The Left and Minority Representation: The Labour Party, Muslim Candidates, and Inclusion Tradeoffs

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Abstract

As ethnic diversity rises across Europe, the Left faces a trade-off between incorporating new minorities while retaining support from settled, working-class voters. Focusing on the Labour Party's selection of Muslims and employing a dataset containing over 42,000 local election candidates in England, this article argues that inclusion is less likely where core voters are most concerned about the representation of Muslims' material and religious interests: economically deprived areas with sizable Muslim populations. It shows that in these areas Muslim candidates underperform at the polls and Labour Parties are less likely to choose Muslim candidates here as a result. Selection thus varies based on the economic and cultural threats that Muslim representation poses to the Left's core constituency. These findings contribute to our understanding of the forces that shape ethnic minority political incorporation across contexts.

In his analysis of the European Left's fortunes at the polls, Labour MP David Miliband identified left parties' too cozy relationship with immigrants as one of the reasons for a spate of recent electoral defeats. He argued that working class voters have abandoned social democratic parties because they "find immigration to be a very big issue on which the centre-left is suspect at best and guilty at worst."[1] Though Labour and the European Left more generally have built coalitions that go beyond the working class, center-left parties have had to consider whether their stance toward immigrants endangers their position among this set of core voters. At the same time, the Left has been careful not to alienate growing minority electorates that can provide coveted votes in key races. Labour learned this lesson in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, when Muslim support for the party dropped significantly.

Indeed, the tradeoff between including immigrant-origin minorities on the one hand while holding on to existing constituencies on the other is especially pronounced when it comes to Muslims, the subject of this article.[2] In many European countries, Muslims tend to be of relatively lower socioeconomic status (see below), a position that can pit them against other low-income voters – traditionally core supporters of the Left – in the competition over material resources. Further, fierce debates about Muslims' ability to fit into European societies have helped stoke anti-Muslim prejudice.[3] To the extent that voters who harbor such prejudice disproportionately belong to the working class, this development further complicates the Left's outreach to an expanding Muslim electorate.

Yet, incorporating Muslims in electoral politics also provides opportunities, especially in local races. Immigrant voters and candidates, including those of Muslim faith, disproportionately identify with parties on the left.[4] From Antwerp to Rotterdam to Birmingham, Muslim candidates have become central figures in rallying support for center-left parties.

In light of these competing pressures, under what conditions does the Left include Muslims in its electoral coalition? Specifically, how does the Labour Party include Muslims as candidates? To answer these questions, I focus on the selection of Muslim Labour candidates in English local elections. I have put together an original dataset of municipal elections that covers over 42,000 candidate-level observations in 68 municipalities between 2002 and 2010. At the time of the 2001 census, 1.5 million Muslims lived in England, representing 3.1 percent of the population and making Islam the country's second largest religion. Many hail from former colonies (especially the subcontinent) and have been able to stand for election early on. The majority have done so within the Labour Party. Though Muslim office-seekers have had some success in entering local races, they have also encountered barriers.[5]

What accounts for this variation? To explain the selection and election of immigrant-origin candidates, existing research has focused on political institutions and on group characteristics. Electoral rules, party systems, and citizenship regimes are among some of the macro-level variables comprising the opportunity structure that immigrant candidates confront. At the group level, the capacity of voters to rally behind co-ethnic candidates and their size and spatial concentration in turn influence the extent to which immigrants can penetrate these structures.[6]

Notwithstanding the importance of these two sets of forces, this article argues that when evaluating the tradeoffs faced by political parties considering whether to field minority candidates one needs to also take into account under what conditions parties' existing constituents are likely to oppose the inclusion of minority candidates. If core voters fear that the inclusion of minority candidates leads to the implementation of disliked policies, they will be less likely to cast ballots for such candidates. Anticipating this behavior, parties should calibrate their selection strategies based on the perceived losses and gains of minority inclusion.[7]

Based on these assumptions, I argue that left parties are less likely to include Muslim candidates in areas with sizable Muslim populations that are economically deprived. As localities face increasing economic pressures, core supporters of the Left may find themselves in competition over scarce resources with Muslims. Further, economically deprived areas contain large shares of low-skilled voters who are more likely to be prejudiced against Muslims and the accommodation of Muslims' religious needs.[8] Left parties therefore anticipate the greatest backlash against the recruitment of Muslim candidates in poorer areas that are home to substantial Muslim populations and are less likely to nominate Muslims in such areas as a result.

This is especially so in contexts where the election of Muslim candidates is associated with the allocation of targeted economic and religious goods that benefit Muslim communities, but that some core supporters of the Left resist. As the Muslim population in economically deprived areas rises, low-income non-Muslim voters fear that the representation of Muslim interests will lead to large shifts in the allocation of material resources and to significant expansions of the public visibility of Islamic practice. By contrast, in poor areas that contain few Muslims, the substantive representation of Muslim needs is less threatening: The election of Muslims will not lead to considerable changes in the distribution of goods or to substantial increases in Muslims' religious presence. *In brief, as areas with large concentrations of Muslims become economically deprived, economic and cultural threats lower the chances of Muslim candidate selection.*

This article advances the study of minority representation more generally and scholarship on selection – the first step in this process – in particular. Though "Candidate nomination…is a

crucial stage in the process of political representation…[it] is largely under-researched in the comparative study of ethnic minority representation."[9] Existing research has addressed the election of immigrant-origin candidates but we know much less about what shapes their entry into electoral politics in the first place.[10] This neglect is partly due to data limitations as researchers can usually only examine elected candidates. To investigate selection, the dataset I have created includes all competing candidates, thereby allowing us to gain insights into recruitment outcomes.

