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An Analysis of Britons' Preferences Regarding the Sociodemographic Characteristics of Politicians and What Politicians Reveal About Their Own Sociodemographic Profiles

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of DPhil in Politics in the Department of Politics
and International Relations at the University of Oxford

Merton College
University of Oxford

Trinity 2025

98,181 words

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores political representation in contemporary Britain. Its subject is very timely, given the record low levels of electoral turnout and record high levels of political disillusionment currently plaguing the country. It focuses on the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians, which prior research has shown are closely tied to political outcomes and hold great importance for Britons. It seeks to answer three related questions: what kind of politicians do Britons want to represent them; what kind of politicians *actually* represent them; and what do British politicians reveal about themselves. It utilises a variety of methods, from both the quantitative and qualitative traditions, in order to do so, employing a candidate choice experiment, surveys, data collection, and content analysis.

The combination of a constituency-focused candidate choice experiment which explores respondents' views towards their own representative and surveys which explore respondents' views towards politicians as a group is an innovative approach and it unearths important, original findings. It reveals that Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians vary by proximity of government, and that while they hold strong, statistically significant preferences with regard to the sociodemographic characteristics of their own MP, they desire a Parliament which reflects the sociodemographic profile of the wider country, not their own views. It further reveals that middle-class Britons, whilst professing a desire for more working-class representatives and fewer middle-class representatives when asked about Parliament as a whole, display a marked class affinity bias when asked about their own MP. It is suggested that this discrepancy of views among the middle-class may help explain the continued under-representation of the working class in Parliament. The candidate choice experiment and surveys not only (re)test variables which have been explored by other scholars using flawed designs, but also identify and test previously untested variables and find that they are extremely important to Britons – indeed, much more important than many of the variables which have long formed mainstays of experimental research in Britain.

The collection of data on MPs' sociodemographic characteristics complements the candidate choice experiment and surveys and allows a comparison to be made between the preferences of Britons towards their representatives and the reality. The results are troubling. British MPs are largely *not* the sort of people that Britons want to represent them. The content analysis of MPs' websites finds that British MPs, perhaps cognisant of this mismatch between the preferences of Britons towards their representatives and the reality, engage in what is termed the strategic release of information. That is to say, British MPs emphasise aspects of their lives that are popular with Britons and downplay elements that are not. Further, it is noted how MPs, when they *do* reference possessing unpopular characteristics, frame the information in such a way as to present it in the best possible light.

Contents

List of tables **6**

List of figures **7**

1. Introduction **9**
1.1 Introduction 9
1.2 The sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs in historical context 10
1.3 The importance of politicians' sociodemographic characteristics 22
1.4 Class in Britain: Dead and buried or alive and kicking? 26
1.5 Education, education, education 31
1.6 The personal is political 32
1.7 Infowars 36
1.8 Congruent, responsive, both, or neither? 37
1.9 The rise, fall, and revival of elite studies in Britain 38

2. Literature review **41**
2.1 Introduction 41
2.2 British candidate choice experiments 42
2.3 Who's who 49
2.4 Self-portraits 49
2.5 Gaps and shortcomings in the existing literature 49
2.5.1 British candidate choice experiments 50
2.5.2 Collection of data on British MPs' sociodemographic characteristics 57
2.5.3 Content analysis of MPs' websites 57

3. Experimental and survey results I: Main effects **58**
3.1 Introduction 58
3.2 Theory 64
3.3 Hypotheses 69
3.4 Research design 72
3.5 Results 88
3.6 Conclusion 99

4. Experimental and survey results II: Subgroup analysis, detailed exploration of higher education, variation across versus within classes, variation at different levels of representation, and the impact of combinations of variables **103**
4.1 Introduction 103
4.2 Theory 105
4.3 Hypotheses 108
4.4 Research design 111
4.5 Results 115
4.6 Conclusion 126

5. British MPs' sociodemographic profiles and self-presentation online 129
5.1 Introduction 129
5.2 Theory 131
5.3 Hypotheses 134
5.4 Research design 135
5.5 Results 137
5.5.1 Secondary education 143
5.5.2 Higher education 147
5.5.3 Prior occupation 153
5.5.4 Class 164
5.5.5 NHS and healthcare 169
5.5.6 Local ties 175
5.5.7 Propensity to rebel 179
5.5.8 Marital status 181
5.5.9 Parental status 186
5.5.10 Marital and parental status combined 190
5.5.11 Outside interests 191
5.6 Conclusion 194

6. Conclusion 198
6.1 Introduction 198
6.2 Summary of results 199
6.3 Implications for British politics 200
6.4 Areas for further research 205
6.5 Final word 210

References 211

Appendix A: Number of candidates per single member seat in the United Kingdom, 1885–2010 327

Appendix B: Attributes and levels tested in British conjoint candidate choice experiments 329

Appendix C: National Statistics Socio-economic Classification 340

Appendix D: Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema 342

Appendix E: Oesch class schema 344

Appendix F: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? (by respondents' social class) (5-class schema) 346

Appendix G: Survey results (July 2021) 347

Appendix H: Survey results (June 2022) 349

Appendix I: Survey results (March 2023) 351

Appendix J: MPs elected at the 2019 General Election but no longer in Parliament when the content analysis of websites was conducted 355

Appendix K: MPs elected at the 2019 General Election who did not have a functioning website when the content analysis was conducted 356

Appendix L: MPs elected at the 2019 General Election who had a functioning website but no biographical section when the content analysis was conducted357

Appendix M: Power analysis simulation (two choice tasks) 358

Appendix N: Difference-in-marginal-means analysis (z-test for independent estimates) comparing evaluations of MPs and local councillors..... 360

Appendix O: Which candidate do you think would be more competent?..... 362

Appendix P: Which candidate do you think would be more approachable? .. 363

Appendix Q: Which candidate do you think holds views most similar to your own? 364

Appendix R: Regression tables 365

Appendix S: MPs who describe themselves as working class or coming from a working-class background..... 379

Appendix T: MPs who changed parties or had the whip removed between holding of the General Election in December 2019 and the conducting of the content analysis 380

Appendix U: Screenshots of the biographical sections from various MPs' websites 383

Appendix V: Screenshot of the dual lingual biographical section of Virginia Crosbie's website (Conservative MP for Ynys Môn)..... 402

Appendix W: Screenshots of the five languages in which the biographical section of Afzal Khan's website is presented 403

Appendix X: Screenshot of the biographical section of Gagan Mohindra's website (Conservative MP for South West Hertfordshire) 408

List of tables

1.1: Female MPs, 1918–2019 13
1.2: Ethnic minority MPs, 1945–2019 14
1.3: Primary former occupations of MPs, 1951–2015 (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrat and predecessor parties, and the Scottish National Party) 15
1.4: Occupation of MPs immediately prior to election, 2017 and 2019 (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrat and predecessor parties, and the Scottish National Party) 17
1.5: Percentage of MPs educated at private school, 1951–2019 20
1.6: Percentage of MPs educated at university, 1951–2019 21
1.7: Percentage of MPs educated at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, 1951–2019 22
2.1: Type of design employed in British candidate choice experiments 42
2.2: How information is provided in British conjoint candidate choice experiments 44
2.3: How information is provided in British non-conjoint candidate choice experiments 44
2.4: Number of choice tasks in British conjoint candidate choice experiments 45
2.5: Number of respondents in British candidate choice experiments 46
2.6: Number of attributes tested in British conjoint candidate choice experiments 48
2.7: Occupations used to test class in British candidate choice experiments 53
2.8: Political occupations tested in British candidate choice experiments 56
3.1: Power analysis simulation (one choice task) 63
3.2: Attributes and levels tested 76
3.3: Occupations tested and classes operationalised (5-class schema) 78
3.4: Occupations tested and classes operationalised (3-class schema) 79
4.1: Recoding of respondents' class from 8-class NS-SEC to 3-class schema 112
4.2: Categorisation of educational level of respondents in the BES 112
5.1: Number of MPs with functioning websites with biographical sections (by party) 137

List of figures

1.1: Select primary former occupations of MPs, 1951–2015 (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrat and predecessor parties, and the Scottish National Party) 16
3.1: Level of randomisation 59
3.2: Variation across dependent variables (overall) 60
3.3: Variation across dependent variables (by respondents' education) 60
3.4: Variation across dependent variables (by respondents' social class) 61
3.5: Variation across dependent variables (by respondents' party identification) 62
3.6: Screenshot of candidate choice experiment 75
3.7: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? 89
3.8: Britons' views towards working-class MPs 90
3.9: Britons' views towards middle-class MPs 90
3.10: Comparison of variance: inter-class versus intra-class 91
3.11: Britons' views towards political careerists (June 2022) 93
3.12: Britons' views towards professional politicians (June 2022) 94
3.13: Britons' views towards political careerists (March 2023) 94
3.14: Britons' views towards professional politicians (March 2023) 95
3.15: Britons' views towards the proportion of MPs who went to private school (July 2021) 96
3.16: Britons' views towards the proportion of MPs who went to private school (March 2023) 97
3.17: Britons' views towards the proportion of MPs with a university degree 98
3.18: Britons' views towards the proportion of MPs who attended Oxford University 99
4.1: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? (by respondents' social class) (3-class schema) 116
4.2: Working-class Britons' views towards working-class MPs 117
4.3: Working-class Britons' views towards middle-class MPs 117
4.4: Middle-class Britons' views towards working-class MPs 118
4.5: Middle-class Britons' views towards middle-class MPs 119
4.6: Working-class Britons' views towards privately educated MPs (July 2021) 120
4.7: Working-class Britons' views towards privately educated MPs (March 2023) 121
4.8: Middle-class Britons' views towards privately educated MPs (July 2021) 122
4.9: Middle-class Britons' views towards privately educated MPs (March 2023) 122
4.10: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? (by respondents' level of education) 123
4.11: Subjects which Britons desire fewer politicians to study at university 125
4.12: Extreme/stereotypical candidates (bundles of attributes) 128
5.1: Number of MPs with websites with biographical sections (by party) 138
5.2: Number of MPs with websites with biographical sections (by gender) 139
5.3: Number of MPs' websites with and without photographs 139
5.4: Number of photographs on Conservative and Labour MPs' websites 140
5.5: Means of providing information on MPs' websites 141
5.6: Type of secondary school attended by MPs compared with the wider country 144
5.7: Type of secondary school attended by MPs (by party) 144

5.8: Propensity of MPs to reference type of secondary school attended....145
5.9: Attendance at university by MPs compared with wider UK....147
5.10: Attendance at university (by party)....148
5.11: Propensity of MPs to reference attending/not attending university....149
5.12: Propensity of MPs to reference attending specific university....151
5.13: Subject studied by MPs at university....152
5.14: Propensity of MPs to reference the subject studied at university....153
5.15: Propensity of MPs to reference their former occupation....154
5.16: Number of MPs who reference coming from a working-class/middle-class background....164
5.17: Number of MPs who reference coming from an unprivileged/privileged background....166
5.18: Propensity of MPs to reference NHS/healthcare (by party)....169
5.19: Propensity of MPs to reference NHS/healthcare (by gender)....170
5.20: Propensity of MPs to reference local ties (by party)....177
5.21: Marital status of MPs....181
5.22: Marital status of MPs (by gender)....182
5.23: Marital status of MPs (by party)....182
5.24: Propensity of MPs to reference their marital status....184
5.25: Propensity of MPs to reference being married (by party)....185
5.26: Propensity of MPs to reference not being married (by party)....185
5.27: Propensity of MPs to reference being married (by gender)....186
5.28: Parental status of MPs (by gender)....187
5.29: Propensity of MPs to reference having children (by party)....188
5.30: Propensity of MPs to reference outside interests (by party)....192
5.31: Propensity of MPs to reference different sociodemographic characteristics..195

1. Introduction

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the research questions driving the thesis, namely, what kind of politicians do Britons want to represent them, what kind of politicians *actually* represent them, and what do British politicians reveal about themselves? It places these questions in a context of falling electoral turnout and rising disillusionment with politics and politicians. It explains how these phenomena are correlated with – and some have argued, caused by – changes in the sociodemographic profile of the House of Commons, in particular the precipitous fall in the number of working-class MPs. It describes how the focus on individual politicians is appropriate and necessary given the increasing personalisation of politics in Britain and the wider West.

The principal difficulty lies, and the greatest care should be employed, in constituting this representative assembly. It should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them.
John Adams (1776, 9).

1.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer three interrelated research questions:

- What kind of politicians do Britons want to represent them?
- What kind of politicians *actually* represent Britons?
- What do British politicians reveal about themselves?

It addresses these questions from the perspective of politicians' sociodemographic characteristics, with a particular focus on class and education. It utilises a variety of research methodologies from both the qualitative and quantitative traditions – combining a candidate choice experiment, surveys, data collection, and content analysis – and as a result uncovers new and important findings and advances the literature on political representation in Britain.

The candidate choice experiment and surveys explore Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of candidates, that is to say, they are used to answer the first of the three questions above ('What kind of politicians do Britons want to represent them?'). Existing research has shown that the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians are of great importance to Britons and the candidate choice experiment and surveys both confirm this. However, they also extend previous work in distinctive and substantial ways. They explore previously untested variables and find that the *type* of university which candidates attended matters to Britons. They (re)test variables which have been explored previously but via flawed designs and find, for example, that the subject candidates studied at university matters to Britons. They

expand the increasingly salient concept of the 'career politician', incorporating these elements of higher education. They adopt an innovative approach, combining a constituency-focused candidate choice experiment which explores respondents' views towards their own representative with surveys which explore respondents' views towards politicians as a group. As a result, they reveal that while affinity bias operates at the level of the constituency, i.e. Britons tend to want their own MP to be like themselves, they believe that Parliament as a whole should reflect society, that is to say, they echo the second President of the United States John Adams's (1776, 9) view that legislatures should be an 'exact portrait' of the societies they represent.

In order to answer the second question ('What kind of politicians *actually* represent Britons?'), an original dataset was constructed, comprising detailed information on the sociodemographic characteristics of British politicians elected at the 2019 General Election. Although others have collected data on the sociodemographic characteristics of these MPs, the dataset compiled for this thesis is at a more granular level; the reasons behind the need for this greater level of detail are discussed below. The collection of this data also enables a comparison to be made between the views of Britons towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians and the actual composition of Parliament and uncovers a troubling finding: Britons are not being represented by the type of representatives they desire. Not only does this mismatch raise questions about the legitimacy of democracy as it is currently operating in Britain, but it suggests possible reasons behind the political disillusionment plaguing the country and the rise of the radical right.

In order to answer the third question ('What do British politicians reveal about themselves?'), a content analysis of MPs' websites was undertaken. This final portion of the project builds on the preceding parts. The candidate choice experiment and surveys reveal the preferences of Britons towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians; the data collection charts what the sociodemographic characteristics of British politicians actually are; the content analysis explores what MPs reveal about themselves with regard to their sociodemographic characteristics. It finds that there is a relationship between the popularity of specific sociodemographic characteristics and the propensity of British politicians to reference these characteristics. Thus, where MPs possess unpopular characteristics, such as attending a private school, they tend not to reference this, while those who possess popular characteristics, such as attending a state school, are very keen to highlight this fact. It further reveals that when MPs *do* reference unpopular characteristics, they are eager to present these parts of themselves and their lives in the best possible light. These two phenomena are herein termed the strategic release of information and the framing of information, respectively.

1.2 The sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs in historical context

The focus on British politicians' sociodemographic characteristics is both timely and important. It is timely as the sociodemographic composition of the elected component of Britain's Parliament – the House of Commons – has undergone dramatic change during the post-war period. A great deal of attention has been devoted to the more visible changes, such as the increase in the number of female MPs, from 24 (4%) in 1945

to 220 (34%) in 2019 (see Table 1.1),[1] and ethnic and racial minority MPs, from zero (0%) in 1951 to 66 (10%) in 2019 (see Table 1.2);[2] far less attention has been paid to the less immediately obvious developments, such as the near disappearance of working-class MPs. Where over a hundred MPs in 1951 had formerly held manual occupations, by 2015 this number had dropped to just 26 (see Table 1.3 and Figure 1.3). By 2019, not a single MP came directly to Parliament from a manual job (see Table 1.4). Byron Criddle (2010, 328), long-time chronicler of the House of Commons, wrote as early as 2010 of the 'virtual eradication of the manual worker MP' and Childs and Cowley (2011, 11–12), the following year, of the 'almost total middle-class takeover' of the lower house.[3] The lack of working-class MPs has been noted by contemporary denizens of the House of Commons. Esther McVey (2020), Conservative MP for Tatton, has suggested that 'the vast majority of Labour MPs wouldn't recognise a member of the working class if they tripped over them' and Angela Rayner (2022), Labour MP for Ashton-under-Lyne and deputy prime minister, has highlighted the aforementioned discrepancy between the increased representation of women and ethnic minorities and decreased representation of the working class, noting that 'while MPs have become more representative in terms of gender and ethnicity in recent years…there is a large and growing representation gap in terms of social class'.[4]

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[1] Women were first allowed to stand for Parliament in 1918. That year, Constance Markievicz became the first female elected as an MP. However, as a member of Sinn Féin, she did not take her seat. The first woman to sit in the House of Commons as an MP was Nancy Astor, elected in a 1919 by-election (Audickas, Cracknell, and Loft 2020, 27). The percentage of female MPs remained relatively stable at just under 5% from 1945 to 1987, when it increased to 6.5%. It has continued to rise thereafter, doubling from 9% to 18% at the 1997 Election (largely due to the number of female Labour MPs increasing from 37 to 101 – the so-called 'Blair's babes') and moving above a third for the first time at the 2019 General Election. The Conservative Party made its great leap forward at the 2010 General Election, with its complement of female MPs almost trebling, from 17 to 49.

[2] In 1987, four non-white candidates were the elected, all for the Labour Party – Diane Abbott for Hackney North & Stoke Newington, Paul Boateng for Brent South, Bernie Grant for Tottenham, and Keith Vaz for Leicester East (Criddle 1988). They were the first non-whites to be elected since Shapurji Saklatvala in 1924 (Criddle 1988; Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou 2011; Le Lohé 1989). Before Saklatvala, there was Dadabhai Naoroji, elected in 1892 as the Liberal MP for Finsbury Central, and Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownaggree, elected as the Conservative MP for Bethnal Green in 1895. By 2015, this number had increased more than ten-fold (see Table 1.2 and Figure 1.2). It was at this election that the first non-white MP was elected at a post-war general election for a party other than Labour and the Conservatives: Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, elected for the SNP in Ochil and South Perthshire in 2015 (Audickas and Cracknell 2020).

