The University
of Manchester

Understanding electoral fraud vulnerability in Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities in England.
A view of local political activists.

Authors:

Maria Sobolewska, University of Manchester

Stuart Wilks-Heeg, University of Liverpool

Eleanor Hill, University of Manchester

Magda Borkowska, University of Manchester

Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity

Disclaimer: This report presents the results of independent academic research that do not represent an official position of the Electoral Commission or Universities of Manchester and Liverpool.

Contents

Acknowledgements

First and foremost we would like to thank all our interviewees, not least those who shared with us their concerns about electoral fraud vulnerability in their communities, as well as those who helped us with the recruitment of our interviewees. Without their commitment to their communities and to the integrity of the British electoral system this research would not have been possible. We hope that we have done justice to the often complex issues which they raised in our discussions with them.

Secondly, we would like to thank the many people who helped with the research from Phil Thompson and Joe Hewton from the Electoral Commission to the researchers at NatCen: Valdeep Gill, Natalie Jago, Camille Aznar and Fatima Husain. We would also like to thank the support staff at the University of Manchester, particularly Damaris Richardson, who went beyond the call of duty to help and Mary Anne Hill for her research assistance.

Executive summary

Research Background

- This research is based on 37 qualitative interviews[1] with local community and political activists in single electoral wards in eight local authorities across England selected to represent those areas where electoral fraud has been alleged or proven, and those areas where there were no serious allegations of fraud.

- All of the areas chosen had a significant proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin residents, as areas with high concentrations of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin residents were thought to be particularly prone to seeing allegations of fraud, and the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities were perceived to be more vulnerable to fraud, according to Electoral Commission's review (Electoral Commission 2014).

- This research set out to understand why these communities are more vulnerable to fraud and how this can be remedied.

Findings

- We found that Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin communities in England share a wide range of vulnerabilities, which may make them susceptible to becoming victims of electoral fraud.

- This report identifies seven main sources of vulnerability to fraud: language and knowledge barriers, community loyalties and pressures; kinship networks; lack of mainstream political party engagement; discrimination in candidate selection; insufficiency of safeguards for voting procedures and finally local economic deprivation.

- Ethnic kinship networks perform many positive community support functions such as translation services and information provision for these more recent immigrants, but also as a campaigning mechanism for Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin candidates, from helping at the candidate selection stage, through mobilising turnout, to generating support votes for these candidates.

- However, these networks tend to be reciprocal, and are hierarchical and patriarchal, which may undermine the principle of voters' individual and free choice through a range of social pressures such as respect for the decision of the elders at its mildest

---

[1] Qualitative interviews engage respondents in an extended conversation about a topic. They are usually structured around a series of questions defined by the researcher before the interview, but do not tend to follow a set structure and offer scope to explore any additional issues highlighted by the interviewee.

extreme, through to undue influence where in some instances access to individual ballots of women and adult children can be refused by the elders.

- Other, non-hierarchical forms of ethnic community or solidarity (more based on informal loyalties) are not problematic in the same way.

- Candidate selection processes seem to reinforce the influence of kinship networks. This emerges from the perceived need to generate co-ethnic support around candidates who are otherwise thought to be discriminated against by political parties; but results in poor candidate quality in local elections, lack of access for ethnic minority candidates from outside the networks and increased vulnerability to fraud.

- Our analysis strongly indicates that the primary source of this influence of kinship networks in politics lies in the lack of mainstream political party activity in the areas of concentration of Pakistani and Bangladeshi voters, confirming the finding from the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study.[2]

- This political void is filled by the ethnic kinship networks, which perform a role of a mediator between the British electoral system and immigrant-origin communities.

- Mainstream political parties were deemed by our interviewees to be only too happy to accept this middle-man role of kinship networks, which confirms much of the academic literature since the 1980s.

- Increasingly, female and young members of Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin communities in Britain raise issue with the role of the ethnic networks in their voting decision and some may feel outright disenfranchised.

- Our interviewees felt that voting by post is intrinsically unsafe and some had additional concerns around the ease with which personation could take place, through an informal approach to voting for others instead applying for a proxy vote.

- Local area deprivation, often resulting in diminishing funding for community organisations, has been a theme present in most of the areas investigated and it almost certainly contributes to fraud vulnerabilities by emphasising the monopoly of kinship networks as a source of community engagement and support.

- Most of these vulnerabilities seem to be present across areas that see a lot of fraud allegations and those that have not in the past seen any serious allegations of fraud.

- Our research points to the possibility that fraud allegations are raised as a result of community or political tension, or a change in political status quo; and the lack of

---

[2] The 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Survey was a large-scale survey designed to study the political views and electoral behaviour of Britain's ethnic minority populations. It complemented the British Election Study (BES) and, like the BES, was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

formal allegations may indicate a less conflictual local context, but not necessarily lack of fraud.

- In the areas where fraud convictions have been issued in the past, the local community often works hard to repair the system and benefits from the support of electoral administration and local parties. On the other hand in some areas where fraud allegations have not been raised, the local activists do not feel they receive enough support to combat fraud, especially from the police and local political parties.

- We found that generational change offers the main hope for the future of electoral integrity, with many younger people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin reported to be resisting the influence of their ethnic kinship networks, although some worries about youth disengagement threated to undermine this mechanism for change.

Study limitations and questions for further research

- The focus of the research was on gathering the views of political activists and, inevitably, their opinions are not representative of all possible perspectives on the issue. Moreover, we did not seek, nor were we in a position to attempt, to assess the veracity of the claims which were made about electoral fraud. As with any fieldwork research, there is also a risk of an 'interviewer effect', whereby the answers provided by interviewees may be shaped, either consciously or sub-consciously, by their perception of the interviewer. The presence of such effects is difficult, if not impossible to establish, but there is clearly a possibility that our 'outsider' status may have influenced the responses we received.

- Although the research focussed on the local political context and interviewed local political activists, it is clear that general elections are exposed to many of the same vulnerabilities to fraud as local elections. Local elections' distinguishing feature is that they more often see an ethnic match between a candidate and the voters, which may contribute to a greater incidence of kinship network activity.

- It is unclear to what extent a lot of the vulnerabilities identified are present in other communities throughout Britain, but it is clear that some might be:

  - Firstly, lack of knowledge of electoral system and language could be shared by other immigrants who may have developed other networks to resolve these issues- these networks may carry similar risks.
  - Deprived areas regardless of the presence of immigrant and ethnic minority communities may suffer a similar lack of community support and mainstream party interest, which could similarly make them vulnerable to being used by dishonest political entrepreneurs.

- Since candidates are selected by local parties, political networks of reciprocity and patronage similar to the kinship networks may conceivably operate in non-immigrant origin communities in Britain. However, there is insufficient evidence from the literature on campaigning and candidate selection to assess the extent to which this is a wider issue in mainstream British politics.

Proposed solutions

- A great majority of our interviewees of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin expressed real concern about fraud vulnerabilities in their communities and to a great extent the need for legal reform and/or significant change in political culture in order to prevent fraud. In the main, these solutions are institutional and relate to reforms which would aim to remove the potential opportunities for fraud, rather than forms of cultural change relating to the role of kinship networks.

- Legal reform suggested in the course of the interviews included:

    - Stricter and more transparent guidelines to political parties and candidates on postal vote handling as the Electoral Commission has already proposed;
    - The information whether a person has a postal vote should be included in the secrecy of voting- i.e. activists and parties should not be allowed to collect this information;
    - Tightening the rules on voting at polling stations by increasing the radius safe from political pressure, enforcing the law already specifying that the tellers must not be present in the polling station.
    - Introducing some form of identification to cast a vote.
    - To compensate for the increased difficulty of voting, new registration laws should be introduced to either automatically enrol voters, for example via other points of contact with the state, or create an opt-out system.
    - Given the weakness of parties as inclusive agents for political participation, the government and local government must fund more direct voter information, registration and turnout efforts at the individual voters in these communities.
    - Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers should receive greater and ring-fenced funding in areas where additional needs are present to deal with severe under-registration, lack of knowledge of eligibility or poor English language skills.

- Cultural change suggested in the course of the interviews included:

- Political parties should take a greater responsibility for not accepting the bloc vote delivered or promised by community leaders.
- Political parties should aim to strengthen their support for diversity of elected representatives. Widening access to standing for elected office to all minority groups, regardless of whether the candidate's ethnicity matches those of voters, should be one of the parties' main objectives.
- Both parties and communities should strongly encourage women of all ethnicities to participate more in politics, including making this participation easier for women and more relevant to their daily lives.

1.   Introduction

While allegations, and instances, of electoral fraud in UK elections have received growing attention in recent years, they continue to be relatively rare. Just over 1000 cases involving allegations of breaches of the Representation of the People Acts were reported to English police forces from 2008-13. From these cases, fewer than 20 have resulted in convictions for electoral offences. Whether the measure used is allegations or convictions, these cases overwhelmingly relate to single wards in English local council elections, while a tiny number relate to parliamentary or European elections. Given the number of ward-level elections held annually in England (2364 wards were contested at the 2013 local elections, 4500 in May 2014), electoral fraud certainly cannot be argued to be widespread.

However, there is clear evidence that allegations of electoral fraud, as well as police investigations and court cases, tend to be concentrated in a relatively small number of localities. For instance, of the 1086 cases reported to the police in England from 2008-13, 633 (58% of the total) originated in just 10 of England's 39 police forces areas. Similarly, 35 of the 68 convictions (51%) for electoral offences since 2000 have arisen from cases in just 7 of England's 353 local authorities. Such patterns have led the Electoral Commission to identify 17 local authority areas [3] at particular risk of electoral fraud. The nature, frequency and distribution of electoral fraud cases in these areas are varied. In some areas, there have been persistent allegations, and multiple convictions, spread over two to three decades and relating to several wards. In others, concern has arisen primarily from one or two very recent cases in a single ward. A significant proportion of cases are associated with postal voting and electoral registration irregularities, although there are also some instances of proxy vote fraud and isolated instances of personation at polling stations. There is no single political party disproportionately associated with fraud cases.

