



RUNNYMEDE TRUST: February 2012
Ethnic Minority British Election Study – Key Findings
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1. Introduction

This briefing summarises the key findings from the Ethnic Minority British Election Study (EMBES). We explain how Black and minority ethnic (BME) people voted, as well as their attitudes on key political questions. EMBES involved a team of researchers from Oxford, Manchester and Essex Universities carrying out a major survey of ethnic minorities' political attitudes and behaviour after the 2010 general election. This is the largest and most authoritative study of ethnic minority voting behaviour and political integration ever conducted in Britain. It focussed on the five main established minorities in Britain – those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African background. The fieldwork was carried out by TNS-BMRB and the study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

These briefing notes provide an introduction to some of the main findings to date. A full report will be published by Oxford University Press in 2013.

The key findings are:

- Black and minority ethnic people remain highly supportive of the Labour party, with 68% (two-thirds) voting Labour. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats – coalition partners in the current government – got only 16% and 14% of the BME vote respectively.
- Ethnic minorities are somewhat less likely than the White British to register to vote, but among those who are registered turnout rates are very similar to white British ones.
- They are also highly supportive of British democracy. BME people share the British norm of a duty to vote, and the great majority identify with Britain. Concerns about the commitment of minorities to British norms and values are misplaced.
- Nor do Muslims show in general any lack of commitment to Britain or any enthusiasm for extremist politics.
- However, there is worrying evidence that second-generation citizens of Black Caribbean heritage do not feel that the British political system has treated them fairly. Black Caribbeans, not Muslims, are the group who feel most alienated.
- Finally, a majority of BME people believe that there is still prejudice in the UK society, including nearly three-quarters of Black Caribbean people. Indeed, over a third (36%) of ethnic minorities report a *personal* experience of discrimination.

2. Background

There have been major academic surveys of the electorate conducted after every general election in Britain since 1964. This series of British Election Surveys (BES) is the longest-running academic social survey in Britain, and indeed one of the longest-running in the world. The BES has been an invaluable resource for charting patterns of political participation, vote choice, attitudes towards the political system, and confidence in government.

Since the BES is representative of the British electorate, it has always included some members of ethnic minority groups. However, the sample sizes in the main BES have never been sufficient for detailed analysis of the voting behaviour and political integration of ethnic minorities. There are several reasons for needing a detailed analysis:

- Ethnic minorities now make up around 8% of the electorate;
- They are distinctive in their patterns of party support, showing much greater support for Labour than any other social group;
- But there have been concerns about the extent to which some minority groups, especially Black Caribbeans and Black Africans, actually participate in the political process, and whether this is due to processes of social and political exclusion.
- There have also been concerns as to whether minority political concerns and priorities are adequately incorporated into the mainstream political agenda or whether their concerns are marginalized and excluded from consideration. A just and well-functioning democracy requires that all citizens have fair access to the political arena.
- Finally there are concerns that if groups feel that they are disenfranchised and their voices are unheard, they may either withdraw from the political arena or turn to alternative unconventional forms of protest.

The study was conducted over the three months following the 2010 general election and includes representative samples of people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African background, and is one of the most ambitious and comprehensive studies of ethnic minority political attitudes and behaviour ever conducted anywhere in the world.

The aim of the survey was, first, to describe patterns of ethnic minority registration, turnout, partisanship and vote choice, and political engagement more generally, and to assess levels of satisfaction with and trust in British democracy and subjective feelings of British identity. Second, the study aims to determine whether the 'drivers' of minority political attitudes and behaviour are the same as those found among the white British majority group, or whether there are ethnic-specific factors (such as their experiences of discrimination and relative deprivation, or their degree of 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital) that must be considered too.

The findings from the study will be of relevance not only to political parties and commentators concerned with party prospects for electoral success but also with issues of fairness and social exclusion and with current debates over the success or otherwise of multiculturalism.

3. Voting behaviour

The headline figure of the research is that 68% of BME voters supported Labour in 2010, compared with 16% voting Conservative and 14% Liberal Democrat. However, levels of support for Labour were well down on 2005 levels, reflecting the general swing away from Labour. In other words, minorities are not a bloc vote that automatically supports Labour irrespective of Labour's performance. Indeed, ethnic minority voters are concerned with issues of performance in much the same way as are the White British.

There were however some differences between ethnic minorities – Black African and Black Caribbean voters were much more strongly supportive of Labour than were other minorities, while some South Asian groups were markedly less supportive. In particular, Indian Hindus' support for Labour was quite close to the overall White British level, although Indian Sikhs were still very supportive of Labour.