[3] The under-representation of the working class stretches far beyond Britain. Studies show it exists in Denmark (Pedersen 2000), America (Carnes 2012; Carnes 2015), Germany (Best, Hausmann, and Schmitt 2000), Finland (Ruostetsaari 2000), Portugal (Magone 2000), France (Best and Gaxie 2000), Norway (Eliassen and Søvaag 2000), the Netherlands (Secker 2000), Italy (Cotta, Mastropaolo, and Verzichelli 2000), Hungary (Ilonszki 2000), Spain (Linz 2000), as well as various countries in Latin America (Carnes and Lupu 2015). Matthews (1983, 18) noted four decades ago how '[a]lmost everywhere legislators are better educated, possess higher-status occupations, and have more privileged backgrounds than the people they "represent"…Few generalizations have been more exhaustively supported by empirical research.' Little, it appears, has changed.

[4] Increased representation of women and ethnic/racial minorities combined with little to no progress with regard to class is not unique to the House of Commons. Accountancy firm KPMG (2022) recently reported the results of an analysis of over 16,000 of its UK employees' career paths. It revealed that socioeconomic background, measured by parental occupation, had the strongest effect on career progression, greater than gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, with individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds taking on average 19% longer to progress to the next grade than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Particularly prominent among the ever-increasing middle-class MPs are those who worked in politics before their election, the number of whom has swollen from 18 in 1951 to over a hundred by 2015 (see Table 1.1). A number of prominent civil servants and politicians have noted – with regret – this proliferation of the 'career' or 'professional' politician (see Allen et al. 2020 for a discussion of the various terms used to categorise this group). Gus O'Donnell (quoted in Wright 2015), for example, the former head of the Civil Service, has suggested that Parliament would benefit from 'people who've got more experience of the world, not just being in politics all their lives', Diane Abbott (2015) has lamented how the Labour Party 'has for years been run by a cabal of ex-spads – a "spadocracy"', Hazel Blears (2014) has described how 'politics has changed quite dramatically in the last thirty or forty years, more people now have come through that route of being special advisers and I think that we need more people in politics who have got a variety of different lives', and Laurence Fox (2023), leader of the Reclaim Party, announced in June 2023 that he would be (ultimately unsuccessfully) contesting the Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election, occasioned by Boris Johnson's resignation, as '[w]e need more people in Parliament and less [sic] professional politicians.' The journalist Peter Riddell (1995, 186) noted as early as 1995 how '[c]areer politicians have become a fashionable bogey, to be condemned, deplored and curbed.'[5]

Populists have proven particularly strident in their criticism of career politicians. Richard Thomson (2025), spokesperson for Advance UK, for example, stated that 'career politicians should be afraid' of his party's emergence, as 'the grifters, careerists, and morally corrupt who infest Westminster will finally meet their match', while Zia Yusuf (2025) of Reform UK, condemned Labour's post-2024 General Election Cabinet for containing too many career politicians and argued that their lack of time outside of politics, specifically their lack of business experience, was leading to economic policies which he argued inhibited growth, stating '[t]here's really nobody in that Labour Cabinet…who's ever started a real business, almost nobody has had a real serious job where they've had to think about systems at a bigger scale in the private sector, none of them have ever had those jobs so they always think that government needs to be the entity that drives everything and unfortunately what this Labour Government are doing in their actions is inhibiting growth in a pretty catastrophic way.'[6] For a rare defence of career politicians, see James Kirkup's (2020) *Spectator* article from April 2020, in which he praises one for providing 'at least a bit of reassurance that the people in charge have some idea of what they're doing' and suggests that he will 'help steady the ship that is

[5] Chris Mullin (2009, 521), recounts in diaries a conversation from 2004 in which Frank Field stated he had recently told Tony Blair that 'he needed more bright, young, attractive people in his Cabinet.' In Mullin's opinion this was '[t]he last thing we need…What we need is people of integrity, with rather more experience of the world than a year or two as a special adviser.'

[6] Oborne (2007, 8) similarly suggests that the political class's lack of experience beyond Westminster has had a baleful effect on the quality of government, contending that 'the culture of incompetence which has become a special hallmark of modern British government may be linked to the absence of any meaningful managerial experience among the Political Class.'

the government's communications effort'. The career politician in question was Matt Hancock.[7]

Table 1.1: Female MPs, 1918–2019

Election	Conservative[1]	Labour	Liberal Democrat[2]	Other	Total	Percentage of all MPs (%)
1918[3]	0	0	0	1	1	0.1
1922	1	0	1	0	2	0.3
1923	3	3	2	0	8	1.3
1924	3	1	0	0	4	0.7
1929	3	9	1	1	14	2.3
1931	13	0	1	1	15	2.4
1935	6	1	1	1	9	1.5
1945	1	21	1	1	24	3.8
1950	6	14	0	1	21	3.4
1951	6	11	0	0	17	2.7
1955	10	14	0	0	24	3.8
1959	12	13	0	0	25	4.0
1964	11	18	0	0	29	4.6
1966	7	19	0	0	26	4.1
1970	15	10	0	1	26	4.1
1974 (Feb)	9	13	0	1	23	3.6
1974 (Oct)	7	18	0	2	27	4.3
1979	8	11	0	0	19	3.0
1983	13	10	0	0	23	3.5
1987	17	21	2	1	41	6.3
1992	20	37	2	1	60	9.2
1997	13	101	3	3	120	18.2
2001	14	95	5	4	118	17.9
2005	17	98	10	3	128	19.8
2010	49	81	7	6	143	22.0
2015	68	99	0	24	191	29.4
2017	67	119	4	18	208	32.0
2019	87	104	7	22	220	33.8

1. Includes Coalition Conservative for 1918; National, National Liberal and National Labour for 1931–35; National and National Liberal for 1945; National Liberal & Conservative for 1945–70.

2. Includes Coalition Liberal Party for 1918; National Liberal for 1922; Independent Liberal for 1931; Liberal/SDP Alliance for 1983–87; Liberal Democrats from 1992.

[7] Academics are more evenly split as to whether career politicians are a bane or a boon. Some (see, for example, Best and Cotta 2000; Cotta 1982; Shabad and Slomczynski 2002), suggest that they are crucial to the emergence, consolidation, and survival of democracies, while others (see, for example, Clarke et al. 2018; Fiorina 1989; Wright 2013) contend that they result in out of touch politicians, excessive regulation, and disillusionment with politics.

3. Figures for all Ireland, not just Northern Ireland.

Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

Table 1.2: Ethnic minority MPs, 1945–2019

	Number						Percentage					
Election	**Con**	**Lab**	**LD[1]**	**SNP**	**Other**	**Total**	**Con (%)**	**Lab (%)**	**LD[1] (%)**	**SNP (%)**	**Other (%)**	**Total (%)**
1945	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1950	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1951	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1955	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1959	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1964	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1966	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1970	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1974 (Feb)	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1974 (Oct)	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1979	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1983	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
1987	0	4	0	0	0	**4**	0	2	0	0	0	**1**
1992	1	5	0	0	0	**6**	0	2	0	0	0	**1**
1997	0	9	0	0	0	**9**	0	2	0	0	0	**1**
2001	0	12	0	0	0	**12**	0	3	0	0	0	**2**
2005	2	13	0	0	0	**15**	1	4	0	0	0	**2**
2010	11	16	0	0	0	**27**	4	6	0	0	0	**4**
2015	18	23	0	1	0	**42**	5	10	0	1	0	**6**
2017	20	32	1	0	0	**53**	6	12	8	0	0	**8**
2019	23	41	2	0	0	**66**	6	20	18	0	0	**10**

1. Includes predecessor parties.

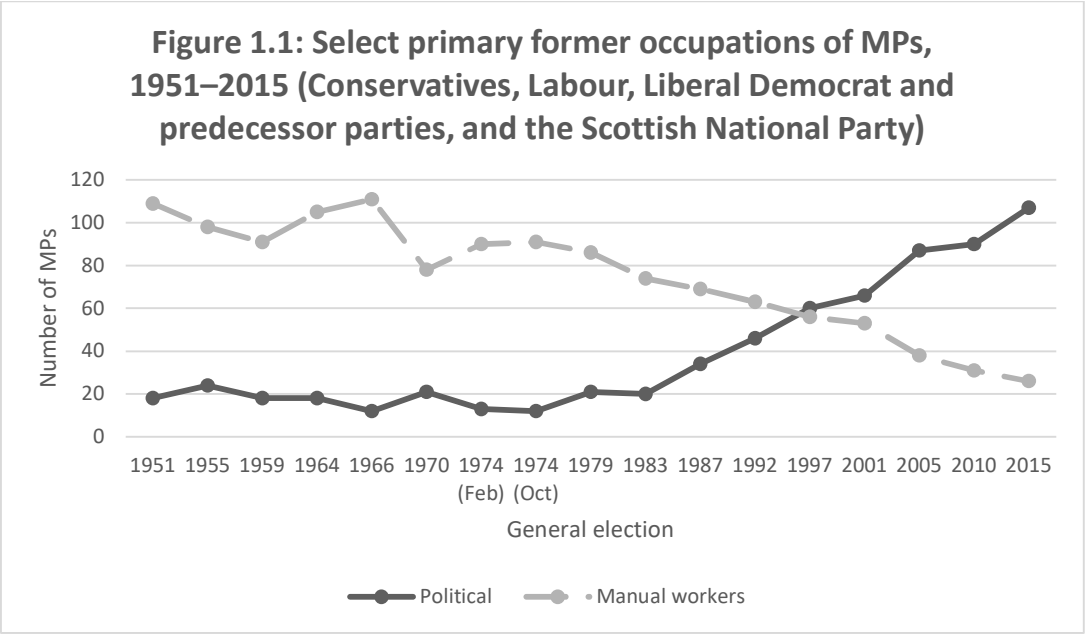
Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

Table 1.3: Primary former occupations of MPs, 1951–2015 (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrat and predecessor parties, and the Scottish National Party[1])

	1951	1955	1959	1964	1966	1970	1974 (Feb)	1974 (Oct)	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015[1]
Professions																	
Barristers	93	97	103	100	94	97	93	90	67	69	57	53	36	33	34	38	38
Solicitor	24	21	25	29	33	28	23	22	29	35	31	30	28	35	38	48	51
Civil service/local government	18	21	22	25	22	15	13	14	30	27	22	19	37	35	28	18	15
Teachers	47	43	41	57	77	66	77	92	77	75	84	102	126	117	91	49	32
Armed services	34	50	40	30	22	24	9	8	20	19	16	15	10	12	14	16	13
Other professions	24	32	39	39	31	61	66	66	55	53	52	39	35	38	37	49	45
Business																	
Company executive/ Director	80	64	94	66	69	108	82	79	71	105	123	123	78	77	87	115	135
Other business	66	73	46	50	41	21	44	41	67	57	38	29	35	30	31	41	57
White collar																	
Politician/ political organiser	18	24	18	18	12	21	13	12	21	20	34	46	60	66	87	90	107
Publisher/ Journalist	46	46	51	47	46	58	56	50	46	45	43	44	47	50	43	38	34
Miscellaneous white collar	16	9	10	17	29	4	7	10	9	21	28	46	72	76	80	94	23
Manual workers																	
Miner	35	33	34	31	32	22	19	19	21	20	17	13	13	12	11	7	7
Other manual	74	65	57	74	79	56	71	72	65	54	52	50	43	41	27	24	19
Miscellaneous																	
Other	47	50	49	47	41	42	39	34	30	29	30	18	9	8	7	0	57
Total	**622**	**628**	**629**	**630**	**628**	**623**	**612**	**609**	**608**	**629**	**627**	**627**	**629**	**630**	**615**	**621**	**626**

1. Scottish National Party data is only included for 2015.

Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.



Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

Table 1.4: Occupation of MPs immediately prior to election, 2017 and 2019 (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrat and predecessor parties, and the Scottish National Party)

	2017					2019				
	Conservative	**Labour**	**Liberal Democrat[1]**	**SNP**	**Total**	**Conservative**	**Labour**	**Liberal Democrat[1]**	**SNP**	**Total**
Brokerage	**55**	**50**	**4**	**7**	**116**	**33**	**23**	**4**	**2**	**62**
Legal profession	38	25	2	1	66	29	15	2	1	47
Education	6	20	2	3	31	4	8	2	1	15
Physicians/dentists	7	3	0	2	12	4	0	1	0	5
Architects/surveyors/ Engineers	4	2	0	1	7	8	0	0	0	8
Instrumental	**101**	**129**	**3**	**13**	**246**	**201**	**148**	**31**	**7**	**387**
Councillor/other elected office	28	47	2	5	82	157	103	25	4	289
Political/social/policy research	30	27	0	5	62	34	19	30	2	85
Party official	14	14	0	2	30	10	1	3	0	14
Journalism/broadcast/ Media	10	6	1	1	18	10	2	0	0	12
Trade union official	0	30	0	0	30	0	23	0	0	23
Lobbyist	19	5	0	0	24	0	0	0	1	1
Business/commerce	**130**	**15**	**4**	**6**	**155**	**92**	**10**	**8**	**2**	**112**
Other	**29**	**64**	**1**	**8**	**102**	**39**	**18**	**5**	**0**	**62**
Agriculture/farmers	6	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	0	1
Armed services	2	2	0	0	4	7	3	0	0	10
Civil service/local authority	5	3	0	1	9	4	2	0	0	6
Clergy	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
NHS	2	7	0	0	9	3	6	1	0	10
Other	0	4	1	2	7	4	4	0	0	8
Other white collar	6	8	0	2	16	1	1	0	0	2
Retired	2	0	0	1	3	0	2	0	0	2
Social worker	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Voluntary sector	5	32	0	2	39	5	4	2	0	11

Writer/literary/artist	1	2	0	0	3	1	2	1	0	4
Manual	**2**	**4**	**0**	**1**	**7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Total	**317**	**262**	**35**	**12**	**626**	**365**	**199**	**48**	**11**	**623**

Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

King (1981, 250) would note shortly after the election of the first Thatcher government how '[m]ost of the top posts in British politics and government have been occupied for many years by…career politicians. Until quite recently, however, a significant number of these posts were occupied by people who were not career politicians. Now these non-career politicians have largely disappeared from the scene; with few exceptions, only career politicians remain.'[8] The years from 2010 to 2015 witnessed perhaps the apotheosis of the career politician, with both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition entering the political realm *before* university. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, spent the first half of his gap year between Eton and Oxford working in Parliament for his godfather, the Conservative MP Tim Rathbone. It was whilst in this job that Cameron (2019) was first made aware of the Conservative Research Department, for which he would work after leaving university. The Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband, got his start, before he too went up to Oxford, working for Tony Benn, as a result of Benn's friendship with Ed's father Ralph, the political scientist (Hasan and Macintyre 2011).[9] The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, had to wait until shortly after university for his first step on the ladder, though it too came about with the assistance of a family friend: on the recommendation of Lord Carrington, former Foreign Secretary and a neighbour of the Cleggs, he was given a job in Brussels by Leon Brittan, the EU trade commissioner and a former colleague of Carrington (Morris 2011).

The growth in the number of career politicians has generated discussion about the rise of a 'political class', defined by Roger Scruton (2007, 530) as '[t]he class, increasingly important in modern democratic politics, of people who have made a career in political and administrative institutions, but who have not had any experience of the ordinary workplace.'[10] The views expressed towards the political class in such discussions are

[8] King (1981, 250) would define the career politician as 'a person committed to politics. He regards politics as his vocation, he seeks fulfilment in politics, he sees his future in politics, he would be deeply upset if circumstances forced him to retire from politics. In short, he is hooked. Politics is his life'. As King notes, his definition owes much to Weber's (1946 [1919], 84) notion, explicated in his seminal lecture 'Politics as a Vocation', of one who 'lives "for" politics'. See Weber (1919) for the original German.

[9] Benn (1992, 461, 471) would describe the young Ed in his diaries as 'very helpful' and 'a very bright young man'. Ruth Winstone (2014), editor of Benn's diaries, would echo his judgement, saying 'Edward (as we knew him) was very sweet – modest, clever and quick.'

[10] It should be noted that Scruton's definition extends beyond politicians. Echoing this broad understanding, Jun (2003, 170) writes that '[w]hile MPs are at the center of the political class, the group also includes the growing numbers of political consultants, political advisors to ministers, research assistants to MPs, as well as the staff at party headquarters, in the House of Commons, and in policy research institutes working for the parties. To this list should also be added lobbyists working for interest organizations.' Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, the sociodemographic characteristics of the unelected members of the political class are also of crucial importance. Indeed, it has been suggested that they are just as unrepresentative of the wider country as MPs. Ayesha Hazarika (2022), in a piece entitled 'I've been a special adviser – there are far too many poshos in the job', argues that '[t]he role, professionalism and conduct of advisers should be looked at by all parties. There should be more formal recruitment processes instead of appointing bag carriers, mates or people you fancy. It should be widened to more than posh, well-connected, mainly white young men and women. We need calm, wise individuals with actual life experience, not just puppy-like loyalty. Let's get some older people (including women with children) in from different walks of life.' Jun also notes the increasing professionalisation of politicians at the local level. For more on this development, which has been occurring across the West, see Berg and Rao (eds.) 2005; Guérin and Kerrouche 2008; Mouritzen and Svara 2002.

almost invariably negative: the campaigner Anthony Barnett (2010), for example, declared that 'the political class is rapacious, lying and incompetent', while Nigel Farage (2018) labelled them 'anti-democrats' who trade in 'lies, deceit and treachery',[11] and the novelist Irvine Welsh (2014) 'lobby-fodder careerists…who continue to preside over the transfer of resources from the rest of us to the super rich.'[12]

The educational profile of British MPs has also changed substantially between 1945 and the present, at both the secondary and tertiary level. With regard to the former, there has been a fall in the proportion of privately educated MPs. In 1951, 75% of Conservative MPs, 20% of Labour MPs, and 50% of Liberal MPs had been privately educated, whereas by 2019, 41% of Conservative MPs, 14% of Labour MPs, 30% of Liberal Democrat MPs, and just 7% of Scottish National Party ('SNP') MPs had attended private schools (see Table 1.5). With regard to the latter, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of MPs who attended university, to the point where 'virtually all MPs' are now graduates (Criddle 2016, 354). Where 60% of Conservative MPs and 39% of Labour MPs elected in 1959 attended university, these figures had risen to 88% and 90% respectively for MPs elected in 2019 (see Table 1.6).