A significant feature of recent convictions for electoral fraud is that a relatively high proportion of those secured since 2000 have involved wards with sizeable Pakistani and/or Bangladeshi communities. Almost all of the cases since 2000 which have resulted in multiple convictions and have found evidence of large-scale fraud have shared this characteristic. At the same time, it should be underlined that electoral fraud is by no means isolated to such communities and that the majority of wards with large Pakistani or

---

[3] The Electoral Commission initially identified 16 such local authority areas in January 2014, with a further area added in late 2014.

Bangladeshi communities have not been the focus of electoral fraud allegations. As such, a key concern for this research was to try to identify the circumstances in which large Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin communities may become vulnerable to electoral fraud.

From the reading of Electoral Commission's existing evidence on electoral fraud and from the literature on ethnic minority communities we have developed more specific questions arising from the main research question posed by the Electoral Commission of why are some Pakistani and Bangladeshi-origin minorities more vulnerable to electoral fraud.

1.1 Research Question 1

To what extent are many such allegations into Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities' vulnerability or propensity for electoral fraud evidence based, or merely self-reinforcing 'perceptions'?

The Electoral Commission's conclusion from their review of evidence on electoral fraud was that the 'Perceptions of fraud can be as damaging as actual incidents of electoral fraud' (Electoral Commission, 2014: 1). Still, from the point of view of Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, the distinction between actual incidences of fraud and the wide-spread perceptions of fraud in these communities makes a huge difference. The source of the perceptions, for example, could lie in racial tensions and potentially in racial prejudice. Through many decades of media popularising such stories the perception may have become ingrained in the public mind, but also some of this may be crudely exploited by the opposition to Pakistani and Bangladeshi's political influence. It may well be the case that these communities have a bad reputation, and it is being reinforced every time the allegations, which may be purely made in opposition to the selection or election outcome, are raised. It may well be an impossibility to truly answer this question; it is nonetheless crucial to keep in mind as a very serious possibility with far reaching consequences.

1.2 Research Question 2

What exactly is the nature of this vulnerability, is it that Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin voters are more likely to fall victims of fraud, or is it that they are more likely to commit fraud (although of course the two are not mutually exclusive)?

The first option – that these communities are more likely to fall victims of fraud – is very likely. There are many indicators of such vulnerability: demographic, social and cultural. Typically, a higher proportion of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin voters are fairly recent migrants with potentially less knowledge of the electoral system, and often with little experience of a functional democratic system with free elections. Some of these are also less likely to be fluent in English. Women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are more likely to have their registration forms filled in by someone else, not by themselves (Sobolewska and Heath, 2014), which may beg the question whether for cultural reasons men take the lead on public life and this would include voting on behalf of their wives or daughters, which in turn could open doors to postal vote personation or undue influence. Women's vulnerability must be thoroughly considered by any research into this issue as women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are less likely to be economically active, with poor English skills and generally marginalised. However, as will be discussed later, achieving interviews with women is a specific challenge which is not be easily overcome by any research in Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities.

The second option is that the communities of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are more likely to adopt permissive attitudes towards electoral fraud and therefore members of these communities may be more likely to be fraud perpetrators. Here we must tread carefully. As we mentioned before, some of these communities have fairly recent immigration history, from countries where electoral procedures and party campaigning differ from the UK. There has been some research, and many more allegations, that the recasting of clan structures of kinship networks (biraderi) among these communities as they have settled in Britain has both enabled fraud by coercing some members and covering fraud by intimidating potential witnesses (Wilks-Heeg, 2008; Akhtar, 2013). However, some more consideration has to be given to other potential sources of increased permissiveness to fraud. One of the main such sources must be racial discrimination and the feeling of powerlessness. These may generate the need for ethnic mobilisation and solidarity, which in its extreme can include manipulations of the electoral system and breed suspicions of electoral fraud, as well as in some rare instances lead to actual electoral fraud. There may also be some perception in these communities that some electoral fraud is in fact a 'soft' form of breach of law or that it may be a necessary evil. Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants have often been greeted by a chilly reception from local political forces and, as like other migrant groups seeking political recognition, often only managed to come to be represented in local politics through coming together and making the most of the 'strength in numbers' approach (Garbaye, 2005). It is worth remembering that the first allegations of electoral fraud among Pakistani and

Bangladeshi origin communities were heard in the 1980s. These allegations concerned candidate selection processes in the Labour party and registration fraud during the period when a lot of ethnic communities were making their first successful bids to be included in the political process in Britain.

Thirdly, to what extent could the problem of electoral fraud in certain localities be associated with other factors operating in the locality? Since only a minority of areas of high ethnic minority concentration have experienced fraud, it may well be that it is the specific political context that produces them. For example, some of the localities historically connected with accusations and incidents of fraud are in Birmingham, where there are significant inter-community tensions between Pakistani communities and groups of Caribbean origin. Likewise, Bradford and many other areas on the list of 17 vulnerable localities recognised by the Electoral Commission (2014) experience exceptional political and social tensions. As such, there could be an underlying root cause behind both the tensions and the fraud, or it could be that these tensions are a direct cause of fraud by making it more tempting and therefore more likely.

1.3 Objectives of the study

As a result of the considerations outlined above, this work aimed to fulfil four main objectives to:

- Separate the sources of electoral fraud vulnerabilities and susceptibilities that arise from within communities; and those which are the result of a political context.
- Separate the vulnerabilities to electoral fraud into two conceptually distinct, even if empirically overlapping, phenomena.
- Investigate the sources of perceptions of fraud and the mechanisms through which they are perpetuated.
- Develop practical recommendations for the Electoral Commission and policy makers on how to tackle the vulnerability and manage any false perceptions and delineate future areas of research.

2. Research methods

2.1 Case selection

A set of criteria to guide the selection of case study areas were agreed collaboratively with the Electoral Commission and NatCen. These criteria were as follows:

- All eight areas should be in England, with local elections taking place in May 2014, and should contain sizeable Pakistani and/or Bangladeshi populations (defined as a minimum of 2.5% of the district population as a whole and at least 25% of residents in at least one ward within the district).
- Four areas meeting these demographic thresholds would be selected where there have been recent cases, or recurrent allegations, of electoral fraud.
- Four areas with a similar demographic profile would be selected which have had no known cases of fraud and very few or infrequent allegations of fraud.
- Wards, rather than local authority districts, would be the focus for the case studies.
- Where possible, wards would be chosen which enabled fraud and non-fraud areas to be broadly paired on indicators of ethnic composition, while also providing for an overall balance of areas with respect to geographical spread, turnout, party control and marginality.
- Areas with current investigations into electoral fraud would be excluded.

These criteria were operationalised using a combination of sources, primarily: 2011 Census data; Electoral Commission records of electoral fraud allegations and their outcomes from 2010-13; Crown Prosecution Service records of electoral fraud allegations and outcomes from 2000-07; searches of press and legal databases for details of electoral fraud cases investigated by the police and/or reaching the courts; and local election statistics provided by the Electoral Commission or obtained via the comprehensive local election results coverage on the BBC website.

An initial long-list of 51 local authority districts was drawn up which met the criteria in the first bullet point above. The selection was then narrowed down using the additional criteria. A range of options were available which enabled pairs of 'high fraud risk ' and 'low fraud risk 'wards to be matched on the basis of similar demographic profiles. Given the recent pattern of local elections results in urban and metropolitan areas, ensuring a political balance within the case selections with respect to current party control proved more difficult. As a result, there is a strong bias among the wards studied towards current Labour Party representation.

Nonetheless, the final selection of 8 wards did allow for a balance of areas with respect to the extent of past and current levels of party competition, turnout and marginality.

2.2 Selection and recruitment of interviewees

The second important choice made by the research team was the selection of interviewees for the in-depth, qualitative interviews to be conducted in the case study areas. As the time frame was limited, we initially envisaged 40 interviews in the 8 localities, with an average 5 interviews per locality, but we found that in some case study areas those approached were not willing to take part or that the area lacked well developed networks of activists. Thus we conducted 37 interviews. Reassuringly, however, we have achieved saturation point in our analysis, with similar themes arising in interviews, and our findings map very well onto the public opinion component of this research conducted separately by NatCen and we think it would be unlikely that more interviews would have significantly changed our findings.

We decided to include party activists (of any ethnic origin), community activists and community leaders, but also interviewed one electoral official who we initially used as a gate keeper, but who was keen to be interviewed. The researchers conducted an in-depth scoping exercise in the areas prior to conducting interviews, including conducting preliminary conversations with potential gate-keepers and interviewees before committing to a full interview. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling, with small elements of snow-balling. The interviews were transcribed and anonymised prior to analysis, which was conducted using thematic analysis approach (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012).

We strived to reach those activists and leaders among Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin community, which involved some issues around getting in touch with those whose English is not fluent by offering translation services, yet these were not taken up by any interviewee (although the level of English fluency varied significantly among our interviewees). Another issue we were very aware of was gender. We struggled to interview women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in particular and women in general. Out of the 37 interviews we managed to conduct 6 interviews with women activists, including 2 with Pakistani or Bangladeshi female activists. This, we feel, reflects the nature of lack of ethnic and gender diversity of local politicians (Thrasher et al 2013). While in certain areas we were very welcome, in one area in particular the willingness to participate in our research has been so severely limited that we only achieved one interview there. We found that the willingness to participate was

not related to whether the area was initially classified by the Electoral Commission as high or low risk for electoral fraud.

2.3 Ethical procedures

Before proceeding with qualitative interviews we have obtained the University of Manchester's ethical approval. The documents required by the University's Ethics Committee are attached in the Appendices 1-3. The first two of these documents: Participant Information Letter and Informed Consent Form were given to the interviewees prior to the interview and the Consent form has been signed by all our interviewees. The interviewees agreed to have their quotes used in this report, but some of them have requested to see the copy of their interview transcript- these were then sent to them. All the interviews were transcribed and these transcripts have been anonymised and are being securely stored without any identifying information. All the original interview recordings have been destroyed.

