

Diversity in the next parliament

**Analysis and projections of the ethnic
and gender balance of the House of
Commons in 2024**

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1. Introduction

2024 will be a year of choice and of change in British politics. As the new year begins, neither the timing nor the result of the General Election can be known for certain. But there is now enough information to make initial projections about the demographics, ethnic diversity and gender balance of the next House of Commons, based on British Future's analysis of retirement announcements and candidate selections, and their impact in different election scenarios.

The research shows that a record number of both women and ethnic minority MPs are set to be elected to the House of Commons at the next General Election.

The number of ethnic minority MPs will rise from 65 to over 75 for the first time. Our current projection is for a range of between 75 and 83 ethnic minority MPs after the General Election across various political scenarios, rising from 10% to around 12% of the House of Commons.

The 2024 General Election will therefore further reinforce the emergence of ethnic diversity as a cross-party norm in British politics after 2010. The number of ethnic minority MPs will have increased five-fold in a decade and a half, having been just 15 out of 650 in the 2005-10 parliament. This represents a significant narrowing of the gap between the ethnic diversity of the Commons and the society that it serves. However, the new House of Commons would still not yet match the 15% of the increasingly diverse electorate who are from ethnic minority backgrounds, a benchmark that would be met if almost 100 ethnic minority MPs were elected.

A record number of women will almost certainly be elected at the General Election yet here the rate of change may prove unimpressive. Some 225 women were elected in 2019 – 35% of the Commons. The British Future research indicates a very gradual increase of just 1%, to around 234 MPs, in a scenario where each party retained the seats that they currently hold – but projects that there would be over 250 women in the Commons for the first time if Labour were to win an overall majority.

The research finds that selection rates of ethnic minority candidates across parties for winnable seats have converged in Class of 2024 selections so far – with the Conservative rate of ethnic minority selection rising to 12%, compared to 6% of the existing Conservative parliamentary group. Though Labour has the strongest record on ethnic representation in the House of Commons historically, the party is currently selecting Class of 2024 ethnic minority candidates at a lower rate (12%) than the existing parliamentary Labour Party. It may be that the final selections in late retirement seats narrow this gap.

These advances in ethnic diversity and especially gender balance may not be at the pace that might have been anticipated. The 2024 General Election is likely to be a “big change” election: one of the three General Elections of the last half century with the biggest turnover of MPs. Elections with a higher turnover of MPs have the potential to accelerate demographic trends towards greater ethnic diversity and gender balance. However, this

turnover effect may be somewhat diluted in 2024 by a stalling in the proportion of female candidates across parties, and in the selection of ethnic minority candidates by the Labour Party in its target seats.

The selections to date have chosen probably nine out of ten of those who will make up the House of Commons “Class of 2024”. So this initial snapshot does capture the likely contours of the next parliament but it is not yet the final picture. The final selections made by party members about the candidates to put to the voters will influence the overall composition of the Commons. In this briefing paper we propose opportunities, beyond the General Election, to improve both the collection of data on parliamentarians and the scrutiny of this within the political parties. This could help each of the parties make progress towards a goal of fair chances and no unfair barriers in political representation, across ethnic diversity, gender balance and social class.

2. Summary of key findings

The demographics of the House of Commons will depend on the interaction of these three factors:

- Retirements by incumbents and decisions about candidates to replace them.
- Selections by parties for party-held and winnable target seats.
- Political change in the General Election, to determine which party wins each constituency.

Five indicative scenarios have been used to reflect different types of political outcome – modelling the composition of the House of Commons in scenarios where the parties win the following numbers of seats.

Five scenarios for the new parliament

	No political change on 2019	Hung parliament (dead heat)	Labour majority of one	Labour majority of 50	Labour majority of 100
Conservative	371	282	242	206	194
Labour	202	282	326	350	375
Lib Dem	11	28	35	39	39
SNP	46	34	25	22	20
Others (GB)	5	5	4	4	4
Others (Northern Ireland)	18	18	18	18	18

Specific constituencies were allocated to the parties in each scenario, on a simple universal swing model, as described in the appendix. Analysis of the candidate selections was then used to project the impact on the ethnic diversity and gender balance of the Commons as a whole, and the different party groups, in each of these election scenarios.

Projections for ethnic minority MPs in the next House of Commons in different political scenarios

	No political change on 2019	Hung/tied	Labour majority of one	Labour majority of 50	Labour majority of 100
Ethnic minority MPs (overall MPs)	75-77 (650) (12%)	77-79 12%	79-83 12-13%	79-83 12-13%	79-83 12-13%
Conservative	26 (371) 7%	20-21 (282) 7.5%	19-20 (242) 8%	17-18 (206) 8%	16-17 (194) 9%
Labour	48 (202) 24%	53-54 (282) 19%	56-58 (326) 18%	58-61 (350) 18%	59-63 (375) 18%
Lib Dem	2 (11) 18%	4 (28) 14%	4 (35) 11%	4 (39) 10%	4 (39) 10%
SNP	1 (46) 2%	0 (34) 0%	0 (25) 0%	0 (22) 0%	0 (20) 0%
Others (GB)	0/5	0/5	0/4	0/4	0/4
Others (NI)	0/18	0/18	0/18	0/18	0/18

Our current projection is that there would be 75-77 ethnic minority MPs if each party won the seats in the General Election that it currently holds – with around 48 Labour and 26 Conservative MPs from ethnic minorities, along with 2 Lib Dems and 1 SNP Member of Parliament.

Our projection anticipates at least 79 ethnic minority MPs being elected if there is a Labour majority government.

Based on party selections to date, whether Labour was to win a slender, medium-sized or landslide majority makes no significant difference to the overall ethnic diversity of the Commons, but rather just to the party balance within it.

