

From Minority Vote to Majority Challenge

*How closing the 'ethnic gap'
would deliver a Conservative majority*

From Minority Vote to Majority Challenge

David Cameron could have secured an extra 500,000 votes and formed a majority government in 2010 if he had appealed to ethnic minority voters, according to new projections published by British Future and ConservativeHome.

In the style of an election night swingometer – “just a little bit of fun” as the inimitable Peter Snow would say – our alternative election result captures what would have happened if David Cameron had bridged the “ethnic gap”.

If the Conservative Party had done this, appealing to minority voters as much as it did to the UK public as a whole, 24 marginal seats would have changed from Labour to Conservative, a 48-seat swing that would have given David Cameron an outright electoral victory.

The research is a wake-up call to Conservatives seeking to avoid a repeat of events in the US last year, where a failure to attract minority votes contributed to Mitt Romney’s failure to capture the White House.

The conclusions are reinforced by new analysis of the Conservative Party’s last outright electoral win in 1992. This projects that John Major would have failed to win the ‘92 election if it was re-run with the British electorate as it looks today.

With a today’s significantly-enlarged ethnic minority electorate, the “ethnic gap” in voting patterns would have cost the Conservatives at least 22 seats in the ‘92 election. This would leave John Major in a similar position to David Cameron in 2010 – seeking a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

What is the “ethnic gap”?

The Conservative Party has historically struggled to appeal to voters from ethnic minorities as much as it appeals to the nation as a whole.

In 2010 the Conservatives won the votes of 36% of voters across the UK. But only 16% of those from minority backgrounds chose David Cameron’s party. This 20% “ethnic gap” is what Cameron’s Conservatives must bridge if they are to win with a majority in 2015 – as they would have done in 2010 with greater ethnic minority support.

Labour, by contrast, enjoys 68% support among non-white voters, with 29% support among 2010 voters as a whole. Liberal Democrat support among non-white voters is just short of the Conservatives on 14%.

The new research by British Future for ConservativeHome shows that over the whole of England, if the Conservatives closed the “ethnic gap” so ethnic minorities voted in the same way as the population as a whole, the Conservative minority vote would increase from 407,291 to 916,405 votes – an extra 509,114 votes that could be the key to an outright majority in parliament.

Those missing half million voters – how they could have changed the election

Our model looked in detail at voting patterns in the marginal seats in England which decided the outcome of the 2010 general election. It found that in 24 of those constituencies the seat would have swung from Labour to Conservative if 36% of non-white voters had voted Conservative, in line with voting patterns for UK voters as a whole.

With this swing, David Cameron would have secured a parliamentary majority of 12, propelling him to Number 10 without the need for a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

What does this mean for the Conservative Party?

The results make positive reading for Conservative party strategists depressed by predictions of hung parliaments and coalitions in years to come.

Ethnic Minority British Electoral Study data published in a major Oxford University Press book and in a **Runnymede Trust** report shows that the ethnic minority voting gap is not explained by class and income effects: the dominant factor is historic perceptions of the Conservative party among non-white voters. Many minority voters hesitate to vote Tory even when their own views are closest to the Conservatives on taxation, the economy and social issues.

Yet Conservatives have long known that their party has failed to engage ethnic minority voters in sufficient number. Changing electoral demographics have now made their votes too numerous to be ignored.

For some in David Cameron's party, last year's US Presidential election represented a glimpse into a future that they want to avoid. In Mitt Romney the Republicans had a candidate with strong appeal to white voters, securing six out of ten white votes and outperforming any recent Republican Presidential candidate with that demographic. Yet his failure to appeal to minority voters has been widely credited as a key factor in the Republican's defeat in the 2012 presidential race.

The answer – actively competing for the ethnic minority vote – is good not just for Conservatives, but for UK politics as a whole.