One of the conditions of our ethical approval was the anonymity and safety of our interviewees. Since we interviewed the local elites and community leaders, who work in very small areas, they would be very easy to identify locally even from a specification of their gender or exact age (especially as the knowledge of our and NatCen's presence in the study areas spread fast). As a result it is necessary for us to maintain an almost complete anonymity when using quotes from the interviews. As a result we will only mention our interviewees' ethnicity very broadly as Asian or white and in some cases whether they were from the area at high risk or a low risk of fraud. We will always refer to them only as 'political activists' or 'community leaders' to simply differentiate those who have spoken to us as party activists, candidates or councillors; and those who hold important community leadership positions. Similarly, the list of all interviews conducted (Appendix 6.4) is entirely anonymised.

2.4 Supplementary analysis of electoral statistics

In addition to the use of electoral statistics to help select case study areas, we also undertook more detailed, supplementary analysis of the available electoral data for the chosen wards and the local authorities in which they are located. The focus of this analysis was twofold. First, we examined key measures of the level of electoral competition in the case study wards. Specifically, we looked at levels of turnout in these wards at local elections since the mid-late 2000s, compared their local authority average, as well as changes in party vote shares and party control over time. Second, we examined the extent

of postal voting, and the rate of postal ballot rejection, in each of the case study wards, compared to all wards in their respective local authority. Ward-level correlations between the postal voting patterns and various socio-demographic indicators (primarily ethnicity, qualifications, and English language skills) were also produced. The statistical analysis for each local authority was then discussed with the relevant election services manager to consider what additional, local factors might explain the patterns observed. Particular attempts were also made to identify any commonalities between areas deemed to be at high risk of electoral fraud, as well as contrasts with the wards in areas seen as having a low risk of fraud.

3. Findings

3.1 Low and high risk fraud areas

Even though our case selection rested on the area classifications conceived by the Electoral Commission based on their prior research into fraud allegations, which distinguished between areas of serious and repeated fraud allegations (rated as a high risk area) and the areas which have not seen serious allegations (rated as a low risk area), our findings about the types of vulnerability to fraud experienced by Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities varied very little in all areas studied. While we did see some differences between the areas, we think they were more strongly related to whether allegations of fraud were more likely to emerge, than whether the fraud was more likely to be committed in the first place. We found that in low risk areas the vulnerabilities reported were very similar and on the whole many interviewees in the low risk areas mentioned cases of fraud that they witnessed in these areas.

> *I'll tell you straight-forward, because I suffered through that, myself. You know, a couple of years back…or three, four years…you know, they start producing these postal ballots…I've seen the people carry bagful. Collecting them…then they sit down, like me and you on the table…and cross it, post it.* (Asian activist, low risk area)

> *People going in their house, Labour members, and they've got a bag and they say 'give me your postal vote'. They're collecting them and they, you know, they put the cross themselves and they come back later and take the signatures. (Asian activist, high risk area)*

The main difference, which became apparent between areas classified by the Electoral Commission as low risk and high risk fraud areas, was the political competition within the community. In most of the areas classified as high risk, there seemed to be two competing kinship structures, and more rarely two competing ethnic groups, who would organise around different organisations, parties or candidates. In areas of low risk of fraud, we saw that different ethnic groups either were united by language, or there were too many small groups for two main competitors to emerge, or there was one unified kinship structure, which held the whole area under control. In two of the case study areas we were told that for many years instances deemed by our interviewees to be fraudulent or within the grey area of electoral fraud were frequent, but have gone unreported. The reports only emerged once the status quo had been somehow undermined, either by a prominent local politician losing their seat, or a long established party losing control of the local council.

Our findings with respect to these contrasting levels of political competition within the respective communities themselves are consistent with the evidence relating to the relative levels of electoral competition in the wards studied. All four areas deemed to be at high risk of fraud exhibit either levels of turnout which are typically far in excess of the local authority average (generally at least 10 percentage points above the mean) or are marginal enough to have seen at least one change of party control in the ward since 2010. Moreover, two of the four high risk areas met both of these criteria for high levels of electoral contestation. By contrast, none of the wards in areas originally selected as being at low risk of fraud had levels of turnout clearly and consistently above the local authority average. These wards were also less likely than those in high risk areas to have seen recent changes in party control.

In the areas thought to be at higher risk of fraud, one clear effect of greater community and electoral contestation has been to drive up levels of postal voting, as is generally the case in any locality where electoral competition is intense. As a result, the proportion of electors issued postal ballots in the 'high risk' areas was also far above average for their local authority, to the extent that they were generally twice, or in one case, three times the ward median. By contrast, the take-up of postal ballots by electors was clearly below average in all but one of the 'low risk' areas. We should underline that the primary driver of these differential rates of postal voting among wards is almost certainly the level of electoral competition, and that higher rates of postal ballot take-up cannot be taken as an indicator of fraud. Levels of turnout among electors issued with postal ballots are significantly higher than for those voting in person. As a result, parties contesting marginal seats often go to great efforts to encourage their core supporters to vote by post. At the same time, there are clearly risks associated with the prevalence of postal votes in contexts where electoral competition reflects, at least in part, forms of political competition or tensions within a community which are not necessarily a product of party politics. In particular, there is a danger that the use of postal votes to mobilise the support of a kinship network will take on a very different character to mainstream campaigning by political parties to 'get their vote out'.

The other difference between areas classified by the Electoral Commission as low risk and high risk fraud areas was the organisational density within the community. Generally, although not without exceptions, areas of low fraud risk were more densely populated by

non-political community organisations and the cooperation between these seemed larger. In most cases a few of the same people were engaged in the same organisations, from mosque committees, youth and residential, to ethnic societies and associations. In areas of low risk there were often active umbrella organisations supporting the smaller groups. In one case, where fraud has been perpetrated and there were convictions, a response seems to have been through supporting greater organisational density in the area- and it is a solution that seems to have worked. In a great majority of the high risk areas however, since all were economically deprived, our interviewees complained about lack of funding and the demise of any organisations that existed there in the past. Since we only looked at eight communities, and all of them but one were economically deprived, it is hard to make any firm conclusions here.

We also found that in situations of local conflict involving the white and Asian community, there may often be a prejudicial response from the white British community, who resort to stereotypes when raising allegations of fraud. Our Pakistani and Bangladeshi interviewees were usually aware that prejudice plays a role in these allegations; particularly in cases where they felt Asian communities were singled out more than other wrong-doers.

> *It's happening everywhere but it is more highlighted in the Asian community. I'll give you an example, as soon as a Muslim does something wrong it's highlighted in national newspapers, whereas when English person... if he does something… it's not highlighted as much… why is this? Exactly... You've got your answer there.* (Asian activist)

In the interviews where we saw the conflicts between white British and Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin groups, we heard some evidence of the white activists resorting to somewhat patronising statements, but generally conflict was not mentioned.

> *In a way you cannot particularly blame them for what they do because it is the norm where they live. We have to teach them, it is like [...] all these young Asians having terrible accidents and frightening everybody to death. It is education, it is teaching them that the rule of law on the road has to be obeyed. It is teaching them that the rule of law in voting and electoral discipline has to be obeyed. That is my view.* (White activist)

In contrast, where allegations of fraud emerged in cases of clashes of interest within the Pakistani or Bangladeshi community themselves, the narratives of our interviewees differed:

even though awareness and needing to be 'educated' were mentioned at times, conflict was directly recognised as a source of electoral fraud.

> *Wrong doing happens because there is a challenge to one particular person. Then they would start, our community will start dividing itself into different groups. But those groups could be from the village you come from or the city, it can break down to that. Or the biraderis, the particular sect you come from. But that of course only happens when you see a threat.* (Asian activist)

As a result of the fact that we found all vulnerabilities to be shared by the low and high risk areas, and we heard claims about incidences of fraud in most of our areas, we will not rely on the distinction of high versus low risk to organise the report.

3.2 Vulnerabilities to electoral fraud

This report identifies seven main sources of fraud vulnerability in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in England: language and knowledge barriers, community loyalties and pressures; kinship networks; lack of mainstream political party engagement; discrimination in candidate selection; insufficiency of safeguards for voting procedures and finally local economic deprivation. These vulnerabilities, the relative impact of which will be described in more detail later, can be classified in two distinct categories: structural and cultural. This classification is not entirely mutually exclusive, but refers to the types of changes that might or should be achieved to resolve them. Structural vulnerabilities are those that could be resolved via the change in law or government funding; while the cultural vulnerabilities are those that would have to be resolved through incremental social and cultural changes. The specific solutions proposed are discussed in Section 4 of this report.

Table 1. Classification of fraud vulnerabilities

Vulnerability	Mechanism	Classification of possible solutions
Lack of knowledge of language and electoral system	Mostly touching more recent immigrants, but also women who for cultural reasons may be excluded from public life. Their engagement is aided by others and thus they are vulnerable to the helpers abusing their position.	Structural
Family loyalty and respect	Less interested or more junior members of less or more extended family or friendship network may take advice from the head of the family or their elders. Potential for undue influence or intimidation, but generally a grey area.	Cultural
Kinship networks	Formal kinship hierarchy may be enforced when supporting candidates for selection. Formalised reciprocity rules may result in some forms of treating and border on voter intimidation.[4]	Cultural
Lack of engagement from political parties	Party presence and campaigning is limited to marginal seats, and largely ethnic seats are often considered safe- this creates a void for ethnic kinship networks to fill. Parties can often accept formal kinship networks as a middle man to bring in a bloc of votes and in doing so rescind their responsibility to engage the voter individually.	Cultural
Discrimination in candidate selection	Perceived difficulty in becoming a candidate for elected office without the support of the kinship networks, as well as perceived difficulty in becoming a candidate in a white area, strengthens the position of the networks.	Cultural
Insufficient safe-guards on voting	Postal votes are vulnerable to fraud via routine handling of votes by either other members of community, or party activists and candidates.	Structural
Local economic deprivation	Lack of support for local community organisations may exacerbate the 'void' which is duly filled by ethnic kinship networks performing a variety of welfare functions, increasing their power within the community.	Structural

---

[4] A person is guilty of treating if either, before, during, or after an election they directly or indirectly give or provide any food, drink, entertainment or provision to corruptly influence any voter to vote or refrain from voting. Treating requires a corrupt intent – it does not apply to ordinary hospitality.