Projections for female MPs in the next House of Commons in different political scenarios

	No political change	Hung/tied (b)	Labour majority of one	Labour majority of 50	Labour majority of 100
Female MPs (%)	234 36%	252 39%	254 39%	260 40%	267 41%
Conservative women (female %)	100 (371) 27%	79 (282) 28%	72 (242) 30%	63 (217) 29%	61 (194) 31%
Labour women (all Labour MPs)	105 (199) 53%	135 (282) 48%	153 (326) 47%	168 (350) 48%	176 (375) 47%
Lib Dem women (all Lib Dems)	7 (11) 64%	14 (29) 48%	17 (36) 46%	18 (39) 46%	18 (39) 46%
SNP women (all SNP MPs)	17 (46) 36%	11 (34) 32%	7 (25) 28%	6 (22) 27%	6 (20) 0%
Others (GB)	1/5	1/5	1/4	1/4	1/4
Others (NI)	4/18	5/18	5/18	5/18	5/18

A significant rise in the number of female MPs would depend primarily on seats changing hands between parties if Labour and the Liberal Democrats make gains from the Conservatives. There would be a projected 253 women (39%) if Labour won 326 seats, a majority of 1, rising to over 40% if the party had a working majority. Our analysis projects an increase to 270 female MPs (43%) across parties in a scenario where Labour secures a majority of 100.

Yet the research finds that the selection rate of women has fallen in the Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem parties for party-held and winnable target seats in this parliament. More than six out of ten Class of 2024 candidates are male in all three parties, despite Labour and the Lib Dems currently having majority-female parliamentary groups.

3. Ethnic diversity in the next parliament

That there will be a record number of ethnic minority MPs in the next parliament can be predicted with confidence. The selections analysis shows that this is pretty certain to be the case, however the political pendulum swings on election night.

There are currently 65 ethnic minority MPs. On the selections to date, this is projected to rise to over 75 in this next parliament.

Our current projection is that there would be 75-77 ethnic minority MPs if each party won the seats in the General Election that it currently holds – with around 48 Labour and 26 Conservative MPs from ethnic minorities, along with 2 Lib Dems and 1 SNP MP.

Our projection anticipates at least 79 ethnic minority MPs being elected if there is a Labour majority government: the analysis identifies 56 Labour and 19 Conservative ethnic minority MPs, along with 4 Liberal Democrats, set to be elected if Labour won 326 seats and a majority of 1. (With a dozen Conservative and seventeen Labour selections currently vacant for MPs who would be elected in this scenario, we estimate that a modest further rise towards 83 MPs is probable if current selection ratios continue). Yet it is striking how little difference our political scenarios make to the ethnic diversity of the Commons.

Projecting the number of ethnic minority MPs in the next Parliament depends on the interaction of patterns of retirement, of new selections, and which MPs and candidates win or lose the election in each constituency. Each factor contributes to guaranteeing that there will be a record number of ethnic minority MPs after the General Election.

(1) Retirements: Ethnic minority MPs are less likely to be standing down in 2024

Four ethnic minority MPs are known to be not standing for their party in the General Election. This represents just a 6% retirement rate among ethnic minority MPs, compared to 13.5% among white British MPs, where 80 out of 585 have announced they do not intend to stand again to date.

The lower retirement rate is primarily because there are fewer ethnic minority MPs among the longest serving MPs. This reflects the recent acceleration in ethnic diversity from the 2010 General Election onwards. Eight ethnic minority MPs – one in eight of those serving in this parliament – were first elected prior to 2010, compared to just under a quarter of the current Commons overall. That there is a higher general retirement rate in 2024 among Conservatives, who have fewer ethnic minority MPs than Labour, also contributes.

The three ethnic minority Conservative MPs who have announced that they are choosing to stand down are Adam Afriyie in Windsor, first elected in 2005 (when he was just one of two ethnic minority Conservative MPs elected); along with former Home Secretary Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) and Alok Sharma (Reading West), both first elected in 2010.

Claudia Webbe, elected for Labour in Leicester East 2019, was suspended by Labour over her

criminal conviction for harassment. She currently sits as an independent after her reduced sentence enabled her to avoid a recall petition. Labour has selected Rajesh Agrawal, of British Indian ethnic heritage, to contest this seat.

Up to 61 of the current 65 ethnic minority MPs could stand again. Further retirements in 2024 could reduce this number. However, late retirements are unlikely to lead to any significant net reduction in overall numbers. That could happen only if the proportion of further ethnic minority candidates selected to replace incumbents fell below the proportion of minority candidates among further retirees. Late selections are more likely to be at a similar or mildly higher rate, given the demographics of the potential retiree pool.

(2) Prospects of re-election

Current ethnic minority MPs have safer seats than average, across the major parties. Only three ethnic minority MPs are more likely than not to lose their seats.

Of the sixty ethnic minority incumbent MPs who may choose to stand again, only two or three will start as the underdogs in their local constituency contest. Most of the others will be very strong favourites to hold their seat.

Anum Qaisar of the SNP is defending the marginal seat of Airdrie and Shotts. This seat is sixth on Labour's target list. The SNP would have to outperform expectations to hold this constituency, where Labour start as favourites.

Darren Henry in Broxtowe is defending the Conservatives' 65th most marginal seat from Labour (majority 5,331, 10%). **Bim Alobami** in Hitchin benefits from boundary changes, compared to his Hitchin and Harpenden constituency (majority 6,895), which was a key Lib Dem target seat. He will be defending a nominal majority of 13,000 in what now looks a three-way contest.