Further, in demonstrating how constituency characteristics interact with minority group characteristics to shape selection strategies, this article improves our understanding of the processes driving ethnic minority representation. Holding macro-level variables constant, it emerges that local threat contexts play an important and systematic role in conditioning inclusion outcomes.

Lastly, examining the political inclusion of England's – and Europe's – largest and fastest growing ethno-religious minority by the Labour Party the article sheds light on how the Left is responding to one of the major forces reshaping European electoral cleavages today.[11] At the local level, where conflicts over economic resources and religious accommodation tend to manifest themselves first and more immediately than they do at the national stage, local elites appear to have already internalized David Miliband's plea to ensure that minority incorporation does not come at the expense of the native working class. Here, inclusion strategies reflect the tradeoffs that emerge when inter-ethnic differences threaten intra-class cohesion.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. I first illustrate that the accommodation of Muslims' economic and religious needs can arouse resistance among the majority population, and especially among those with few skills and low incomes. Focusing on English localities, I provide evidence that ethnicity plays a role in how government-provided resources are distributed and, further, that the election of Muslim candidates has produced policy gains for Muslims in both the economic and religious realms. The next section considers the implications of these patterns for the Left's selection strategies. I discuss why voters may consider candidate religion and how the importance of candidates' faith in determining vote choice – and in turn party selection strategies – should vary based on the interaction of economic deprivation and Muslim population size. I then provide aggregate-level results that are consistent with the microlevel assumptions of voter behavior: As economic deprivation rises in areas with sizable Muslim populations, Muslim Labour candidates perform less well than do non-Muslim Labour candidates running in the same ward.[12] I next demonstrate that Labour selectors[13] are less likely to field Muslim candidates in wards where economic deprivation and Muslim concentration are high, controlling for a host of institutional, electoral, and demographic variables. It is only in the rare instances when the Muslim electorate is large enough to influence selection outcomes as party members and election outcomes as voters that the economic conditions of local constituencies fade in importance. Lastly, I consider a set of alternative mechanisms. I argue that the observed patterns are not due to lower levels in the supply of Muslim candidates or to depressed turnout rates in poor areas. Comparing Muslim with Hindu selection I further contend that resistance to inclusion is based on the threat potential of a given minority group rather than on ethnic difference per se.

A final note before proceeding: I follow common practice[14] and consider religion to be an ethnic identity category. British Muslims of course identify with additional categories, such as region of origin. In recent years, however, Muslim voters as well as councilors have tended to prioritize their religious identity over others.[15]

Muslim Economic and Religious Needs and Electoral Politics

Economic Goods

Muslims in Western Europe are, on average, less economically advantaged than the majority population. Many arrived as guest workers or postcolonial migrants, employed in low-skill, manual jobs that disappeared as countries deindustrialized. Additionally, many Muslims are refugees, a group that often faces steep barriers to labor market integration. Discrimination against Muslims on the labor market provides another hurdle to economic integration.[16]

Using national origin as a proxy for religion (as most statistical agencies do not collect data by religion), it is apparent that Muslim unemployment rates are substantially higher than those of non-Muslim populations. In the Netherlands in 2009 those originating from Turkey and Morocco registered unemployment rates of 10.0 and 12.3 percent, respectively, while less than four percent of the native Dutch were unemployed. As a result, these groups are also much more likely than natives to receive social assistance.[17] In Denmark, Turks and Iraqis are four and six times more likely, respectively, to be unemployed than is the overall population.[18] A similar picture of disadvantage emerges in Great Britain where Muslims exhibit the lowest activity rate, the highest unemployment rate, and the lowest earnings among all religious groups.[19]

This unfavorable economic position has political implications. Political parties, especially on the far-right, have argued that Muslims undermine the sustainability of national welfare states and are a threat to local services. Local left parties who deliver economic goods to Muslim constituents are therefore often at pains not to publicize such actions, while their opponents do not shy away from making the Left's incorporation of these groups' economic needs an election issue. When allocating resources to heavily Muslim neighborhoods, France's Socialist Party has therefore avoided "mentioning the ethnic or religious background of the target populations."[20]

In Britain, tensions over the allocation of resources to Muslim neighborhoods have also built up in some locales. Despite the strong role of central government in defining the powers of local authorities, the latter exercise a considerable degree of control over the ways in which goods and services are allocated.[21] Municipalities' main job is the delivery of public services, and ethnicity has been shown to play a role in how these are delivered, sometimes benefiting whites, other times ethnic minorities. Public housing, for example, remains a valued resource that local councils control. Within broad guidelines, local authorities can identify groups to receive preferential treatment, and some have been found to prioritize or marginalize groups on the basis of their ethnicity. The ethnicity of recipients has also been a factor in how government dispenses regeneration funds, which are intended for deprived neighborhoods more generally.[22]

Muslims' presence in city hall has thus had consequences for the allocation of resources. For instance, when Labour politicians of Bangladeshi origin in Tower Hamlets (East London) successfully lobbied the council to improve Bangladeshis' access to public housing and social services native constituents who feared losing out in the competition for scarce goods reacted with a fierce backlash.[23] Accounts of favoritism by Muslim officials – though also based on perception rather than hard facts – abound elsewhere. In Bradford, a northern city with a large Kashmiri-origin Muslim population that has representation in city hall, a government-sponsored report concluded that "white people feel that their needs are neglected because they regard the minority ethnic communities as being prioritised for more favourable public assistance; some people assert that the Muslims…get everything at their expense."[24] In Trafford and Rochdale (Greater Manchester area), some whites have accused the local government, which has included Muslim councilors, of lavishing Muslims with

resources while ignoring the economic needs of whites. Due to their "special link with the providers of public funds" Muslims were seen to receive preferential treatment in the disbursement of neighborhood regeneration monies, access to public employment, or assistance in starting local businesses.[25]