The division between structural and cultural sources of vulnerability is important as it carries different methods of resolving these issues. Structural problems can be addressed through policy and funding changes, as well as greater provision of support from local government; cultural changes are harder to achieve as they are usually voluntary and organic.

3.3 Language and knowledge

The first type of vulnerability is widespread especially among the more recent immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh, and particularly affects women. This is a vulnerability because as these recent immigrants and women receive help from their community and family with negotiating their way through the process of voter registration and filling out their postal ballot or postal voting statement, they may fall prey to disingenuous attempts at pressure to fill out their vote in a certain way, or even – as we hear from our interviewees – their postal ballot may be kept from them altogether and filled out by someone else. This source of vulnerability to fraud was mentioned in all of our locations and by many of our interviewees.

Issues relating to language were also highlighted by our analysis of differential postal vote rejection rates and the feedback we received from electoral administrators. In almost all the areas, we found evidence of a strong correlation at ward level between rates of postal vote rejection (on grounds of dates of birth or signatures not matching those supplied in the application, or completed ballots being returned with the wrong postal voting statement) and the proportion of residents with poor English language skills. A number of electoral administrators pointed to a tendency for migrants with poor English to receive assistance from community members or party activists when completing applications for postal votes, as well as to the risk that at least some of these electors receiving 'assistance' may be unsure about the purpose of the form they are signing.

While this kind of assistance is invaluable in many cases, some of our interviewees expressed concern that it may lead to the senior men in the family taking this help too far by also exerting some pressure on how to vote. However, a few of our interviewees from high risk areas where these kinds of allegations have emerged rejected the notion that such misuse of power has happened in their areas and generally the feeling among our interviewees was that these types of family influence are a grey area.

I think…in any situation, there will always be a minority, a small percentage, that does cross the line and its wrong. The vast majority is that grey area that we talk about. Why shouldn't a husband turn round to his wife and encourage her to vote for a candidate? Why shouldn't a father say that to their children…yeah? It's not as if they've got a gun in their hand and say "Right, you will sign that way or vote that way, otherwise I'm going to disown you." That's very few and far between. The vast majority's consensual. My parents - my father's educated so that they can read and write English (17:23) – when the ballot papers come, they will ask me "Go on, fill these in for us." Is that fraud? Yeah, my mother can't read and write, I fill it in in for her…yeah…that's not fraud, because my parents tell me "We want to vote for this candidate – fill it in." And they do it. (Asian activist)

This notwithstanding, such practises   have led in the past to open allegations of disenfranchisement of women and young people and has generally been considered a case of very clear cut electoral fraud.

If I force my wife to vote… "Cross here"…or …ask my daughters or my sons, you know, "Vote for this gentleman here, because he's my friend"…they probably don't know him. I won't allow them to make their decision. And that's where the problem is. I think, as far as I'm concerned, that's fraud. (Asian activist)

3.4 Family loyalty and respect

A similar issue, mostly because it also affects women and those who are less powerful in the community either through less knowledge of the system or through their lower social status, is the phenomenon of family voting.

Voting together as a family is emerging as a universal phenomenon from the newer voter literature that shows that families of all backgrounds tend to go to the polling station together (Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2008) and influence each other in their decision to vote (DeRooj 2014). Family voting is also likely to be commonplace where the eligible voters in a household have all requested postal votes. Feedback from electoral administrators suggested that where families have a tendency to complete postal votes together, there is a tendency for a portion of ballot papers and postal voting statements to be incorrectly matched. This is by no means a tendency which appears to be specific to families of a particular size or ethnic group. However, we did find evidence that postal vote rejection rates

tend to be higher in wards with larger Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities, and for this to be strongly associated with higher rates of poor English language skills. Just as concerning, was that it was widely reported by our interviewees that in Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities family voting is more clearly hierarchical. Most of our interviewees indicated that women especially, but also adult children were expected to follow the lead of the head of the household.

> *And you'll probably ask some people and they probably won't even know who they voted for because sadly their vote has come in the post, they will request a postal vote because dad would like to see that happening and then all they have done is just signed a piece of paper. (Asian activist)*

One of our interviewees even referred to the canvassers on the doorstep bargaining about how many of the family's votes they can count on with the head of the household.

> *I've equally heard…where political party agents have gone round and said "You've got five votes, can we please have them?" And they [say] "Tell [you] what, you can have three and I'm gonna give two to the other one".* (Asian activist)

This hierarchical assumption was recognised by most of our interviewees as distinct from the general pattern among the British population and most of them accepted that it could create a vulnerability to fraud in a sense that in some families the level of coercion could be present. However, generally, this practice was referred to as a potentially grey area in our interviews, as women and young people were thought to have less interest and knowledge of politics. In situations where coercion was not present, female and younger voters would still be expected to defer to their elders however, on the basis of respect and loyalty that traditionally would be expected towards the elders.

> *If that man was to go to their houses and pick the [postal votes] up, sign them, date them and then bring them here, that for me is [fraud]. Whereas […] them out of respect handing them over to whoever their elder is, that, you know, I don't think, how can that be fraud? Saying 'look I don't really care, do what you like, you've asked me, here they are'. I don't think that is fraud, whereas if he had gone forcibly taken them, or blackmailed them, that is wrong. (Asian activist)*

While some interviewees believed this respect and loyalty was given gladly, others felt it increased the chance that it would lead to effective 'loss' of power to freely and individually decide one's vote.

I think they are aware but I think that there is not much of a deterrent or reason to be fearful. For, say, the [local] Asian communities, they still very much have this concept of man of the house who decides everything, whatever the eldest male says goes and that's not challenged and there is not enough external pressure to challenge that behaviour and therefore people are quite comfortable engaging in that way, that sort of behaviour in elections. I don't think the excuse is that they weren't aware that that is fraud or that is not really correct behaviour really goes, I think people understand that it is one person one vote so… (Asian activist)

3.5 Kinship networks

The third source of vulnerability to electoral fraud springs from the engagement of ethnic kinship networks in the process of both candidate selection and voting. The networks are usually transported from the country of origin in the process of chain migration, in which members of the same locality, and often extended family, follow each other to Britain, where the pioneer settlers from their family or village have already settled (Eade, 1989; Shaw, 2000; Garbaye, 2005). This chain migration is still ongoing, with marriages accounting for the greatest immigrant inflow from South Asia (Charsley et al, 2012). The influx of new migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh often reinvigorates the strength of kinship networks as the newcomers owe their arrival to a family member who was already a British resident and will have less knowledge of the language and political system here. As a result they will most often rely on the kinship networks and their extended family here for anything from employment to help with all the official forms and processes (for good descriptions of the role of these networks see Shaw, 2000; Akhtar, 2013).

3.5.1. Kinship networks as positive community resource

The positive impact of the existence of these networks is hard to over-estimate. Traditionally, these networks proved an invaluable source of support for the newly arrived immigrant communities that were otherwise at a significant disadvantage in Britain. Their role as welfare providers, translators and interpreters as well as guides to the British ways, including how and where to register and cast the vote, has been well described and is still much needed by the newer immigrants and some women who are otherwise excluded from formal means of education (Shaw, 2000).

In politics, their influence is probably responsible for the high levels of electoral participation among South Asian communities (Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2008) and our interviewees often underlined the wide-spread participatory culture within Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. This, for many of our interviewees has been an issue of pride and they often contrasted the high levels of engagement in their communities with much lower ones in groups of different ethnicities.

> *I mean whatever we may think about the way that some South Asian politics is conducted, they do have a history of voting and of active participation in politics which just isn't there in the Eastern European community* (White activist)

Kinship networks have been in the past a means of overcoming discrimination and disadvantage for access to elected office (Akhtar, 2013; Purdam, 2001), and this role is clearly still alive. The persistent discrimination in candidate selection processes and some negative aspects of this role of kinship networks will be discussed later in part 3.6.3.

3.5.2 Kinship networks and fraud

Despite its many positive and much needed functions, in most, but not all, of our locations this network has been identified as a major source of vulnerability to fraud in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.

The sources of vulnerability to fraud within these networks lies in their nature: they are usually a highly hierarchical and patriarchal structure, and often very formalised. In fact, their formality seems to be one of the main reasons for the negative influence of these networks on politics. Apart from this, and as a result of a caste and class component of these networks, there is an additional hierarchy between networks.

The formality of the networks can extend beyond the issue of hierarchy and also transpire through semi-formalised reciprocity. The level of this formalisation varied across our interviews, but it ranged from promising votes on the basis of friendship and as a favour, with the strong expectation of reciprocity, to an almost formal arrangement by which the voters who supported a local candidate can call on them in the middle of the night for help, and with very little being out of bounds in terms of what can be asked of one's representative. Thus, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin councillors were sometimes providing, in effect, an all-

hours service covering a wide range of personal and business issues that would not usually fall within the bounds of work for a non-Asian councillor.

> *My home is theoretically open 24/7. I have had people knocking at 11 o'clock at night saying "can you sign my passport for me?" or 6.45 in the morning saying "actually I am off to London can you give me a signature please?" And that is just the way it is and when you become a Councillor you just have to accept that.* (Asian activist)

Since some of our interviewees have been past or present councillors, or unsuccessful candidates, we have heard many first-hand accounts of this phenomenon whereby the services of the councillor were understood to be exclusively 'earned' by those local residents who have cast a vote for this candidate. Thus, by contrast, voters who supported the opposition were understood to have no claim on the elected councillor's time and help.