Most current ethnic minority MPs have safer seats than average, perhaps for different reasons across the two major parties.

Conservative ethnic minority MPs make up 6% of the parliamentary group yet held twelve of the party's one hundred safest seats. Black and Asian Conservative MPs – including Rishi Sunak, Kemi Badenoch, Suella Braverman, James Cleverly, Alan Mak and Priti Patel – represent constituencies among the fifty safest Conservative seats. More than three-quarters of the Conservative ethnic minority MPs would survive a 1997-style landslide defeat where half of their colleagues lost their seats.

It may seem counter-intuitive for Conservative ethnic minority candidates, having been historically under-represented, to disproportionately hold particularly safe seats, rather than more precarious ones – or to face a similar level of electoral vulnerability to colleagues. The current pattern appears to be the result of a deliberate party strategy from 2015 onwards. With the party leadership placing significant emphasis on more visible diversity, from a low base in parliament and on the candidates list, ethnic minority candidates were viewed as a scarce resource. This instinct was reinforced after the defeat of several "A-list" candidates in

marginal seats in 2010. For example, six ethnic minority Conservatives were chosen in 36 Conservative-held seats with retiring incumbents in 2015, with no ethnic minority Conservative candidates in the 35 seats that the party gained from opposition parties. Conservative Central Office also appeared to be hedging against the possibility of residual electoral prejudice by preferring to promote candidates in safe rather than marginal seats. The 2024 selection data does see an increase in ethnic minority candidates, and a wider range of seats, including more marginal defence seats.

Labour has been distinctly more likely to select ethnic minority candidates in seats of above average and high ethnic diversity. Labour has performed particularly strongly in seats with high levels of ethnic diversity, reflecting its historically strong support from ethnic minority voters and from other voters in inner city constituencies. Labour's majorities in diverse, urban constituencies and university seats have increased further in response to political changes after 2015. All Labour MPs choosing to stand again will start as favourites to win their constituency contests, since the party is gaining ground nationally.

However, it is possible for a party to lose a safe seat due to specific local factors. One challenge for Labour is how its historically strong support from British Muslim voters is coming under pressure over the party's approach to Palestine and the war in the Middle East. Shabana Mahmood and Rushanara Ali are Labour frontbenchers with among the highest proportion of Muslim constituents. They have large majorities that may be targeted by independent candidates, as happened when George Galloway took the Labour seat of Bethnal Green in 2005. Yet in 2024 Labour will be favourite to win these seats – and to affect the overall level of diversity in the Commons, a successful challenger candidate would have to be white British (like Galloway) rather than being from an ethnic minority background.

(3) Class of 2024 selections: There has been a convergence in selection rates of ethnic minority candidates in winnable seats, across the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

In the 52 cases of Conservative MPs standing down, six constituencies have selected ethnic minority candidates. So the Conservatives would expect to have 24 ethnic minority MPs if they could match their 2019 General Election victory, but would see fewer new MPs elected if they lose seats in the General Election.

Ben Obese-Jecty inherits a large majority of over 19,000 in Huntingdon, so would retain the seat in each of our projected scenarios, and even in a 1997-style landslide defeat where the Conservatives won 165 seats. The Huntingdon seat had the 145th largest Conservative majority in 2019 but could become vulnerable only if the Conservatives risked falling below 150 seats in the Commons.

Yousef Dahmash is defending Rugby, which had a majority of over 13,000 in 2019 prior to minor boundary changes. Labour could secure an overall majority without taking this seat, which ranks 144th on the target seat list, so we rank it as Labour's potential 344th seat arithmetically. Labour should therefore expect to win Rugby in scenarios where it was on course for an overall majority of 50 seats.

Four other newly selected Conservative ethnic minority candidates are defending Conservative-held marginal seats in England that the party could hold if it won the election, but which Labour would expect to gain if it won an overall majority.

Zakar Ali defends a majority of 8,360 in Crawley, which we rank as Labour's 291st target seat in the Commons. The Conservatives would probably win the seat if they were the largest party in a hung parliament, but it would fall if Labour won a majority.

Johnny Luk in Milton Keynes Central and **Ameet Jogia** in Hendon would be likely to lose the seats they are defending if Labour was the largest party, even if it fell short of a majority.

Chandra Kanneganti, defending a Conservative majority of just 670 in Stoke-on-Trent Central, would require a 2019-style Conservative majority to win a seat that we rank as tenth on Labour's target list.

The Conservatives would have 24 ethnic minority MPs (+3) if each party repeated its 2019 performance but this could dip to around 18 ethnic minority MPs if Labour win a majority in the General Election.

Conservative Class of 2024 (new candidates in Conservative held seats)

		Majority	<i>Cons Defence</i>	<i>Con seat rank</i>	Target rank	No change	Hung	Lab maj 1	Lab maj 100
Ben Obese-Jecty	Huntingdon	19383	217	148	Lab target 196	Win	Win	Win	Win
Yousef Dahmash	Rugby	13,446	164	204	Lab target 144	Win	Win	Win	Lose
Zakar Ali	Crawley	8360	110	255	Lab target 91	Win	Win	Loss	Loss
Johnny Luk	Milton Keynes Central	6,944	75	290	Lab target 55	Win	Loss	Loss	Loss
Ameet Jogia	Hendon	4230	51	314	Lab target 39	Win	Loss	loss	Loss
Chandra Kanneganti	Stoke-on-Trent Central	670	15	350	Lab target 10	Win	Loss	Loss	Loss

Labour's Class of 2024

In the 14 cases of Labour MPs standing down, no fewer than seven of these fourteen constituencies have selected ethnic minority candidates.