Table 1.5: Percentage of MPs educated at private school, 1951–2019

General election	Conservative (%)	Labour (%)	Liberal Democrat[1] (%)	SNP (%)
1951	75	20	50	-
1955	76	22	50	-
1959	72	18	67	-
1964	75	18	33	-
1966	81	18	58	-
1970	74	17	50	-
1974 (Feb)	74	16	71	-
1974 (Oct)	75	18	69	-

[11] Farage (2024) would lambast Britain's 'career political class' during the press conference announcing his (successful) bid for the seat of Clacton at the 2024 General Election. Denouncing them for a perceived lack of patriotism, his criticisms echo the 'anywheres' and 'somewheres' dichotomisation of modern Britain proposed by Goodhart (2017).

[12] Concerns about the rise of a political class – and the nefarious consequences that allegedly trail in its wake – are not unique to Britain. John Hewson (2017), former leader of the Australian Liberal Party, for example, argues that in Australia, '[p]olitics has become a daily "conflict game", dominated by career politicians concentrated on winning points on the other side, rather than on developing and delivering good public policy, and good government.' Mitt Romney (quoted in Memmott 2011), when running to be the Republican nominee for the 2012 American Presidential election, declared, in what was widely seen as an effort to differentiate himself from – and implicitly assail – his fellow candidates, 'I have spent most of my life outside of politics, dealing with real problems in the real economy. Career politicians got us into this mess and they simply don't know how to get us out.' However, as one observer noted, his 'absence from politics was not for lack of *trying*. Over the last 20 years, Romney has run for office four times, including his current run for president – a 1994 bid for Senate in Massachusetts, his 2002 bid for governor, and his 2008 bid for the Republican presidential nomination. In addition, he served as president of the Republican Governors Association from 2005 to 2007. Insofar that Romney isn't a career politician, it's because he has spent so much time losing [emphasis in original]' (Bouie 2011).

1979	73	18	55	-
1983	70	14	52	-
1987	68	14	45	-
1992	62	15	50	-
1997	66	16	41	-
2001	64	17	35	-
2005	60	18	39	-
2010	54	12	39	-
2015	50	16	13	7
2017	44	13	30	6
2019	41	14	30	7

1. Includes predecessor parties.

Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

Table 1.6: Percentage of MPs educated at university, 1951–2019

General election	Conservative (%)	Labour (%)	Liberal Democrat[1] (%)	SNP (%)
1951	65	41	100	-
1955	63	40	100	-
1959	60	39	100	-
1964	63	42	78	-
1966	67	51	83	-
1970	63	54	100	-
1974 (Feb)	67	53	71	-
1974 (Oct)	69	57	62	-
1979	68	59	45	-
1983	71	53	65	-
1987	70	56	73	-
1992	73	61	75	-
1997	81	66	70	-
2001	83	67	69	-
2005	81	64	79	-
2010	80	61	81	-
2015	81	77	100	75
2017	83	84	92	62
2019	88	90	91	70

1. Includes predecessor parties.

Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

There has also been a significant change in the *type* of university attended by British MPs. Specifically, there has been a decline in the number of MPs educated at Oxford and

Cambridge Universities ('Oxbridge'). Where 52% of Conservative MPs, 19% of Labour MPs, and 67% of Liberal MPs elected in 1951 attended Oxbridge, these figures had fallen to 27%, 18%, and 18% respectively for MPs elected in 2019 (Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022) (see Table 1.7).[13]

Table 1.7: Percentage of MPs educated at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, 1951–2019

General election	Conservative (%)	Labour (%)	Liberal Democrat[1] (%)	SNP (%)
1951	52	19	67	-
1955	53	17	67	-
1959	50	18	83	-
1964	52	19	44	-
1966	57	23	50	-
1970	52	25	50	-
1974 (Feb)	54	20	43	-
1974 (Oct)	56	25	38	-
1979	49	21	27	-
1983	48	15	30	-
1987	44	15	27	-
1992	45	16	30	-
1997	51	15	33	-
2001	48	16	27	-
2005	43	16	31	-
2010	34	15	28	-
2015	30	21	13	0
2017	34	20	17	0
2019	27	18	18	0

1. Includes predecessor parties.

Source: Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022.

However, despite – in some cases because of – these changes, the House of Commons does not reflect the sociodemographic profile of the wider country. For example, notwithstanding the aforementioned fall in the number of privately educated MPs, they remain vastly over-represented in the House of Commons. Where 29% of MPs elected in 2019 attended private school, just 7% of the wider country did so (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019). The university-educated are also over-represented in the House of Commons: where 88% of MPs elected in 2019 had attended university, just 19% of the working-age population of the wider country had done so (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019). The Oxbridge-educated are also greatly over-represented among British parliamentarians; where 24% of MPs elected in 2019

[13] The final figure for 2019 is for the Liberal Democrats, successor to the Liberal Party.

attended Oxbridge, less than 1% of wider British society does so (Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019).[14]

The exploration of the class of British representatives undertaken for this thesis is extremely timely. Where debates on descriptive representation have tended to focus on sex and race (Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Sapiro 1981), academics are increasingly contemplating whether it is required for the working class (Carnes 2015; Elsässer and Schäfer 2022; Lupu 2015; Mansbridge 2015; Pinto-Duschinsky and Middleton 2013; Pontusson 2015).

1.3 The importance of politicians' sociodemographic characteristics

The sociodemographic characteristics of politicians matter. Studies have shown, for example, that Labour MPs from working-class backgrounds were more likely to rebel against Tony Blair's welfare reforms than career politicians (O'Grady 2019),[15] that members of the American House of Representatives from different occupational backgrounds vote differently on economic legislation (Carnes 2012), that both the amount (Hayo and Neumeier 2014) and composition (Hayo and Neumeier 2012) of public spending in German Länder varies depending upon the class of the prime minister, that American politicians who have served in the military are less likely to initiate the use of force than those who have not (Gelpi and Feaver 2002), that funding for child-care services in Norwegian municipalities increases as the number of local female politicians increases (Bratton and Ray 2002), that spending decisions by local village councils in India better reflect women's preferences when positions are reserved for women (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004), that the birth towns of Italian members of Parliament are favoured in budgetary allocations (Carozzi and Repetto 2016), and that the presence of openly gay legislators in parliaments around the world is consistently

[14] Highlighting both the prevalence of the university-educated in politics and the tendency for politicians to blur the facts around their own background, a commentator (Deacon 2015) would report Andy Burnham's comments at one of the Labour leadership hustings in 2015 as follows: '"The Westminster bubble is full of people who went to university," thundered Mr Burnham, MA (Cantab).'

[15] For a second study demonstrating the unique voting patterns of career politicians in Britain, see Warncke, Searing, and Allen 2024.

associated with enhanced gay rights (Reynolds 2013).[16] This policy-based representation is often referred to as 'substantive' representation.[17]

Further, studies show that increased representation of ethnic and racial minorities and immigrants is associated with increased electoral turnout among these groups (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Geese 2023; Rocha et al. 2010), that government decisions are viewed as more legitimate when they are made by groups that reflect the sociodemographic composition of society (Arnesen and Peters 2018),[18] and that increased representation of women, ethnic and racial minorities and the working class is associated with increased trust in, satisfaction with, and identification with government and politicians among these groups (Abney and Hutcheson 1981; Barnes and Saxton 2019; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gay 2002; Heideman 2020; Rahn and Rudolph 2005).[19]

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[16] For further work demonstrating the ties between descriptive and substantive representation, see Baker and Cook 2005; Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Binderkrantz et al. 2020; Bird 2011; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Burden 2007; Campbell and Feagin 1975; Childs and Withey 2006; Fiva and Halse 2016; Frankovic 1977; Gamble 2007; Griffin and Anewalt-Remsburg; Grose 2005; Haider-Markel, Joslyn, and Kniss 2000; Han and Han 2021; Hänni 2017; Haynie 2001; Hayo and Neumeier 2016; Kathlene 1994; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019; Meier and England 1984; Minta 2009; Poggione 2004; Preuhs and Hero 2011; Saalfeld 2011; Saalfeld and Bischof 2013; Saint-Germain 1989; Swers 2002; Thomas 1991; Thomas and Welch 1991; Vega and Firestone 1995; Wallace 2014; Wängnerud 2000; Wängnerud 2005; Washington 2008; Weeks 2022; Welch and Karnig 1979; Whitby 1997. Descriptive representation does not, however, guarantee substantive representation; see Donahue 1997; Garboni 2015; Hero and Tolbert 1995; Koning 2009; Swain 1995; Welch 1985 for examples of where it has failed to do so. As Wängnerud (2009, 59) puts it, '[t]he link between descriptive and substantive representation…is probabilistic rather than deterministic.' Further, there would appear to be a temporal element to the relationship when it does exist; Bailer et al. (2022), for example, demonstrate that the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation weakens as politicians' careers lengthen (though see Wüst 2014 for a contrasting view).

[17] For detailed considerations of the nature of substantive representation, see Celis 2008; Celis 2009; Celis et al. 2008; Childs 2006; Lovenduski 1997; Wängnerud 2009. For an insightful discussion (containing empirical analysis) of the impact of context on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, see Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou 2011. For discussions on the role of critical masses and critical actors as the variables explaining the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, see Chaney 2012; Childs and Krook 2006; Childs and Krook 2008; Childs and Krook 2009; Dahlerup 2006; Dahlerup 1988; Kanter 1977; for examples of studies which highlight the contingent and policy-dependent nature of the relationship, see Jones 1997 and Schwindt-Bayer 2006.

[18] The Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation stated in 2010 that 'a more representative House of Commons would be a more effective and legitimate legislature' (Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation) 2010, 18).

[19] As Mill (1861, 56) suggested, the lack of concern devoted to groups who do not have representatives in legislatures or positions of power may not be due to nefarious schemes, but rather simple ignorance: 'We need not suppose that when power resides in an exclusive class, that class will knowingly and deliberately sacrifice the other classes to themselves: it suffices that, in the absence of its natural defenders, the interest of the excluded is always in danger of being overlooked…In this country, for example, what are called the working classes may be considered as excluded from all direct participation in the government. I do not believe that the classes who do participate in it, have in general any intention of sacrificing the working classes to themselves…Yet does Parliament, or almost any of the members composing it, ever for an instant look at any question with the eyes of a working man?' The perspicacity of Mill's point was demonstrated concretely (and much more recently) by Lee Cain (2023), former Downing Street Director of Communications, during the Covid Inquiry hearings, in which he recalled 'asking in the Cabinet Room of 20 people, how many people had received free school meals. Nobody had – resulting in a policy and political blind spot.' Cain (2021) was reiterating a point he had made two years earlier in The Spectator, in which he described how '[w]hile the food poverty debate raged last summer, and the government found

It is this second set of consequences, concerning turnout, government legitimacy, and trust in, satisfaction with, and identification with government, which is particularly relevant to Britain. In recent decades, Britain has experienced record low levels of electoral turnout and record high levels of disillusionment with politicians and politics. Turnout at general elections has fallen from 77.7% in 1992 to 71.4% in 1997 to just 59.4% in 2001, before 'recovering' in 2005 to 61.4%. The following four elections saw turnout rise,[20] but fail to break 70%. Britain's most recent general election in 2024 saw turnout of just 59.7% (Cracknell and Baker 2024). By comparison, turnout at the 1950 and 1951 general elections was 83.9% and 82.6%, respectively (Audickas et al. 2020). This decline occurred at the same time as the number of candidates per seat increased, (theoretically) expanding the choice available to electors (Appendix A). This collapse in turnout is not the result of a fall in interest in politics; indeed, interest in politics has remained remarkably stable in Britain since the 1970s, with 60% of Britons saying they were 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics in 1973 and 61% saying they were 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics in 2005 (Marshall et al. 2007).

As turnout has fallen, so disillusionment with politics and politicians has grown. The percentage of Britons who trust the government to place the needs of the country above the interests of their own party has fallen from 38% in 1986 to just 17% by 2013, while the percentage who agree that most politicians 'are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally' has risen from 41% in 2004 to 46% in 2014 (Phillips and Simpson 2015). The most recent iteration (Curtice, Montagu, and Sivathasan 2024) of the long-running British Social Attitudes survey reveals that the percentage of Britons who trust the government to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their party has fallen to the lowest level ever recorded.[21] Politics is regularly rated the least-trusted occupation by Britons (Ipsos MORI 2017; 2019; 2022; 2023; 2024) and politicians are increasingly viewed as disconnected from the people (Curtice and Jowell 1997). Further, the percentage of spoilt ballots has more than doubled between 1964 and 2015 (Audickas et al. 2020) and the percentage of Britons feeling that '[i]t is not really worth voting' increased sixfold between 1987 and 2010 (Curtice 2016).

Britain has become an outlier in the level of distrust its citizens feel towards Parliament. The World Values Survey demonstrates that '[t]he UK (22%) ranks among the bottom

itself losing a PR war with the footballer Marcus Rashford, I attended a cabinet meeting. I asked the people running the country how many of them were ever eligible for free school meals and discovered I was the only person in the room who had been…would it have helped if more senior politicians had had personal experience of food poverty? Undoubtedly.' Nadine Dorries, on the other hand, the former MP for Mid Bedfordshire, suggested in 2012, during the discussions around potential cuts to child benefits, that the problem was not ignorance, but rather insouciance, on the part of the Eton-educated David Cameron and the St. Paul's-educated George Osborne: 'The problem is that policy is being run by two public school boys who don't know what it's like to go to the supermarket and have to put things back on the shelves because they can't afford it for their children's lunchboxes. What's worse, they don't care either' (quoted in Parker, Rigby, and Stacey 2012).

[20] To 65.1% (2010), 66.2% (2015), 68.8% (2017), and 67.3% (2019).

[21] Just 14% of Britons in 2023 believed that the government would put the needs of the nation ahead of the interests of their party 'just about always' or 'most of the time', compared to 40% when the question was first asked in 1986.

half of countries for confidence in parliament, behind many of its European neighbours, including Germany (43%), France (33%) and Spain (32%), and even further behind Scandinavian countries such as Norway (70%) and Sweden (64%). In Europe, only Greece (14%) of the countries included in our analysis has lower confidence in its parliament than the UK' (Duffy 2023, 12).[22]

A number of contemporary political figures have suggested that a lack of descriptive representation is a reason behind the low levels of political trust and electoral turnout in modern Britain. Nadine Dorries (Gimson 2012), for example, then the MP for Mid Bedfordshire, justified her decision to participate in ITV's *I'm a Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here!* television show with the following: 'A lot of people don't vote and if they can see I am a normal mother who comes from a poor background and who didn't go to a posh school, they may think they can be a politician too. Maybe they will trust us more'. Nigel Farage (2024), meanwhile, on (re)assuming leadership of the Reform Party, argued that the increasing disconnect in life experiences between politicians and citizens in Britain was contributing to the disillusionment felt by so many Britons. Laying out Reform's electoral strategy, he explained that 'above all, what we're appealing to are those who intend not to vote because they don't believe there's anybody within the Westminster establishment that actually stands up for them. Very often they're people running small businesses, acting as sole traders, they run a plumbing company, they run a taxi company, whatever it is, they know and they're right, that nobody in Westminster is on their side, that nobody in Westminster even understands what they do.' In contrast to the other parties, Reform's approach to candidate selection would see the party 'put forward over the next few years…men and women that will stand for us, represent us, who have got real life experience.'

1.4 Class in Britain: Dead and buried or alive and kicking?

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to the (very) long-running debate concerning the role of class in British politics. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was widely held that class was the primary motivator behind voting behaviour in Britain (Alford 1963; 1967; Bealey, Blondel, and McCann 1965; Benney, Gray, and Pear 1956; Blondel 1963; Bonham 1954; Budge and Urwin 1966; Butler and Stokes 1969; Lipset 1960; Milne and Mackenzie 1954; 1958; Sharpe 1962). As Peter Pulzer (1967, 98), one of the proponents of this view, famously put it in 1967: 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail'. The most influential[23] of these works emphasising the importance of class to voting in Britain was Butler and Stokes's *Political Change in Britain* (1969). They argued that voting in Britain was largely determined by party identification, i.e. a long-standing psychological attachment to a political party, and that the 'foremost' reason that Britons identified with a party was class (Butler and Stokes 1969, 4). The concept of party identification had been imported from America,

[22] Various academics have written about the 'mood of discontent permeat[ing] British politics' (Allen 2006, 54). See, for example, Allen and Birch 2015; Flinders 2018; Hay 2007; Hay and Stoker 2009; Jennings et al. 2017; Jennings, Stoker, and Twyman 2016.

[23] In 2010, members of the Political Studies Association voted it the best British book on political science published in the previous 50 years (Denver and Garnett 2014).

specifically from Michigan, where scholars at the eponymous university developed the 'Michigan' model of voting. Explicated most fully in the Stokes-co-authored *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), this model of voting behaviour contends that 'no single datum can tell us more about the attitude and behavior of the individual as presidential elector than his location on a dimension of psychological identification extending between the two great parties' (Campbell et al. 1960, 142–143). Butler and Stokes mapped how, with some exceptions,[24] the working class identified with Labour and the middle class with the Conservatives. The central role of social cleavages in structuring political competition in Western democracies more generally was highlighted at this time by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) in their seminal contribution to *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*.

The logical correlate of a theory of voting based on long-term party identification, which in turn was built upon social class, is stable, slow-changing patterns of voting and this was indeed the situation which obtained in Britain at the time these studies were written.[25] The eight general elections between 1945 and 1970 demonstrated 'an almost rock-like stability to the major parties' equal share of the vote, such that elections were decided by tiny fluctuations of Conservative and Labour support…A better example of non-volatility would be difficult to find' (Crewe 1985, 101, 103).

However, the advent of the 1970s and the electoral turbulence it brought in its wake, from the collapse in support for Ted Heath's government to the sudden rise of third parties such as the Liberals, Plaid Cymru, and the Scottish National Party, suggested that a new theory was required. During this so-called 'decade of dealignment' (Särlvik and Crewe 1983), party identification weakened; where 42% of the electorate identified 'very strongly' with a political party in 1970, by 1979 this figure had almost halved (Crewe 1985, 124). It was argued by many – Beer (1982), Crewe (1982; 1985; 1986), and Franklin (1985) among the most prominent – that alongside this diminution in party identification, and often explicitly linked to it, class voting had also declined; indeed, Whiteley (1986, 98) went so far as to claim that 'the sociological account of electoral behaviour is clearly obsolescent'. Indeed, Butler and Stokes themselves argued in 1969 in the first edition of *Political Change in Britain* that 'the class basis of party allegiance is becoming weaker' (1969, 115–116), an observation they reiterated and amplified five years later in the book's second edition (1974).

