

Power of the Black Vote in 2017





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To understand the potential political power of the Black and Minority Ethnic vote one needs to look no further than the top ten most marginal seats in the country. Seven of the ten have very significant BME voter populations. That means in some of the fiercest battlegrounds, during this snap election race, the BME electorate could easily be the deciding factor.

Take Croydon Central for example, this Conservative seat has a wafer-thin majority of just 165 votes. The seat is in a Labour-held borough with a BME voting population of over 30,000. In this election, as with the previous 2015 general election, a seat like this cannot be won without the BME vote. It's as simple as that.

In other very marginal seats, this time held by Labour - like Brentford and Isleworth, or Hampstead and Kilburn - Labour will be counting upon the BME vote to save them once again. If the party loses its appeal, and BME communities believe that Theresa May can deliver as well as talk the talk on race equality politics, then constituencies such as these may hold the key to her success.

This is an election like no other, in which each of the main political leaders needs the BME vote, all for very different reasons. Here's what this election means for the main party leaders:

Theresa May: Although the pundits say she'll win, we've learnt from very recent elections and the referendum that we should not rule out the unexpected. But even if she does win, if she doesn't win big the PM would not have that greatly desired Brexit mandate. It would in many ways feel like a small but significant defeat. May needs the BME vote to win big.

Jeremy Corbyn: His goal, beyond doing the completely unexpected and winning, is to spoil Theresa May's party. If he can stop her winning a huge majority when the polls have written him off, he will feel like a winner. Corbyn has privately said that key target groups who instinctively gravitate to Labour are young people and BME voters. Corbyn needs the BME vote for his own survival.

Tim Farron: As the only political party that will campaign as a pro-European Union party, Farron is banking on the millions of Remain voters who are petrified by the potential of a 'hard Brexit'. Farron's call has been, 'if you want to reign in Theresa May during the Brexit discussions vote Lib Dem.' Farron is also acutely aware that very much like the younger voters, BME voters were heavily Remain - 75% in fact. Farron needs the BME vote to prove the Lib Dems are back.

In the days and weeks ahead during this election OBV will be highly active, including an aggressive last-minute voter registration drive with a poster and social media campaign. We will use this clout, along with our manifesto demands, to force dialogue and discussion with political parties about relevant policy issues.

Simon Woolley
National Coordinator - Operation Black Vote



The Black or BME Vote: complexities and voting patterns

Labour has traditionally held the lion's share of what is termed the 'Black vote' or the 'BME vote' (Black and Minority Ethnic).

While far from a homogenous, surveys tell us that on average Labour's Black vote has steadily fallen with each successive general election from over 80 percent in the 1980s to 68 percent in 2015. A key question in this snap general election is whether that trend away from Labour continues, or even accelerates, and what impact that might have on the result, or whether Jeremy Corbyn can stem the flow of BME votes to the Conservatives with a strong manifesto programme to tackle racial inequality.

At the 2015 election BME voters were still twice as likely to vote Labour compared to their White peers. Local elections in May 2017 saw a Conservative regional mayor elected in the highly-diverse West Midlands. Closer inspection reveals that areas of higher BME population (Birmingham, Sandwell) gave greater support to the Labour candidate, however every region in the region has a significant BME population and therefore this result focuses attention on whether Labour can still hold onto BME support.

ICM polls tracking non-white voting intentions nationwide during the 2017 election run-up indicate that Labour support amongst BME voters is running between 37 and 47 percent, with the Conservatives are behind on between 20 and 26 percent. That equates to an average 19-point gap in Labour's favour, but five points down on the British Elec-

tion Study 2015 estimates, and a massive 33 points down on 2010 election estimates. Studies assessing the proportion of BME votes the Conservatives took in 2015 vary between one in three to one in four votes.

These figures point to an important trend; that BME voters are increasingly moving out of the 'inner cities' - areas with high concentrations of BME residents - and into more marginal and less diverse election battlegrounds. This was a trend identified in Operation Black Vote's 2015 *Power of the Black Vote* report. It is clear that the influence and potential power of BME votes has increased as a result of greater numbers in suburbs and small towns.

Voting patterns indicate that the same racial group are more likely to vote Labour if they live in seats with a high to very high non-White population, but are more inclined to vote Conservative as they move out of those areas and into less racially-diverse areas.

BME communities are not a homogenous group and there are many different voting patterns across Asian, African and Caribbean and other communities. Indeed, there are further complexities with evidence that the same racial group can display different political preferences not just according to social status (for example income) but also which region of the country they live in.