Miatta Fahnbullah in Peckham (majority 33,780), **Abtisam Mohamed** in Sheffield Central (majority 27,273) and **Jas Athwal** – selected in Ilford South (majority 24,101) in a contest with current MP Sam Tarry – defend three of Labour's thirty safest seats.

There are more modest majorities being defended by **Baggy Shanker** in Derby South (6,019), **Satvir Kaur** in Southampton Test (6,213) and **Harpreet Uppal** in Huddersfield (4,937) but all are likely to be elected given that Labour is unlikely to lose current seats.

Rajesh Agrawal, formerly deputy Mayor of London for business, has been selected in Leicester East, where Labour's majority fell to 6,000 in 2019 and where the current MP was convicted of a criminal offence. The Conservatives made significant gains against the national trend in local elections, so this may be one of Labour's more challenging defence seats in 2024. (The Conservatives have selected ethnic minority candidates to contest this constituency in the last three General Elections, though have yet to select their 2024 candidate).

There has been a sharp divergence in current Labour selection rates between retirement seats and target seats. Labour needs to make 127 gains to win an overall majority: it has selected ethnic minority candidates in ten of its top 127 target seats – just 8% of the target seats that it needs to take for a majority – and in thirteen of the top 175 target seats.

Among newly selected Labour candidates seeking to gain seats from other parties, **Kirith Entwistle** is seeking to overturn a Conservative majority of just 378 in Bolton North-East. **Fazia Shaheen** is standing again in Chingford and Woodford Green, where in 2019 she reduced Iain Duncan Smith's majority to 1,262 and needs a swing of 1.3% to win what is Labour's 13th target seat. **Warinder Juss**, a solicitor and trade unionist, is Labour's candidate in Wolverhampton West, the party's 20th target seat arithmetically, needing a 2% swing. Those three seats look likely to be gained by Labour even if it won only as many seats as in its 2015 general election defeat.

Juss's party colleague **Sureena Brackenridge** needs a 6% swing in Wolverhampton North-East, which is the 66th seat on Labour's target list. She is among several more ethnic minority candidates who we would expect to see elected if Labour was on course to form a government.

Kaniska Narayan is contesting the Vale of Glamorgan, which has been a bellwether seat won by the winning party in every General Election since its creation in 1983. Success here would make Narayan, who was born in Bihar, India before coming to Wales with his family as a 12 year old, the first Asian MP to represent a Welsh constituency at Westminster.

Surgeon **Dr Zubir Ahmed** is contesting the SNP-Labour marginal seat of Glasgow South-West, which is one of Labour's top ten targets in challenging the SNP in Scotland. If Labour

gains this seat from the SNP, Ahmed could well be the sole ethnic minority MP representing a Scottish constituency at Westminster. **Juliet Campbell** is hoping to unseat Darren Henry in Broxtowe, having been a Cabinet member on Lewisham Council. **Jeevun Sandher**, an economist who has worked for the New Economics Foundation, is the Labour candidate in Loughborough, 74th on the target list and so is another marginal seat that Labour would need to take if it is on course to be the largest party in the House of Commons.

There are some more challenging seats needed by Labour to rack up the 127 gains it needs to form a majority government. **Primesh Patel** in Harrow East needs an 8.3% swing to unseat Bob Blackman, who has been the sole Conservative MP to hold a majority-minority constituency. The party political battle for the sizeable British Indian vote has been hard fought and contentious. The seat ranks 89th on the Labour target list mathematically, but the interaction of local, national and international politics could make it harder to predict than other marginal contests.

Yuan Yang, who was a Financial Times journalist prior to her selection, contests the new constituency of Earley and Woodley, in the Reading suburbs, which has a nominal Conservative majority of 8,745. **Ben Taylor** in Croydon South is seeking to overturn a sizeable Conservative majority of 12,000 – but Labour may need to take the seat on a 10% swing if it is to achieve a working majority.

There are relatively few Labour ethnic minority candidates selected in the long-shot marginal seats that are well beyond the winning post for a majority government. If the party was heading for a majority of over 100, then **Bayo Alaba** in Rochford and Southend East (145th target seat) and **Naushabah Khan** in Gillingham and Rainham (174th target seat) could be elected in Essex and Kent.

The Labour selection rate across party-held and target seats is therefore 17 out of 141 seats (12%) but with a very sharp divergence in the selection rates in retirement seats (50%, albeit of a small sample) and in the much larger group of target seats (8%).

The Labour Party is set to have by far the largest number of ethnic minority MPs – projected to be 55 ethnic minority Labour MPs if the party wins an overall majority, compared to around 21 Conservatives.

However Labour is selecting ethnic minority candidates for winnable seats in the 2024 General Election (12%) at a considerably lower rate than the current Parliamentary Labour Party (20%), being considerably more likely to select ethnic minority candidates in retirement seats than target seats in this round. If that were the approximate ratio, this would be the first time that the incoming cohort was less ethnically diverse than the existing PLP. Nevertheless, the projection for the post-election PLP as a whole – 18% if Labour wins a majority – would remain ahead of the electorate as a whole.

Overall, the Conservatives have selected ethnic minority candidates for winnable seats at the same rate (12%) as the Labour Party in this round of selections so far. This involves an increase in the rate of Conservative selections, and a dip in the rate of Labour selections. The Conservatives have a much smaller number of winnable seats, given the overall political

context. As a result, the projected rise in ethnic minority representation depends less on the political outcome of the General Election, reflecting a new cross-party norm of ethnic diversity in British politics.

The Reform Party, currently polling at 10%, is not expected to secure any seats in parliament at the General Election, and so its candidate selections will not make a difference to the projections of parliamentary diversity. It is worth mentioning, however, that Reform has selected at least nine ethnic minority candidates to stand in the General Election, with Pakistani-born Deputy Leader Ben Habib standing for the party in the forthcoming Wellingborough by-election.