Some, like Heath, Jowell, and Curtice (1985, 35; see also Goldthorpe 1996; Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 1994; Heath et al. 1991), maintained that, with the correct measurement of class voting and the appropriate classification of classes, class voting in Britain had not in fact declined, but rather had experienced only 'trendless fluctuation'. This in turn led to a fierce debate as to how one should measure class voting, with Dunleavy (1987, 403, 405, 418) criticising Heath, Jowell, and Curtice's use of odds ratios as 'inappropriate',

[24] A number of studies have explored those who do not identify with their 'natural' party (McKenzie and Silver 1967; 1968; Nordlinger 1967; Parkin 1967; Runciman 1966; Samuel 1960).
[25] David Denver and Mark Garnett (2014, 43) quipped that '[s]omewhat ironically, a book entitled *Political Change* largely explained why the British electoral process exhibited such remarkable *stability* in the early post-war period [emphasis in original].'

'distorting', and 'virtually meaningless', Crewe (1986, 626) criticising it as 'unsatisfactory', and Heath, Jowell, and Curtice (1987, 257) in turn suggesting that 'Crewe is so far from the target that he manages to score a spectacular series of own-goals'. However, following (New) Labour's triumph in 1997, even these scholars were forced to concede that class voting in Britain had begun to decline, whatever the method used to measure it, and by 2001 Heath, Jowell, and Curtice (2001, 139; see also Evans, Heath, and Payne 1999; Goldthorpe 1999) were describing Labour as 'the party of middle-income middle Britain'. Some scholars went so far as to claim that class itself had 'dissolved' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, 205) and become an 'outmoded concept' (Clark and Lipset 1991, 397).[26]

Attention therefore turned to what may have replaced class and party in determining British voting behaviour. A variety of theories have been proffered. Some argue that social cleavages remain important, but *different* social cleavages. Dunleavy, for example, suggests that a consumption cleavage, based on whether Britons consume in the public or private sector, had replaced the traditional, production-based class cleavage (1979; 1980a; 1980b; Dunleavy and Husbands 1985). Others, like the aforementioned Crewe and Franklin, contend that policies have assumed a new importance among the British electorate, a phenomenon dubbed 'the rise of issue voting' (Crewe, Särlvik, and Alt 1977; Franklin 1985; Särlvik and Crewe 1983).[27] Some, like Clarke and Sanders (Clarke et al. 2004; Clarke et al. 2009; Clarke et al. 2011; Whiteley et al. 2013), argue that 'valence' politics – the theory that voters judge the incumbent government according to how well it has performed with regard to (near) universally-popular outcomes, such as economic growth, low unemployment, and low crime – has superseded class politics.[28] Some argue that campaigning has assumed a new importance (Denver and Hands 2001; Denver, Hands, and MacAllister 2004; Pattie et al. 1994; Whiteley and Seyd 1992; 1994;

[26] See also Beck 1986 (for the original German) and 1992 (for the first English translation); Pakulski and Waters 1996; Clark 2001a; Clark 2001b.

[27] Theories of voting based on policy have a long history. The proximity model of voting, based on Downs's *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) subsequently formalised by Davis, Enelow, and Hinich (Davis and Hinich 1966; Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook 1970; Enelow and Hinich 1982; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Hinich and Pollard 1981) posits that voters vote for the candidate who is closest to them on policy. For decades, the proximity model reigned supreme as an explanation of issue voting largely – largely 'by default', due to the lack of challengers (Evans 2004, 102). However, following an initial foray in the late 1970s (Rabinowitz 1978; see also Matthews 1979), Rabinowitz and Macdonald would launch an all-out assault in 1989, arguing that their directional model possessed 'greater empirical verisimilitude' than the proximity model (1989, 114). Under the directional model 'voters prefer candidates "on their side," and the more on their side the better' (Lewis and King 2000, 23). Merrill and Grofman (1999) would later combine the proximity and directional models to produce a 'unified theory'. See Westholm 1997; Westholm 2001 for defences of the proximity model in the face of these attacks.

[28] See Green and Jennings 2017 for a recent analysis of valence politics in relation to Britain. Stokes, who coined the term 'valence' in an article in 1963, later acknowledged that his terminology, taken from chemistry, was 'obscure' (1963; 1992, 143, 153). The role of partisan identification in shaping competence judgements has been highlighted by various scholars, raising questions as to which way the causal arrow in fact points. See Bartels 2002; Evans and Chzhen 2016; Marsh and Tilley 2009 for recent empirical analyses. This point was made in *The American Voter* (1960, 133), with Campbell and his co-authors arguing that '[i]dentification with a party raises a perpetual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be.'

2003),[29] while others emphasise the (re)emergence of a core-periphery, geography-based cleavage (Bogdanor and Field 1993; Curtice and Steed 1980; Field 1997; Fieldhouse 1995; Johnston and Pattie 2006; Johnston, Pattie, and Allsopp 1988; Pattie 2014; Pattie and Johnston 1990; Smith 1989).[30]

However, recent work suggests that reports of the death of class politics in Britain have been greatly exaggerated. It has been demonstrated, for example, that the British working and middle classes continue to hold very different political views (Evans and Tilley 2017) and engage in very different voting behaviour (Oesch 2008b).[31]

Further, scholars have highlighted the yawning gap in electoral turnout that has emerged between different classes in Britain.[32] The difference in reported turnout between the working and middle classes was less than 5% in 1964; by 2010 it had risen to 19% (Heath 2018). Class, it would appear, may no longer determine how Britons vote, but it appears to have begun to determine *whether* they vote. It has been suggested that the decline in the percentage of working-class Britons who vote is the result of the decline in the propensity of Labour politicians to make class-based appeals,[33] the failure of the Labour Party to offer distinctive policies which enjoy popularity among the working-class, and, highlighting once again the importance of the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians, the fall in the number of working-class Labour MPs (Evans and Tilley 2011; 2012b; 2017; Heath 2018).

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[29] Denver and Hands (2001, 76, 77) chart the process thus: 'By the late 1980s then, in the eyes of most commentators, constituency-level campaigning had more or less been consigned to the grave. During the 1990s, however, the corpse began to show signs of life. There was renewed interest both in the parties themselves and on the part of academic analysts…there was powerful evidence that the electorate was becoming increasingly dealigned. There was a decrease in the extent to which party support was aligned with class and, perhaps more importantly, a decrease in the strength of party identification among voters. The consistent and almost automatic support for one party or another, which had been the norm in the 1950s, became less common. In the words of Ivor Crewe, more voters were "up for grabs" – and local campaigns might "grab" them…We found clear evidence that in 1992 Labour and Liberal Democrat campaigning improved their performance and…there was evidence that all three parties' campaigns were effective in 1997.' For an exploration of the relative impact of paid campaigning and the voluntary effort of members, see Fisher et al. 2014. For data on, and analysis of, the funds available to parties for these campaigns, see Fisher 2001; Fisher 2004; Fisher 2005; Fisher 2010; Fisher 2015; Fisher 2018; Fisher 2020.

[30] As Field (1997, 1) puts it: 'Great Britain's political cohesion is breaking down. In the 1950s electoral outcomes could be predicted on the basis of a few seats and a national swing; today, different regions in the country have moved disproportionately to support one party or another…The increasingly pronounced division of Britain into two distinct voting blocs, each with its own distinct electorates, problems, attitudes, and goals, reflects the renewed importance of the core-periphery cleavage in the country.' Tony Blair sought to downplay this divide and to portray it as the result of Conservatives divisive rhetoric. In a speech in 2000, he argued that '[t]here are those on the political right who seek to divide town and country, to say that because you live in a city you neither know nor care about those who live in the country. Again, not true…there is more that unites us than divides us. There are more common challenges, common values, and indeed common solutions, than there are things that divide us. This is one Britain, one nation, and I will challenge the politics of division wherever they exist' (quoted in Woods 2002).

[31] For confirmatory comparative analysis which demonstrates the existence of similar patterns across a host of countries, see Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Kitschelt and Rehm 2014; Oesch 2008b.

[32] And beyond – see Evans and Hepplewhite 2022.

[33] The importance of appeals by parties and politicians in shaping voting behaviour extends beyond class; see Serra 2022 for a study demonstrating the role played by age-based appeals.

Further, the rise of the populist, radical right Reform Party is closely entwined with class. Its first MP, Lee Anderson (2023), initially defected from Labour to the Conservative Party due to his belief that Labour had 'turned its back on the people it was set up to support – the working class',[34] before joining Reform and sharing a platform with its leader, Richard Tice (2024), who agreed that '[y]ou might expect it from the Tories. But what you wouldn't expect is for the Labour Party to betray the working class.'

Much research has explored whether the radical right disproportionately draws support from the working class. Among those who contend that it does, there is a division between those (Betz 1994; Bowyer 2008) who argue that the connection is the result of economic concerns, such as the fear of losing one's job to an immigrant and the broader insecurity inaugurated by globalisation, and those (Bornschier and Kriesi 2013; Lucassen and Lubber 2012; Oesch 2008a; 2013; Oesch and Rennwald 2018) who posit that it is due to the perceived cultural threat presented by immigration and anxieties about race. Conversely, other scholars (Abou-Chadi, Mitteregger, and Mudde 2021; Norris 2005; Sipma, Lubbers, and Spierings 2023; van der Brug et al. 2013; van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2000; 2005) downplay the connection between the working class and the radical right or highlight the links between the working class and the radical *left*.

Class is one of the leitmotifs driving this work. The thesis explores Britons' views towards the class and class backgrounds of politicians, details the class profile of current British politicians, and charts what they publicise – and don't publicise – about themselves with regard to their class. This focus on class is appropriate. Class remains for Britons '[t]hat topic all-absorbing' (Betjeman 1948, 84). And with good reason. Continued – indeed, often increasing – class differentials exist in Britain in terms of pay (Gallie 2015), security of employment (Evans and Tilley 2017), self-reported health (Drever, Doran, and Whitehead 2004), quality of diet and amount of exercise (Roberts et al. 2013), various measures of health, including blood pressure, body mass index, depression, and anxiety (Atherton and Power 2007), educational achievement (Bolton 2010; Crawford 2014; Erikson et al. 2005; Goldthorpe and Jackson 2008; House of Commons Education Committee 2015; Richardson, Mittelmeier, and Rienties 2020), and mortality rates (Johnson and Al-Hamad 2011; Langford and Johnson 2010).[35]

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[34] Anderson (2023) would highlight what he viewed as the disjuncture between Labour activists and the working class, warning readers: 'Don't forget who is really pulling the strings. When Labour politicians are not parroting their union paymasters' latest lines, they're appeasing their 400,000 activists. Remember, these are the Marxist middle-class, loony liberals who joined the party just to elect Jeremy Corbyn as leader. Their members have nothing in common with Labour's traditional base, the working class.'

[35] Inequalities across classes – often increasing – have been shown to exist beyond Britain; see Bor, Cohen, and Galea 2017; Bosworth 2018; Chetty et al. 2016; Hadden and Rockswold 2008; Preston and Elo 1995 (America); Hurt, Ronsmans, and Saha 2004 (Bangladesh); Veenstra 2011 (Canada); Liang et al. 2000 (China); Martikainen, Valkonen, and Martelin 2001 (Finland); Heritage 2009 (France); Lampert et al. 2018 (Germany); Petrelli et al. 2024 (Italy); Smith and Goldman 2007 (with some caveats) (Mexico); Krokstad, Kunst, and Westin 2002 (Norway); Shkolnikov et al. 2006 (Russia).

1.5 Education, education, education

The focus in this thesis on education is appropriate, given its longstanding – and increasing – relationship with politics.[36] Education has been shown to have an independent effect on turnout (with greater education increasing the probability of voting (Dee 2004; Milligan, Moretti, and Oreopoulos 2004; Sondheimer and Green 2010)),[37] interest in politics (with greater education resulting in greater interest in politics (Easterbrook, Kuppens, and Manstead 2016)) and political views (with greater education resulting in more positive attitudes towards migrants (Cavaille and Marshall 2019; d'Hombres and Nunziata 2016; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007)[38] and ethnic minorities (Wagner and Zick 1995), less positive views towards authoritarianism (Scott 2022), and greater support for civil liberties (Campbell and Horowitz 2016).

Attending university has also had a profound impact on British politicians themselves. Nicholas Ridley (1991, 2, 3), for example, former Secretary of State for Transport and later the Environment, described how it was at university (Oxford, naturally) that he 'first began to think about politics'; he would leave university 'a confirmed Tory'. Similarly, Ken Clark (2016, 23, 25) 'had no idea what my political convictions really were at the time I first went up' to Cambridge, yet '[b]y the time I left Cambridge I was firmly taken by the principles of free-market economics combined with a social conscience, and a supporter of a foreign policy that accepted the realities of the new post-war world. I remained a One Nation Conservative for the rest of my life', while Andy Burnham has described how attending Cambridge 'radicalised' him (quoted in Byrom 2023), and Liz Truss how it was at Oxford that she first realised she was a Conservative (following a brief flirtation with the Liberal Democrats). Truss (quoted in Samuel 2021) describes how she met Conservatives for the first time – '[i]n north Leeds in the 1990s you didn't meet many Tories' – and 'I thought, yes, this is more where my future lies'.

Even the politics of the famously apolitical student Tony Blair were shaped by his time at university; not by political associations or clubs, but by fellow students: he 'wasn't a member of the Labour Club, and took virtually no part – or certainly no very focused part – in student politics' but four friends ('two Australians, an Indian and a Ugandan') '[e]ach gave me an insight which stayed with me and shaped my approach to politics' (Blair 2010, 77).[39]

[36] Further, education has become an increasingly important determinant of people's position in British, and more broadly, Western, society. This has been attributed to two developments: the shift to a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy in the West (Kitschelt 1994) and globalisation (Koehn and Rosenau 2002; Rosenau 2003).
[37] Though see Kam and Palmer 2008; Tenn 2007 for a contrasting view.
[38] Though see Finseraas, Skorge, and Strøm 2018; Lancee and Sarrasin 2015 for a contrasting view.
[39] The insights garnered were 'not to be an unthinking disciple of the left' (from Geoff Gallop, one of the two Australians and later premier of Western Australia), that politics should always begin with humans as one's 'compass' (from Peter Thomson, the other Australian and according to Blair 'probably the most influential person in my life'), that the state is far from an impartial actor (from Anmol Vellani, the Indian), and 'to look beyond the confines of Western student debate and think about the world that was not debating "capitalism versus socialism", but life, hope and health versus death due to the ravages of poverty, conflict and disease' (from Olara Otunnu, the Ugandan) (Blair 2010, 77–80).

A particular college at Cambridge – Peterhouse, its oldest – became something of a seminary for right-wing politicians in the 1970s, counting among its graduates Michael Portillo and Michael Howard. Portillo (2005), the former Secretary of State for Defence and candidate for the leadership of the Conservative Party in 2001, would describe Maurice Cowling, his tutor and one of the leaders of the 'Peterhouse right' at Cambridge, as 'a hero.' It would be Cowling who introduced Portillo to the Conservative Research Department following his time at Peterhouse and his frustration at his 'dead-end job'.

Further, the effects of education have increased, with education becoming an increasingly important predictor of political views and voting behaviour among British voters. Hakhverdian and his colleagues (Hakhverdian et al. 2013), for example, in their study of euroscepticism between 1973 and 2010, find that the difference between more- and less-educated Britons' views towards the EU grew over the period in question, while Evans and Tilley (2017; see also Evans and Hepplewhite 2022) have demonstrated the growing gap in political participation between Britons of greater and lesser education. The impact of education on politics more generally has become so great – in Britain and Western Europe more generally – that a number of scholars have suggested it could be forming a new electoral cleavage (Bovens and Wille 2017; Ford and Jennings 2020).[40]

Further, just as the former occupation, class, gender, place of birth, and sexuality of legislators has an impact on policy (see above), so the education of politicians matters in terms of outcomes. Besley, Montalvo, and Reynal-Querol (2011, 205), for example, echoing and extending the findings of Jones and Olken (2005), find in their study of 1,654 political leaders in 197 countries between 1848 and 2004 that '[economic] growth in general is higher when leaders are more educated.'

In short, the education – of both representatives and the represented – matters.

1.6 The personal is political

This thesis's focus on individual politicians is appropriate, important, and relevant, given the increasing personalisation of politics in Britain. The personalisation of politics, called 'a – and perhaps *the* – central feature of democratic politics in the twenty-first century [emphasis in original]' by McAllister (2007, 585), can be understood as comprising two related, but nevertheless distinct, phenomena: 'individual political actors…becom[ing] more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities' (Karvonen 2010, 4) and 'an increasing emphasis in political discourse on the character and personal lives of politicians' (Langer 2011, 6). Research suggests that both have occurred in Britain.[41]

[40] Kriesi and his colleagues (Kriesi et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2012) agree that this increasing political divide between high- and low-educated people is occurring across the West as a whole and argue that it is the result of globalisation.

[41] It should be noted that the theory that British politics has become increasingly personalised is not uncontested. See Kriesi (2011), for example, for a contrasting view.

With regard to the first, Mughan (2000, 38, 40), in his analysis of newspaper and television coverage of election campaigns in Britain, for the periods 1951 to 1997 and 1964 to 1997, finds, respectively, 'strong evidence that a presidentialization of presentation has taken place in the way that British newspapers cover election campaigns…*The Times* significantly increased the attention it paid to sitting prime ministers relative to their party and did likewise, albeit more mutedly, for opposition leaders relative to theirs' and that both Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition 'are vastly more prominent in television news broadcasts of the 1980s and 1990s than previously.'[42] Boumans, Boomgaarden, and Vliegenthart (2013, 209) in an analysis of *The Guardian* and *The Times* newspapers for the years 1992 to 2007, echo Mughan's results, finding an 'increased visibility of politicians in general as compared to parties'.[43] The growing emphasis on individual politicians is not just a media phenomenon. Hodess, Tedesco, and Kaid (2000, 64), for example, describe how changes to British party political broadcasts during the 1980s and 1990s 'support the argument about the decreasing role and focus on parties in the British political landscape and increasing attention to leading candidates.'