How influential is the Black Vote in 2017?

The winner of the snap general election called by Theresa May has been declared a foregone conclusion by many pollsters and political commentators, but if the polls are wrong then other factors will come into play. The Black or BME electorate is a key factor in many swing seats.

This study looking at the influence of the Black vote in the 2017 snap general election shows that the top ten most marginal seats in England and Wales all have BME electorates greater than the majority of the MP elected in 2015. Seven of those top ten seats have BME electorates count as significant.

Of the top 50 swing seats, 45 have BME electorates larger than the 2015 majority. Significantly so for 31 of them. And of the top 200 swing seats, 96 have BME electorates large enough to make the difference.

That makes the Britain's BME communities, who make up 14 percent of the England and Wales population according to the 2011 census, key players in determining the outcome of the coming election. BME communities potentially hold the balance of power in over 15 percent of all parliamentary constituencies.

There is no doubt that the challenge for Labour is to stem the flow of BME votes to the Conservatives. The key to this will be to hold BME support in the small towns, especially the marginal swing seats, rather than concentrating effort in their 'inner city' heartlands.

In our study, we analysed the top 200 marginals and found 34 Conservative-held marginals where the BME vote is larger than the majority of the sitting MP, and 34 Labour-held marginals which fell into the same category.

The Lib Dems lost most of their seats with a significant BME population in 2015 but will need to win back the 'Black vote' to regain those seats.

Our analysis also found an additional 20 Conservative-held marginals where the BME population was not larger

7 of the top 10 most marginal seats have significant BME populations

Constituency	Majority of sitting MP BME Electorate	
Gower (Con)	27	1,181
Derby North (Con)	41	9,793
City of Chester (Lab)	93	2,826
Croydon Central (Con)	165	32,745
Ealing Central & Acton (Lab)	274	36,745
Ynys Mon (Lab)	229	1,231
Vale of Clwyd (Con)	237	1,484
Brentford & Isleworth (Lab)	465	39,751
Bury North (Con)	378	7,599
Morley & Outwood (Con)	422	3,271

Statistics from ONS for England and Wales. Majorities of elected MPs at the 2015 general election. Population statistics based on 2011 census.

than the majority of the sitting MP but nevertheless large enough in comparison with the slim 2015 majority to have an impact in the result in 2017. There were also seven Labour-held marginals and one Liberal Democrat-held marginal that fell into this category.

What actually transpires in this snap election may well be influenced by how successful each party is in making a 'value-added' pitch to BME communities that in addition to their general manifesto pledges they also care about race equality and have a plan to address racism, including institutional or systemic racial inequality.

A coalition of race equality non-governmental organisations are to launch a 'Black Manifesto' of demands for the next government to address in order to make Britain a more racially-equal society. In addition, Operation Black Vote will be seeking to highlight the potential power of the BME vote if under-registration rates are tackled.



Top 50 marginal seats by marginality and BME population

Constituency	Majority of sitting MP	BME Electorate
Gower (Con)	27	1,181
Derby North (Con)	41	9,793
City of Chester (Lab)	93	2,826
Croydon Central (Con)	165	32,389
Ealing Central & Acton (Lab)	274	36,745
Ynys Mon (Lab)	229	1,231
Vale of Clwyd (Con)	237	1,484
Brentford & Isleworth (Lab)	465	39,751
Bury North (Con)	378	7,599
Morley & Outwood (Con)	422	3,271
Halifax (Lab)	428	12,790
Wirral West (Lab)	417	1,353
Thurrock (Con)	536	14,892
Plymouth Sutton (Con)	523	4,938
Cambridge (Lab)	599	14,631
Ilford North (Lab)	589	35,651
Eastbourne (Con)	733	4,438
Newcastle-under-Lyme (Lab)	650	5,536
Brighton Kemptown (Con)	690	6,409
Bolton West (Con)	801	4,742
Weaver Vale (Con)	806	1,524
Telford (Con)	730	4,304
Barrow and Furness (Lab)	795	1,396
Wolverhampton SW (Lab)	801	30,152
Hampstead and Kilburn (Lab)	1,138	32,802
Lewes (Con)	1,083	2,618
Enfield North (Lab)	1,086	24,508
Hove (Lab)	1,236	7,880
Bedford (Con)	1,097	18,916
Plymouth Moor View (Con)	1,026	1,674
Dewsbury (Lab)	1,451	17,413
Southport (LibDem)	1,322	2,268
Lancaster & Fleetwood (Lab)	1,265	3,675
Thornbury and Yate (Con)	1,495	2,001
Lincoln (Con)	1,443	3,234
Carshalton & Wallington (LibDm)	1,510	14,936
Twickenham (Con)	2,017	16,080
NE Derbyshire (Lab)	1,883	1,287
Peterborough (Con)	1,925	19,050
Cardiff North (Con)	2,137	5,883
Sheffield Hallam (LibDem)	2,353	5,038
Corby (Lab)	2,412	2,956
Waveney (Con)	2,408	1,800
Warrington South (Con)	1,553	3,587
Harrow West (Lab)	2,208	45,629
Kingston & Surbiton (Con)	2,834	29,579
Bridgend (Lab)	1,927	1,645
Middlesborough S & E Clev (Lab)	2,268	1,678
Westminster North (Lab)	1,977	37,350
St Ives	2,469	1,092