The Green Party is defending one seat, Brighton Pavilion, with incumbent Caroline Lucas stepping down and former party co-leader Sian Berry selected to contest the seat in 2024. The Greens have identified three other main target seats, fielding three female candidates, but has selected no ethnic minority candidates in this quartet of higher profile constituency campaigns.

4. Gender balance in the next parliament

It seems certain that the number of women elected to the House of Commons at the General Election will go up, rather than down, in all political scenarios.

But the Commons 'Class of 2024' is currently set to have a weaker gender balance than in the incoming cohort five years ago in 2019, when 41% of newly elected MPs were women. On present selections, just 36% of new MPs would be female in a scenario where very few, if any, seats changed hands between parties. In the Labour majority scenario some 39% of new MPs in 2024 would be female, rising to 42% in the event of a Labour landslide.

Women have been less likely to announce that they are retiring, particularly among Conservative women. The 85 MPs to announce they are retiring include 65 men and 18 women. Some 8% of female MPs and 15% of male MPs have announced they are standing down. The 52 Conservatives to announce they are standing down include 44 men and 8 women. Fewer than one in ten Conservative women (9%) are standing down so far, compared to one in six Conservative men (16%). Conservative women currently make up a quarter of the party's MPs and one in six of those choosing to retire.

The 14 Labour MPs who have announced they are retiring include 6 women (42%) and 8 men (58%). Some 6% of female Labour MPs and 8% of male Labour MPs are standing down. The 9 SNP MPs to retire include 6 men and 3 women, in line with the party's gender balance, so a fifth of male (21%) and female (20%) SNP MPs are standing down. Seven men and one woman are standing down from other parties and independents.

However the selection rate of women has fallen in the Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem party selections in this parliament. The Conservatives have a 70:30 ratio of male to female candidates selected where current MPs are standing down, with 10 women out of 32 selections to date. This is also a modest slippage from the large Conservative intake in 2019, when 36 women made up a third (34%) of the 107 newly elected Conservative and a quarter (24%) of the parliamentary group as a whole.

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats currently have more women than men in the current House of Commons – but six out of ten new 'Class of 2024' Labour MPs (62%) and Lib Dem MPs (68%) are set to be male, based on the selections to date.

The Labour Parliamentary group is currently 52% female – with 95 men and 103 women representing Labour in the House of Commons. Labour would have at least 146 new MPs if it formed a majority government. So far the party has selected 49 women (38%) and 80 men (62%) as new candidates for seats it needs to win to reach the winning post. This is set to be the lowest proportion of women in an incoming Labour intake since at least 2015 (45%) and probably 2001. This would also be the first time since 2001 that the incoming cohort was less gender-balanced than the PLP that they join.

The Liberal Democrats currently have ten female MPs (65%) and five male MPs (35%). The party is thought to have good prospects of doubling its number of seats at the General

Election. This research finds that six women (32%) and thirteen men (68%) have so far been selected in the party's top twenty target seats, with one selection still to happen. The Lib Dems would still have a gender-balanced group of 35 MPs (51% male, 49% female) because most returning incumbents would be female.

With the Conservatives having a weaker rate of selections than their main party rivals, the gender balance of the Commons is set to improve primarily because the governing party is expected to lose seats. Since 52% of Labour MPs and 25% of Conservative MPs are women, it is counter-intuitive that the female proportion of the next intake could fall in an election where most new MPs were Labour.

Conservative party chair Greg Hands is among those to have expressed concern about the gender balance of candidates in this round of selections, saying that his party should be committed to a 50-50 goal in candidate selection, though the selections data shows this remains an issue across both Labour and the Conservative parties.

The major parties have each placed more emphasis on the local credentials and connections of candidates in this round of selections. There is no reason in principle, of course, why gender balance is not compatible with local connections. But around half of the Class of 2024, across parties, have been local councillors, and this is likely to be one factor contributing to gender imbalances. The Local Government Association [national census](#) of local councillors has reported that 32% of Conservative councillors are women and 68% are men, with a 60-40 male/female ratio among Liberal Democrat councillors. Over half (52%) of Labour councillors are women, so a higher proportion of councillors can only be a partial explanation of the gender selections across parties.

There is considerably lower ethnic diversity in local councils than in national politics, with 93% of councillors being white. Data is collected more patchily and intermittently on ethnicity than on gender in local government, as Professor Maria Sobolewska and Dr Neema Begum have reported.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Why do the demographics of the House of Commons matter? In a liberal democracy and a diverse society, candidates and MPs of different genders, ethnicities and faiths will have to represent citizens of all backgrounds.

Parliament is a less effective forum of the nation if some perspectives are absent from it. It was possible for all-white parliaments to pass race discrimination legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, but there were missing perspectives when major moments of debate on race relations in 1968 or 1981 were debated without any ethnic minority voices in the house at all.

The demographics of the House of Commons can be seen as a significant indicator of progress towards the meritocratic idea of equal opportunities. On the premise that talent and the appetite for public service are distributed evenly across ethnic groups, genders and other protected characteristics, then a political system which offered “fair chances and no unfair barriers” would tend to see a broadly representative mix of the population among its elected representatives.

However, where a group was systematically under-represented – as with women making up less than a tenth of the House of Commons in every parliament until 1997 – this would be a clear indicator that barriers to equal opportunities persist. Parliament is not required to be a perfect microcosm of society in every aspect, but to reflect modern Britain one would expect to see a broadly representative mix.