As Table 1 indicates, the various ethnic minority groups also expressed different support for parties other than Labour. While Indians and Bangladeshis were twice as likely to support the Conservatives as the Liberal Democrats, Black voters split roughly equally (and in much smaller numbers) between the two coalition parties, while Pakistanis were unique in being twice as likely to vote for the Liberal Democrats compared to the Conservative Party. Compared to White British voters, very few (2%) supported smaller parties.

Table 1: Percentage Reported Vote shares for Different Ethnic Groups in the 2010 UK General Election

	<i>White</i>	<i>All Ethnic Minorities</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>Pakistani</i>	<i>Bangladeshi</i>	<i>Caribbean</i>	<i>African</i>
Labour	31	68	61	60	72	78	87
Conservative	37	16	24	13	18	9	6
Lib-Dem	22	14	13	25	9	12	6
Other	11	2	2	3	1	2	1
N (unweighted)	2805	2787	587	668	270	597	524
N of voters	2125	1768	409	449	185	371	298

Cell entries (excluding Ns) are column percentages. Sources: for whites, BES 2010; for ethnic minorities, EMBES 2010

4. Registration and turnout

Before addressing *why* ethnic minority people voted as they did, it's first worth summarizing data on registration, as those who lack the means to vote obviously cannot vote. Respondents in the BES and in EMBES were asked whether they were registered to vote and, if so, at the current address or elsewhere. The researchers also checked the electoral registers to see whether they were indeed registered at the current address (but were not able to check on registration at other addresses). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Validated registration

	Registered at current address - validated	Reported being registered at another address	Not registered at current address	Other (unable to verify data)
Indian	78	2	17	3
Pakistani	78	2	16	4
Bangladeshi	73	5	17	6
Black Caribbean	72	4	17	8
Black African	59	5	28	9
White British	90	TBC	TBC	TBC

Source: BES, EMBES 2010

As Table 2 shows, up to four-fifths (78%) of ethnic minorities in the sample were registered to vote at the sampled address although the proportion was significantly lower among Black Africans (59%). The proportion for the White British sample in the main BES (90%) was however markedly higher.

Eligibility can be a factor – but is not taken account of in the figures here. For example in the case of Black Africans 11% don't fall into either British / dual citizenship or Commonwealth but not British citizenship and may not therefore be eligible to vote. This compares to 1% for Bangladeshis and Black Caribbeans. There may also be an issue among all minority groups about lack of knowledge about eligibility (especially on the part of Commonwealth citizens). Lack of fluency in the English language is also a barrier to registration, especially among the most recent arrivals from Africa. These barriers take on greater salience in the context of proposed changes to registration, namely weakening the requirement of councils to register electors, and will likely lead to even lower registration rates.

Among those who were registered, ethnic minority turnout rates at the general election were only slightly lower than those of the White British. Contrary to previous assumptions, there was no indication that Black Caribbean citizens were less likely to vote than South Asian or White British citizens. *The key barrier to participation is therefore registration not turnout.* This suggests that if (as suggested above and by the Electoral Commission) BME people are less likely to be registered as a result of current policy proposals, this will not be because of their choice not to register or lower level of political engagement.

5. A distinct ethnic agenda?

One key question is whether ethnic minorities have any distinctive concerns which differ from those of the White British majority (which of course is itself stratified by class, education, region, and national identity).

To be sure, many concerns, for example about the recession and the need to reduce unemployment and control inflation, will be shared right across British society. Political scientists often refer to these as 'valence' issues where there is a broad consensus on policy goals, and voters' major concerns are to estimate the likely performance capabilities of rival parties on these key issues of the day. For these issues 'the key question is not what should be the objective, but how to achieve it, and who is best able to do so'.

There are also more ideological issues typically associated with the main social cleavages in British society, such as those based on social class, where voters typically hold contrasting rather than consensual views. Political scientists refer to these as ‘position’ issues. Previous research has shown that in contemporary British politics voters distinguish at least two, usually unrelated, underlying position issue dimensions: one that reflects ‘economic left-right’ preferences about the extent to which the state should be involved in the economic life of the nation; and a second that measures preferences for ‘liberal *versus* authoritarian’ approaches to dealing with criminals.