> *[...] because if you say "I didn't vote for you" or you say "Look, I'm not interested, yeah"…you know that they will not engage with you, the politician will not want to do anything with you…they'll certainly remember what "You didn't vote for me so therefore, you know… I'm not…!", yeah…and you tend to find that once politicians know that you if you are affiliated to a party, you know…they will most likely help and support those people from their party…* (Asian activist)

Although many of the councillors said that they felt they were representing all the residents in their ward, effectively they accepted that this is not a general perception in the community. This is a very extreme expression of patronage politics, which is common in Pakistan and Bangladesh (Piliavsky, 2014) where these kinship networks originate, but which is by no means exclusive to these countries. As a result many of our interviewees explained that the voters wanted the candidates to see them vote for them so that their claim to the future councillor's services can be clear and beyond doubt.

> *In my election, people brought me their postal vote forms. They would sign them and then say 'you can vote whichever way you like.' […]Saying 'look, these are my household's and they have all signed them, they have all filled it in, I haven't ticked them, here you tick them and you can post them.* (Asian activist)

3.5.3 Community support for kinship networks

The kinship network activities described above were very rarely considered to be in any way acceptable, with most of our Asian and non-Asian interviewees in agreement as to the highly irregular nature of these activities. At their least extreme we heard accounts of candidates

being present in the house of the voter when the voter was filling out their postal ballot paper in order to show the candidate formally that they have voted for him and thus 'earned' their services. At their most extreme we heard stories of voters bringing signed, but not filled in postal votes to the candidate, often in bulk (from their whole family), or even 'carrier bags' of votes being delivered to the candidate and/or polling stations on behalf of a network.

> *One gentleman, I use the term loosely, turned up to the polling station with 50 postal votes in his hand.* (White activist)

A great majority of our interviewees criticised the role of kinship networks in elections. There was recognition that, in the past, it has delivered positive results in terms of community mobilisation, help navigating the complexities of registration and voting, as well as support for minority candidate selection and election. However, most of our interviewees felt it has outgrown its usefulness in many ways. Some believed that kinship networks served to severely disenfranchise women and younger people, as well as those lower down the kinship hierarchy. We have heard many stories when more talented and suitable candidates were discouraged or prevented from standing for office by the network elders. As a result we heard dissatisfaction with quality of candidates, whose suitability for office was decided on the basis of their position within kinship network, not quality. Many of our participants felt this represented poor value for the community.

> *Yes. In my view, in [city X], out of the 5 councillors, the one cabinet member they had...none of the other councillors is capable of becoming even a cabinet member. That's my honest view about the Pakistani councillors that we have. They are not competent enough to have...to be even a cabinet member.* (Asian activist)

Increasingly, our interviewees reported, the social support for the influence that these networks have in politics may be on the wane, especially among young people, whose position will be discussed later. However, as the next section will show, there is very little alternative provision for political engagement in most of the areas we studied. Finally, we must underline that it is a complex case of balancing the positive effects of community support and ethnic mobilisation with the negative opportunities for voting irregularities. By trying to discourage the negative aspects of kinship networks we must ensure the alternative paths to engagement are available and well supported.

3.5.4 Kinship networks and ethnic mobilisation

In the locations where we heard less evidence of kinship network activity we still heard mentions of other forms of ethnic solidarity and loyalty, more akin to the issue of loyalty and respect discussed earlier, but these informal loyalties and forms of ethnic mobilisations were thought to be less of a vulnerability to electoral fraud. Since they lacked the formality and hierarchy of kinship networks they were generally less prone to produce fraud vulnerabilities, and were thought to be easier to opt out of.

> *I don't think we have any of that community leader politics where you go to one person and he controls a number of houses. [...] We did try and stay away from this, it's quite easy to read names off the electoral register and say 'this person is English, that person is Pakistani, that person is Indian, therefore from our candidates so and so person should go to this house' which correlates to that community [...] So we did try to, we consciously tried to stop that.* (Asian activist)

Having said this, we also heard some indication that some ethnic mobilisation effort, such as party supporters standing outside the polling station, may be intimidating to some voters and there were routine complaints about this activity in many of our study areas.

> *Outside the polling stations you have, there was a congregation of [Party] members. Almost all of them were Asian and male and it's quite intimidating to people who are going in to vote.* (Asian activist)

This intimidation is sometimes given as a reason why Asian voters may prefer to vote by post, although as we saw throughout our interviews this has the potential to increase their vulnerability to fraud.

> *People just don't want to go out when there is men congregated around the polling stations, that is another issue, they don't like going out, they finding it intimidating sometimes, so the prefer to vote at home, sat at home.* (Asian activist)

3.6 Political parties and kinship networks

Some of the responsibility for the strength of the kinship networks, and therefore the increased vulnerability of fraud, must be laid with the main political parties. There are three reasons for this: lack of campaign activity with areas of South Asian residential concentration; informal adoption of kinship networks within party campaigning strategy; and the persistent discrimination and ghettoization of ethnic minority candidates at the stage of selection.

3.6.1 Lack of mainstream party activity

At the 2010 elections, the Ethnic Minority British Election Study (EMBES) showed that ethnic minority residents were much less likely to have been contacted by a political party during the electoral campaign. Even those minority residents of marginal and hotly contested constituencies saw less contact from parties than their white neighbours, despite the fact that the campaign in these constituencies is most active (Sobolewska et al 2013).

> *I am saying go and talk to people, go to the houses, go and talk to them. Have the decency to knock on someone's door, you never met Asians before. You never in 20 years knocked on Asian doors.* (Asian activist)

Our study of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin local political activists shed some light on this curious finding. What we heard is that in the areas we studied, electioneering has effectively been delegated from the political parties to the ethnic kinship networks operating in these areas. In one of the areas we heard mentions of the 'Asian Labour party' as a label distinguishing the local activists acting on behalf of the kinship network from the local Labour party, which was absent from this area. This absence was pretty much confirmed in almost all of our study areas. Even in the areas that were not safe areas for one political party and thus were contested by more than one party, either the locus of competition was placed between two competing kinship networks or ethnic factions representing different parties, which made for a vicarious community competition; or a younger or disaffected group of ethnic voters aligned themselves with another political party in an open bid to overthrow the dominance of their ethnic kinship structure.

> *[...] when the first Asian candidate stood, everybody supported him thinking 'It's the first Bengali guy, it's the big thing for our community, blablabla' So he stood, he was from Sylhet, so then, the other group said to him, we want someone from our area to stand next time and he said 'NO'. So they joined the Liberal Democrat party and said 'You are not gonna give us a chance, we are gonna make our own party.* (Asian activist)

3.6.2 Adoption of kinship networks

The phenomenon of political parties abdicating their political influence and instead acting through ethnic kinship networks is a well-known phenomenon, which often emerges in the media. Garbaye (2005) describes this adoption of self-identified ethnic leaders as the link between a party and the ethnic voters as a British mode of incorporation of ethnic voters. While this has led to positive outcomes for these communities at first- with increases of

participation and representation among ethnic minorities- now this mode of incorporations may have outlived its initial purpose. Our study found that this phenomenon significantly strengthens the local ethnic kinship networks and opens up vulnerabilities to fraud that spring from these networks' political control. Our interviewees often felt that if the parties had taken an interest, or at least been present, many abuses of influence could be prevented.

> *[...] there is need for the mainstream parties to attract youngsters from the Asian community particularly in [area X] because they will be the future generation that will be serving their communities...and I can see that that is not very...you know...and the other thing is that we shouldn't have that expectation, if somebody's father was a councillor, the son will be the councillor...that's not necessary, it might happen though, but that tradition should diminish and there should be more... mainstream political parties should try to attract more people.. (Asian activist)*

The main source of the abuse of power by the kinship networks caused by the delegation of power from the mainstream parties into these networks lies in the shift between a voter defined individually and one defined as a group. In the modern understanding of elections a voter is an individual- a notion supported by the one person one vote principle and safeguarded by the secrecy of the vote. Electoral fraud of the kind we heard about during our interviews were often breaking these two principles, and many of our interviewees thought that the misunderstanding of these principles constituted a lack of an understanding among the Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities and needed to be tackled with awareness campaigns and voter education. However, from the interviews it seemed clear that this education is not being delivered by the parties- and in fact the way that the parties engage with just the community leaders in the hope that they would deliver the vote of the entire community may be undermining this education. The political parties in fact perpetuate the notion of a Pakistani and Bangladeshi voter as a group and not an individual voter. This tendency to see Pakistani and Bangladeshi voters as a homogenous bloc has long been evident in British politics. For example, writing in his memoirs about the February 1974 General Election, Roy Hattersely, then MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook, referred to a group of Kashmiri voters as casting a singular 'vote' :

> *I won with an increased majority, The well-organised and invariably loyal Kashmiris had cast their disciplined vote early in the day* (Hattersley, 2003, p.126)

This perception is shared by our interviewees in 2014:

> *So for example, people from the Conservative Party have come to our house, seen a Labour poster and basically sort of said, 'oh well, you know, all of you are going to*

vote Labour' and my wife says 'no, don't take it for granted that I am going to vote Labour' because my wife was born in this country, she is English. I never, I have never found out how she votes. And I don't want to. So there is this assumption that you see a Labour poster, therefore it is a Labour household, or the Labour Party make the mistake and basically assume that everybody in my house is going to vote the same way as I do. Whereas I don't know and I don't think that they should. (Asian activist)

3.6.3 Candidate selection

Candidate selection is the first area where the ever-present influence of kinship networks may be felt. While this influence is particularly significant in increasing the political power of kinship networks- and thus vulnerabilities to fraud- they seem also quite necessary for acquiring political access to political office. Our interviewees perceived the activities of these networks in the selection process both as a necessary means of overcoming discrimination that the Asian candidates would usually suffer; and a negative phenomenon. Since we mentioned two of the negative aspects of this phenomenon before: poor quality of candidates and political representatives and the strict hierarchy in selecting candidates (page 30); in this section we will focus on the root cause of the networks' perceived necessity: perceived discrimination and the role of kinship networks in overcoming it.