The British National Party (BNP) has capitalized on these patterns of competition. It claimed that Muslims in Oldham received "nearly *five times as much* as white people" in home improvement grants disbursed by the local council.[26] One should not trust the BNP's accounting. Yet, given these resource conflicts, it is not surprising that the party scores well among working class whites living in disadvantaged areas with sizable Muslim populations – traditional strongholds of the Labour Party.[27]

Religious Goods

The accommodation of Muslim religious needs also has the potential to cause controversy and electoral backlash. The building of mosques, the allocation of burial grounds, the provision of religious education or halal meat in schools, comprise some of the issues that local authorities have to tackle. As Bowen notes, "The very existence of Islamic institutions…requires at least tacit approval from local officials, and at any time can become elements in local electoral political battles."[28] A Muslim politician in Marseille put matters more bluntly: "[T]o decide to build the largest mosque in France in the second-largest city in France, well, you lose a big part of the vote. People here want invisible Islam."[29]

City councils thus tread carefully when negotiating issues relating to the public expression of Islam. In Amsterdam a Labour Party borough leader vetoed the construction of a mosque, expressing fears that the building would lead to "Turkish domination of the neighborhood."[30] In the late 1980s, a mayor in the French town of Charvieu-Chavagneux bulldozed buildings that Muslims had used for prayer, while in other cities plans to build mosques were put on hold in the face of far-right mobilization.[31] Local parties in England have similarly approached issues of Islamic religious incorporation with caution. In Birmingham, the Labour-led council cited the "strength of local opinion" as one of the main reasons for turning down Muslims' request to broadcast the call to prayer (*azan*).[32]

Reservations about Muslims' public religious presence are highest among those of low socioeconomic status – a voting bloc that has traditionally been allied with Labour. When the 2008 British Social Attitudes Survey asked about the construction of a mosque in one's neighborhood, low-skilled Britons (who constitute 36 percent of Labour supporters in the survey) expressed the most intense opposition. Likewise, individuals with below-median incomes (52 percent of Labour's supporters) are most hostile. Similarly, respondents with lower incomes and skill levels are significantly less likely to state that they feel favorable towards Muslims (these relationships generally hold when additional controls are included; for regression results see the online appendix).[33] These figures have to be treated with a bit of caution, as the more educated may answer in more socially acceptable ways. Yet, at a minimum, they reveal that a core constituency of the Left expresses hostile attitudes toward Muslims and the accommodation of Islam, a pattern that others have documented as well.[34]

These preferences are in turn likely to influence Labour's strategies of electoral inclusion, especially since the election of Muslim candidates often leads to an expansion in the public presence of Islam. In Bradford, for instance, the Muslim community has produced a number of councilors who have effectively campaigned for the provision of religious goods.[35] In Birmingham, getting "a few more Muslim councillors involved" also aided Muslims in their efforts to develop facilities for their communities.[36] Tatari similarly finds that as the share of Muslim councilors in London boroughs rises, so does the number of cemeteries that accommodate Muslim burials; of Islamic schools; of officially licensed mosques; and the

amount of grant money allocated to Muslim organizations.[37] *In short, in the case of English Muslims, descriptive representation is often followed by substantive representation, in both the economic and the religious realms.*

Implications for Electoral Inclusion: Ethnic Voting and The Selection of Muslim Candidates by the Labour Party

In English local elections, local party leaders as well as ward party members are involved in selecting candidates. In the case of the Labour Party, the national party formulates general procedural guidelines, but is rarely involved in the nomination and selection process, which is carried out by Local Government Committees. Once the latter approve nominations, ward parties vote on who will compete. Local party leaders thus act as initial gatekeepers. Selected candidates then run in single-member or multimember wards according to plurality rule.[38] Though this article's main goal is to investigate selection strategies, below I briefly explain why candidate religion may matter to voters, thereby influencing selection decisions.

Voters and Candidate Religion

Given the backlash that the representation of Muslims interests can trigger among traditional allies of the Left, the inclusion of Muslim candidates can be electorally costly. Fielding ethnic minority candidates is a highly visible sign that minority interests may be represented. Parties in turn base their selection strategies in part on expectations of voter behavior. Among voters, ethnicity can serve as a cue about a candidate's likely behavior once in office.[39] If the ethnic background of a candidate is easily observed and if voters expect that it helps predict their policies, ethnicity may function as a shortcut that facilitates decision-making in low-information elections. Further, when preferences are known to be shared within but not across groups, and elected candidates will represent the interests of their groups, ethnicity can help determine voting behavior.[40]

Applied to Muslim candidates standing in English local elections, these accounts are relevant for two broad reasons. First, the religious identity of Muslim candidates is relatively easily observed via features such as candidates' names and their physical appearance. Three quarters of England's Muslims are of Asian origin, the majority of whom trace their roots to the subcontinent (only 12 percent identify as white). Muslims are thus physically distinct from the majority population. Also, the names of Muslim candidates appearing on ballots (and thus serving as information to voters) tend to be of non-English origin and often denote an Islamic background.[41] Second, as stated earlier, ethnicity can be relevant in the distribution of economic and religious goods that local officials help allocate.

Voter Behavior and Party Selection Strategies across Constituencies

If non-Muslim voters take candidate religion into account, the importance of candidates' religious background in influencing vote choice and party selection strategies should vary across wards. Specifically, I argue that resistance to voting for Muslim candidates should rise as areas with sizable Muslim populations become more economically deprived. Anticipating this behavior, Labour Parties will be less likely to field Muslim candidates in these areas.