Statistics from ONS for England and Wales. Majorities of MPs at the 2015 general election. Population statistics based on 2011 census.

Challenge for the parties

Labour - We found 41 Labour-held seats where Jeremy Corbyn's party desperately need to hold BME support to retain the seat. The BME electorate was larger than the majority in 34 of those seats.

14 of these are in the Midlands, mainly in Birmingham, and 15 are in the North, including areas that voted Brexit. Just 14 of those seats are in London, where the BME vote has historically been strongest and most resilient for Labour. These include Ealing Central and Acton, Brentford and Isleworth, Hampstead and Kilburn, Harrow West, and Enfield North in the capital. Despite those constituencies being in the capital they are nevertheless vulnerable to a Conservative win. If Labour can keep hold of them this will be valuable evidence Labour is holding the BME vote, at least in London.

Historically BME voters have been arguably the most loyal section of the electorate towards Labour. Jeremy Corbyn will be hoping this continues. Especially after seeing support plummet in Scotland and Brexit-leaning working class towns.

It is worth noting that Labour were performing less well among BME groups before Corbyn became leader. The 2015 *Power of the Black Vote* report identified 60 marginal seats where Labour were in second place and the BME population was larger than the majority of the Conservative incumbent. Labour failed to win 51 of those seats under Ed Miliband's leadership, indicating that Labour did not inspire and mobilise BME voters enough in 2015, including in smaller towns and suburbs. Labour cannot afford to lose their share of the BME vote in any of more marginal seats.

Conservatives - the Tories could potentially lose up to 34 seats where the BME vote is larger than the majority of the sitting MP. One third of these seats are in the South, with seven in the North. The party are defending six seats in London and it is possible that Labour could make inroads here, particularly Croydon Central and Harrow West, where Conservative supporting families of Indian origin has been a feature of electoral politics in the area for some time. Sutton and Cheam, and Hendon, are other London seats where the BME vote will matter greatly.



45 marginal seats with a significant BME population by party & closest challenger

Constituency	Majority of sitting MP % of Electorate	BME Population % of Electorate	Main Challenger
Derby North (Con)	0.09	13.34	Lab
City of Chester (Lab)	0.18	4.15	Con
Croydon Central (Con)	0.31	38.58	Lab
Ealing Central & Acton (Lab)	0.54	36.31	Con
Brentford & Isleworth (Lab)	0.81	42.25	Con
Bury North (Con)	0.84	11.90	Lab
Morley & Outwood (Con)	0.87	4.63	Lab
Halifax (Lab)	0.98	17.33	Con
Thurrock (Con)	1.08	17.50	Lab
Plymouth Sutton (Con)	1.09	6.12	Lab
Cambridge (Lab)	1.16	17.42	LibDm
Ilford North (Lab)	1.20	47.78	Con
Eastbourne (Con)	1.39	5.68	LibDm
Newcastle-under-Lyme (Lab)	1.51	6.22	Con
Brighton Kemptown (Con)	1.52	9.56	Lab
Bolton West (Con)	1.65	6.86	Lab
Telford (Con)	1.80	6.51	Lab
Wolverhampton SW (Lab)	1.99	35.51	Con
Hampstead and Kilburn (Lab)	2.11	34.48	Con
Enfield North (Lab)	2.35	32.49	Con
Hove (Lab)	2.37	10.79	Con
Bedford (Con)	2.38	25.57	Lab
Dewsbury (Lab)	2.71	21.62	Con
Carshalton & Wal'n (LibDm)	3.17	21.41	Con
Twickenham (Con)	3.25	14.33	LibDm
Peterborough (Con)	4.09	22.55	Lab
Cardiff North (Con)	4.18	9.12	Lab
Sheffield Hallam (LibDem)	4.24	7.70	Lab
Harrow West (Lab)	4.74	59.85	Con
Kingston & Surbiton (Con)	4.78	25.07	LibDm
Westminster North (Lab)	5.00	43.70	Con
Southampton Itchen (Con)	5.18	9.20	Lab
Walsall North (Lab)	5.25	13.72	Con
Tooting (Lab)	5.31	34.10	Con
Birmingham Northfield (Lab)	5.91	14.16	Con
Keighley (Con)	6.22	16.39	Lab
Eltham (Lab)	6.24	23.42	Con
Birmingham Edgbaston (Lab)	6.55	31.33	Con
Coventry South (Lab)	7.30	26.60	Con
Hendon (Con)	7.50	45.10	Lab
Sutton and Cheam (Con)	7.86	21.40	LibDm
Burnley (Lab)	8.16	12.64	LibDm
Bristol West (Lab)	8.83	25.48	LibDm
Harrow East (Con)	9.71	60.76	Lab
Enfield Southgate (Con)	10.38	30.04	Lab