Many, although not all, of our interviewees, felt that being from a Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin was an obstacle in reaching political office in the UK. The blame was usually laid equally with the voters- who were thought not to be likely to vote for an Asian candidate - and the parties.

Ethnicity will always play a part. All you have to do is look at the political parties nationally. They're all desperate in their own way to represent the community at large but they don't. Yeah, some do better than others, in fairness – Labour does better than the Tories – but, you know, they all need to do a lot more. So, round here, where do non-white candidates get selected from? Generally, from those areas where there are black voters. They seldom get selected from all-white areas. Why not? It's not through lack of ability alone…it's because obviously, you know, ethnicity plays a part in it.[...]It's blatant discrimination, not just kind of. It's absolute discrimination because they know their white voters won't vote for them. (Asian Activist)

The perception that the white voters will not vote for the Asian candidates receives mixed support from other empirical research, although it seems the Muslim candidates are more likely to suffer (Fisher et al 2013). However, it is clear that all parties were perceived to mount substantial barriers for entry unless the candidate was receiving support from the kinship network and the resulting 'votes in hand'. The perception of discrimination both from parties and voters may counter-balance any sense of wrong-doing among those candidates who do not want to rely on traditional kinship networks to get selected and elected. One of our interviewees described this cognitive dissonance for a prospective candidate:

> *On the one hand, they condemn openly, vigorously these grouping based on biraderis and the regions. They condemn that. But on the other hand, without having that, they can't move further...you know.. they can't progress at all... they can't enter in that field because... But they're having to face this barrier also…you know.. and they come up, they are very energetic, they believe in their strength, educational strength, their other strengths, they're outspoken and everything.. But when they come to the saddle they realize.. hang on a minute we can't go any further...but that change is.. you know... is a long way ahead. It's not going to happen in the immediate future...that's not going to happen.* (Asian activist)

With the national political parties trying to remove some of these barriers (Sobolewska 2013) and generally increasing the number of ethnic minority candidates- at least nationally- in areas that are predominantly white, change may be indeed on its way – however the local parties are usually considered one of the main obstacles in this change (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995) and this was also raised in our interviews.

3.7 Insufficient safe-guards on voting

Although the majority of the underlying vulnerabilities to fraud among Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities were of a cultural nature, there were also some crucial structural disadvantages. These revolved mostly around safety of postal voting, but also to a lesser extent potential for registration fraud and personation at the polling station.

3.7.1 Safety of postal voting

The majority of our interviewees both knew and recounted examples of fraud relating to postal votes, or thought that the use of postal votes was a potentially major source of vulnerability in the system. Although some of them underlined the ease of voting, which the

postal voting offered, three different vulnerabilities were identified. The first one was to do with the lack of law enforcement around fraudulent applications for postal votes; second was the issue of undue influence and intimidation both when filling out the vote at home with others present, and during the handling of the vote by party activists, community members and candidates themselves; and finally the high rejection rates of postal votes in areas of high density of Pakistani and Bangladeshi voters (all of which have been discussed earlier) may risk further disenfranchisement of these voters.

One additional, although much less pronounced in our interviews, issue was that of fraudulent applications to join the electoral register. One interviewee said that this was a problem known to the parties and the police, but that they generally looked away. None of the interviewees were seemingly aware that the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) should solve this problem, but whenever this was mentioned by our interviewers, they were positively surprised. In a few of the case study areas, particularly those that have seen fraud allegations raised in the past, the issue of handling postal votes, and especially blank ones, has been tackled head on and many interviewees reported that they themselves discouraged it. However, it was also felt more generally in these interviews, that the political parties and the police themselves did not really care and as a result many of our interviewees wanted to see an intervention from the law to prevent the handling of postal votes and other perceived abuses of the system.

> *The police says they are not interested. Let me be frank and I'm going to say it on the record that they are not interested! They're not interested, they don't have resources, and the whole issue haven't been taken seriously. If you ask me personally what I would say that what Electoral Commission needs to do as a starting point if they decide to carry on with the postal votes I think there needs to be a way to say 'Right, everyone who has applied for postal votes previously is cancelled and we start from scratch so people need to sign up again'. So then we start the whole process. Now people are more aware. A lot of these people who here signed up for the postal votes forever. They were signed up many years ago and they still remain on postal votes and people can't come off or people don't know how to come off. A lot of people are persuaded not to come off. If people want to start all over again, in [area X] for example, everyone needs to start from scratch again and there are more rigorous checks. I think then you might find the results are a lot better.' (Asian activist)*

A few of our interviewees felt that there was a degree of harassment in cases where the activists knew somebody had applied for a postal vote and this combined with the pressure

to apply for the postal vote in the first instance led some of our interviewees to propose that the law should be changed to protect those who choose to vote by post.

> *[...] there should be some mechanism in to say look, you know, that you shouldn't be targeting people, who have their …postal votes, it's their choice. (Asian activist)*

The familial and community pressure to fill a postal ballot in a certain way, or even handing it over blank – which we discussed in section 3.4 – was further adding to the sense that postal votes in fact may disenfranchise many voters.

> *For example, when I stood, I had a lot of young people that were willing to back me up… But because of the postal votes, the father said 'NO, I'm taking them, just sign here'. So their parents got involved and took their votes and they just said 'You sign here' and they didn't even vote. (Asian activist)*

> *What the postal votes has done is... I think... it has restricted people's choice. Because people are working in groups and clans, what you might find is some people who may want to vote for you or previously did vote for you can no longer vote for you because other people are influencing those postal votes. And that's the difficulty. (Asian activist)*

Aside from the risks of undue influence and other fraud associated with postal votes, there is a related, but distinct, concern about postal voting highlighted by our research. As we have already noted, there is a clear tendency in some localities for intra-community competition to manifest itself in unusually high levels of electoral contestation in individual wards and to drive up levels of postal voting as a result. Where this process occurs in areas with higher proportions of recent, or non-economically active, migrants who are unable to speak English well, there is a very clear risk that an unusually high proportion of postal ballots will fail to pass the verification process and therefore be excluded from the count. In six of the eight case study wards, 8% or more of postal votes had been rejected at the last local election for which figures were available. In two cases, the level of postal vote rejection was well into double digits. Again, there is no direct, or even indirect, evidence to suggest that these high rejection rates are an indicator of electoral fraud. It is also important to underline that similar rates of postal vote rejection may occur in predominately white area with either larger elderly populations or concentrations of residents with poor literacy levels, because anyone who struggles with the language or design/layout of the forms is more likely to make mistakes when completing the forms The key point is that while postal voting is intended to widen access to voting and encourage electoral participation, there is a clear risk that the safeguards it requires will inadvertently disenfranchise a worrying number of voters from

more vulnerable parts of the population because language and literacy issues result in higher rate of vote rejections.

3.7.2 Registration fraud

In one location in particular our interviewees voiced concerns over registration fraud and in a couple of others this form of fraud was mentioned. The alleged cases of fraud relate to more people being on a registration form than are actually resident at the address.

> *I think people are on the electoral roll who don't live in their houses and aren't there and my sister came across something and we didn't do anything about it, and perhaps we should have done. She said, she'd looked at the electoral role and there were 4 voters listed and when she knocked on the door, the lady and gentleman came to the door and she said 'oh you've 4 voters here' and this lady said, 'no, no, there's me and my husband and our 2 children.' And they were only little and so my sister came away from the door and said, 'I don't understand that', we should have done something about that but we didn't*. (White activist)

Again, the interviewees were generally not aware that the IER should help with this problem.

3.7.3 Personation

In a couple of locations the risk of personation at the polling station was thought to be significant. The two main vulnerabilities which were identified within communities were: the habit of asking people to cast a vote on their behalf; and the complex system of names given as opposed to names used by individuals. Both of these were understood as resulting from a cultural difference between white British and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. In the case of the first one there would be a trust system in which one individual would ask another to vote for them as a matter of convenience- without understanding this is fraudulent. The second case is even more complex as a lot of individuals would be given the same name at birth and so they would more or less informally use a different name throughout their lives: sometimes forgetting which of these names, or in what form exactly, were put on forms. Some of our interviewees felt this could enable someone to inadvertently commit personation through this form of confusion.

However, a few interviewees did think some members of the community may intend to commit personation and are exploiting the cultural differences to do so. One interviewee also mentioned that many small polling stations in a ward may encourage personation through lack of visual control over who had already voted.

> *[...] our polling station voting, the security there is based on very close communities that knew one another…we don't live in those communities anymore, it doesn't…and the way that the law's written…means I could go in anywhere and vote for anybody before they do…and the person – even if they knew who I was – wouldn't be able to reject me having the vote…they'd just make a little note to say "He did it"… (*White activist)[5]

3.8 Local economic deprivation

The design of the study had not envisaged that economic deprivation would play a major role- and thus did not include this factor in the selection criteria for area selection. As a result only one of the eight areas studied was relatively prosperous. This renders all our conclusions about the role of local economic deprivation tentative, yet it seemed important as many of our interviewees mentioned lack of funds and cuts to funds as a major obstacle to creating and supporting community engagement organisations. The presence and density of organisations was one of the only differences we found between areas initially divided into those at lower risk of fraud and those classified as high risk.

We also found some indications of a relationship between the existence of a conflict and tension in the community and the emergence of fraud allegations. Parts of the literature link the existence of community conflict with competition for economic resources (Dancygier, 2010), and it seems important that economic deprivation is noted as a potentially crucial vulnerability. The potential vulnerability of some groups of postal voters, either to fraud or to failing to complete their ballots so that they pass the threshold for verification checks, should again be underlined here. At the same time we accept that a more targeted investigation would be needed to confirm such a relationship.

---

[5] In fact the person in the polling station would be instructed to act upon their suspicion that the vote cast is fraudulent.

3.9 Generational change and gender

In discussing the many vulnerabilities to fraud that originate in either the political culture (such as lack of individual engagement from the political parties) or cultural norms of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities, it is crucial to underline the dynamic nature of these factors, mostly expressed through generational differences.