Broadly speaking positions on the left-right dimension are linked to one’s social class position, with the middle class and especially the more entrepreneurial sections of the middle class tending to be more supportive of free-market policies and the working class supporting more redistribution and state spending. Positions on the liberal/authoritarian dimension are more closely linked to education than to social class, with the higher-educated tending to take more liberal views. The general assumption is that ethnic minorities’ views on these ‘position’ issues will largely reflect their own social class and educational backgrounds.

However, as indicated in Table 3, social class does not appear to explain ethnic minority voting for the Labour party, nor indeed to increase it for the Conservatives. Around 7 in 10 ethnic minority voters support the Labour party, regardless of social class. This contrasts significantly from white British respondents, among whom class is much more strongly linked to party choice. Among ‘manual’ respondents, Labour barely won a plurality (36%) of votes, while among ‘non-manual’ white British respondents, the Conservatives got nearly twice as many votes as Labour (44% to 24%). Although these figures are striking, the link between class and voter choice has weakened generally in the UK since the 1960s.

Table 3: Relationship between Vote and Manual/Non-Manual Occupational Class, 2010; White and Ethnic Minority Voters Compared

	<i>White (BES) Respondents</i>		<i>Ethnic Minority (EMBES) Respondents</i>	
	<i>Non Manual</i>	<i>Manual</i>	<i>Non Manual</i>	<i>Manual</i>
Labour	24	36	68	73
Conservative	44	34	15	13
Liberal Democrat	26	21	15	13
Other	6	9	2	1
N	2125		1768	

Cell entries (excluding Ns) are column percentages. Sources: for whites, BES 2010; for ethnic minorities, EMBES 2010

In addition to the two enduring ideological divisions within the British public, two other issues have been salient in recent general elections – the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (in 2005) and the issue of immigration (in 2010). The Iraq war was variously a matter of concern across all social groups, but it appears to have been of particular interest for Muslim voters (especially in the 2005 election)¹, many of whom felt that the war meant UK troops being involved (wilfully or accidentally) in the

¹ See Runnymede coverage of voting behaviour in 20 constituencies with largest Muslim populations in 2005: <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/342BulletinJune05.pdf>

deaths of civilians in a Muslim country. Non-Muslim minorities, however, might well be more akin to the majority group in their views. Ethnic minorities might also be more supportive of immigration into Britain than is the majority group, although we would not expect the differences to be all that great.

There has, however, been dispute as to whether the average member of a minority group does in fact have a distinctive political agenda. While ethnic minority leaders may have clear ideas about issues that need to be put on the political agenda, it is an open question whether the average ethnic minority person will be equally exercised by these issues. Donley Studlar (1986) for example has argued that the issues of the greatest importance to ethnic minorities are those also considered to be most important by the general population in similar socio-economic positions. He argued that race-specific issues did not dominate the political priorities of nonwhites – and the different groups were not united on these issues either, concluding that ‘[t]here is no such thing as a distinctive nonwhite political agenda’ (1986: 176).

However, a lot may have changed since Studlar’s research was conducted twenty-five years ago, and the polls available at that time did not have the same range of questions as are available to us in EMBES. Table 4 shows minority and majority views on the question (very similar to the one available to Studlar): *As far as you’re concerned, what is the single most important issue facing the country at the present time?*

Table 4: Most important issue facing Britain today

Column percentages

	White British	All minorities (BES)	All minorities (EMBES)
State of the economy	39	31	23
financial crisis	23	17	2
Immigration	11	5	8
Unemployment	6	20	25
War in Iraq/Aghanistan/ on terror	4	1	8
Law and order	2	4	6
NHS	2	1	3
Taxes	1	3	2
Inflation/prices	1	1	4
Education	1	1	5
My standard of living	1	0	2
Other	7	9	8
None	0	2	1
Don’t know	2	3	4
<i>N</i>	2643	277	2784

Sources: BES, EMBES

Notes: weighted. Figures in bold are significantly different at the 5% level. Because of a slight difference in the pre-codes used in the BES and EMBES, we report figures for ethnic minorities in the main BES where we can be sure that exactly the same pre-codes were used.

As we can see from the BES data, there are a number of significant differences between the majority group and the minorities in what they take to be the most important issue facing the country. The biggest difference concerns unemployment, to which ethnic minorities attach much more importance. Correspondingly minorities

attach less importance to the state of the economy, the financial crisis and immigration.

Moreover, it is far from clear that ethnic minorities' greater concern with unemployment simply reflects their greater risks of being unemployed. In more detailed analysis of the BES data we find that, although the importance attached to unemployment is indeed associated with one's socio-economic position, this fails to account for ethnic minorities' greater concern about unemployment. In other words, ethnic minorities are more concerned about this issue than are members of the majority group in similar socio-economic positions. So this does suggest that there might be something of a distinct non-white political agenda after all.