Statistics from ONS for England and Wales. Majorities of MPs at the 2015 general election. Population statistics based on 2011 census.

Other marginal Tory seats with a high BME population that are vulnerable to a Labour win include Derby North, and Thurrock on the Thames estuary. A high proportion (ten) of the 34 seats are in the South of England, including Brighton, Eastbourne, Southampton and Ipswich. Many of these are likely to be heavily targeted.

There are a further 20 Conservative-held seats where the BME population is less than the majority but still a significant influence on the result. These include seats like Cheadle, Gloucester, Nuneaton, Loughborough, Dudley South, Solihull and Worcester. In all but four of these 54 Conservative-held marginal seats with large BME populations Labour is the main challenger. The four remaining seats are all targeted by the Lib Dems (Twickenham, Kingston and Surbiton, Sutton and Cheam and Eastbourne).

The *Power of the Black Vote* report ahead of the 2015 general election identified 50 Labour-held marginal seats where the Conservatives were the main challengers and the seat had a BME electorate larger than the majority. Of those 50 seats the Conservatives won just seven, including Bolton West, Derby North and Southampton Itchen. This suggests that the Conservatives did not win over a significant slice of the BME vote from Labour. There was undoubtedly movement in the Conservatives direction but it was moderate.

Lib Dems - Under Nick Clegg the Lib Dems lost all their marginal seats with a large BME electorate in 2015 but will be aiming to win back seats like Solihull this time around. To manage this they will need to win over BME voters. Watford, with a large Asian population, is another target they aim to snatch from the Conservatives and will need BME votes to achieve that. However, previous targets in Streatham and Brent Central look a step too far for the Lib Dems in 2017, even with a positive BME swing.

The Lib Dems only have nine seats and of these just one – Richmond Park – has a BME population that is significant in comparison to the Lib Dem majority. Seats with notable BME populations they aim to win back include Southwark and Old Bermondsey, Eastbourne, Sutton and Cheam, Burnley, Brent Central, Hornsey and Wood Green, Birmingham Yardley, Carshalton and Wallington, and Twickenham. Tim Farron's party's success here may depend to an extent on their appeal to BME communities, an area which has historically been a difficult area for them.



Where is the Black vote?

The seats where the BME vote is larger than the majority of the sitting MP are spread across several regions including London (18), the West Midlands (15), Yorkshire and the North-East, the South East and East Anglia (14 each).

Regions with the least less marginal seats in comparison to the BME population are the East Midlands (six), Wales, and the South West (four each) Scotland, which was not part of this study, has two.

There are 27 seats where the non-white population is larger than the white population (BME majority seats). Of these two are clear marginals – Harrow West and Harrow East - and one is moderate marginal (Slough). The other seats are reasonably safe for Labour, although Feltham and Heston, Ilford North and Leicester South will concern Labour.

Seats with the largest Asian populations

There are six seats where the Asian population is over 50 percent of the constituency - Leicester East, Ilford South, Bradford West, East Ham, Brent North and Ealing Southall. Only one of these can be reasonably called a marginal, Bradford West. This previously safe Labour seat was held by Respect between 2012 and 2015. The subsequent decline of Respect may return this to a Labour stronghold again.

Harrow West and Harrow East are both marginals with very large Asian populations (42 percent and 45 percent respectively). One is Labour, the other is Conservative. Other seats where there is an Asian population large enough to have a significant impact include Brentford and Isleworth, Hendon - both in the capital - and Dewsbury in Yorkshire.