In particular, a ‘fair chances’ model would tend to see each incoming cohort – such as the Class of 2024 – broadly reflecting the society it purports to represent. Given that MPs tend to serve around three to six terms on average, establishing a proportionate mix among new intakes will tend to deliver, over time, a Commons that reflects the nation. However, if the incoming cohorts do not yet reflect the broad demographic balance, the gap will never quite close. This new research shows that we can expect to see significant progress towards more equal opportunities, but highlights that there is more to do in order to close the gaps – and a range of different challenges across different demographic groups.

The impact of the incoming cohort of new MPs is greater still in ‘big change’ elections, which deliver a larger-than-usual share of new MPs to the House of Commons. With the pace of diverse selections stalling, across both ethnicity and gender representation, a 2024 election could therefore be a missed opportunity to accelerate progress.

Recommendations

Make final selections matter

There are selections still to happen. An emphasis from political leaders can influence party staff and members involved in shortlisting and voting for candidates to give due attention to equal opportunities, including awareness of the current patterns of selection in this parliament. Getting this right could help a 'big change' election deliver greater gender and ethnic representation in Parliament.

Collect better data at a Parliamentary level

An approach to equal opportunities and breaking down barriers to opportunity is more effective and more legitimate when it addresses all strands. The Women and Equalities Select Committee could forge consensus on how to do this, taking advice from the Social Mobility Commission and the EHRC.

The House of Commons does not currently collect ethnicity data on MPs. The reason given is that ethnic identification is subjective and personal. However, the House of Commons Library produces research reports, including on ethnicity in parliament, sourcing its statistics from NGOs like British Future or Operation Black Vote, which use the public statements of candidates. The UK is a leader on ethnic diversity data, with cross-party consensus on the value of collecting and analysing such information, in contrast to much of western Europe. The ONS census categories are well established and involve public consultation on their legitimacy. It should be possible to command a broad consensus for parliament and the parties collecting data from newly elected MPs directly.

Data on **social class** is less accessible than that on gender or ethnic diversity. This could be improved if Parliament and each of the major political parties were encouraged to collect and publish data on social class and social mobility – including professional background, education, and parental occupation at age 14 (a measure recommended by the Social Mobility Commission).

Examine the cost of candidacies

The Electoral Commission should investigate the costs of becoming a candidate. It should assess whether the cost of seeking a candidacy, in terms of both time and money, acts as more of a barrier to some groups than others. Its conclusions should help inform strategies to address barriers that are hampering more equal representation in parliament.

Scrutiny

Leading figures across political parties have expressed concern about why gender balance in selections has stalled or gone backwards, but do not yet have any clear account of the causes or the best responses. A cross-party process in the next parliament to explore progress and barriers could take various forms. Re-establishing a Speakers Convention on parliamentary representation could be one potential vehicle to establish what action can be taken across parliament as a whole, and to provide a forum for debate on action within specific parties.

Promotion and outreach

Parliament as an institution should do more to publicise existing parliamentary placements and apprenticeship schemes among under-represented groups. All MPs should be encouraged to visit every secondary school and FE college in their constituency, to talk to young people about their jobs and the work of MPs.

Party culture

The UK's system of representative democracy means that equal opportunities in parliament are primarily the product of the culture and outcomes of selection processes within political parties.

Parties should collect data in a more rigorous way across protected characteristics, including on candidates for local elections and those for devolved national parliaments as well as or Westminster. They should also analyse data on the composition of party staff and party members. This could help identify where the opportunities and challenges lie for making equal opportunities in representation an established norm.

Parties should also invest in outreach and training programmes for people who are interested in becoming councillors, MLAs, MSs, MSPs or MPs and review the lessons and impacts of existing schemes.

Appendices

I. Methodology

The demographics of the next parliament depend on the combination of the following factors:

- (a) Retirements of incumbent MPs, and which MPs seek re-election.
- (b) Selections of new candidates for party-held and winnable target seats for each party.
- (c) The constituency outcome of the contest between the parties in marginal seats, and any others that might change hands.

Retirements: As of 1st January 2024, 82 MPs have announced they will not stand at the next election. A further four MPs have stood down in their current seats, but have been reselected in constituencies that do not include any part of their old seat.

Selections: The research covers all selections for constituencies where a party is the current or nominal incumbent, and selections for Labour and Liberal Democrat target seats, given that these are the parties likely to make net gains in the General Election in the Great Britain. A small number of winnable target seats for other parties were considered – with the Alliance having a good chance of gaining a seat in Northern Ireland and the Scottish Conservatives having some possible target gains.

Scenarios to model political change: Our projected seat outcomes are calculated using a simple universal swing model between the two major parties in Conservative-Labour marginal seats, mirroring this for Conservative-Lib Dem marginals. The seat ranking was based on the swing needed to win the seat from the 2019 general election result, adjusting this for boundary changes. We used the Electoral Calculus's 2019 'implied majority' calculations to rank seats. For example, the new West Bromwich seat is made up of 62% of the old West Bromwich East constituency (won by the Conservatives in 2019 with a majority of 1,593), 25% of West Bromwich West (won by the Conservatives with a majority of 3,799) and 13% of Halesowen and Rowley Regis (won by the Conservatives with a majority of 12,074). Electoral Calculus suggests that the 2019 'implied majority' for the new West Bromwich seat is 3,588.

Labour target seats were then ranked from one to 126 with seats falling according to their arithmetic ranking, and Lib Dem target seats ranked from one to 20. For seat changes between other parties, we have made indicative estimates of net gains and losses, broadly reflecting poll trends and current expectations. The Labour Party gains 10, 20 and 25 seats from the SNP, and the Lib Dems gain 10, 20 and 25 seats from the Conservatives in our three change scenarios. There are very few three-party contests in 2024 target seats to complicate this method. We chose to exclude the three-way contest in Wimbledon from the Lib Dem target seat list, judging it more likely to end up as a Labour gain, given the constituency's electoral history.