While the issues surrounding the lack of knowledge of English and the electoral system in Britain have been predominantly relevant to more recent immigrants, we also found that these vulnerabilities were also crucial for women of the older generation. In terms of gender, the generational changes, and the more general cultural shift- although by no means complete- has been in the direction of more engagement from women. Most of our interviewees recognised the need to encourage and include women.

> *Now, I think that's beginning to change…um, and you'll find some of the younger women in the, um, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are…are…are beginning to want to have a say in things. But still, you often go to community meetings and the only people you see are men. And I think, to some extent – I was just thinking through it the other day – um, we've probably got to do, as politicians, a bit more challenging of that and saying "You know, if I'm here to meet you, I want to get a view of the whole community and that must involve the women in the community, not just the men".* (White activist)

A vast majority of our interviewees mentioned generational differences within their communities; however there has been quite a distinct characterisation of the young. On the one hand, some interviewees presented them as more independent of kinship structures and more critical consumers of political messages from both their own community and the main political parties. On the other hand, some interviewees presented them as disengaged from politics. In both cases, they were understood as being more akin to the white British youth and thus free from the cultural heritage of their own community, both in the positive sense- such as participatory norms- and the negative one- by following blindly the hierarchical network structures.

> *The younger ones, those who are…um, are shrewd, sharp, cleverer…eh, they'd probably want to see through a lot more – what it is, why it is, how…they wouldn't, you know…somebody knocking, they say "Look, that's fine. You'll come to my door, I'll give you a vote, yeah?" They wouldn't…they'd... they'd: "What is your manifesto? What will you be doing? What's your policy on education? What is on this, etcetera".*

They would question little bit more, they would. Women in particular, it's a…it's a totally different thing. (Asian activist)

To be honest, young people basically don't want to get involved. They are just…like .. I don't want to know. Because of what's happening in the community, what's happening in the national politics, local politics, they are so side-tracked, that they don't want to get involved at all. Some don't want to even vote because it's that bad. The just have all these bad vibes about the voting system, the councillors, MPs, you know the whole system. They've gone off it basically, they don't want to vote. (Asian activist)

Whichever picture of the young Pakistani and Bangladeshi Britons one is to believe, it seems that the support from kinship network politics is weakening in both cases. This may lead a natural weakening of these networks, but it may also create more community tensions between the newly immigrant and the British born members of these communities.

3.10 Research limitations, generalizability and future research

3.10.1 Local versus General Elections

Because the research was designed and conducted on the local ward level, we do need to be careful about what we can generalise about how the Westminster elections are conducted. Most of the descriptions of fraud vulnerabilities were spoken about in a very general sense. All of our interviewees spoke very generally about such issues as the lack of knowledge, influence of ethnic kinship networks and the role of political parties. The lack of parties' activity is an issue where it is worth noting that a few of our interviewees said that the parties' invisibility diminishes somewhat during Westminster election campaign; however we know from the large survey of ethnic minorities from 2010 General Election, the lack of party campaigning is still an issue for the national elections. Also, while a lot of the discussion of the role of kinship networks related to candidates using these networks to rally support for themselves, we also heard evidence on how these networks are used on behalf of the party and other candidates supported by the networks. As such, we believe both of these sources of vulnerability generalise to the Westminster elections. We also heard some mentions of General Elections where a shortlisted candidate came:

with 50 votes in their pockets (Asian activist).

3.10.2. Need to examine the nature of local campaigning and vulnerability to fraud in non-Asian areas

Since this research has been design as an exploratory investigation into the electoral fraud vulnerabilities among people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, we have not planned to compare them with areas with different ethnic mixes of residents. However, as we have discovered, some of the vulnerabilities to fraud involve processes that may well go beyond the communities we have been asked to study. We feel that firstly the insufficiencies of certain safeguards around voting by post for example may be a less publicised, but equally as important, source of vulnerability for all communities in Britain. Lack of knowledge of English and the electoral system and processes is most likely shared by other immigrant groups. Similarly, the lack of organisational strength, economic deprivation and lack of party activity on a local level may well increase vulnerability to fraud among other ethnic groups, including white British. The existing literature on local political networks in Britain is generally lacking and it is our suspicion that the patronage politics which we describe in this report may be more widespread than we think.

> *Are ethnic minorities much more likely to be vulnerable? Probably. Is it only happening in ethnic minority wards? No it isn't. I know of a [non-Asian] Councillor who, in fact, genuinely sort of collects votes, postal votes.* (Asian activist)

3.10.3. Role of deprivation

Although we believe that relative deprivation may play a role in how electoral vulnerabilities are tackled by the local communities and parties, as we explained in section 3.10, this study did not allow us to explore this further as only one of our selected areas was not economically deprived. However, our analysis of how patterns of postal voting in our case study wards compare to other wards in their respective local authorities has highlighted some evidence that specific deprivation indicators may be associated with higher rates of postal vote rejection.

4. Conclusions

Our first research question was whether electoral fraud allegations in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are evidence based, or a result of self-perpetuating, and to an extent prejudicial, perceptions. Based on our data, the answer really is both. First, we found that these communities do exhibit particular vulnerabilities to fraud, and that – from our limited sample – the allegations are usually based on the existence of practices widely recognised by these communities as problematic (but not all of which are necessarily fraudulent). This vulnerability also seems universal and is not linked to a specific local or political factor, although we found that the allegations (rather than vulnerability to, or – as far as we can tell – incidences of) fraud do emerge in response to local conflict. However, we also found that our interviewees felt prejudice plays a role both in why such problematic practices emerge (through the necessity to use kinship networks to overcome language and low-information problems and obstacles to getting into elected office); and in how they are more widely publicised that they would otherwise have been if they happened among white communities.

Our second research question was whether allegations of fraud among Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities sprang from the fact that these communities were more likely to commit fraud, or that they were more likely to be victims of fraud. For reasons outlined in section 3.10 on the research limitations, we are unable to draw firm conclusions on the first part of this question. However, it has emerged very strongly from our research that Pakistani and Bangladeshi voters are likely to be disproportionately vulnerable to falling victims of fraud. This seems to be especially the case for women and young people, as well as more recent immigrants. We have identified the role that the hierarchical and patriarchal kinship networks play in this, but also concluded that the mainstream political parties have to share part of the blame. First of all they fail as inclusive political outlets open to and engaging with all voters equally, and secondly, through this they strengthen and encourage the kinship networks to fill in the political vacuum.

5. Proposed solutions for greater electoral integrity

Before we recommend any solutions for increasing electoral integrity and decreasing fraud vulnerability in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, we want to underline that both we and our interviewees strongly feel that there is a trade-off to be had between the accessibility of the electoral system and its integrity. This trade-off must not be taken lightly. Given that Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are amongst the most vulnerable to political exclusion - through low rates of electoral registration, through low contact from political parties, through discrimination in selection and election for political office and finally through loss of vote to either rejected postal votes or domineering community elders- we must underline that we feel making the system accessible must be an overwhelming priority. However, we also feel that empowering individual voters and weakening the strength of strict and formalised kinship networks in politics will achieve both: greater accessibility of the democratic process and its greater integrity.

> *There are always going to be issues if you make stuff accessible for people. So if I want to make my home burglar proof - it's easily - to make my home burglar proof, I brick up all the doors and all the windows - it just stops being a home. And the same with democratic process – we can make it really, really secure. But in doing that, there's a danger that we couldn't have accessibility to an extent where stop it being a democratic process. So, if there's a bounce…now the checks on…on, um, the signatures and dates of birth we do…how to counteract that balance…it's never going to be 100% safe…but you can't have an accessible system that's 100% safe from fraud…it's just not…but if somebody wants to be fraudulent, they will be fraudulent…some people get away with it.* (White activist)

As a result of this balance- and to compensate for the fact that a number of changes that we recommend below may increase the difficulty of voting- our first recommendation is for a system of automatic voter registration (or at least an opt-out system) where at point of contact with NHS, and/or any government service, the individual is prompted to register/asked to opt out.

We have divided our perceived sources of fraud vulnerability (page 23) into structural- those that can be addressed through legal changes and actions of the government (both national and local) – and cultural – which must be addressed through incremental and voluntary changes in all the involved actors. We will therefore classify our solutions accordingly.

- Legal reform suggested in the course of the interviews included:

- Stricter and more transparent guidelines to political parties and candidates on postal vote handling as the Electoral Commission has already proposed;

- The information whether a person has a postal vote should be included in the secrecy of voting- i.e. activists and parties should not be allowed to collect this information;

- Tightening the rules on voting at polling stations by increasing the radius safe from political pressure, enforcing the law already specifying that the tellers must not be present in the polling station.

- Introducing some form of identification to cast a vote.

- To compensate for the increased difficulty of voting, new registration laws should be introduced to either automatically enrol voters, for example via other points of contact with the state, or create an opt-out system.

- Given the weakness of parties as inclusive agents for political participation, the government and local government must fund more direct voter information, registration and turnout efforts at the individual voters in these communities.

- Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers should receive greater and ring-fenced funding in areas where additional needs are present to deal with severe under-registration, lack of knowledge of eligibility or poor English language skills.

- Cultural change suggested in the course of the interviews included:

  - Political parties should take a greater responsibility for not accepting the bloc vote delivered or promised by community leaders.

  - Political parties should aim to strengthen their support for diversity of elected representatives. Widening access to standing for elected office to all minority groups, regardless of whether the candidate's ethnicity matches those of voters, should be one of the parties' main objectives.

  - Both parties and communities should strongly encourage women of all ethnicities to participate more in politics, including making this participation easier for women and more relevant to their daily lives.

6. References

Akhtar, P. (2013) *British Muslim Politics: Examining Pakistani Biraderi Networks*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Charsley, K, Van, HN, Benson, M & Storer-Church, B (2012) 'Marriage-related migration to the UK'. International Migration Review, 46: 861-890.

Dancygier, R. (2010) *Immigration and Conflict in Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DeRooj E. (2014) 'Shamed into voting: how our nearest and dearest motivate us to turn out' in Cowley and Ford (eds) *Sex Lies and the Ballot Box,* London: Biteback Publishing

Eade, J. (1989) The Politis of Community: The Bangladeshi Community in East London, Aldershot: Avebury.