Two mechanisms – one economic, one cultural – underlie this proposition. First, non-Muslim voters may fear that the election of Muslims will lead to resource shifts towards the Muslim electorate. These voters will therefore be especially hesitant to support Muslim office-seekers where resources are scarce *and* where the Muslim electorate is sufficiently sizable for changes in goods allocations along ethnic lines to make a difference.

Second, voters with relatively lower incomes and education levels are more likely to oppose the expansion of Islam in the public sphere and to hold prejudicial views against Muslims. To the extent that the share of such voters rises with the economic deprivation of an area, a larger proportion of voters will object to the election of Muslims in these areas. Voters who are hostile to the practice of Islam in schools, mosques, or other public institutions may fear that the election of Muslim candidates will lead to an expansion of these practices as the local Muslim population and with it the need for religious accommodation rise. Though non-Muslim candidates may also accommodate Muslim interests, the low-information environment that typically characterizes local elections makes it difficult for voters to know ex ante how non-Muslim Labour candidates would behave with respect to the local Muslim constituency once elected.

I have argued that the interaction between a ward's level of economic deprivation and the size of its Muslim population influences selection. Note, however, that in wards with very large Muslim populations, Muslims tend to comprise a substantial part of the electorate and – due to relatively open ward membership rules and politically active Muslim voters – of the selectorate.[42] This implies that the interaction between economic deprivation and Muslim population size should become less significant in predicting selection patterns at very high levels of Muslim concentration when Muslims decisively influence selection and election outcomes.

Data

I test this argument using a dataset of English local elections in 68 municipalities between 2002 and 2010. Thirty-two local authorities comprise Greater London, and the remaining 36 are metropolitan districts which are located in regions throughout the country (Yorkshire and the Humber, the Northwest, the Northeast, and the West Midlands). Over 70 percent of England's Muslim population resides in these municipalities, which together contain 17.99 million residents of whom 1.13 million (6.28 percent) are Muslim. Across localities, the Muslim population share ranges from .17 to 36 percent (with a mean of 5.2 percent); across wards, it ranges from zero to 67.0 percent (with a mean of 5.2 percent). The data cover 312 city-level elections, 6,784 ward-level elections, 26,574 ward-party elections, and 42,650 candidates (see the appendix for more information).

To identify candidates' religion, I use their first and last names and employ software (Onomap) developed in the UK for this purpose (to do so, I entered first names of every candidate as election data typically only include last names).[43] This strategy has the advantage of making use of a wide range of years and of covering all candidates, winners and losers. By contrast, sending out questionnaires to inquire about the composition of city councils tends to allow researchers to only gather information from a given year, is often restricted to elected candidates, and is prone to reporting errors and variable response rates (which may be related to patterns of minority representation). Yet, the name-based approach is also subject to error as names may not always accurately reflect religious backgrounds. I therefore conducted several validity tests, which indicate that Onomap's coding of religious affiliation produces quite accurate results (see appendix).

Models and Results

Constituency Characteristics and Muslim Candidate Performance

This section shows that Muslim candidates perform less well as wards with sizable Muslim populations become more economically disadvantaged. These aggregate patterns do not reveal voters' motivations. However, they are consistent with the behavior of voters just outlined and, importantly, unlike individual voters' calculations, aggregate election

outcomes present the kind of more easily observed information that selectors actually draw on when considering how voters react to candidates' religious backgrounds.

Parties can get a sense of the electorate's willingness to vote for Muslim candidates by comparing the votes attained by Muslims with those collected by non-Muslims who run in the same multi-seat ward election on the same party ticket. In multi-member wards (typically three-member wards in the sample), voters have as many votes as there are seats, and they can allocate their votes across parties (but they cannot award candidates with more than one vote). In the case of pure partisan voting, candidates that run for the same party should obtain the same number of votes. If, however, candidates' religious backgrounds also play a role in determining vote choice, vote shares may diverge.

To explore how constituency characteristics influence how Muslim candidates' performance compares with that of their non-Muslim co-partisans, I created a variable, *Muslim Vote Proportion*, which divides the votes attained by Labour's top Muslim vote getter by the votes received by the party's non-Muslim top vote getter in the same ward election where more than one candidate (and typically three) compete (similar results obtain when I construct the variable using average vote shares, see appendix). Values below (above) one indicate that the Muslim candidate receives fewer (more) votes. The mean (median) value of *Muslim Vote Proportion* is .94 (.93), but the range is wide (.51 to 2.38): On average, Muslim candidates do collect fewer votes, though they may also significantly outperform non-Muslims. This relatively weaker showing has caused the party to lose seats; one in ten Muslim Labour candidates loses elections when at least one of their non-Muslim co-partisans wins.

Note that if selected Muslim candidates are more competent or deemed "more electable" than the population of all Muslim office-seekers because they actually manage to cross the selection hurdle, this observed electoral penalty might be lower compared to the penalty that selectorates anticipate when considering the average Muslim party member hoping to get on the ballot. Further, even though reasons in addition to candidate religion may cause voters to award Muslim candidates with fewer votes (e.g., perceived competence or party loyalty), selectors will find it more challenging to infer these less readily observable motivations from the gap in votes and may thus fall back on religion.