We also asked a number of questions to tap the left/right political dimension (focussing here on the choice to increase government spending versus making tax cuts) and on the liberal/authoritarian dimension (focussing on the choice to be tougher on criminals or to protect the rights of the accused). Further questions were asked about immigration and asylum seekers, and on the war in Afghanistan. Table 5 compares ethnic minority and white British views on these issues.

Table 5: Attitudes to spending/tax cuts, civil liberties, immigration and Afghan war by ethnic group

Percentage favouring the 'progressive' side of the debate (cell percentages)

	Spend rather than cut taxes	Protect rights of the accused	Don't send asylum seekers home	Disapprove of Afghan war	N
White British	49	15	39	64	2761
Black Caribbean	42	23	59	56	603
Indian	33	24	34	46	586
Pakistani	33	20	41	68	665
Bangladeshi	32	20	43	59	271
B African	43	24	74	51	530
Majority/minority difference	+12	-7	-11	+8	

Sources: BES, EMBES, weighted data

Notes for the scale items on spending/tax cuts and civil liberties, the percentages are those who place themselves to the left of the mid-point. For the items on asylum seekers and the Afghan war, they are for those who disagree or disagree strongly with the statement.

Firstly, on the tax cuts versus spending question we find that every ethnic minority group is *less* supportive of greater government spending than the white British group. In this respect they appear to be less 'left-wing' than the majority, which contrasts strangely both with their greater support for Labour and with their greater emphasis on unemployment. In further items covering different aspects of the left/right dimension there was either no significant difference between the majority and the minority, or the majority was more left-wing than the minority.

On the other hand, answers to our question on protecting the rights of the accused do fit more straightforwardly with our expectations: we find that ethnic minorities generally are more supportive of the rights of the accused, although like the white British majority most of our respondents feel that reducing crime is what is important. Interestingly, there are no significant differences between any of the different ethnic minority groups in this respect.

Thirdly, we see much bigger differences on the question of asylum seekers. Black African respondents – especially those from non-Commonwealth countries (the most recent arrivals and the ones most likely themselves to have come as asylum seekers) – are much more likely to disagree with the proposition that all asylum-seekers should be sent back immediately. South Asian groups in contrast are even less supportive of asylum-seekers than are the White British. So there is clearly not a shared ethnic minority position on asylum-seekers, and the same general pattern also holds for other questions on immigration.

Finally, we see that minorities overall are *less* hostile to the war in Afghanistan than are the White British, although unsurprisingly the Muslim groups – those with Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali backgrounds – are significantly more hostile, whereas Indians are significantly less hostile than are the White British. So as with the question on asylum, here is an issue where there are greater divisions between ethnic minorities than there is between the White British and the average ethnic minority position.

Table 6: Attitudes to minority opportunities and affirmative action by ethnic group

Percentage favouring the 'progressive' side of the debate (cell percentages)

	Improve opportunities for minorities	Give priority to minorities	Big gap between what minorities expects and receives	Non-whites are held back by prejudice	N
White British	19	1	-	-	2761
Mixed W/B	62	25	68	54	80
Black Caribbean	74	20	67	58	603
Indian	65	26	44	40	586
Pakistani	71	28	51	38	665
Bangladeshi	70	37	49	41	271
Black African	75	36	63	53	530
All EM	70	28	55	47	2775
Majority/minority difference	-51	-27	-	-	

Sources: BES, EMBES, weighted data

Notes for the scale items on spending/tax cuts and civil liberties, the percentages are those who place themselves to the left of the mid-point. For the other items, it is the percentage who agree or agree strongly with the statement.

Table 6 covers a different issue – attitudes towards policies on improving equal opportunities for ethnic minorities. The first column provides powerful evidence that the provision of equal opportunities for minorities does constitute a distinct and shared ethnic minority claim that unites all minorities and contrasts markedly with the view of the white majority, with a fifty percentage-point gap between the average views of the majority and the minorities. To be sure, there is some variation, with the Black groups tending to be even more anxious to improve opportunities than the South Asian groups, but in every case the overwhelming majority of all groups support improved opportunities.