Five indicative General Election scenarios were used to project the impact of political change on which party wins each constituency:

1. No change: parties retain 2019 seats, adjusted for boundary changes.
2. Hung Parliament
3. Labour majority of 1
4. Labour majority of 50
5. Labour majority of 100.

While the exact pattern of seats won and lost would differ in each scenario, the demographic impacts on the gender balance and ethnic diversity of the Commons would be marginal. There would be more potential impact on these initial projections from the further late retirements and final selections in party held seats. For now, the totals have been adjusted, reflecting the demographics of the party groups. A final set of projections of the demographics of the Commons will be produced after the election is called and nominations close, with all retirees and candidates known, ahead of the short campaign.

1. No Change: parties retain current actual/nominal seats, adjusted for boundary changes.
The distribution of seats is set out below:

Party	Seats 2019	Boundary change adjustments
Labour	202	199
Conservative	365	371
Lib Dems	11	11
SNP	48	46
Plaid Cymru	4	3
Greens	1	1
Speaker	1	1
Northern Ireland	18	18
Total	650	650

Some 36 selections are still to take place (25 Conservative, 10 Labour, 1 SNP) for candidates who would be elected.

2. Hung Parliament

We use an indicative hung parliament scenario, with the seats set out below:

Party	Seats
Labour	282
Conservative	282
Lib Dems	29
SNP	34
Plaid Cymru	3
Greens	1
Speaker	1
Northern Ireland	18
Total	650

There are 329 women out of 617 candidates identified, with 33 selections still to take place.

The Conservatives have yet to make 17 selections for seats they would win in this hung parliament scenario. They have 20 ethnic minority candidates out of 265 selections, so are projected to have 20-21 ethnic minority MPs. The Conservatives currently have 73 women out of 265 selections, with 17 vacancies; this is projected as 79 women out of the 282 seats.

Labour currently has 133 women candidates out of 276 selections, with 6 vacancies; this is projected as 135 women MPs out of Labour's 282 seats.

3. Labour majority of one.

In this scenario, Labour wins 326 seats, with the distribution of seats set out below.

Party	Seats
Labour	326
Conservative	242
Lib Dems	35
SNP	25
Plaid Cymru	2
Greens	1
Speaker	1
Northern Ireland	18
Total	650

Some 243 women have been chosen as candidates out of 620 incumbents/selections, with 30 vacant selections.

4. Labour majority of 50

In this scenario the distribution of seats is:

Party	Seats
Labour	350
Conservative	217
Lib Dems	39
SNP	22
Plaid Cymru	2
Greens	1
Speaker	1
Northern Ireland	18
Total	650

5. Labour majority of 100 seats

In this scenario the distribution of seats is:

Party	Seats
Labour	375
Conservative	194
Lib Dems	39
SNP	20
Plaid Cymru	2
Greens	1
Speaker	1
Northern Ireland	18
Total	650

Some 45 seats have not yet selected candidates or have incumbents in this scenario.

Labour does not yet have a candidate/incumbent for 25 seats that they would win in this scenario.

Labour has 59 ethnic minority candidates among the 350 identified candidates or incumbents, so are projected to have 59-63 ethnic minority MPs.

Labour would have 163 women candidates out of 349 identified candidates, with 26 selections to make, projected as 176 women MPs out of 375 seats.

The Conservatives have 9 vacant selections in this scenario, with 16 ethnic minority candidates out of 185 identified candidates or incumbents. Women make up 58 out of 185 identified candidates, with 9 selections to make, so are projected as 61 women MPs out of 194 seats.

II. Information about ethnic minority candidates

Conservatives

Conservative ethnic minority incumbents standing in 2024

1. Kemi Badenoch – North West Essex
2. Saqib Bhatti – Meriden and Solihull East
3. Suella Braverman – Fareham and Waterlooville
4. Claire Coutinho – East Surrey
5. James Cleverly – Braintree
6. Nusrat Ghani – Sussex Weald
7. Helen Grant – Maidstone and Malling
8. Ranil Jayawardena – North East Hampshire
9. Kwasi Kwarteng - Spelthorne
10. Alan Mak - Havant
11. Gagan Mohindra – South West Hertfordshire
12. Priti Patel – Witham
13. Rishi Sunak – Richmond and North Allerton
14. Shailesh Vara – North West Cambridgeshire
15. Nadhim Zahawi – Stratford-on-Avon.

Conservative candidates – incumbents who risk their seats

Candidate	Seat	2019 Majority	Cons defence	Target	No change 1	Hung 2	Labour majority of one 3	Labour majority of 50 4	Labour majority of 100 5
Bim Afolami	Hitchin	6,895	85	LD target	Hold	Hold	Lose	Lose	Lose
Rehman Chishti	Gillingham and Rainham	15,119	220	Lab target	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Lose
Darren Hendry	Broxtowe	5,331	65	Lab target	Hold	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose
Paul Scully	Sutton and Cheam	8,351	108	LD target	Hold	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose

Conservative Class of 2024 - new candidates in Conservative-held seats

Candidate	Seat	2019 Majority	Cons Defence	Con seat rank	Notional target	Scenario 1	2	3	4	5
Zakar Ali	Crawley	8360	110	255	Lab target 91	Win	Win	Lose	Lose	Lose
Yousef Dahmash	Rugby	13,447	164	??	Lab target 58	Win	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose
Ameet Jogia	Hendon	4230	51	314	Lab target 39	Win	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose
Dr Chandra Kanneganti	Stoke-on-Trent Central	670	15	350	Lab target 10	Win	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose
Johnny Luk	Milton Keynes South	6,944	75	290	Lab target 55	Win	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose
Ben Obese-Jecty	Huntingdon	19,383	217	148	Lab target 196	Win	Win	Win	Win	Win