With regard to the second, Deacon and Harmer (2019, 1002), in their analysis of newspaper coverage of twelve general election campaigns between 1918 and 2015, find that the election of Tony Blair in 1997 marked a 'step change' in media interest in politicians' personal lives.[44] Their findings are echoed and complemented by those of Langer (2011), who demonstrates that the same pattern obtained outside campaign periods.[45] Stanyer (2013, 15) similarly details the 'intimization' of political reporting in Britain between 1995 and 2009, a process he describes as 'the publicizing of information and imagery from…three domains…exposure of information and imagery about the politician as a person; the public scrutiny of personal relationships and family life; and the opening up of personal living spaces'.[46] In his comparative study of seven advanced democracies – the UK, the US, Italy, Australia, France, Spain, and Germany – he finds that Britain consistently ranks at or near the top of the various ways in which he tests the level of personalisation in politics. As with the increasing focus on individual politicians, parties have been active participants in the politicisation of politicians' personal lives. Scammell and Langer (2006, 76), for example, in their survey of party political broadcasts in Britain, document the rise of 'the leader-focused biography ads that emphasise personal character'.

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[42] For his analysis of newspaper coverage, Mughan's dataset comprises editorials in The Times during election campaigns (with the exception of the campaign in 1979, when industrial action led to *The Times* not being published). For his analysis of television coverage, Mughan collates data collected in the 'Nuffield' studies of British general elections.

[43] They also demonstrate, in Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, and Boumans (2011), that the *type* of newspaper affects the level of personalisation, with tabloids more prone to personalisation than broadsheets. They compare *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Sun* for 2006 and 2007. Kriesi (2011) observes the same pattern in his study of tabloid and quality newspapers in Austria, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, as does Karvonen (2010) in his study of newspapers in Sweden.

[44] Confirmatory results are documented in Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg (2000).

[45] Langer's study encompasses the period 1945 to 2009.

[46] Stanyer builds his concept of 'intimization' on earlier works by Sennett (1976), van Zoonen (1991), and Hirdman, Kleberg, and Widestedt (2005).

It has been argued that innovations in media have facilitated the personalisation of politics. Much attention in this regard has been devoted to the development of television. Karvonen (2010, 4), for example, asserts that 'television automatically focuses on persons and personalities'. Horton and Wohl (1956, 215) would note as early as 1956 the ability of television to create a 'face-to-face relationship' between viewers and the viewed: 'the most remote and illustrious men are met *as if* they were in the circle of one's peers [emphasis in original]'.[47] However, just as Mancini and Swanson (1996, 11) were proclaiming in 1996 that television was the 'key' to 'accentuating the process of personalization', a new technology was emerging – the internet – and studies suggest that it too facilitates the personalisation of politics.[48] Small (2010, 42), for example, describes how '[p]ersonalization was evident in the use of Twitter in Canada. Leaders essentially tweet about themselves', Guðmundsson and Sverrisson (2019, 27) how social media is 'a vehicle for personalisation in politics in Iceland', Karlsen and Enjolras (2016, 352) how candidates in Norway use social media 'to convey their personal side', Voerman and Boogers (2008, 198) how there is 'a growing trend towards the personalization of politics online' in the Netherlands, and Boas (2008, 31) how 'efforts to facilitate direct personal connections with supporters are one of the major ways that Chilean candidates currently use the Internet'. However, it has not proven to be a universal phenomenon. Schweitzer (2008), for example, finds little evidence of the internet facilitating the personalisation of politics in Germany, a finding echoed by Wüst, Schmitt, Gschwend, and Zittel (2006).

A number of prominent contemporary British politicians have accepted – even embraced – this increased focus on their personal lives and explicitly linked it to the rise of the internet, with former Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary David Cameron (2010) arguing that '[i]f I am asking to lead their country, then people have a right to know more about me. It would be naïve not to accept this in an age of YouTube and Twitter. Some voters might not like this approach, but the personal is political.'

Scholars are divided as to whether the personalisation of politics is, from a normative perspective, a positive or negative development. Adam and Maier (2010, 240–241), for example, as representatives of the former position, suggest that it may be 'valuable as it has the potential to foster participation of those normally less involved in the political process'. Keeter (1987, 356), on the other hand, an example of those in the latter camp, argues that 'candidacies emphasizing personal qualities must necessarily be isolated, each one disconnected from those preceding it and those following. Accountability and public control of public policy are dangerously attenuated because retrospective voting on substance may be irrelevant and prospective voting on substance may be impossible.'

[47] Though they would note that this was in actuality 'the illusion of [a] face-to-face relationship' (1956, 215), a point made contemporaneously by Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang, who highlighted how television 'create[s] no intimacy in the proper sense, no two-way response and exchange of feelings, in which rapport is confirmed. The intimacy is spurious' (1956, 110).

[48] The various media – television, radio, print, the internet, etc – should not be viewed as hermetically-sealed domains, worlds unto themselves; rather they coexist, combine, and interact with each other to create a 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick 2013).

It has been argued that the personalisation of politics in Britain has been accompanied by a related development: individual politicians assuming a new importance in Britons' voting decisions. Conventional wisdom long held that voting in Britain was a factor of class and party identification. Candidates were dismissed as 'contribut[ing] little to the outcome of British general elections. They are the mere bearers of party labels, the anonymous footsoldiers' (Criddle 1988, 191). When politicians *were* accorded some degree of importance in Britons' voting decisions, it was hedged with caveats and qualifications. Thus, Butler and Stokes, in the second edition of their seminal *Political Change in Britain* (1974, 367–368), suggest that party leaders can have 'demonstrable effects' but emphasise that 'the pull of the leaders remains but one among the factors that determine transient shifts of party strength; it is easily outweighed by other issues and events of concern to the public'. Studies of the (lack of) advantage enjoyed by incumbent MPs supported the idea that Britons voted for parties not people; as Butler and King (1965, 295) remarked in respect of the 1964 British General Election, '[i]n constituencies where the sitting M.P. stood again, the swing in most cases differed little from that in constituencies where the incumbent party had a new, and presumably less familiar candidate. If the sitting M.P. had an advantage, it was very small.'

As detailed above, evidence began to mount in the 1970s that the pull of class and party in Britain was weakening. A number of scholars subsequently suggested that evaluations of party leaders had come to occupy the resulting vacuum created by their decline. Thus, Graetz and McAllister (1987, 501) argued in 1987 that 'leadership is an important electoral resource' and indeed that evaluations of party leaders were more important in explaining defections by Labour and Conservative partisans in the 1983 General Election than political attitudes. Two years later, Bean and Mughan (1989, 1175) would argue, again in relation to the contest in 1983, that '[i]f Foot had possessed Thatcher's personality profile, Labour's vote…would, other things being equal, have been some six to seven percentage points higher than it was.' Stewart and Clarke (1992, 447) contended with regard to the 1987 General Election that 'public reactions to the leaders had sizable effects on electoral choice.' Evans and Andersen (Andersen and Evans 2003; Evans and Andersen 2005), argue that Tony Blair made a substantial impact in the 2001 and 2005 General Elections, to Labour's benefit and detriment, respectively. Diego Garzia (2014, 53), taking a long-term perspective, argued in 2014 that 'the contribution of party leader evaluations to the voting model [for Britain] appears to have doubled throughout the last three decades.'[49] Studies suggest that

[49] It should be noted that not all academics agree that leaders now play a substantial role in British voting behaviour. Bartle (2002, 192), for example, argues with regard to the 2001 General Election that while 'voters thought that Tony Blair would make a better prime minister than William Hague…these evaluations are almost entirely predictable on the basis of voter predispositions, policy preferences and evaluations of party competence. William Hague was not the Conservative Party's problem. Quite the reverse: the Conservative Party was William Hague's' and Bartle and Crewe (2002, 92–93) that 'the best evidence from 1997 is that the effects of the party leaders' perceived personal traits were small…[t]he seeds of Labour's landslide victory in 1997 were to be found much further back in the "funnel of causality": in the events of September 1992 and the creation of New Labour. Similarly, preliminary analysis suggests that Labour's second landslide victory in 2001 was the result of a buoyant economy and the Conservative Party's failure to reassure voters that they would look after the public services rather than voters' markedly more favorable evaluations of Tony Blair than William Hague.'

leaders have become more important in determining both how (Garzia and da Silva 2021) and whether (Da Silva, Garzia, and Angelis 2021) people vote across Western Europe as a whole.[50]

And what of candidates more broadly, Criddle's 'anonymous footsoldiers'? Studies suggest that they too had assumed a new importance. Curtice and Steed (1980, 409) found 'strong evidence of the personal vote that an MP can build up' in their analysis of the 1979 General Election and estimated the benefit of incumbency (for Labour and Conservative MPs) at around 750 votes; by 1987, they (Curtice and Steed 1988) calculated that this figure had increased to 1,000 and that at least six Conservative seats had been saved as a result of it. Further, the 1987 General Election was the first in which the 'Nuffield Studies' series considered the incumbency effect for third parties and it was found that it was even greater for these parties than for Labour and the Conservatives. They highlight in this respect the Western Isles, where Donald Stewart's decision to stand down precipitated a 26% fall in SNP support, the highest changes recorded by any party in the election. Incumbency effects have continued, up to and including the 2019 General Election (Curtice, Fisher, and English 2021).

1.7 Infowars

There has been much debate – and concern – in recent years, both in Britain and the wider world, about an alleged rise in political misinformation and disinformation, the former referring to false information that is inadvertently spread and the latter to false information that is deliberately spread (Andrews 2006; Bechmann 2020; Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018; Bennett and Livingston 2018; Bennett and Livingston 2021; Freelon and Wells 2020; Freeze et al. 2021; Giusti and Piras 2021; Humprecht 2019; Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst 2020; Jerit and Zhao 2020; Lanoszka 2019; Li 2020; López-García et al.; Luttrell, Xiao, and Glass 2021; Moran 2020; Pennycook and Rand 2019; Shin et al. 2018).[51] [52] Far less attention, however, has been paid to a different phenomenon: not

[50] The specific countries included are Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom in Garzia and da Silva 2021 and Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom in Da Silva, Garzia, and Angelis 2021.

[51] See Chong and Choy 2020, Kapantai et al. 2021, and Molina et al. 2021 for proposed taxonomies of misinformation, disinformation, and 'fake news', respectively.

[52] Before mis/disinformation, there was 'spin' (Campbell 2002; Esser, Reinemann, and Fan 2000; Gaber 2000a; Gaber 2000b; Jones 1995; Moloney 2001; Pitcher 2003; Richards 1998). Definitions of this nebulous concept abound, but almost all revolve around the idea of deception – Jackson and Jamieson's (2007, viii) is characteristic: '[s]pin is a polite word for deception. Spinners mislead by means that range from subtle omission to outright lies. Spin paints a false picture of reality, by bending facts, mischaracterizing the words of others, ignoring or denying evidence, or just "spinning a yarn" – by making things up.' Moore (2006, 2, 3) traces the origins of 'modern spin' to the post-war Labour Government, arguing that the 'conscious separation of policy from presentation, and the constant management of information in order to engineer consent, emerged as a feature of government in the aftermath of the Second World War…modern spin did not suddenly appear in 1997, as some people have suggested. To understand its origins one must go back to the period immediately following the Second World War. It was in this period that the institutional, methodological and conceptual frameworks for both information management and modern spin were first developed.' For personal accounts from some of the leading practitioners of (what is almost inevitably termed the dark arts of) spin, the so-called 'spin doctors', see

misinforming nor disinforming, but rather *not informing at all*. It is this phenomenon, what might be termed being 'economical with the truth', that is the focus of Chapter 5. It does so by comparing what British MPs publicise about themselves, with regard to their sociodemographic characteristics, with the objective reality.

This study into the accuracy of the information that politicians are disseminating into the digital ether relates to questions around democracy itself. It has long been held that a well-informed citizenry constitutes a core component of democracy and a bulwark against tyranny, from Pericles in ancient Athens ('[w]e enjoy a form of government that does not emulate the institutions of our neighbours…Democracy is the name we give to it…people combine an interest in public and private matters, and those who are more involved in business are still well enough aware of political issues' (quoted in Thucydides 2013, 111, 113)) to Thomas Jefferson ('wherever the people are well informed they can be trusted with their own government' (Jefferson 1789)) and James Madison ('[a] popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both…a people who mean to be their own Governours, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives' (Madison 1822)) in revolutionary America to Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 8) in more recent times, the last two of whom contend that '[p]olitical information is to democratic politics what money is to economics: it is the currency of citizenship.' Müller (2016, 55) has similarly described how '[e]ven for the most minimal definitions of democracy – as a mechanism to ensure peaceful turnovers in power after a process of popular will-formation – it is crucial that citizens be well informed about politics'.

1.8 Congruent, responsive, both, or neither?

It is hoped that this thesis will expand work and theories which have been applied to policy to politicians. Specifically, a great deal of effort has been devoted to testing whether policy is congruent with public opinion and whether it is responsive to public opinion.[53]

With regard to the former, and focusing on Britain, Hewitt (1974, 214) examined the twenty years between 1944 and 1964 and found that for the twenty cases he examines 'issues tended to be resolved in a fashion that was generally compatible with the preferences of the majority of the public', while Brooks (1985) explored the years 1965 to 1974 and found that policy and public opinion were incongruent in 56% of the 106 cases he examined.

Bell 2014; Campbell 2010; Campbell 2011a; Campbell 2011b; Campbell 2012; Ingham 2003; Mandelson 2010; Mandelson 2011; McBride 2013; McBride 2014; Oliver 2016; Oliver 2017; Price 2005. Garnett and Lynch (2016) argue David Cameron himself functioned as a spin doctor during his time at Carlton Communications.

[53] For a discussion of the alleged – and allegedly growing – incompatibility between responsiveness to voters' demands and the responsibility of governing, see Mair (2013, 2014) and the writings inspired by Mair's work (Bardi, Bartolini, and Trechsel 2014a; Bardi, Bartolini, and Trechsel 2014b; Lefkofridi and Nezi 2020). Mair (2014, 581) contends that this growing gap 'is one of the principal sources of the democratic malaise that confronts many Western democracies today.'

Responsiveness studies in Britain are more plentiful and more up to date. Soroka and Wlezien (2005) examine the relationship between government spending and public preferences for government spending in four areas – health, education, defence, and transport/roads[54] – in the UK between the years 1978 to 1995. They find that changes in public preferences for government spending on defence and health are followed by changes in government spending in the desired direction the following year. With regard to education, they find that public preferences for government spending are followed by changes in government spending in the desired direction in the following year, but not at statistically significant levels. With regard to transport/roads, they find that public preferences for government spending are not followed by changes in government spending in the desired direction in the following year. They find that public preferences for government spending in health, education, and transport/roads taken collectively are followed by changes in government spending in the desired direction in the following year.[55]

Hobolt and Klemmemsen (2005) investigate the responsiveness of the UK and Danish governments to public opinion over the years 1970 to 2002. They do this by comparing the policy areas which the public declare in surveys to be most important to them with the policy areas which the British and Danish governments state they will legislate in in their annual opening speeches to parliament (the 'Queen's Speech' and the 'Prime Minister's opening speech', respectively). They find that policy responsiveness is higher in Denmark than in Britain.

Hakhverdian (2010) considers the responsiveness of the British government to public opinion during the thirty years between 1976 and 2006. He analyses the content of government speeches – specifically, the Budget – to create a government policy variable and the left-right self-placement item from the Eurobarometer surveys as a proxy for voter ideology. He finds that changes in public opinion are subsequently followed by corresponding changes in government policy. He thus concludes 'the Westminster system fulfils the requirements of dynamic representation rather well' (2010, 837).

Jennings and John examine the responsiveness of the UK government to public opinion for the years 1960 to 2001. Through a content analysis of the Queen's Speeches, they determine which policy areas governments focused on and compare this to which policy areas the public deemed most important or most urgent in survey questions. They find that of the ten policy areas they investigate, there is short-term government responsiveness to public opinion for macroeconomics, labour and employment, and health, and long-run government responsiveness to public opinion for macroeconomics, health, labour and employment, law and order, housing, and defence.

[54] They use government spending on transport and public preferences about roads.
[55] See Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002 for more on this idea of policy 'mood'.

Turning to theoretical discussions of congruence and responsiveness, it has been suggested that responsiveness is a core feature of democracy. Indeed, Dahl (1971, 2) went so far as to 'reserve the term "democracy" for a political system one of the characteristics of which is the quality of being completely or almost completely responsive to all its citizens'. Definitions of democracy have tended to define democracy in terms of (i) the source of democratic governmental authority,[56] (ii) the purpose(s) of democratic government,[57] and (iii) the procedures involved in constituting a democratic government.[58] As Huntington (1989, 12) succinctly puts it: 'democracy can be defined in terms of who rules, for what ends, and by what means.'

Given the trend among theorists in recent decades towards the proceduralist (or minimalist) approach, a Dahlian definition of democracy based on congruence or responsiveness seems out of step with the times. However, it may be that, as Powell (2004) suggests, congruence and responsiveness should be viewed as relating to the *quality* of democracy, if not as part of a definition of it. If so, and building on Collier and Levitsky's (1997) work on 'democracy with adjectives', a case could perhaps be made that democracies which attain a certain threshold of congruence could be labelled 'congruent democracies' and those which attain a certain threshold of responsiveness could be designated 'responsive democracies'.[59]

Supporting the aforementioned suggestion that a lack of congruence between the type of people who act as politicians and the type of people whom Britons want to act as politicians may be a cause behind the high levels of disillusionment and low levels of turnout in Britain, studies demonstrate that greater congruence between policy and public opinion results in increased satisfaction with government (Ezrow and Xezonakis

[56] Aristotle (1992, 187), for example, explains how 'the citizen-body of a state is sovereign; the citizen-body *is* the constitution. Thus in democracies the people are sovereign, in oligarchies the few. That, we say, is what makes the one constitution differ from the other [emphasis in original]', Hobbes (1996 [1651], 123) how 'the difference in commonwealths, consisteth in the difference of the sovereign, or the person representative of all and every one of the multitude. When the representative is one man, then is the commonwealth a MONARCHY: when an assembly of all that will come together, then it is a DEMOCRACY, or popular commonwealth: when an assembly of a part only, then it is called an ARISTOCRACY', and Montesquieu (1989 [1748], 10) how 'when the people as a body have sovereign power, it is a *democracy*' [emphasis in original].