In the models that follow, the independent variable of interest is a ward's economic deprivation at different levels of the Muslim population. I operationalize economic deprivation with the Index of Multiple Deprivation. This index, measured every three years, is commonly used to describe the extent of material deprivation in small local areas and to identify disadvantaged localities. It measures several dimensions of deprivation (including in the areas of income, employment, housing, and services; see appendix) and takes into account the demand and the supply side: It incorporates population characteristics (e.g., income, employment, and education) as well as area-based scarcity (e.g., availability and condition of housing and education). The wards used in the analyses below represent the wide variation in deprivation experienced in the country as a whole (see appendix for summary statistics). Moreover, as I have assumed above, wards with high levels of economic deprivation contain a disproportionate number of less educated residents which in turn have been shown to be more opposed to the provision of Islamic goods (the census does not provide income measures).[44] Finally, as area-based economic deprivation rises, so does Muslim and overall economic disadvantage and, by implication, resource competition. It is not the case, however, that areas that are economically deprived generally have high Muslim population shares; deprivation is not a proxy for Muslim concentration.[45]

Do Muslim candidates perform worse as wards with sizable Muslim populations become more economically deprived? To answer this question, Table 1 presents OLS estimates broken down by Muslim population shares. Because OLS is a linear model, but the effect of deprivation should diminish at very high levels of Muslim population when Muslims have considerable impact on selection strategies as party members and as voters, results are split by the size of the Muslim population (the choice of thresholds does not affect the results; see appendix). I also present a model using the entire sample that interacts Muslim population shares with economic deprivation (see model I; the appendix shows that the interaction including *Sizable Muslim Population (10–30%)* is significant (at $p < .05$) for most of the observed values of *Economic Deprivation*). Since incumbent candidates may collect more votes, I control for whether or not the party runs a sitting councilor (and no Muslim incumbent). Region and year fixed effects are also included.

Table 1 demonstrates that economic deprivation reduces the votes attained by a Muslim candidate relative to his non-Muslim co-partisan, but only in areas with substantial (but not small or very large) Muslim populations (the differences in these effects are statistically significant at $p < .01$). Here, moving from minimum to maximum levels of deprivation decreases the *Muslim Vote Proportion* by about .16 points (a one standard deviation increase in deprivation results in a drop of .03). *Muslim candidates running in areas of Muslim concentration affected by economic deprivation suffer penalties at the polls*.

Economic Deprivation, Muslim Concentration and Selection Outcomes

This weaker performance of Muslim candidates, especially when it causes the loss of a seat, is not likely to go unnoticed by selectors who will adjust their selection strategies accordingly. To test the implications of this claim, the dependent variable in the subsequent models is a dummy indicating whether the Labour Party selects a Muslim candidate. The unit of analysis is the ward-election. In the sample, 11.5 percent of ward elections feature Muslim Labour candidates. The independent variable of interest is once again the percent of a ward's Muslim population interacted with economic deprivation.

I additionally include several controls. A higher *Number of Seats* has been linked to greater minority representation. When more than one seat is up for election, party leaders may be more willing to balance the slate, even if such an outreach alienates some voters.[46] Non-Muslim incumbency may also undermine the selection of Muslims. Party leaders are typically hesitant to replace sitting candidates, and this effect may be compounded when the aspiring candidate belongs to a minority group.[47] Controlling for incumbency serves another purpose as well: Economically deprived wards may also be the type of working-class wards where Labour is particularly entrenched. Without accounting for incumbency a connection between economic conditions and selection could therefore simply reflect Labour strongholds with machines that Muslim candidates find difficult to penetrate (there are no term limits). I measure incumbency with a dummy, indicating whether or not Labour ran a non-Muslim incumbent in the previous election. I also include whether other parties run incumbents. If minorities are treated as sacrificial lambs and placed on seats they have little chance of winning, the presence of a non-Labour incumbent should raise the chances of Muslim entry. Lastly, as selection calculations may not be constant across regions and elections[48], region and year fixed effects are included.

Table 2 presents Probit models with standard errors clustered at the ward (results are similar when using rare events logistic regression; see appendix). The demographic and economic characteristics of wards strongly influence the selection of Muslim candidates by local Labour Parties. *Economic Deprivation × % Muslim Population* has a negative effect: As the size of the Muslim population rises, increases in deprivation reduce the chances of Muslims getting on the ballot. Conversely, in areas where few Muslims reside and where Muslim

political empowerment is less likely to lead to substantial resource shifts or to a considerable expansion of Islam's public presence, local economic strains do not play a role in shaping selection.

Figure 1 (based on Model II) illustrates these patterns. It depicts the probabilities of Labour running a Muslim candidate as wards move from mean to minim and maximum levels of deprivation, grouped by the size of the Muslim population. When the local Muslim population is small, the economic context appears irrelevant.[49] By contrast, in wards where 15 percent of the population is Muslim, switching from minimum to maximum levels of deprivation makes it 20 percentage points less likely that Labour fields a Muslim candidate. For example, in a ward in Rochdale (Spotland and Falinge) where Muslims constitute 16 percent of the population and deprivation is high (in the 95th percentile) no Muslims have stood for Labour. In a nearby Manchester ward (Levenshulme) that contains the same share of Muslims but where economic disadvantage is much less pronounced (approximately two standard deviations lower), Labour fielded Muslim candidates in three elections. *The Left's electoral inclusion in areas with a significant Muslim presence is conditional on the economic environment and the electoral tradeoffs these areas generate.*

Figure 2 demonstrates similar patterns as well as the non-linearities discussed above. The top panel shows that the effect of economic scarcity is magnified as the Muslim population grows. However, once the Muslim population reaches 30 percent this trend begins to reverse.[50] In wards where the Muslim population is very large, it is able to influence selection outcomes and contextual conditions play much less of a role. This result is consistent with portrayals of Muslim local electoral behavior in boroughs across England.[51]

Electoral and institutional variables behave as expected. Muslim candidates find it easier to compete in elections as the number of seats rises, but they have less of a chance when non-Muslim incumbents ran in the previous election. Further, Labour Party selectorates are more willing to allocate less desirable seats to Muslim candidates: A Muslim office-seeker has a better shot when non-Labour incumbents are running.

