for the Number of Immigration-Related Questions of 90 MPs (2005–11): Incidence Rate Ratios (standard errors in brackets)

Dependent variable: Number of parliamentary questions relating to immigration and its risks	Baseline Model (Model 1b)			Sociological Model (Model 2b)			Rational-Choice Model (Model 3b)		
BAME MP	2.13	(0.90)	*	3.84	(2.38)	**	1.53	(0.57)	
MP is an immigrant (irrespective of ethnicity)	—	—		0.20	(0.14)	**	—	—	
MP's parents or grandparents were immigrants	—	—		0.61	(0.41)		—	—	
Labour MP	—	—		0.97	(0.38)		—	—	
Years of parliamentary experience	—	—		1.01	(0.02)		—	—	
Number of questions not related to immigration or minorities	—	—		1.01	(0.00)	***	—	—	
Interaction experience x number of other questions	—	—		1.00	(0.00)		—	—	
Percentage of "non-whites" in MP's constituency	—	—		—	—		1.02	(0.01)	
MP holds marginal seat	—	—		—	—		1.79	(1.42)	
Interaction "non-whites" x marginality	—	—		—	—		0.89	(0.04)	***
Interaction BAME MP x marginality	—	—		—	—		6.94	(8.19)	
MP member of an opposition party	—	—		—	—		1.22	(0.37)	
Electoral cycle: election year following general election	—	—		—	—		0.39	(0.09)	***
Electoral cycle: second post-electoral year	—	—		—	—		0.68	(0.18)	
Electoral cycle: third post-electoral year	—	—		—	—		0.64	(0.17)	*
Electoral cycle: pre-electoral year	—	—		—	—		0.51	(0.10)	***
Electoral cycle: election year prior to general election	—	—		—	—		0.09	(0.03)	***
Ministerial position	0.01	(0.01)	***	0.03	(0.02)	***	0.01	(0.01)	***
Control for 2010 Parliament	0.29	(0.09)	***	0.25	(0.08)	***	0.25	(0.08)	***
Constant	2.21	(0.60)	***	0.86	(0.45)		3.09	(1.47)	**
Log pseudolikelihood	-587.00			-552.46			-566.737		
N (MP-years)	436			436			436		

Notes: ∗∗∗: p < 0.01; ∗∗: p < 0.05; ∗: p < 0.1 (two-tailed). Standard errors are clustered robust standard errors. Reference category for variables on the stage in the electoral cycle: first post-election year.

Figure 1: Predictions for the statistically significant effects of the sociological model