Conservative Class of 2024 - new candidates in Conservative target seats

Candidate	Seat	Majority	Cons target	1	2	3	4	5
Pinder Chauhan	Bedford	145	1	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose
Dr Sandesh Gulhane	East Renfrewshire	5,426	54	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose

Labour

Labour ethnic minority incumbents standing in 2024

1. Tahir Ali - Birmingham Hall Green
2. Rushanara Ali - Bethnal Green and Bow
3. Rosena Allin-Khan - Tooting
4. Apsana Begum - Poplar and Limehouse
5. Dawn Butler Brent - South
6. Feryal Clark - Enfield North
7. Marsha de Cordova - Battersea
8. Janet Daby - Lewisham East
9. Thangam Debbonaire - Bristol Central
10. Florence Eshalomi - Vauxhall
11. Preet Gill - Birmingham Edgbaston
12. Mark Hendrick - Preston
13. Rupa Huq - Ealing Central and Acton
14. Imran Hussain - Bradford East
15. Kim Johnson -Liverpool Riverside
16. Afzal Khan - Manchester Rushholme
17. David Lammy - Tottenham
18. Clive Lewis - Norwich South
19. Khalid Mahmood – Birmingham Perry Barr
20. Shabana Mahmood - Birmingham Ladywood
21. Seema Malhotra - Feltham and Heston
22. Navendu Mishra - Stockport
23. Lisa Nandy - Wigan
24. Chi Onwurah - Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West
25. Abena Oppong-Asare - Erith and Thamesmead
26. Kate Osamor - Edmonton
27. Taiwo Owatemi - Coventry North West
28. Sarah Owen - Luton North
29. Yasmin Qureshi - Bolton South and Walkden
30. Bell Ribeiro-Addy – Clapham and Brixton Hill
31. Naz Shah - Bradford West
32. Virendra Sharma Ealing, Southall
33. Tulip Siddiq Hampstead and Highgate
34. Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi - Slough
35. Zarah Sultana Coventry South
36. Valerie Vaz - Walsall and Bloxwich
37. Nadia Whittome Nottingham East
38. Mohammad Yasin - Bedford

Labour - new candidates in Labour-held seats

Candidate	Seat	Majority	No change	Hung	Labour majority of 1	Labour majority of 50	Labour majority of 100
Rajesh Agrawal	Leicester East	6,019	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
Jas Athwal	Ilford South	24,101	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
Miatta Fahnbulleh	Peckham	33,780	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
Satvir Kaur	Southampton Test	6,213	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
Abtisam Mohamed	Sheffield Central	27,273	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
Baggy Shanker	Derby South	6,019	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
Harpreet Uppal	Huddersfield	4,937	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold

Labour Class of 2024 - new candidates in Labour target seats

Candidate	Seat	Majority	Lab target	Lab seat rank	1	2	3	4	5
Zubir Ahmed	Glasgow South-West	4,900 (SNP)	81	283	Lose	Lose	Win	Win	Win
Bayo Alaba	Southend East and Rochford	12286	145	345	Lose	Lose	Lose	Win	Win
Sureena Brackenridge	Wolverhampton NE	4,080 (Cons)	66	266	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win
Juliet Campbell	Browtowe	5,331 (Con	53	255	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win
Kirith Entwistle	Bolton North East	378 (Cons)	5	205	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win
Adam Jogee	Newcastle-under-Lyme	7,446 (Cons)	90	290	Lose	Lose	Win	Win	Win
Warinder Juss	Wolverhampton SW	1,661 (Cons)	20	220	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win
Naushabah Khan	Gillingham & Rainham	15,119 (Cons)	174	374	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose	Win
Primesh Patel	Harrow East	8,170 (Cons)	89	289	Lose	Lose	Win	Win	Win
Jeevun	Loughborough	7,169	74	274	Lose	Lose	Win	Win	Win

Sandher		(Con)							
Fazia Shaheen	Chingford And Woodford Green	1,262 (Cons)	13	213	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win
Ben Taylor	Croydon South	12,339 (Cons)	114	314	Lose	Lose	Win	Win	Win
Yuan Yang	Earley and Woodley	8,745*	*	*	Lose	Lose	Lose	Win	Win

*Implied majority as this is a new seat

Liberal Democrats

Liberal Democrat ethnic minority incumbents standing in 2024

Layla Moran – Oxford West and Abingdon

Munira Wilson – Twickenham.

Lib Dem Class of 2024 - new candidates seeking to gain Liberal Democrat target seats from the Conservatives

Candidate	Seat	Maj	LD target	LD seat rank	1	2	3	5	5
Josh Babarinde	Eastbourne	4,331	12	22	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win
Chris Lucas	Hitchin	6,895	16	26	Lose	Lose	Win	Win	Win
Shaffaq Mohammed	Sheffield Hallam	1,528 (Lab)	n/a	n/a	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose

Scottish National Party

SNP candidates – incumbents who risk their seats

Candidate	Seat	Majority	SNP defence	Target	No change 1	Hung 2	Labour majority of 1 3	Labour majority of 50 4	Labour majority of 100 5
Anum Qaisar	Airdrie and Shotts	5,201 (2019) 1,757 (2021 by-election)	17	Labour target	Hold	Lose	Lose	Lose	Lose