In Model III I check for the robustness of these results. I add a variable measuring the extent to which the Muslim population is fractionalized along regional lines (using region of birth of the foreign-born Muslim population; see the appendix for this and other variables), as regional diversity could impede successful campaigns for office. I also include the size of the Muslim population at the authority level; Muslims living in municipalities with larger shares of co-religionists may draw on wider support networks and knowledge when seeking selection. Additionally, I control for the presence of the nonwhite population at the ward level. Other minorities could act as coalition partners, but they could also compete in vying for "minority seats." Further, highly educated voters may form part of a liberal coalition in favor of minority representation and more willing to support underrepresented groups.[52] I therefore add the percentage of highly skilled residents. These inclusions do not change the results, and the additional variables are not statistically significant.

Alternative Mechanisms: Supply, Turnout, and Ethnic Difference

I have argued that local Labour Parties will be less willing to select Muslim candidates in economically disadvantaged wards with sizable Muslim populations because it is here that Labour selectors expect the greatest opposition to Muslim inclusion. Is it possible, however, that the negative relationship between economic conditions and selection is due to reasons of supply?[53]

Existing evidence does not suggest that supply mechanisms are at work. When surveyed, a majority of local Labour candidates thought that recruitment efforts were a problem, while

only small minorities thought that ethnic minorities had attributes that were not conducive to a political career.[54] Even if it were true that few potential Muslim candidates emerged in deprived wards, parties cast a much wider net as candidates have to reside in the authority, but not in the ward. Only about one half to a third of all Labour candidates reside in the ward that elected them.[55]

Could it be the case that Muslims who decide to come forward in low-income areas are of lower quality and that more competent Muslims decide not to compete in these wards for fear of losing? To answer this question systematically we would need information on all Muslims who consider entering local races as well as those who end up running, data which are not available. However, local cases generally do not fit this pattern. Tower Hamlets, for example, is home to a large, economically disadvantaged Muslim population and is one of the country's most deprived authorities. Bangladeshis sought entry into the local Labour Party early on, but party leaders resisted these advances in the face of native opposition. It was only once Bangladeshi Muslims ran successful campaigns as independents and became ward party members that Labour opened its ranks to Muslim candidates. In other words, the candidates remained the same, but selection outcomes changed.[56] Analogous events unfolded in other cities with sizable Muslim populations of relatively lower socioeconomic status, including Bradford[57] and Birmingham.[58] Case studies are more likely to mention the competition for representation within Muslim communities among several aspiring politicians than they are to suggest that too few qualified Muslims were available to run.

If supply-side explanations are inadequate, perhaps the answer lies in the behavior of the Muslim electorate. Muslims living in deprived wards may be less likely to vote. Facing a politically disengaged electorate, selectors surmise that a Muslim candidate will not boost the co-ethnic vote here. Qualitative and quantitative evidence rules out this mechanism. Muslim electorates, including those living in deprived areas, often display high turnout rates, buttressed by the mobilizational capacity of ethnic networks.[59] Muslim voters with low incomes are no less likely to vote in local elections compared to their high-income counterparts.[60] *In short, it is doubtful that explanations stressing supply or turnout can account for the dampening effect of economic deprivation on Muslim electoral inclusion in areas of Muslim concentration.*

Lastly, is it possible that in poorer areas selectorates resist the entry of *any* minority group, regardless of the groups' economic standing or religious demands? To test for this possibility, I replicated the analysis focusing on the selection of Hindus (using the same name-based procedure to identify religious background).

The majority of Muslims and Hindus (68 and 85 percent, respectively) in England trace their origins to the subcontinent. They thus share similar skin colors and ethnic backgrounds, making it less likely that such features cause differences in electoral inclusion. Both groups began to arrive in large numbers in the 1960s, with male workers arriving first to be joined by families later.[61] Politically, they are strong supporters of Labour. In the sample, 66 percent of Muslims and 63 percent of Hindus run as Labour candidates, and both groups report above-average turnout rates in local elections.[62]

The two groups do vary considerably in the two features that importantly shape Labour's selection strategies: economic and religious needs. Muslims are almost three times more likely than Hindus to be unemployed; their labor market participation rate is close to twenty points lower than that of Hindus; and Muslim men's hourly wages are about two thirds those of Hindu males.[63] Even in wards where economic deprivation is high (above the sample average), Muslim economic need exceeds that of Hindus. In such wards, the Muslim unemployment rate is 17.9 percent compared to that of Hindus, which registers 7.2 percent.

In other words, where resource competition is likely to be high, Hindus do not pose a significant economic threat to poorer white voters. The allocation of goods to Hindus has thus not been politicized in recent years. Indeed, a BNP publication in Oldham specifically asked white residents to target Muslims with harassment, but to spare Hindus.[64] In another difference, the religious presence of Hindus has not given rise to the same degree of opposition as has that of Muslims.[65] Locally, the salience of Hindus' religious practice is also less pronounced: Mosques far outnumber Hindu temples, and there are about twice as many Hindus per temple as there are Muslims per mosque.[66]

According to the logic developed in this article, then, Labour selectors will not conjecture that Hindu candidates will alienate voters as economic deprivation rises. When I repeat the above analyses on a sample of Hindu candidates, this implication is born out (see the appendix for results). Regardless of the size of the Hindu population, economic deprivation does not influence selection. At the same time, results indicate that local Labour Parties still respond to electoral and institutional constraints: A larger district magnitude bodes well for Hindu candidates while non-Hindu Labour incumbency does not (though the effect of *Non-Labour Incumbent* is negative). It is thus not the case that Hindus encounter no hurdles when seeking to gain entry into electoral politics. Rather, specific group differences determine differences in the types of tradeoffs the Left anticipates – tradeoffs which in turn cause variation in the kind of barriers local Labour Parties put up when selecting candidates.