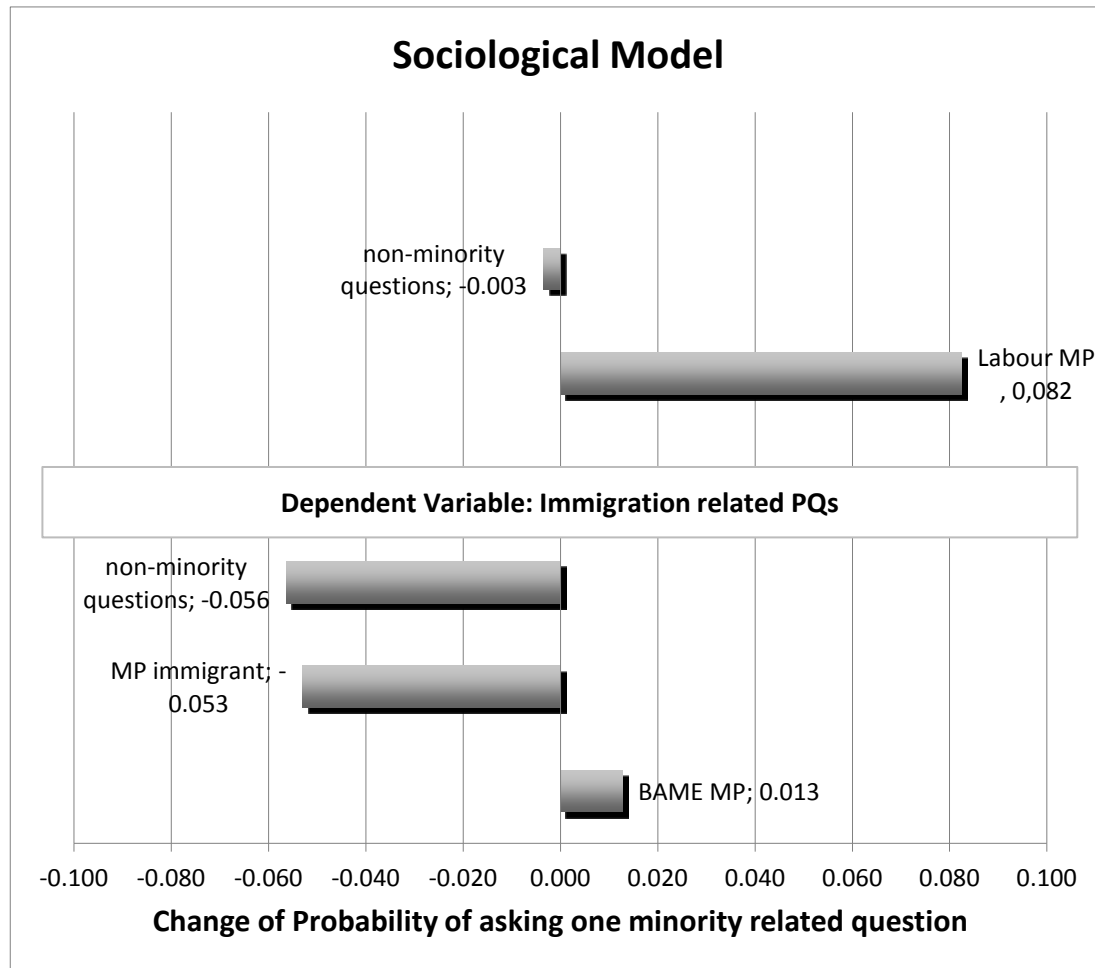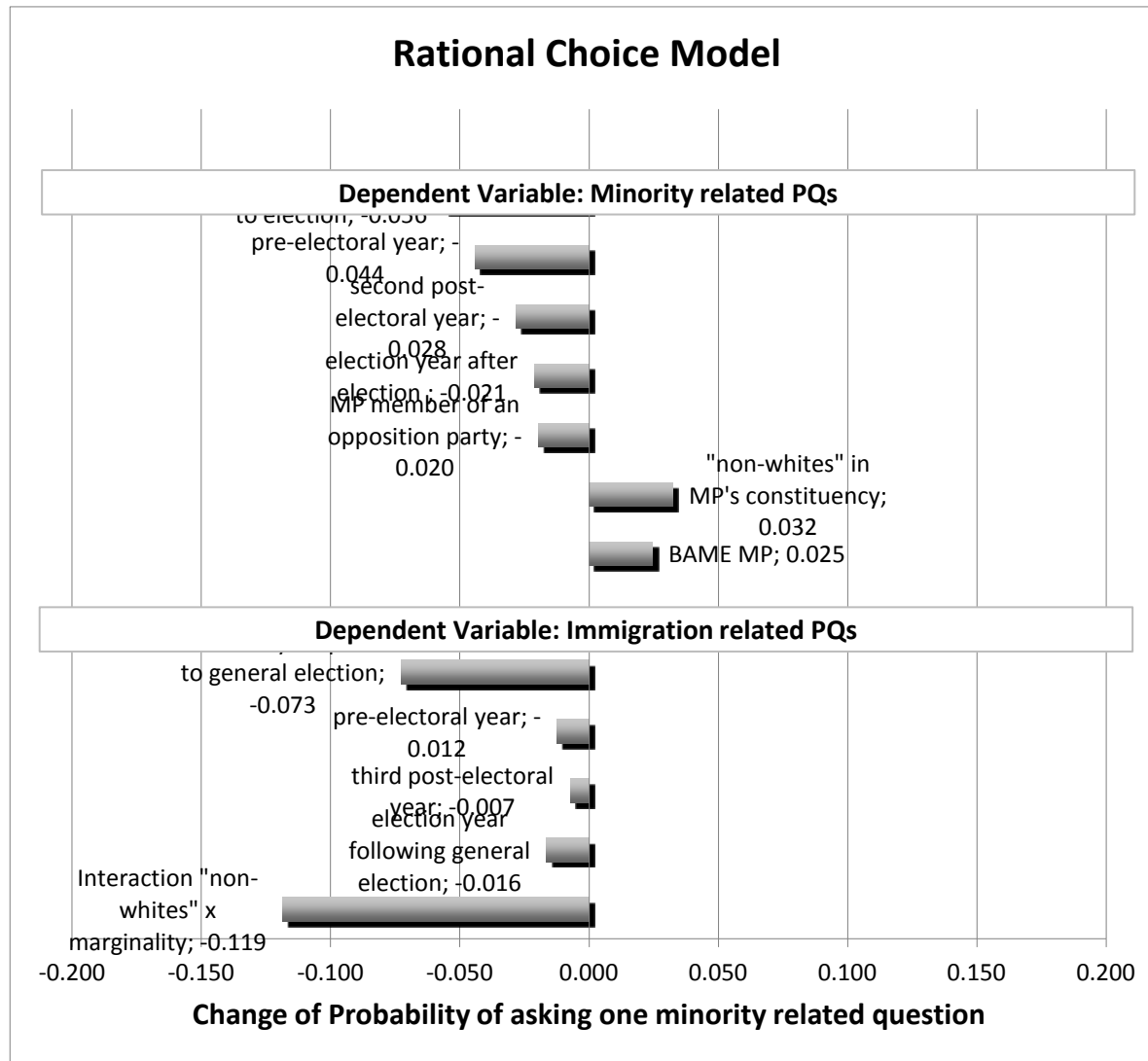
Sociological Model

non-minority questions; -0.003

Labour MP, 0,082

Dependent Variable: Immigration related PQs

non-minority questions; -0.056

MP immigrant; -0.053

BAME MP; 0.013

Change of Probability of asking one minority related question

Figure 2: Predictions for the statistically significant effects of the rational-choice model

Rational Choice Model

Dependent Variable: Minority related PQs

to election; -0.036
pre-electoral year; -0.044
second post-electoral year; -0.028
election year after election ; -0.021
MP member of an opposition party; -0.020
"non-whites" in MP's constituency; 0.032
BAME MP; 0.025

Dependent Variable: Immigration related PQs

to general election; -0.073
pre-electoral year; -0.012
third post-electoral year; -0.007
election year following general election; -0.016
Interaction "non-whites" x marginality; -0.119

-0.200   -0.150   -0.100   -0.050   0.000   0.050   0.100   0.150   0.200

Change of Probability of asking one minority related question

Appendix:

Table A1: Search terms used to identify immigration-related and minority-related questions

Problems and rights of ethnic minorities in the UK	Immigration and its perceived risks
ethnic	asylum
minorit*	illegal immigra*
diversity	UK border
Asian	extradit*
Black	repatriat*
racial	removal
race	remove
integration	deport*
community cohesion	detention centre
Islam	migra*
Muslim	terror* (if explicitly linked to minorities and post 9/11 terrorism in
Hindu	foreign
Sikh	refugee

Note: an asterisk indicates that we truncated a word stem in the search.

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