[57] Turning again to Aristotle (1992, 189–190), he argues there are three 'correct' or 'right' constitutions (monarchy, aristocracy and polity) and three 'deviations' thereof (tyranny, oligarchy and democracy), with the distinction being that: '[w]henever the one, the few or the many rule with a view to the common good, these constitutions must be correct; but if they look to the private advantage, be it of the one or the few or the mass, they are deviations'.

[58] Joseph Schumpeter (1943, 269), often considered the lodestar of proceduralist theorists, defined the democratic method as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.'

[59] Scholars have explored whether the level of policy congruence varies by electoral system. Until 2006, there was a consensus that proportional representation resulted in closer congruence than single-member plurality (Huber and Powell 1994; Lakeman 1974; McDonald, Mendes, and Budge 2004; Powell and Vanberg 2000); it was at this point, however, that research revealed that the systems had moved into a state of parity (Blais and Bodet 2006), causing Powell (2013, 12) to lament: 'How inconvenient of the world to disrupt our nice research results with ugly new facts.'

2011; Kim 2009) and increased turnout (Brody and Page 1973; Lefkofridi, Giger, and Gallego 2014; Zipp 1985).[60]

1.9 The rise, fall, and revival of elite studies in Britain

This thesis focuses on British elites and Britons' views towards them. It stands in a long – if not unbroken – tradition of research into the sociodemographic characteristics of British politicians.[61] As described in greater detail in Chapter 2, these studies date back to – at least – the 1920s. However, the publication in the early 1970s of two edited volumes, Urry and Wakeford's (1973) *Power in Britain* and Stanworth and Giddens's (1974) *Elites and power in British society*, heralded the beginning of a downturn in elite research in Britain.[62] It would be decades before research into British elites revived. However, when it did so, it would involve not just academics (Bond 2012; Bukodi et al. 2025; Bukodi, Goldthorpe, and Steinberg 2022; Friedman and Reeves 2020; Reeves, Friedman, Rahal, and Flemmen 2017; Worth, Reeves, and Friedman 2023) but government (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission n.d.; Social Mobility Commission 2021), Parliament (Audickas and Cracknell 2020; Audickas, Cracknell, and Loft 2020; Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022; Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation) 2010), and third sector bodies like the Sutton Trust (Hecht et al. 2020; Kirby 2016; Montacute and Carr 2017; Sutton Trust 2015; Sutton Trust 2019), and the Institute for Public Policy Research (Quilter-Pinner et al. 2022) as well. This recent work encompasses studies of politicians (Bukodi et al. 2025), senior civil servants (Social Mobility Commission 2021), fellows of the Royal Society (Bukodi, Goldthorpe, and Steinberg 2022), as well as those in public life more broadly (Kirby 2016; Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission 2019).

[60] Though Lefkofridi, Giger, and Gallego 2014 find that policy congruence and turnout are only related for extremists.

[61] For some of the classic works on the broader theory of elites, see Michels 1911 (for the original German) and 1915 (for the first English translation); Mosca 1896 (for the original Italian) and 1939 (for the first English translation); Pareto 1916a and 1916b (for the original Italian) and 1935a; 1935b; 1935c; 1935d (for the first English translation).

[62] See Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2021; Savage 2015; Savage and Williams 2008; Scott 2008 for competing explanations for the reason for this decline.

2. Literature review

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports the results of a systematic review of all the candidate choice experiments that have been conducted in Britain – both published and unpublished – and places the growth of such experiments within the wider rise of experimental designs in political science. It employs a two-pronged approach for the review: a methodological component which compares and contrasts the research designs employed and a substantive component which analyses the specific variables which have been tested. It then assesses the work which has been undertaken charting the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs and the more limited work exploring what British MPs publicise about themselves with regard to these characteristics. It considers the gaps and shortcomings of the aforementioned literature and explores how the work undertaken for this thesis advances our understanding of British politics.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises two parts. First, a review of all[63] the text-based[64] candidate choice experiments – both published and unpublished – that have been conducted in Britain ('2.2 British candidate choice experiments'), of the studies which have been undertaken charting the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs ('2.3 Who's who'), and the work which has been conducted which explores what British MPs publicise about themselves with regard to these characteristics ('2.4 Self-portraits'). Second, a consideration of the issues, problems, and lacunae in this literature which this thesis hopes to address ('2.5 Gaps and shortcomings in the existing literature').

It is hoped that the detailed review of candidate choice experiments conducted in Britain will provide scholars with a useful compendium of the variables that have been tested and the ways in which they have been tested, and in so doing will prevent unnecessary duplication of research, will encourage replication where necessary, and stimulate research in new directions. Further, it is hoped that this chapter will form a foundation which can be updated going forwards, both for new experiments as they are

[63] To the best of the author's knowledge.

[64] There have been a number of candidate choice experiments conducted in Britain which utilise visual elements (see, for example, Johns and Shephard 2007; Johns and Shephard 2011; Shephard and Johns 2008; Weinberg 2020). Though the use of visual elements is a fascinating – and important – elaboration of text-based candidate choice experiments, their inclusion can introduce potential cofounders. For example, Weinberg (2020) utilises photographs of hypothetical candidates in order to operationalise views towards gender, age, ethnicity, and disability of candidates. However, it has been demonstrated that people prefer more attractive candidates (Banducci et al. 2008; Efran and Patterson 1974; King and Leigh 2009; Mattes and Milazzo 2014; Milazzo and Mattes 2016; Praino, Stockemer, and Ratis 2014), more competent-looking candidates (Armstrong et al. 2010; Atkinson, Enos, and Hill 2009; Ballew and Todorov 2007; Martin 1978; Praino, Stockemer, and Ratis 2014; Todorov et al. 2005), etc. There is thus a risk that respondents may be responding to these unseen (no pun intended) variables rather than the variables (putatively) under investigation. References in this article to candidate choice experiments refer solely to text-based candidate choice experiments.

undertaken and for experiments that have been conducted but of which the author is unaware. It is also hoped that the chapter will be expanded to encompass visual and aural candidate choice experiments.

2.2 British candidate choice experiments

Academics are increasingly utilising experimental designs to explore Britons' views towards candidates' sociodemographic characteristics. There have been, to the best of the author's knowledge, forty-four text-based candidate choice experiments, which use a large, nationally representative sample, conducted in Britain, the results of which are detailed in twenty articles (Baron, Lauderdale, and Sheehy-Skeffington 2023; Campbell and Cowley 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2018; Campbell et al. 2019a; Campbell et al. 2019b; Carnes and Lupu 2016a; Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018; Frederiksen 2022; Hobolt and Rodon 2020; Kevins 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2021; 2022; Martin and Blinder 2021; Reher 2021; Saha and Weeks 2022; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016; Vivyan et al. 2020a) and four unpublished papers (Greenwood-Hau 2023; Horne 2022; Mckay et al. n.d.; Wüest and Pontusson 2019).[65] Their appearance, from 2014, forms part of the wider growth of experimental research in political science; Druckman and his colleagues charted in 2006 how '[e]xperiments in political science have progressed from a method used in the occasional anomalous study to a generally accepted and influential approach' (Druckman et al. 2006, 634). A decade and a half later, he and Donald Green would note how 'experiments now occupy a *central* place in political science [emphasis added]' (Druckman and Green 2021, 4). The growth of experimental research in political science is the result of a variety of factors, among them computing advances (which have made data collection and analysis far less time- and resource-consuming) and the reduced cost and increased ease of recruiting nationally representative samples.

Twenty-two of the aforementioned forty-four British candidate choice experiments employ a conjoint design and twenty-two a non-conjoint design (see Table 2.1). Conjoint experiments require respondents to rate or choose between two or more alternatives, the attributes of which vary randomly (among a specified set of possible values, also known as levels).

Table 2.1: Type of design employed in British candidate choice experiments

Conjoint design	Non-conjoint design

[65] Each of the published articles and unpublished papers analyse the results of a single experiment, with the following exceptions: Campbell and Cowley 2014a analyses the results of two experiments; Campbell and Cowley 2014b analyses the results of two experiments; Campbell and Cowley 2014c analyses the results of eight experiments; Campbell and Cowley 2018 analyses the results of eight experiments; Campbell et al. 2019a, Vivyan and Wagner 2015, and Vivyan and Wagner 2016 analyse the results of the same two experiments; Campbell et al. 2019b analyses the results of two experiments; Greenwood-Hau 2023 analyses the results of two experiments; Magni and Reynolds 2021 and Magni and Reynolds 2022 analyse the results of the same experiment; Martin and Blinder 2021 analyses the results of two experiments; Mckay et al. (n.d.) analyses the results of two experiments; Reher 2021 analyses the results of two experiments; Vivyan et al. 2020a analyses the results of two experiments.

Campbell et al. 2019a (two experiments); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (two experiments); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (two experiments)	Baron, Lauderdale, and Sheehy-Skeffington 2023
Campbell et al. 2019b (study 2)	Campbell and Cowley 2014a (two experiments)
Carnes and Lupu 2016a	Campbell and Cowley 2014b (two experiments)
Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018	Campbell and Cowley 2014c (eight experiments)
Frederiksen 2022	Campbell and Cowley 2018 (eight experiments)
Greenwood-Hau 2023 (two experiments)	Campbell et al. 2019b (first experiment)
Hobolt and Rodon 2020	
Horne 2022	
Kevins 2021	
Magni and Reynolds 2021 and Magni and Reynolds 2022	
Martin and Blinder 2021 (two experiments)	
Mckay et al. n.d. (two experiments)	
Reher 2021 (two experiments)	
Saha and Weeks 2022	
Vivyan et al. 2020a (two experiments)	
Wüest and Pontusson 2019	

Of the forty-four British candidate choice experiments, thirty-six ask respondents to choose between the candidates (Baron, Lauderdale, and Sheehy-Skeffington 2023; Campbell and Cowley 2014a; Campbell and Cowley 2014b; Campbell and Cowley 2014c; Campbell and Cowley 2018; Campbell et al. 2019a; Campbell et al 2019b (second experiment); Carnes and Lupu 2016a; Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018; Greenwood-Hau 2023; Horne 2022; Martin and Blinder 2021; Mckay et al. n.d.; Saha and Weeks 2022; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016), five ask respondents to rate how likely they would be to vote for each candidate (Campbell et al. 2019b (first experiment); Frederiksen 2022; Kevins 2021; Vivyan et al. 2020a), three ask respondents to both decide between the candidates *and* to rate how likely they would be to vote for each candidate (Hobolt and Rodon 2020; Magni and Reynolds 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2022; Wüest and Pontusson 2019), and two only ask respondents about candidates' perceived traits (Reher 2021).

Twenty-one of the twenty-two British conjoint candidate choice experiments present respondents with two candidate profiles, as do all twenty-two British non-conjoint candidate choice experiments; the sole exception (Kevins 2021) employs a single-profile design.

Of the twenty-two British conjoint candidate choice experiments, five present the information on candidates in vignettes, seven in tables, and four in prose text presented

in bullet points (see Table 2.2). Of the twenty-two British non-conjoint candidate choice experiments, twenty-one present the information on candidates in vignettes and one in tables (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.2: How information is provided in British conjoint candidate choice experiments

Vignettes	Tables	Prose text presented in bullet points
Carnes and Lupu 2016a	Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018[66]	Campbell et al. 2019a (study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 1)
Greenwood-Hau 2023	Frederiksen 2022	Campbell et al. 2019a (study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 2)
Martin and Blinder 2021	Hobolt and Rodon 2020	Campbell et al. 2019b (study 2)
Reher 2021	Horne 2022	Mckay et al. n.d. (both experiments)
Vivyan et al. 2020a	Magni and Reynolds 2021 and Magni and Reynolds 2022	
	Saha and Weeks 2022	
	Wüest and Pontusson 2019	

Table 2.3: How information is provided in British non-conjoint candidate choice experiments

Vignettes	Tables
Campbell and Cowley 2014a	Baron, Lauderdale, and Sheehy-Skeffington 2023
Campbell and Cowley 2014b	
Campbell and Cowley 2014c	
Campbell and Cowley 2018	
Campbell et al. 2019b (study 1)	

Of the twenty-two British conjoint candidate choice experiments, seven ask respondents to complete one choice task, one asks respondents to complete two choice tasks, one asks respondents to complete three choice tasks, three ask respondents to complete

[66] Eggers et al. state that they use 'vignettes' (2018, 322), but the information is in fact presented in a table format.

four choice tasks, nine ask respondents to complete five choice tasks, and one asks respondents to complete ten choice tasks (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Number of choice tasks in British conjoint candidate choice experiments

One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Ten
Carnes and Lupu 2016a	Greenwood-Hau 2023 (experiment which excludes party)	Wüest and Pontusson 2019	Horne 2022; Mckay et al. n.d. (both experiments)	Campbell et al. 2019a (study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 1)	Frederiksen 2022
Greenwood-Hau 2023 (experiment which includes party)				Campbell et al. 2019a (study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 2)	
Kevins 2021				Campbell et al. 2019b (study 2)	
Reher 2021				Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018	
Martin and Blinder 2021				Hobolt and Rodon 2020	
				Magni and Reynolds 2021 and Magni and Reynolds 2022	
				Vivyan et al. 2020a (study 1)	

				Vivyan et al. 2020a (study 2)	

Of the forty-four candidate choice experiments that have been conducted in Britain, forty-three focus on the national level, i.e. Parliament. The sole exception is Carnes and Lupu's (2016a, 842) experiment, which asks Britons about candidates running for 'a local political office.'

The number of respondents in the forty-four British candidate choice experiments range from 700[67] to 7,903[68] (see Table 2.5 for a full list of the number of respondents).

Table 2.5: Number of respondents in British candidate choice experiments

Experiment	Number of respondents
Baron, Lauderdale, and Sheehy-Skeffington 2023	1,656
Campbell and Cowley 2014a (first experiment)	1,876
Campbell and Cowley 2014a (second experiment)	1,387
Campbell and Cowley 2014b (wealth experiment)	1,727
Campbell and Cowley 2014b (occupation experiment)	1,686
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 1)	2,864
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 2)	2,700
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 3)	2,577
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 4)	2,656
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 5)	2,847
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 6)	2,665
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 7)	2,709
Campbell and Cowley 2014c (wave 8)	1,152
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 1)	720
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 2)	715
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 3)	700
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 4)	747
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 5)	729
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 6)	739
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 7)	708
Campbell and Cowley 2018 (variant 8)	758
Campbell et al. 2019a (Study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (Study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (Study 1)	1,899

[67] Variant 3 in Campbell and Cowley 2018.
[68] Martin and Blinder 2021.

Campbell et al. 2019a (Study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (Study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (Study 2)	1,919
Campbell et al. 2019b (study 1)	5,203
Campbell et al. 2019b (study 2)	1,719
Carnes and Lupu 2016a	5,552
Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018	1,962
Frederiksen 2022	2,882
Greenwood-Hau 2023 (experiment which includes party)	1,767
Greenwood-Hau 2023 (experiment which excludes party)	1,767
Hobolt and Rodon 2020	1,936
Horne 2022	3,257
Kevins 2021	1,129
Magni and Reynolds 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2022	1,122
Martin and Blinder 2021 (with 'Neither' as an option)	7,903
Martin and Blinder 2021 (forced choice)	7,903
Mckay et al. n.d. (rural version of experiment)	1,692
Mckay et al. n.d. (urban version of experiment)	1,578
Reher 2021 (experiment which includes party)	1,500
Reher 2021 (experiment which excludes party)	1,500
Saha and Weeks 2022	869
Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 1)	1,899
Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 2)	1,919
Vivyan et al. 2020a (study 1)	1,992
Vivyan et al. 2020a (study 2)	2,017
Wüest and Pontusson 2019	Not stated

Calculating the number of attributes that are tested in conjoint candidate choice experiments is not as simple as one might imagine, as the definition of an attribute is open to differing interpretations. For example, Hobolt and Rodon (2020, 237) state that they test eight attributes in their experiment; one of these attributes is titled 'The candidate is likely to become' and is operationalised via three possible values, namely, 'A member of the opposition', 'A junior minister in the government', and 'A senior minister in the government' (Hobolt and Rodon n.d., 16–17). However, it could be argued that Hobolt and Rodon are in fact testing two attributes: (i) whether the candidate is likely to

be in opposition or in government, and (ii) the level of seniority which the candidate is likely to hold in government.[69]

Using academics' own views with regard to the number of attributes they test – as stated in their papers or conveyed via personal correspondence – two of the twenty-four British conjoint candidate choice experiments include four attributes, six test five attributes, four test six attributes, three test seven attributes, five test eight attributes, and two test nine attributes (see Table 2.6). A full list of all the attributes and levels tested in British candidate choice experiments is provided in Appendix B.

Table 2.6: Number of attributes tested in British conjoint candidate choice experiments

Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine
Carnes and Lupu 2016a	Campbell et al. 2019a (study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (study 1); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 1)	Campbell et al. 2019b (study 2)	Martin and Blinder 2021 (with 'Neither' as an option)	Hobolt and Rodon 2020	Frederiksen 2022
Kevins 2021	Campbell et al. 2019a (study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2015 (study 2); Vivyan and Wagner 2016 (study 2)	Horne 2022	Martin and Blinder 2021 (forced choice)	Magni and Reynolds 2021	Reher 2021 (experiment which includes party)
	Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018	Vivyan et al. 2020a (study 2)	Vivyan et al. 2020a (study 1)	Magni and Reynolds 2022	
	Saha and Weeks 2022	Wüest and Pontusson 2019		Mckay et al. n.d. (both experiments)	

[69] Similarly, Eshima and Smith (2022a, 1859) state that they test seven attributes in the conjoint candidate choice experiment they conduct in Japan, namely, 'age, incumbency, gender, level of education, hometown (inside or outside the district), prior occupation, and prior political experience (such as serving in a local assembly).' However, the four options for level of education, namely 'High school', 'Regional university', 'University of Tokyo', 'Graduate school' (Eshima and Smith 2022b, 21), could also be viewed as testing attendance at an elite (University of Tokyo) and non-elite university (Regional university).