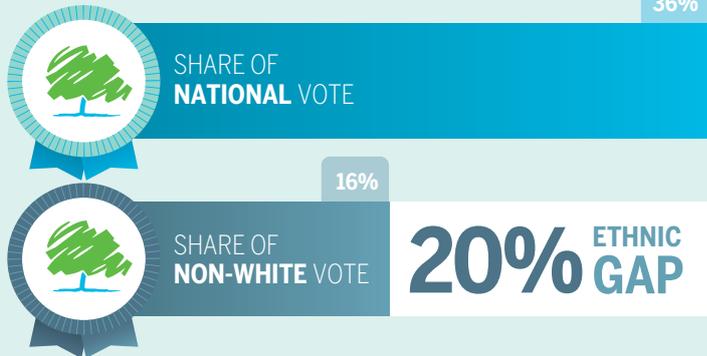
With political parties fighting for the support of minority voters, policies and communication will have to reach out to connect with this electorate.

It is no good for our democracy or for integration if one major party views minority votes as “in the bag” and the other party sees them as “written off”.

Closing the ethnic gap could deliver a Conservative majority

1

In the 2010 election the Conservative Party won **36% of the national vote** but among ethnic minorities **only 16%** voted Conservative



2

Across England as a whole, this ethnic gap translates to a total of **half a million** 'missing' Conservative votes



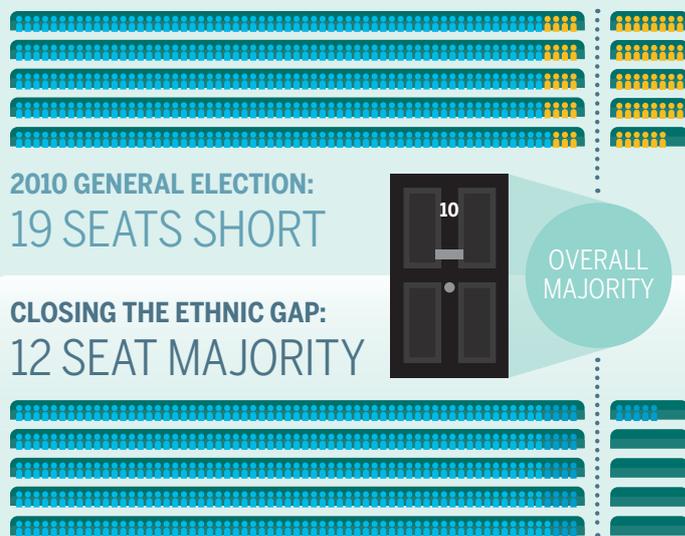
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Looking at 2010 key marginals, **an additional 24 seats** would have swung from Labour to Conservative if the ethnic gap had been bridged



4

These seats would have made all the difference to the 2010 election, giving the Conservatives an **overall majority** without having to rely on the Lib Dems



Projected marginal seats that Conservatives would have won in 2010 if they had bridged the ethnic gap

LABOUR MAJORITY IN 2010	CONSTITUENCY	CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY IF BME VOTE IN LINE WITH NATIONAL AVERAGE
42	Hampstead and Kilburn	10,034
92	Bolton West	1,058
192	Southampton Itchen	2,521
613	Derby North	1,774
649	Dudley North	1,453
714	Great Grimsby	79
981	Telford	13
990	Walsall North	956
1,274	Birmingham Edgbaston	4,018
1,472	Halifax	1,286
1,663	Eltham	2,886
1,755	Walsall South	4,825
1,772	Nottingham South	3,994
2,126	Westminster North	6,704
2,329	Luton South	6,798
2,404	Wolverhampton North East	1,207
2,413	Southampton Test	809
2,524	Tooting	5,421
2,630	Dagenham and Rainham	3,360
3,143	Harrow West	9,645
3,482	Birmingham Selly Oak	599
3,549	Hammersmith	5,574
5,763	Bradford West	6,741
6,030	Poplar & Limehouse	7,701

Major's 1992 win undone with today's demographics

John Major's Conservatives won in 1992 with a slim majority of 21 seats, winning 336 to Labour's 271 with the Liberal Democrats securing 20 seats.

But Britain today is very different to 1992. The ethnic minority vote, which the Conservative Party has traditionally struggled to attract, is now bigger and carries more electoral weight. Would Major still have won in 1992 with today's electoral demographics?

British Future used electoral data from 1992 and census figures from 1991 and 2011 to conduct a hypothetical "re-run" of the '92 election's key marginals with ethnic minority populations as they are (roughly) today.

The answer is that Major would have lost 22 seats to Labour, leading to a hung parliament.