In a sense this is a relatively easy statement to agree with, so we asked a more 'difficult' question on affirmative action policies:

*And how much do you agree or disagree with this statement:
Black and Asian people in Britain who apply for jobs should be given priority,
to try to make up for past discrimination against them.*

Affirmative action of the sort implied in this question is a fairly extreme policy which has never been strongly advocated in Britain, and would probably be against EU law. In practice ethnic minority groups have tended to ask for more modest interventions in order to promote equal opportunities for ethnic minorities, and so we do not expect to find great support for this policy even among minorities. The second column of table 7 shows that this is indeed the case: only 28% of our ethnic minority sample supported strong affirmative action. But even this figure contrasts very sharply with the White British figure: only 1%. Moreover, there is no significant variation between the ethnic minority groups in their support for affirmative action.

Overall, then, while there is only weak support for measures such as strong affirmative action, EMBES evidence supports the claim that there is a distinct ethnic minority concern with equal opportunities and the removal of barriers to ethnic minorities. The majority/minority differences on these issues are much the largest of any included in our survey, and they dwarf both the differences between the individual ethnic minority groups and between social classes or educational groups.

One way to interpret the finding that white British people do not support more equal opportunities is that they believe that existing hiring and promotion policies are more or less fair – they therefore read these questions as moving away from a baseline of fairness. This doesn't really accord with existing social science evidence on barriers in the job market, and it's also clear that BME people generally believe that prejudice still exists in the UK. Among all ethnic minority respondents, 57% agree with the statement 'there is prejudice against ethnic minorities in the UK', with around half of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups agreeing, and nearly three-quarters of Black Caribbean people agreeing.

In fact, over one-third (36%) of ethnic minorities reported a *personal* experience of discrimination. The range here was from one in four for Bangladeshis to half of all Black Caribbean people. This context – widespread agreement that prejudice persists, and substantial personal experience of discrimination – is not widely discussed in wider public debate, or indeed by any of the main political parties in their manifestos. But if the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives are to increase their vote share, they will arguably need to find ways to respond to the concern among ethnic minorities that societal and personal discrimination has not disappeared.

6. Satisfaction with British democracy

One key test of political integration is whether ethnic minorities feel that the British political system is a legitimate one that provides them with adequate means for articulating and redressing their grievances and provides them with an adequate stake in British decision-making. We therefore explored the degree of satisfaction or disaffection with British democracy and the extent to which ethnic minorities feel themselves to be incorporated as equal members into the British political community.

Overall, we expect minorities to be fairly satisfied. Our data show that migrants come positively oriented towards British democracy, that they have high levels of political involvement in terms of identification with a political party (primarily Labour), high levels of turnout and participation in conventional politics, and they feel that Labour represents their interests reasonably well. To be sure, there are some variations across generations and across minorities. For example we saw that the most recent arrivals, who lack citizenship and are less than fluent in English, have lower levels of turnout and identification.

On the other hand, there are several respects in which ethnic minorities might be expected to be less than wholly satisfied or less than fully incorporated into the British political community. Their political concerns to secure redress for discrimination and exclusion are not well integrated into British politics, with the Conservative Party in particular failing to address issues of racial discrimination or inequality anywhere in its 2010 manifesto (or indeed in earlier manifestos). Ethnic minority concerns for equal opportunities were not well-reflected in the manifestos of the three main parties. The Conservative manifesto made no mention whatsoever of racial or ethnic inequality. The Labour manifesto made a limited number of references, mainly highlighting their past achievements, while the Liberal Democrat manifesto was the only one to promise new measures to help priorities, though it doesn't appear to have been much noticed by BME voters and has not been implemented by the coalition.

Moreover, some groups such as young Black men are more vulnerable than others, experiencing substantially higher levels of unemployment and reporting greater levels of harassment by the police. Previous research (Maxwell 2006, 2009; Heath and Roberts 2008) has suggested that experiences of discrimination may be particularly likely to undermine a sense of British identity, and by implication undermine commitment to the British polity. Muslims may also feel more excluded and rejected with the evidence of growing 'Islamophobia' (Field 2007).

While the first generation came with notably positive orientations towards British democracy – quite possibly because British democracy and freedom compares favourably with their countries of origin, the second generation may be more critical since they will be making comparisons not with their parents' origin countries but with Britain's own claims of equal opportunities and fairness.