Electoral Commission (2014) *Electoral Fraud in the UK: Final Report and Recommendations*, London: The Electoral Commission.

Fieldhouse, E. and Cutts, D. (2008) 'Mobilisation or Marginalisation? Neighbourhood Effects on Muslim Electoral Registration in Britain in 2001', *Political Studies* 56: 333-354.

Garbaye, R. (2005) *Getting into Local Power: The Politics of Ethnic Minorities in British and French Cities*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Guest, G., MacQueen K.M. and Namey E.E. (2012) Applied Thematic Analysis; Sage

Hattersley, R. (2003) *Who Goes Home? Scenes from a Political Life*, London: Abacus.

Norris, P. and Lovenduski, J. (1995) Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pilivasky, A. (ed.) (2014) Patronage as Politics in South Asia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Purdam, K. (2001) 'Democracy in Practice: Muslims and the Labour Party at the Local Level', *Politics* 21: 147-157.

Shaw, A. (2000) *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain*, London: Routledge.

Sobolewska, M. and Heath, A. (2014) 'Voter engagement in the UK: the case of ethnic minorities' Written evidence submitted to Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (House of Commons)

http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/political-and-constitutional-reform-committee/voter-engagement-in-the-uk/written/6513.html

Sobolewska M. (2013) "Party strategies, political opportunity structure and the descriptive representation of ethnic minorities in Britain", *West European Politics Vol 36, 3:615-33.*

Sobolewska, M. Fieldhouse, E. and Cutts, D. (2013) "Who takes the black vote for granted? Electoral campaign and ethnic targeting: the case of Britain", *Parliamentary Affairs Vol 66, 2: 329-44.*

Wilks-Heeg, S. (2008) *Purity of Elections in the UK: Causes for Concern*, York: Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

7. Appendices

7.1 Participant Information Letter

7.2 Consent Form

7.3 Interview guide for interviewers

7.4 Anonymised List of Interviews

Understanding Electoral Fraud

Participant Information Letter

V2. 13.08.2014

What is our research about?

Proven cases of electoral fraud in the UK are very rare and on the whole international monitoring organisations classify elections in the UK as well run, fair and democratic.

However, some areas experience serious allegations or proven cases of fraud. We want to understand why this happens and what can be done to prevent those few cases. We are studying areas that experience fraud and comparing them to similar neighbourhood which do not, to see what makes some areas less likely to experience fraud and what lessons we can take from them to make our elections more secure and fair.

We are particularly concerned that South Asian communities which are already politically under-represented or disengaged may be more vulnerable to fraud. This is why this research will focus on ethnically diverse, often deprived neighbourhoods.

Why were you asked for an interview?

You have been asked to be interviewed because we feel you are knowledgeable about and engaged in local politics and community. You do not need to have any experience of electoral fraud and, as we are also interviewing local activists in areas which have not experienced fraud.

Who are we doing this research for?

This research is done for the Electoral Commission who will publish its findings. The final report will be used to inform policy, but NOT to investigate any cases of fraud. All our participants will have their anonymity guaranteed and the report will NOT name any participants.

What will we do with what you say today?

This interview will be fully confidential. The content of your interview will be used for research purposes ONLY. We are NOT investigating electoral fraud or any allegations of it. Nothing you say about past cases of fraud can be reported to the police or any other authority, unless we believe there is an imminent threat of serious personal harm to another person or you inform us about a planned criminal activity.

If you have any concerns or evidence about electoral fraud, which you would like to pass on to the authorities please contact your local Returning Officer [write in local number].

What will happen to this interview and your personal information?

We will guard your PRIVACY. All identifying details and the transcripts of the interviews (recordings will be destroyed) will be kept on an encrypted file at the University of Manchester. We are required by our University's regulations to store the data in the encrypted files for ten years. The interviews may be re- used for research purposes ONLY. We will NEVER share any of your details or recorded materials with a third party.

Can we record this interview?

If you allow us we will make an audio recording of this interview, which will help us transcribe what you said and will make our analysis easier. We will destroy these recordings once we make a transcription.

You can stop at any time

We aim to be respectful and flexible towards our research participants and so if for whatever reason you want to stop the interview, or stop recording it, please feel free to tell us.

If you have any complaints

You can direct any complaints about any part of this research to Dr Maria Sobolewska, University of Manchester, 0161 275 4889, maria.sobolewska@manchester.ac.uk. If you are further dissatisfied you can contact Phil Thompson, at the Electoral Commission: 020 7271 0570 pthompson@electoralcommission.org.uk.

<div align="center">Thank you for your time!</div>

<div align="center">Your contribution makes a difference</div>

The University
of Manchester

MANCHESTER
1824

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please initial box

1. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service. This includes a withdrawal of the right to use the interview after it has been conducted up to the point where the final report is published.	52
2. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.	
3. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.	
4. I agree that the anonymised transcription of this interview will be stored at the secure University of Manchester computer for a minimum of 10 years.	
5. I agree that the anonymised transcription of this interview can be used by the University of Manchester researchers working on this project in their future work.	
6. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Letter V.... Dated	
7. I agree to take part in the above project	

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Introduction:

1. Hello and introduction. Thanks for time, importance of contribution.
2. Reminder about anonymity, read through the consent letter, agree recording

Part one: local context and local politics

a. Local organisational density and structure
      i. Ethnic, religious, broader appeal?
      ii. Are there any umbrella organisations (is your organisation member?), are some of the same people engaged in more than one organisation?

b. Political parties locally
      i. Are political parties active in the area?
      ii. Do you think they have a lot of activists locally? *(esp if political party activist being interviewed)*
      iii. *Do the local organisations working with the parties or on elections more generally? Do business organisations?*

Part two: electoral politics

c. Integrity of elections
      i. Are there any campaigns to raise awareness of registration and turnout run in your area (by whom)?
      ii. Do a lot of people in the area use postal voting? Are you aware of any issues around this?
      iii. There is a common concern around the country about postal voting causing fraud, what are your thoughts? (Prompt: Someone else may be more likely to tell you how to fill it out, or fill it out for you or maybe see how you voted; prompt families, including extended families here)
      iv. Prompt what they actually think fraud is- is there any grey area where they think something is not fraud but it actually is? Do you think everyone in the area agrees what fraud is, or are some things more accepted (like showing someone your postal ballot before sending it off- other examples?) Prompt families deciding together, or someone deciding for the whole family
      v. If area of fraud: do you think the allegations are unfair?

vi.   Do you think there are any (similar/other) problems with the elections in neighbouring areas or wards?

vii. Why do you think the problems we spoke about takes place?

d. Local electoral context

[if problems not mentioned proceed with the prompts as a further local context info]:

i.   Ask about local electoral context (based on previous research into area: impact of UKiP presence, one party dominance, competitive context)

ii.   Are some parties/candidates considered more for one ethnic group?

iii. Do people in the area experience a lot of discrimination or exclusion on the basis of ethnicity or religion? In politics?

iv.   Do people generally struggle to engage in local politics because of English- is local politics run in other languages?

v.   Do people around here have a lot of interest in/ knowledge about politics? How about politics back 'home' (countries of origin)?

vi.   Do people around here think voting is a civic duty/responsibility?

vii. Do you think women participate/engage as much as men? (is there anything being done about this in the area?)

viii. Are Mosques or religious organisations also engaging in elections like the other organisations?

ix.   Are young people engaging in politics locally in the same way? Prompt different organisations, any conflict with elder community leaders or disengagement. (this is when hopefully biraderi may come out- I also added the family earlier on)

e. [If any concerns reported] We were talking about [problems mentioned] can I ask you if you had witnessed it personally (remind if need be that we won't report to the police), or is it one of the 'everybody knows' situations, someone told you?

Part three: wrap up

1. Thank you
2. What will happen now: data analysis, reporting, reminder of anonymity
3. An opportunity to ask questions

Anonymised list of interviews

1. A1: White, male, political activist. July 2014
2. A2: Indian, male, political activist. July 2014
3. A3: Pakistani, male, community leader. July 2014
4. A4: Pakistani, male, community leader. September 2014
5. A5: Pakistani, male, political activist. September 2014
6. B1: Pakistani, male, political activist. September 2014
7. B2: Asian, male, community leader. September 2014
8. B3: White, male, political activist, September 2014
9. B4: Pakistani, male, political activist. September 2014
10. B5: White, male, political activist. September 2014
11. C1: White, male, political activist. September 2014
12. C2: Pakistani, male, community activist October 2014
13. C3: Bangladeshi, male, community leader. October 2014
14. C4: White, female, community leader. October 2014
15. D1: Pakistani, male, political activist. October 2014
16. D2: White, female, political activist. October 2014
17. D3: White, female, political activist. October 2014
18. D4: Pakistani, male, political activist. October 2014
19. E1 Bangladeshi, male, political activist, October 2014
20. E2 Bangladeshi, male, political activist, October 2014
21. E3 Bangladeshi, male, political activist, October 2014
22. E4 Bangladeshi, male, political activist, October 2014
23. E5 Bangladeshi, male, political activists, October 2014
24. E6 Bangladeshi, female, community activist, October 2014
25. F1 Bangladeshi, male, political and community activist, July 2014
26. F2 White, male, political activist, September 2014
27. F3 White, male, political activist, September 2014
28. F4 Pakistani, male, community and political activist, September 2014
29. F5 Pakistani, male, political and community activist, September 2014
30. F6 Pakistani, male, community leader, September 2014
31. F7 Pakistani, male, community leader, October 2014
32. G1 Pakistani, male, community leader, October 2014
33. G2 Pakistani, male, community leader, October 2014
34. G3 White, female, political and community activist, October 2014
35. G4 White, male, political activist, October 2014
36. G5 Bangladeshi, female, community and political activist, October 2014
37. H1 – white, male, political activist, November 2014

Areas initially classified as low risk by the Electoral Commission A, C, F, H