The Indian population is larger than 15 percent in 15 seats, including eight marginals. The Pakistani vote are larger than 15 percent of the population in 11 seats, including three marginals (Pendle, Bradford West and Slough).

Only one of the top 14 seats with large Pakistani populations is in London (Ilford South) with the remainder in in Birmingham, the North-West (four each), Bradford and Luton (two each). Only two seats have Bangladeshi populations larger than 15 percent, the Tower Hamlets seats of Bethnal Green and Bow, and Poplar and Limehouse. Both are fairly safe for Labour.

25 seats with largest Asian populations (marginals bold)

Constituency	Asian Population % of Electorate
Leicester East	58
Ilford South	57
Bradford West	54
East Ham	54
Brent North	53
Ealing Southall	51
Birmingham Hodge Hill	50
Birmingham Hall Green	49
Harrow East	46
Harrow West	43
Poplar and Limehouse	42
Feltham and Heston	41
Birmingham Ladywood	40
Slough	40
Bethnal Green and Bow	40
Bradford East	39
Birmingham Perry Barr	39
Blackburn	38
Leicester South	37
Hayes and Harlington	36
West Ham	34
Ilford North	33
Walsall South	31
Luton South	29
Manchester Gorton	29

25 seats with largest Black populations (marginals bold)

Constituency	Black Population % of Electorate
Camberwell & Peckham	37
Croydon North	32
Lewisham Deptford	29
Edmonton	27
Hackney S & Shoreditch	27
Tottenham	27
Lewisham East	26
Erith and Thamesmead	26
Brent Central	26
Dulwich & West Norwood	25
Vauxhall	25
Streatham	24
West Ham	23
Birmingham Ladywood	23
Lewisham W & Penge	23
Barking	20
Bermondsey & Old S'wk	20
Greenwich & Woolwich	20
Hackney N & Stoke New'tn	20
Walthamstow	19
Croydon Central	18
Mitcham and Morden	18
Leyton and Wanstead	17
East Ham	16
Enfield North	15



Seats with largest Black populations

There are 27 seats where the Black African and Caribbean population is larger than 15 percent of the constituency population. 26 of those are in London, with one in Birmingham. Only five of these constituencies can be considered marginal, which indicates that Black communities are more likely to be concentrated in safe Labour seats.

The exceptions are Labour-held marginals of Bermondsey and Old Shoreditch (targeted by the Lib Dems), Dagenham and Rainham, and Enfield North, which are all swing seats. Black communities (African and Caribbean) are also a major force in the Conservative-held seat of Croydon Central, targeted by Labour.

However there are a further eight marginal seats where Black electors have a significant population (10 - 15 percent) and where they can still have a significant influence. These are Battersea, Tooting, Hendon, Hammersmith, Bristol West, Hayes and Harlington, Hornsey and Wood Green, Birmingham Erdington, and Hampstead and Kilburn).

Of the 16 seats where Africans are more than 10 percent of the population, just two are marginals (Bermondsey and Old Southwark, and Dagenham and Rainham). Caribbeans are more evenly and thinly distributed as a community, with just five seats having a Caribbean population in excess of 10 percent, however they are all safe Labour seats at the moment.

There are a further 19 seats where Caribbeans are larger than five percent of the population, but just two are marginals – Croydon Central and Birmingham Erdington.

25 seats with largest BME populations (marginals bold)

Constituency	Non-white Population % of Electorate
East Ham	77
Ilford South	76
Brent North	74
Birmingham Ladywood	73
Ealing Southall	70
Leicester East	68
West Ham	65
Croydon North	65
Birmingham Hall Green	64
Birmingham Hodge Hill	64
Bradford West	63
Brent Central	61
Harrow East	61
Birmingham Perry Barr	60
Harrow West	60
Hayes and Harlington	57
Poplar and Limehouse	56
Camberwell and Peckham	55
Feltham and Heston	55
Slough	55
Walthamstow	53
Bethnal Green and Bow	53
Edmonton	53
Leyton and Wanstead	51
Leicester South	51
Ealing North	50
Lewisham Deptford	50

BME populations of selected seats today (2011 census) compared to BME population in 1987 in the four seats when Diane Abbott, Keith Vaz, Paul Boateng and the late Bernie Grant were first elected

Brent South (1987)	46
Hammersmith (2011)	38
Tottenham (1987)	37
West Bromwich E (2011)	32
Hackney North & StN (1987)	31
Chingford & Woodford (2011)	27
Leicester East (1987)	26