Another possibility which has been raised by politicians and commentators rather than by academic researchers is that some groups, particularly Muslims, who are socially and residentially more separated from British society may feel less a part of the British political community. This is a key element of politicians' repudiation of multiculturalism. British Prime Minister David Cameron has argued:

“But these young [Muslim] men also find it hard to identify with Britain too, because we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity. Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values. So, when a white person

holds objectionable views, racist views for instance, we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious frankly – frankly, even fearful – to stand up to them. The failure, for instance, of some to confront the horrors of forced marriage, the practice where some young girls are bullied and sometimes taken abroad to marry someone when they don't want to, is a case in point. This hands-off tolerance has only served to reinforce the sense that not enough is shared. And this all leaves some young Muslims feeling rootless. And the search for something to belong to and something to believe in can lead them to this extremist ideology. Now for sure, they don't turn into terrorists overnight, but what we see – and what we see in so many European countries – is a process of radicalisation.” (Cameron 2011)

The key claim here is that some groups, notably young Muslim men, may feel less committed to British society and British values, in part because multiculturalism has allowed them to lead separate lives apart from the mainstream, and may therefore be prone to radicalisation.

Table 7: Satisfaction with democracy

Cell percentages

	Very or fairly dissatisfied with democracy	Agree that parties are only interested in votes	Distrust parliament	Distrust politicians	Distrust police	N
Mixed	52	46	54	58	32	93
Black Caribbean	49	53	51	61	38	594
Indian	25	37	29	36	18	586
Pakistani	23	41	29	38	17	667
Bangladeshi	20	39	23	31	17	270
Black African	24	49	28	36	23	524
All minorities	30	44	34	42	23	2782
White British	37	NA	44	54	18	2761

Sources: BES, EMBES, currently unweighted

Notes: trust questions were asked as 0 (no trust) -10 (a great deal of trust) scale; the percentages above are for those reporting less trust than the midpoint, ie scoring less than 5 on the scale.

Strikingly, on all these indicators people of Black Caribbean background, together with those of mixed White/Black background, are significantly more dissatisfied and distrusting than are the White British. Conversely, people of South Asian background and of Black African background are significantly *more* satisfied and more trusting than the White British. There is no sign here that Muslims have low trust, cynicism or satisfaction. A detailed breakdown of these sentiments by religion is shown in Table 8. This shows that the group with the highest dissatisfaction are in fact those with no religion.

Table 8: Satisfaction in democracy by religion

	Very or fairly dissatisfied with democracy	N
Anglican (WB)		
Anglican (EM)	33	120
Catholic	37	206
Pentecostal	35	255
Other Christian	39	257
Hindu	22	234
Sikh	24	164
Sunni	21	935
Other Muslim	26	204
None (EM)	49	362
None (WB)		

Sources: BES, EMBES, weighted. Questions were asked in the mailback in EMBES but a half-sample in BES?

7. Conclusion

Among the main themes of the 2010 General Election was whether David Cameron could broaden the appeal of the Conservative Party to levels not seen since the election of John Major in 1992. One of the measures used to assess his success was the voting behaviour of Black and minority ethnic Britons, historically strong supporters of Labour. In fact, BME voters weren't the only way to measure Cameron's appeal: his party's perception on race was also viewed as part of a wider question of how far centrist white British voters felt the Conservatives were in line with their broadly liberal social attitudes.

As we've explained in this document, in the end, only 16% of BME voters supported the Conservative Party in 2010, with a similar proportion supporting the Liberal Democrats. This means over two-thirds of BME voters (68%) still voted Labour in 2010. While these numbers are undoubtedly striking, two factors place this figure in some context. First is that while Labour support is vastly higher among all BME groups, this has dropped from even higher support – as many as 8 or 9 out of 10 BME voters have supported Labour in the past. Second is that the Conservative Party did less well in 2010 in terms of increasing its vote share among all voters.

While the Conservative Party increased its vote share from 2005 by 4%, and the Liberal Democrats by 1%, the decline in the Labour Party, down 6% to 29% is arguably the most significant feature of the 2010 Election. In recent historical context Labour's decline is even more marked: down 14% from 43% in 1997, when Labour got nearly 5 million more votes than in 2010. To put this in perspective, in 1997 John Major got only 5% less and 1 million less votes than David Cameron in 2010. With Cameron getting nearly 3 million votes less than Blair in 1997, it's clear that BME voters are simply one among many constituencies that the Conservatives still struggle to win over.

However, it is also clear that with a low percentage of BME voters voting Liberal Democrat, and decreasing numbers voting Labour more work needs to be done to

across all parties to meet the needs of BME voters. This is likely to require greater attention to policies that respond to BME concerns on unemployment and discrimination, and to the ethnic inequalities that have persisted whatever the government of the day.