				Reher 2021 (experiment which excludes party)	

2.3 Who's who

A great deal of work has been undertaken in recent years cataloguing the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs, from the 'Nuffield studies' series of books published after each general election (Butler, Campbell, and Hudson 2021; Campbell and Hudson 2018; Criddle 2010; Criddle 2016) to *Dods Parliamentary Companion* (Dods 2020) to the various editions of *Butler's British Political Facts* (Butler and Butler 2011; Mortimore and Blick 2018) to the guides to the House of Commons published by *The Times* (Brunskill 2020) and *Politico* (Carr, Dale, and Waller 2015; Carr, Dale, and Waller 2017) to reports by the Sutton Trust (Montacute and Carr 2017; Sutton Trust 2019) and the House of Commons itself (Audickas, Cracknell, and Loft 2020; Cracknell, Uberoi, and Burton 2022). Such efforts have a long history, dating back – at least – to Laski (1928) and Namier (1929a; 1929b) in the 1920s, Haxey (1939) in the 1930s, Ross (1943) in the 1940s, and Butler (1952; 1955), Guttsman (1951; 1954), and Matthews (1954) in the 1950s.[70]

2.4 Self-portraits

Despite the large amount of work which has been conducted in detailing British politicians' sociodemographic characteristics, much less attention has been paid to what they publicise about their sociodemographic characteristics. In fact, there has been – to the best of the author's knowledge – just *one* study which has systematically compared the objective reality of British MPs' sociodemographic characteristics with what they publicise, namely, Campbell and Cowley's study from 2018 exploring whether or not MPs with children publicise their parental status on their websites.

As well as exploring what British MPs publicise about their children, Campbell and Cowley also run an experiment, testing Britons' views towards politicians with and without children, which enables them to test whether MPs are highlighting popular attributes (which they do indeed find). This thesis will do likewise. As explained in the following chapter, a conjoint candidate choice experiment will be conducted which explores the importance Britons attach to the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians. This will enable the author to test whether politicians are downplaying unpopular characteristics and highlighting popular ones.

2.5 Gaps and shortcomings in the existing literature

[70] See also Lupton and Wilson's 'at the time influential, though now largely forgotten' study from 1959 (Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2021, p. 675).

Let us turn to the gaps and shortcomings in the aforementioned literature which this thesis hopes to address. This section follows the structure above, first addressing the shortcomings and gaps in British candidate choice experiments, then in the collections of data on British MPs' sociodemographic characteristics, and finally the work which has been conducted on the self-publicising by British MPs of their sociodemographic characteristics.

2.5.1 British candidate choice experiments

As the above review demonstrates, a great deal of experimental work has been conducted in an effort to understand the type of politicians that Britons want. The growth of experiments in this area is a reflection and a part of the wider growth of experimental research in political science.

However, despite the amount of work that has been conducted, there are important variables which are yet to be tested and which may be more important to Britons than the variables that *have* been tested. For example, despite the fact that the divide between state and private secondary education remains an important issue in British politics – when Keir Starmer, as Leader of the Opposition, pledged to add VAT to private school fees, then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak accused him of stoking a 'class war' (Daly 2023) – and a highly emotive issue in British society, the impact of this variable on Britons' views towards candidates has not been tested.[71] [72] Highlighting the importance of this educational divide, it has been shown that attending a private secondary school has an independent impact on Britons' social and political attitudes (Evans and Tilley 2012a; Wiggins et al. 2023).[73]

One candidate choice experiment *does* vary candidates' educational background between state and private (Kevins 2021), but the impact of this variable is not considered in and of itself; rather, it is combined with another variable to produce a measure of class. Further, none of the candidate choice experiments that have been conducted in Britain test whether respondents' views towards candidates differ depending upon the elite nature of the private school that candidates attended.

[71] In response to Nigel Farage announcing that he would be contesting the seat of Clacton in the 2024 General Election, Rosena Allin-Khan (2024), Labour MP for Tooting, highlighted what she appears to view as the disjuncture between his private schooling (and City career) and man of the people persona, writing 'BREAKING NEWS: Private school-educated stockbroker, who has stood seven times for Parliament and failed on every occasion, in a speech against the "elites" announces he's got the funding and time to stand again.'

[72] Private schools remain a source of enduring fascination to Britons, with a slew of books in recent years about Britain's private schools and the damage they purportedly do – to their products and to the country their products run (see, for example, Beard 2021; Fraser 2006; Green and Kynaston 2019; Renton 2017; Turner 2015; Verkaik 2018).

[73] E. M. Forster (Tonbridge) (1926) argued that products of the English public schools went forth into the world 'with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds and undeveloped hearts' and Cyril Connolly (Eton) (1938, 324–325) postulated, in his 'Theory of Permanent Adolescence', that 'the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development. From these it results that the greater part of the ruling class remains adolescent'.

Similarly, while a number of British candidate choice experiments have tested Britons' views towards university- and non-university-educated candidates, none have tested whether Britons' views vary depending upon the elite nature of the university that candidates attended. Further, the experiments which *do* test whether Britons hold different views towards candidates who did and did not attend university produce conflicting results, fail to conduct appropriate subgroup analysis, and employ faulty research methodologies. Let us consider each of these issues in turn.

Five candidate choice experiments test Britons' views towards university- and non-university-educated candidates. However, they find conflicting results: one (Magni and Reynolds 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2022)[74] finds that Britons prefer candidates who attended university,[75] one (Campbell and Cowley 2014c) that they prefer candidates who did not attend university,[76] and three (Carnes and Lupu 2016a; Greenwood-Hau 2023; Horne 2022) that they are ambivalent towards candidates attending or not attending university.

A number of these five experiments also employ flawed research designs. For example, Carnes and Lupu (2016a) do not make it unequivocally clear whether or not a candidate attended university. Their control variable states that the candidate 'graduated from university', while their treatment variable states that the candidate 'completed secondary school' (842). As Carnes and Lupu (2016a, 842) acknowledge, 'respondents who hear that a candidate completed secondary school could still wrongly infer that the candidate later went on to complete college (and that the vignette simply omitted that information), thereby obscuring any effects of education'.

Two of these five experiments collect data which allows the existence of higher educational affinity to be tested. However, only one conducts such analysis, and it comprises a solitary line in the supplementary material, with no explanation of the calculations undertaken (Carnes and Lupu 2016b). Analysis of the underlying data in the two experiments reveals discrepant findings. Carnes and Lupu's (2016a) data reveals no statistically significant educational affinity bias among either respondents who attended university or respondents who did not attend university.[77] Magni and Reynolds's (2021; 2022) data, on the other hand, reveals the existence of educational affinity bias among respondents who attended university but not among respondents who did not attend university.[78]

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[74] Magni and Reynolds 2021 and Magni and Reynolds 2022 analyse the results of the same experiment.
[75] At statistically significant levels.
[76] At statistically significant levels.
[77] Their data reveals that respondents who attended university are ambivalent towards both candidates who attended university and candidates who did not attend university and that the difference between their views towards candidates who attended university and candidates who did not attend university is not statistically significant. Their data reveals identical findings among respondents who did not attend university.
[78] Their data reveals that respondents who attended university view candidates who attended university positively (at statistically significant levels), are ambivalent towards candidates who did not attend university, and that the difference between their views towards each group are statistically significant. It

Just one of the candidate choice experiments that have conducted in Britain varies the subjects candidates studied at university – the third wave of the eight-wave experiment in Campbell and Cowley (2014c) – but problems with the research design employed mean that this variable has not been adequately tested either. Campbell and Cowley (2014c) conduct a non-conjoint experiment. One group of respondents viewed profiles of two candidates, giving a 'baseline' result, while the treatment groups viewed slightly modified profiles; differences in how the groups respond to the candidates can thus attributed to the changes made. However, for this causal reasoning to hold, only one change per treatment can be made. In the baseline comparison, respondents were presented with profiles of two candidates: John Burns, who, amongst other information, studied physics at university and now runs an accountancy firm, and George Mountford, who studied business at university and now runs a solicitor practice. In the two experimental treatments in wave three of their experiment, George is altered to having studied medicine at university and to having studied politics at university. However, these are not the only changes made in the two treatments; indeed, they are incidental to the main change: George's occupation. In the two treatments, George is changed to a GP and a career politician (a 'politico' as Campbell and Cowley term him). The changes to the subject studied at university were made so that the profiles with these occupations feel more realistic. However, as more than one change was made in the two treatments, changes in how respondents view the candidates cannot be attributed to either the altered occupations or to the altered subjects studied.

Five candidate choice experiments have attempted to gauge Britons' views towards the class of politicians (Carnes and Lupu 2016a; Horne 2022; Vivyan et al. 2020a; Wüest and Pontusson 2019).[79] All five experiments operationalise the candidate's class by varying their occupation. The classes which are tested, and the occupations employed to operationalise these classes, are shown in Table 2.7.[80]

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reveals that respondents who did not attend university are ambivalent towards both candidates who attended university and candidates who did not attend university and that the difference between their views towards candidates who attended university and candidates who did not attend university is not statistically significant.

[79] Vivyan et al. 2020a contains two experiments.

[80] Although occupation, rather than income, is the standard way of operationalising class, income is clearly an important part of class. Campbell and Cowley (2014a), in their study 'Rich Man, Poor Man, Politician Man: Wealth Effects in a Candidate Biography Survey Experiment', test Britons' views towards the income of candidates and find that Britons prefer candidates who earn less than their rivals. In the baseline for their experiment, a sample of respondents were presented with profiles of two fictional candidates. John, the self-employed businessman earning £28k per year, was respondents' preferred candidate over George, the solicitor earning £45k, by 33 percentage-points. However, when John's income (and nothing else in the two profiles) was changed from £28k per year to £100k per year, George became a different sample of respondents' preferred candidate, by 14 points, a statistically significant swing of 47 percentage-points. Further, when John's income (and nothing else in the two profiles) was changed from £28k per year to £1m per year, George became a different sample of respondents' preferred candidate, by 24 points, a statistically significant swing of 57 percentage-points. The same pattern – of respondents turning away from John as his income increases – obtains when John is made a financier rather than a self-employed businessman. John, the financier earning £28k per year, was respondents' preferred candidate over George, the solicitor earning £45k, by 19 percentage-points. When John's income was increased to 100k per year, George became a different sample of respondents' preferred candidate, by 26 percentage-points, a statistically significant swing of 45 percentage-points. When John's income was

Table 2.7: Occupations used to test class in British candidate choice experiments

Experiment	Class	Occupations
Carnes and Lupu 2016a	Working class	Factory worker
	White collar	Business owner
Horne 2022	Working class	Factory Worker; Retail Salesperson
	'Professional' or 'Higher' class	Businessperson; Lawyer; Political Advisor
Vivyan et al. 2020a (first experiment)	Lower-grade service class	Teacher; Hotel manager; Local council employee; Accountant
	Higher-grade service class	GP; Senior manager in the public sector; Journalist; Bank manager
	Political class	Press officer for a political party
Vivyan et al. 2020a (second experiment)	Working class	Factory worker; Shop assistant
	Upper-middle class	Manager; Judge; GP
Wüest and Pontusson 2019	Routine working class	Shop assistant; Cleaner in a hospital
	Skilled working class	Clerk at a law firm; Paramedic
	Lower-middle class	Solicitor with own practice; General practitioner
	Upper-middle class	Managing partner of a large law firm; Cardiologist in a prestigious hospital

However, these experiments unearth conflicting findings. Carnes and Lupu (2016a) find that Britons do not discriminate between working-class candidates and middle-class candidates. Horne (2022) likewise finds no clear pattern in Britons' views towards the

increased to £1m per year, George became a different sample of respondents' preferred candidate, by 41 percentage-points, a statistically significant swing of 60 percentage-points. Analysis by subgroup provides additional illumination. They find that the fall in support for candidates as they became wealthier was greater among women than men, greater among the lowest social classes (DE) than the highest (AB), and greater among Labour supporters than Conservative supporters. The age of respondents, however, did not have an impact. See Greenwood-Hau's (2023) unpublished study for confirmatory findings. A similar bias against high-income candidates and in favour of low-income candidates has been found in various other countries, including the US (Griffin, Newman, and Buhr 2020) and Switzerland (Wüest and Pontusson 2017).

class of politicians.[81] Vivyan et al. (2020a) reach similar conclusions in their first[82] and second[83] experiments. Wüest and Pontusson (2019), on the other hand, find pronounced results, namely that Britons prefer skilled working-class candidates over routine working-class candidates (at statistically significant levels), that they prefer lower-middle class candidates over routine working-class candidates (at statistically significant levels), and that they prefer upper-middle-class over routine working-class candidates (at statistically significant levels).

Three of these experiments employ subgroup analysis by respondents' class: Carnes and Lupu (2016a), Horne (2022), and the second experiment in Vivyan et al. (2020a). Their work reveals two key insights. First, the value of subgroup analysis. All three experiments find heterogeneity of views among different classes – such diversity can easily be hidden when overall results alone are presented. Second, the need for the research undertaken in this thesis, as their subgroup analysis generates conflicting results. Where Horne finds that both working-class and middle-class Britons exhibit an affinity bias, in roughly equal measure, Vivyan et al. (2020a, 10) find that 'class affinity is primarily a working-class phenomenon, with little evidence that middle-class respondents favour in-group candidates', a finding echoed by Carnes and Lupu.

Perhaps explaining the conflicting results discussed above, and again highlighting the need for the work undertaken in this thesis, many of the existing experiments employ flawed designs. A number of the existing experiments use insufficiently precise occupations. For example, Carnes and Lupu (2016a) randomly vary the occupations of the two candidates in their experiment between 'business owner' and 'factory worker'. Respondents prefer the factory worker to the business owner in terms of whom they want to be their MP, but the difference is not statistically significant. Carnes and Lupu (2016a, 838) conclude that '[t]he average respondent in Britain…was essentially indifferent about candidates from the working class and candidates from white-collar jobs'. However, Carnes and Lupu's choice of middle-class occupation may be insufficiently specific. There is a great deal of difference between a business owner who founded a company and employs five people and a business owner who inherited a multinational company that employs tens of thousands of people (hence the Office of National Statistics, in their National Statistics Socio-economic Classification distinguishing between those who employ 25 or more people (L1) and those who employ fewer than 25 people (L8)). It seems reasonable to assume that some

[81] Calculating the AMCEs and using factory worker as the baseline category, Horne (2022) finds that Britons prefer the businessperson over the factory worker (at statistically significant levels), prefer the factory worker over the lawyer (at statistically significant levels), are ambivalent towards the factory worker and the political advisor, and are ambivalent towards the factory worker and the retail salesperson.
[82] Their supplementary material (2020b) calculates the AMCEs for MPs' occupations and finds only one statistically significant result. Designating GP as the baseline category, they find that Britons view bank managers negatively but are ambivalent towards teachers, hotel managers, local council employees, accountants, senior managers in the public sector, journalists, and press officers for political parties.
[83] They find that Britons prefer the 'class climber' over the 'upper middle class stayer', but that they are ambivalent towards the 'working class stayer' and the 'upper middle class stayer' and ambivalent towards the 'working class stayer' and the 'class climber'.

respondents would have assumed that the business owner in Carnes and Lupu's experiment was of the former kind (i.e. small and entrepreneurial), that some would have assumed that the business owner was of the latter kind (i.e. larger and an inheritor), and that some would have been confused as to whether the business owner was of the former or latter kind.

In addition, a number of the existing experiments use too few classes. Just two of the experiments move beyond a dichotomous working/middle class division (Vivyan et al. 2020a (first experiment); Wüest and Pontusson 2019). Although this binary divide has been extremely important historically, it no longer adequately reflects society in Britain, as can be seen from the fact that the leading class schemas, the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, the Erikson-Goldthorpe schema, and the Oesch schemas, employ eight, eleven, and seventeen classes, respectively (see Appendix C for the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, Appendix D for the Erikson-Goldthorpe schema, and Appendix E for the Oesch schema). Further, the two experiments which do go beyond this dichotomous class divide do not do so satisfactorily. Vivyan and his colleagues add a third class: politics. It is the contention of this paper that politics should be viewed as a sector rather than a class in and of itself, as there is a great range of occupations within politics. A special adviser with the ear of a government minister, for example, is very different to a local party organiser. The experiment which contains the most classes – four – is that of Wüest and Pontusson (2019), which has not yet been published.

Further, the existing experiments use too few occupations per class, raising the possibility that respondents are reacting to the occupations themselves, rather than to the classes that the occupations are intended to represent. Thus, as described above, Carnes and Lupu (2016a) use just one occupation for their working-class and white-collar categories, 'factory worker' and 'business owner', respectively. With regard to the experiments that *do* use more than one occupation from different classes, none actually aggregate their results by class; results are only reported for each occupation.

Finally, a number of the existing experiments miscategorise the occupations they include. Wüest and Pontusson (2019), for example, classify 'Solicitor with own practice' and 'General practitioner' as 'Lower-middle class'. It seems reasonable to assume that a large number of Britons would not classify these occupations in the same way.

Just one British candidate choice experiment (Vivyan et al. 2020a) attempts to test whether Britons hold different views towards politicians who work in the public as opposed to the private sector. Unfortunately, the results are not discussed in the article, and there is no theorising as to the results that may be expected. There is a single line in their supplementary material (Vivyan et al. 2020b) which states that Britons prefer candidates who work in the public sector over candidates who work in the private sector (at statistically significant levels). However, the research design they employ is highly suspect. They do not use the exact same occupations for the two sectors, testing, for example, a candidate who 'worked in the public sector as a teacher' and a candidate who 'worked in the private sector as a journalist' (Vivyan et al. 2020a, 6). As a result,

there is a risk that respondents are reacting to the occupations rather than the sectors for which they are intended to act as proxies.

Five candidate choice experiments test Britons' views towards career politicians (Campbell and Cowley 2014c; Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018; Frederiksen 2022; Horne 2022; Vivyan et al. 2020a).[84] All five do so by including various political backgrounds as potential occupations the candidates could have held. The political occupations which are tested are shown in Table 2.8. However, all five experiments only include one political occupation. As referenced above with regard to class, when only one occupation is used as a proxy for a larger category, there is the risk that respondents are reacting to the occupation itself rather than the actual object of interest (i.e. the larger category). In addition, the experimental results are contradictory, suggesting further research is required. Campbell and Cowley (2014b), for example, find opposition to career politicians at statistically significant levels while Vivyan et al. (2020a) do not,[85] and while Horne (2023) finds that career politicians are more popular than lawyers, Frederiksen (2022) finds the reverse. Moreover, none of these experiments test career politicians against as many other occupations as will be tested in the experiment conducted for this thesis.