Demographic shifts would have cost Major's Conservatives seats up and down the country, including in Brentford, Birmingham Edgbaston, Bolton, Luton, Southampton, Corby, Chester and Norwich.

Our projections are hypothetical, of course: 1992 is not 2011, nor is it 2015 when the next election will be fought. What the projections do illustrate, however, is an important point for Conservatives. The Britain that goes to the polls in 2015 will look very different to the Britain that last returned an outright majority for the Conservative Party.

Projected seats John Major's Conservatives would have lost if 1992 election was re-run with today's demographics

CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY IN '92 ELECTION	CONSTITUENCY	LABOUR MAJORITY IN RE-RUN WITH TODAY'S DEMOGRAPHICS
19	Vale of Glamorgan	437
45	Bristol North West	2,100
53	Hayes & Harlington	11,120
185	Bolton North East	2,633
266	Norwich North	501
342	Corby	314
514	Slough	11,670
585	Southampton Test	2,875
593	Edmonton	9,535
788	Bury South	897
799	Luton South	7,165
1,101	Chester	684
1,408	Batley & Spen	2,513
1,666	Eltham	2,074
1,734	Mitcham & Morden	6,731
2,086	Brentford & Isleworth	7,586
3,548	Kensington	775
3,665	Birmingham Hall Green	13,482
4,244	Leeds North East	490
4,307	Birmingham Edgbaston	561
4,966	Wolverhampton South West	442
5,376	Peterborough	76

Methodology

Both the 2010 and 1992 projections are hypothetical. They provide an illustrative “what if?” scenario to illustrate a broad point: that the ethnic make-up of the electorate has changed significantly in the last twenty years, to the extent that non-white voters must now be treated with importance by any political party seeking a parliamentary majority. The research relies on various simplifying assumptions

2010 election

The 2010 projection used 2011 census data for individual constituencies to give a total number of each ethnic group in each marginal seat we studied.

The research focused on England due to the lack of Lab-Con marginals in Scotland or Wales, with a significant ethnic minority population.

Looking at those of voting age in 2010, data from www.ethnicpolitics.org was then used to account for lower levels of voter registration among ethnic minorities. Most studies show that turnout levels are roughly the same across different ethnic groups.

British Electoral Study and the Ethnic Minority British Electoral Study findings were used to model how different ethnic groups voted, providing a nominal prediction for each constituency.

This was then “re-run” with non-white voters hypothetically voting in line with the national level of 36% support for the Conservative Party, to provide the result if the ethnic gap did not apply.

This gave us a figure for the increase in Tory votes in each constituency if the ethnic gap was bridged. By comparing this against the Labour majority in those marginal seats we were thus able to establish whether the result on election night would have changed.

1992 election

Our study projected what impact that change would have had on the outcome of the 1992 election, if it was ‘re-run’ with today’s changed electorate.

Census data from 1991 and 2011 gives a clear picture of the demographic changes in the national population as well as in individual constituencies. This gave us the population breakdown of white and non-white voters from 1991 and 2011 for the marginal constituencies that decided the 1992 election.

For each constituency we took the population figures from 1991 census, counting only those of voting age, and adjusted for different rates of voter registration among white and non-white voters to find the ethnic make-up of the local electorate.

We first calculated the number of non-white votes for each party in 1992, using the Ethnic Minority British Electoral Study figures of 16% Conservative and 68% Labour. From this figure we then extrapolated the number of white voters for each party in 1992.

We then took the 2011 census figures to see how the number of white and non-white voters in each constituency have changed in size as a percentage. This percentage change was then applied to the tally of white and non-white votes respectively: so if the number of white voters has increased by 5%, the number of voters was increased by 5%; and if the number of non-white voters has increased by 15%, the number of voters was increased by 15%.

This would give us a revised projection in which people had behaved in the same way as in 1992, only accounting for the change in the ethnic demographic.

The research made the simplifying assumption that voting patterns and registration patterns stayed constant between the 1992 electorate and the electorate in 2010. It also ignored constituencies that had been abolished since 1992. We did not make adjustments for other boundary changes: a more sophisticated model which did this would give more precise constituency results, but would not change the overall conclusion.

British Future...

*British Future is an independent,
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