Conclusion

The results presented in this article show that minority groups face systematic obstacles when seeking access into the Labour Party. Examining the entry of Muslim candidates, this research advances scholarship on ethnic minority representation more broadly, which has tended to focus on election, rather than selection. Drawing on a new dataset, I have demonstrated that in constituencies where a large share of Labour's core support base is likely to feel threatened by Muslim political advances and the economic and religious gains these generate, Muslims find it difficult to gain entry into the Labour Party.

The present results are based on patterns found among thousands of wards and candidates. As such, they are able to highlight the interaction of economic and demographic features while controlling for a host of other factors that also influence selection outcomes. To complement the present findings, in-depth analyses of party behavior with respect to different minority groups and in several localities that vary along the economic and demographic dimensions emphasized here would complement the present findings by tracing out the motivations of party selectors and their assumptions about voter behavior. Furthermore, such research can look into the relative importance of religious versus economic threats. In preliminary investigations, I have gathered information on the number of large mosques in localities to examine whether selection dynamics differ where Islam has a visible public presence. However, this variable is highly correlated with the size of the Muslim population, making it difficult to pin down its effect. In fact, many quantitative indicators that may measure religious threat via the conservativeness of the Muslim population (e.g., the share of Muslim women in the labor force or fertility rates) can also be proxies for the economic status of Muslims. Given these limitations, more fine-grained qualitative research of several strategically chosen sites would reveal how and when different types of threat are at work, and how these might influence selection.

This article invites additional research about the Left's efforts at minority inclusion. For instance, scholars can investigate whether the inclusion strategies of other parties may shape the Left's outreach to minority candidates. Are center-left parties more likely to select minority candidates once these candidates have proven themselves to be competitive in

other parties?[67] Lastly, this article has focused on the potential backlash of low-income whites. As the Left has come to also rely increasingly on the votes of higher-income professionals, future research needs to examine how this constituency views the electoral inclusion of Muslims specifically and of ethnic minorities more generally.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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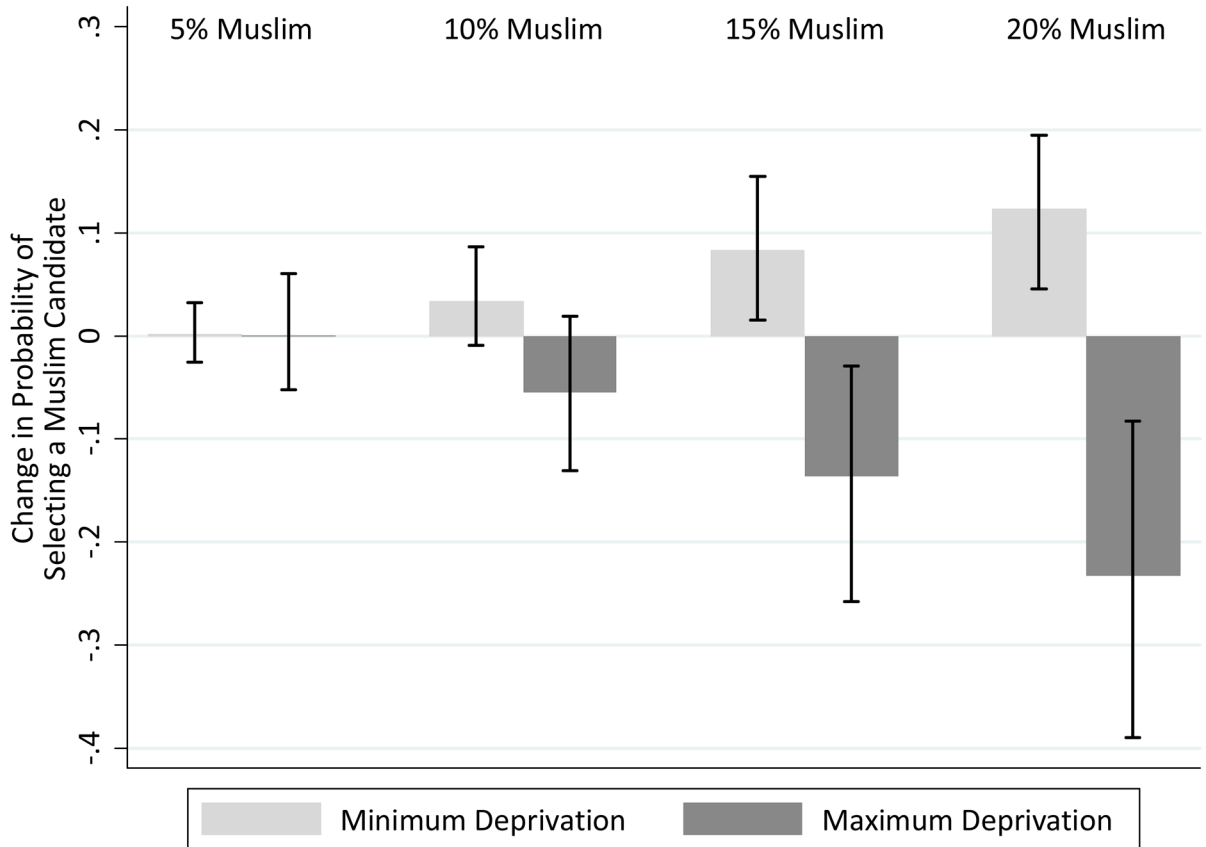
Figure 1.
Muslim Candidate Selection by Economic Deprivation and Muslim Population Size
Note: The bars show the magnitude of the effects and the vertical lines depict the 95 percent
confidence intervals surrounding these effects.
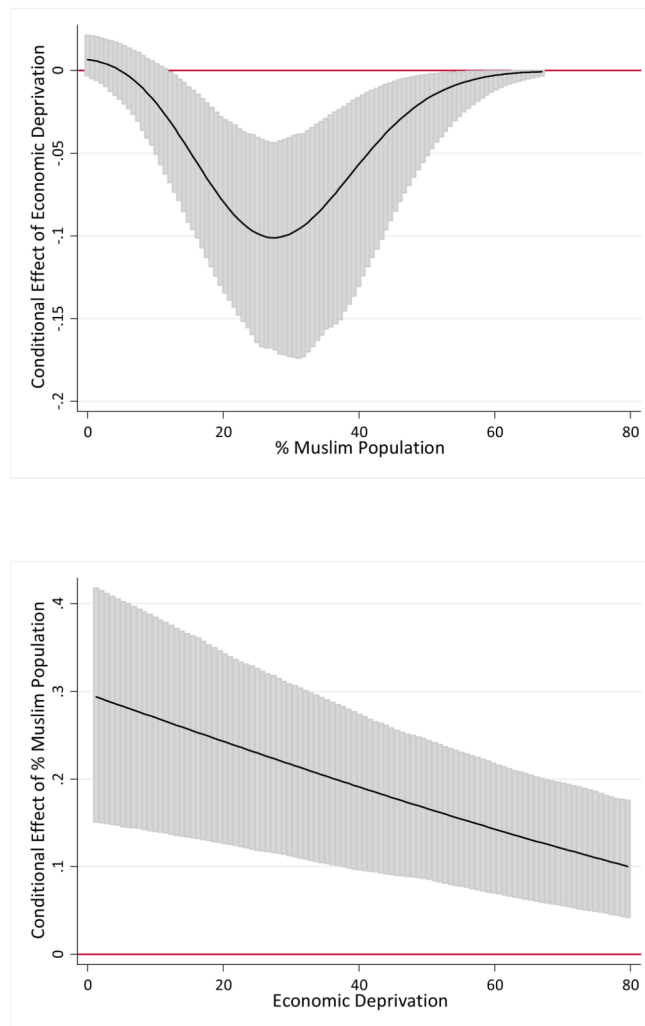
Figure 2.
Conditional Effects of Economic Deprivation and Muslim Population Size on the
Probability of Labour Selecting a Muslim Candidate
Note: The solid lines trace the conditional effects of a one standard deviation increase from
the mean in *Economic Deprivation* (upper panel) or in *% Muslim Population* (lower panel);
the shaded areas cover the 95 percent confidence intervals surrounding the effects.

Table 1

Performance of Top Muslim Candidates Compared to Top Non-Muslim Candidates

	I	II	III	IV
	Entire Sample	**By Muslim Population Size (%)**		
		<10	**10–30**	**>30**
Sizable Muslim Population (10–30%)	0.136^{***} (0.0286)			
Very Large Muslim Population (>30%)	0.160 (0.105)			
Sizable Muslim Population (10–30%) × Economic Deprivation	−0.00164 (0.000974)			
Very Large Muslim Population (>30%) × Economic Deprivation	0.00251 (0.00255)			
Economic Deprivation	−0.00164 (0.000974)	0.000653 (0.000594)	-0.00207^{**} (0.000628)	0.00370 (0.00235)
% Muslim Population		0.00836^{***} (0.00224)	0.00561^{***} (0.00128)	0.00589 (0.00583)
Non-Muslim Labour Incumbent	−0.0187 (0.0116)	−0.0104 (0.0131)	−0.0190 (0.0149)	−0.0765 (0.0618)
Constant	0.735^{**} (0.254)	1.125^{***} (0.0366)	0.991^{***} (0.0403)	0.367 (0.245)
Region Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	506	221	228	57
R^2	0.350	0.326	0.125	0.301

Note: The dependent variable is the *Muslim Vote Proportion*. This variable divides the votes attained by Labour's top Muslim vote getter by the number of votes received by the party's non-Muslim top vote getter in the same ward election. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors (clustered on the ward) in parentheses. *Economic Deprivation* in model III is significantly different from *Economic Deprivation* in model II (IV) at $p = .001$ ($p = .009$).

*
 $p<0.05$,

**
 $p<0.01$,

***
 $p<0.001$.

Table 2

Muslim Candidate Selection in the Labour Party

	I	II	III
% Muslim Population	0.107*** (0.0115)	0.112*** (0.0116)	0.0980*** (0.0138)
Economic Deprivation	0.00124 (0.00300)	0.00372 (0.00305)	0.00199 (0.00327)
Economic Deprivation × % Muslim Population	−0.000711** (0.000234)	−0.000789*** (0.000235)	−0.000712** (0.000236)
Number of Seats	0.499* (0.213)	0.521* (0.219)	0.503* (0.220)
Non-Muslim Labour Incumbent (previous election)	−0.433*** (0.0728)	−0.334*** (0.0789)	−0.348*** (0.0804)
Non-Labour Incumbent		0.267*** (0.0782)	0.290*** (0.0802)
Muslim Fractionalization			−0.512 (0.451)
% Muslim Population in City			0.00973 (0.00911)
% Nonwhite Population			0.00460 (0.00405)
% Highly Skilled Population			−0.00335 (0.00329)
Constant	−2.929*** (0.343)	−3.182*** (0.348)	−2.663*** (0.446)
Region Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4,504	4,494	4,494
Pseudo-R^2	0.350	0.354	0.357
Log-Likelihood	−1,045	−1,038	−1,033

Note: The dependent variable indicates whether the Labour Party runs (1) or does not run (0) a Muslim candidate. Probit coefficients with robust standard errors (clustered on the ward) in parentheses.

*
$p<0.05$,

**
$p<0.01$,

***
$p<0.001$.