Table 2.8: Political occupations tested in British candidate choice experiments

Experiment	Political occupation
Campbell and Cowley 2014c	Worked for two MPs and became a local councillor
Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018	Political advisor
Frederiksen 2022	Political career
Horne 2022	Political advisor
Vivyan et al. 2020a	Press officer for a political party

All of the existing British candidate choice experiments ask respondents about only a single level of government.[86] All, bar one, test respondents' views towards politicians at the national level, i.e. Parliament. The sole exception is Carnes and Lupu's (2016a, 842) experiment, which asks Britons about candidates running for 'a local political office.' By focusing on a single level of government, none of these experiments test whether Britons' preferences with regard to the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians vary by level of government. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis adds to the literature by testing more than one level of government, exploring respondents' views towards both their local councillor and their MP.

The length of some of the candidate choice experiments also raises concerns. If an experiment is too long, it risks collecting low quality data as a result of fatigue effects

[84] Is it stated in Frederiksen's online appendix (2022a) rather than his article (2022b) that he includes a career politician in his experiment.
[85] Career politician is tested in the first experiment in Vivyan et al. 2020a.
[86] Cowley (2013) explores Britons' views towards their own MPs and MPs as a group but does so using traditional survey methods.

(Ben-Nun 2008). In one of the aforementioned experiments conducted by Vivyan and his colleagues (Vivyan et al. 2020a), respondents are asked to read the profiles of five pairs of MPs. A screenshot is provided in their article of one of the five pages which respondents are asked to read; it contains 219 words and numbers. Assuming the remaining four pages are of a similar length, respondents were asked to read over a thousand words and numbers. In addition, their questionnaire contained preliminary questions asking respondents about their sociodemographic profile and a 91-word introduction to the experiment. To put in perspective just how lengthy (and fatigue-inducing) this is, Stanley Payne, in one of the classics on survey composition, recommends that in order to prevent fatigue effects, questions should be around just 20 words (Payne 1951, 136).

2.5.2 Collection of data on British MPs' sociodemographic characteristics

Let us turn to the work which has been conducted charting the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs. As noted above, a great deal of work has been undertaken collecting this data. However, this work comprises either individual profiles of MPs, as found, for example, in *Dods Parliamentary Companion*, or anonymised data at the aggregate level, such as is found in the Nuffield election studies and Sutton Trust reports; no study combines both. For the purposes of this thesis, data was required at both the individual level *and* the aggregate level. This data has therefore been collected. Further, it will be made freely available to other scholars for them to use and build upon.

2.5.3 Content analysis of MPs' websites

Finally, let us turn to the (very limited) work which exists which explores what British politicians publicise about themselves with regard to their sociodemographic characteristics. As noted above, there has been just one study on this topic. Further, this single study focuses on just one characteristics: parental status. There is, therefore, a gaping hole in the existing literature. The aforementioned experiments have shown that politicians' sociodemographic characteristics are of crucial importance to Britons, yet there is barely any work which explores how British politicians highlight – or downplay – their sociodemographic characteristics; this thesis will help rectify this glaring lacuna.

3. Experimental and survey results I: Main effects

ABSTRACT

This chapter details the technical aspects of the conjoint candidate choice experiment and surveys and reports their main effects. It finds that Britons collectively prefer politicians from groups that are under-represented in Parliament (the working class, the state-educated, and those who did not attend university) over politicians from groups that are over-represented in Parliament (the upper-middle class, the privately educated, the university-educated, and the Oxford-educated). The innovative approach adopted reveals that Britons do not want people from groups they personally disfavour to be absent from Parliament – rather they want the House of Commons to reflect the sociodemographic profile of the wider country. It is suggested that this mismatch between the kind of legislature that Britons desire and the kind that exists may help explain some of the maladies plaguing contemporary British politics, among them a worrying rise in disillusionment with politics and politicians.

3.1 Introduction

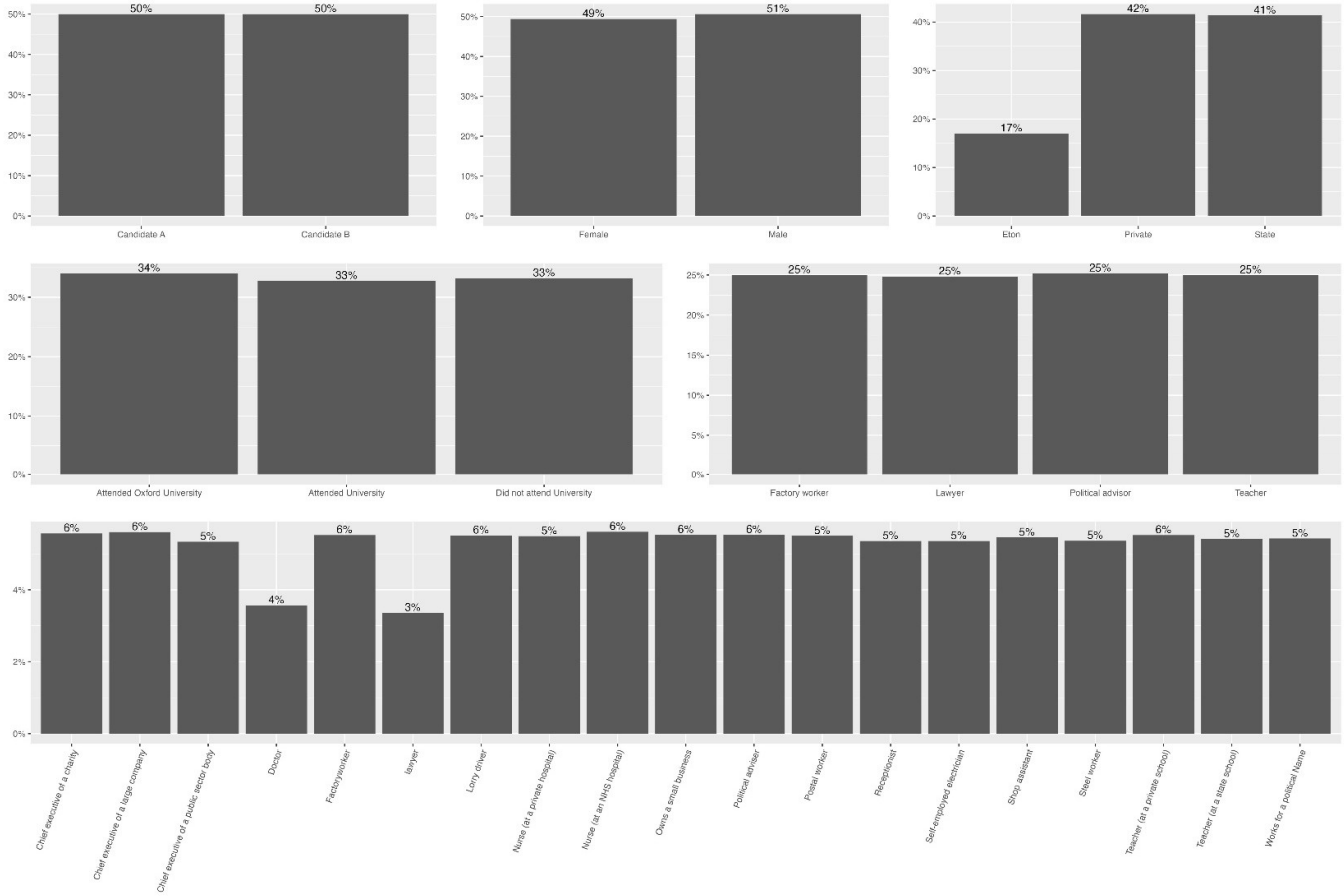
This chapter begins with an analysis of the technical aspects of the candidate choice experiment and surveys (such as when they were conducted, the number of respondents, analysis to confirm that the candidate choice experiment was appropriately randomised, checks to ensure that the candidate choice experiment was sufficiently powered, etc) before reporting their main effects (hypotheses 1 to 5). The regression tables for the candidate choice experiment are contained in Appendix R.

The candidate choice experiment was carried out in May 2023 as part of wave 25 of the British Election Study ('BES'), with a nationally representative sample comprising c. 7,600 respondents. A screenshot of the experiment is provided in Figure 3.6. The surveys were conducted in three waves: the first between 23 and 25 July 2021 (comprising 1,693 respondents), the second between 13 and 14 June 2022 (comprising 1,678 respondents), and the third between 23 and 27 March 2023 (comprising 2,214 respondents). All three surveys utilise large samples, weighted to ensure they are nationally representative.

Statistical analysis was conducted to confirm that the experiment was appropriately randomised. As explained above, the experiment employed a constrained design, with a small number of impossible or extremely unlikely combinations of attributes prevented from occurring (only male candidates will have attended Eton and candidates who are doctors or lawyers must have attended university). As Figure 3.1 shows, the experiment was appropriately randomised and the constraints correctly operationalised. For example, the experiment was coded so as to randomise whether a candidate attended university, did not attend university, or attended Oxford University and, as Figure 3.1 shows, a third of candidates presented to respondents attended university, a third did not, and a third attended Oxford University. Conversely, the experiment was coded such

that only male candidates could have attended Eton. As a result, far fewer candidates attended Eton (17%) than attended an unnamed private school (42%) or a state school (41%).

Figure 3.1: Level of randomisation



A danger inherent to surveys and survey experiments is 'straight-lining'.[87] This 'tendency to use an identical response category for all items' (Herzog and Bachman 1981, 551) is a particularly insidious risk, as, unlike respondents failing to answer, straight-lining furnishes researchers with data, which they may mistakenly believe is of high quality and represents respondents' true feelings.

One way to test the presence and extent of straight-lining is to measure the level of variation among dependent variables. As Figure 3.2 shows, there was sufficient variation among dependent variables to allay concerns that respondents were simply ticking the same box without due thought and consideration.

[87] Also referred to as 'nondifferentiation' (Yan 2008).

Additional analysis reveals that variation across the dependent variables was largely the same regardless of respondents' level of education (see Figure 3.3),[88] social class (see Figure 3.4), and party identification (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.2: Variation across dependent variables (overall)

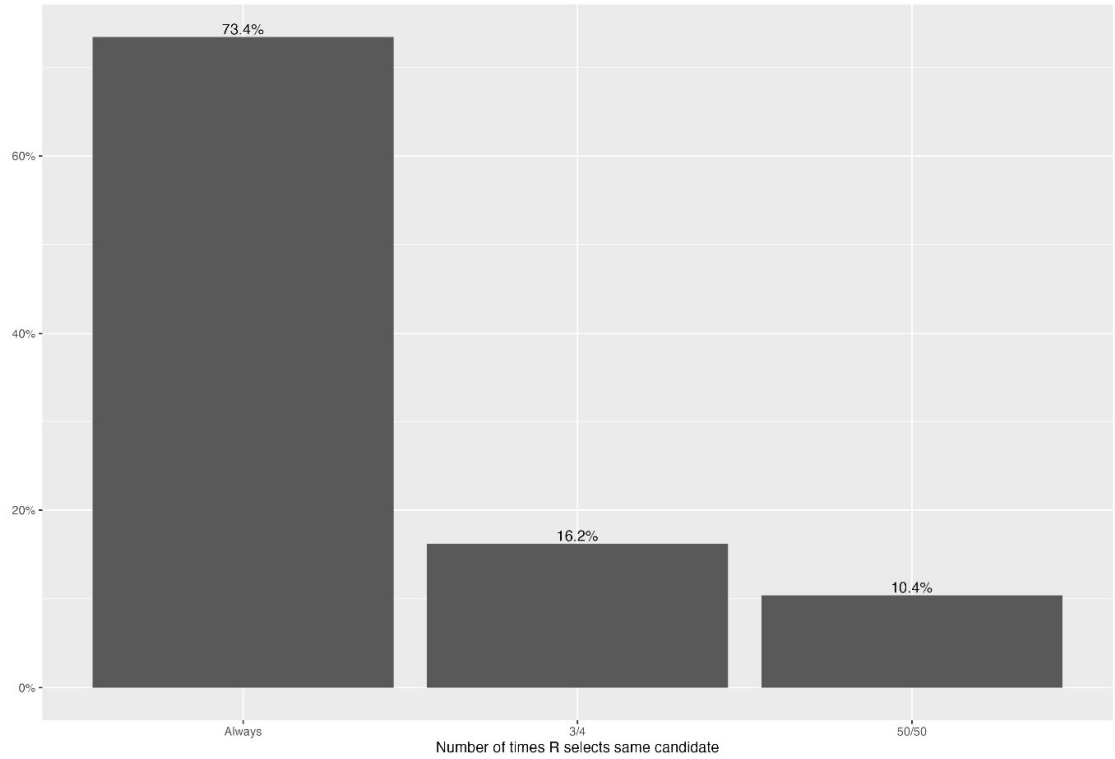


Figure 3.3: Variation across dependent variables (by respondents' education)

[88] A finding that runs contrary to Kim et al. (2019).

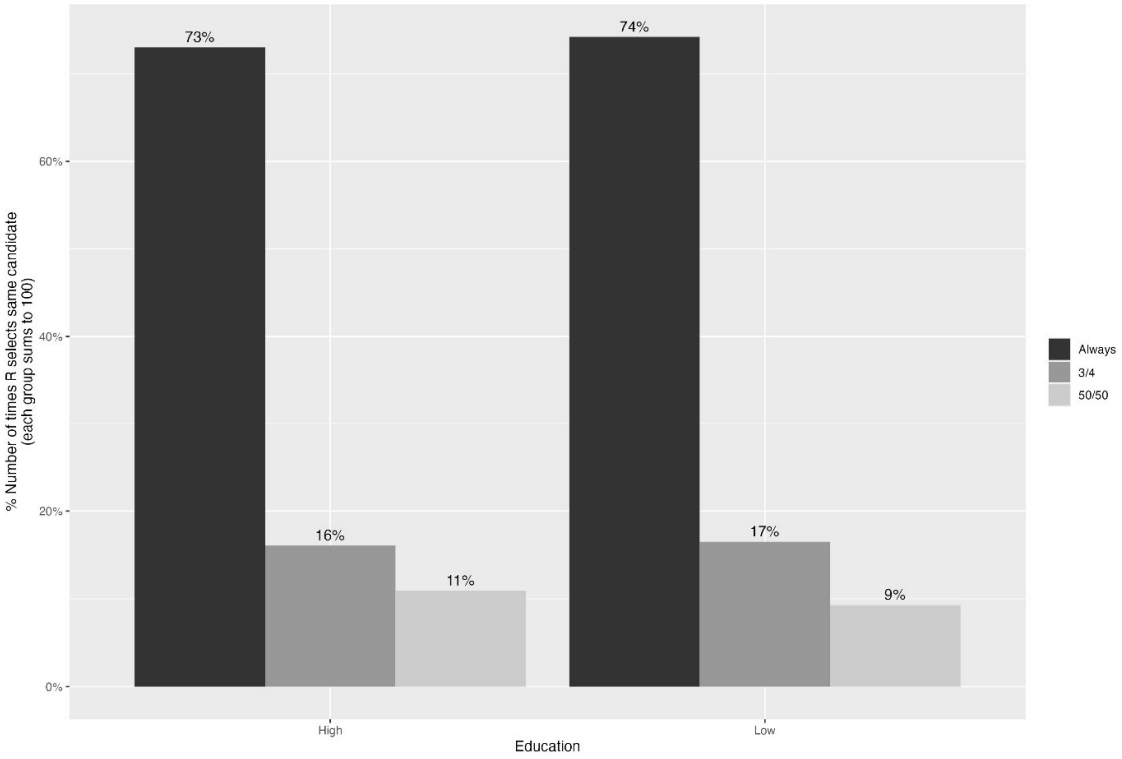


Figure 3.4: Variation across dependent variables (by respondents' social class)

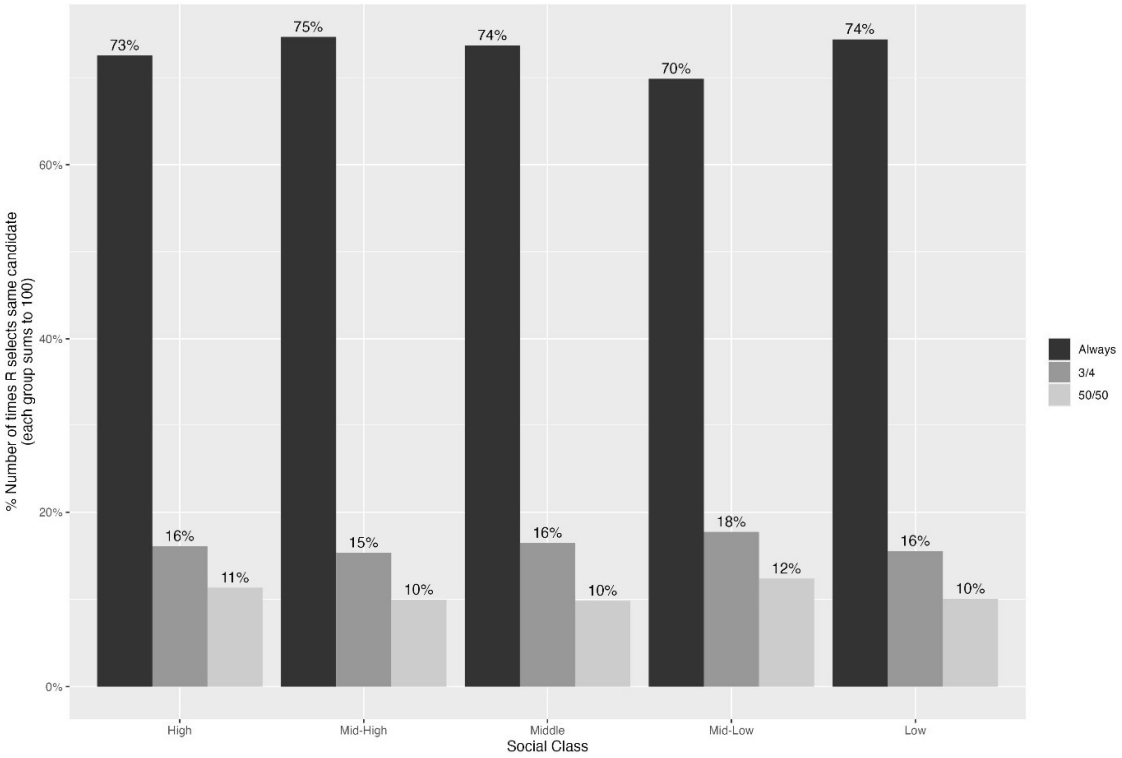
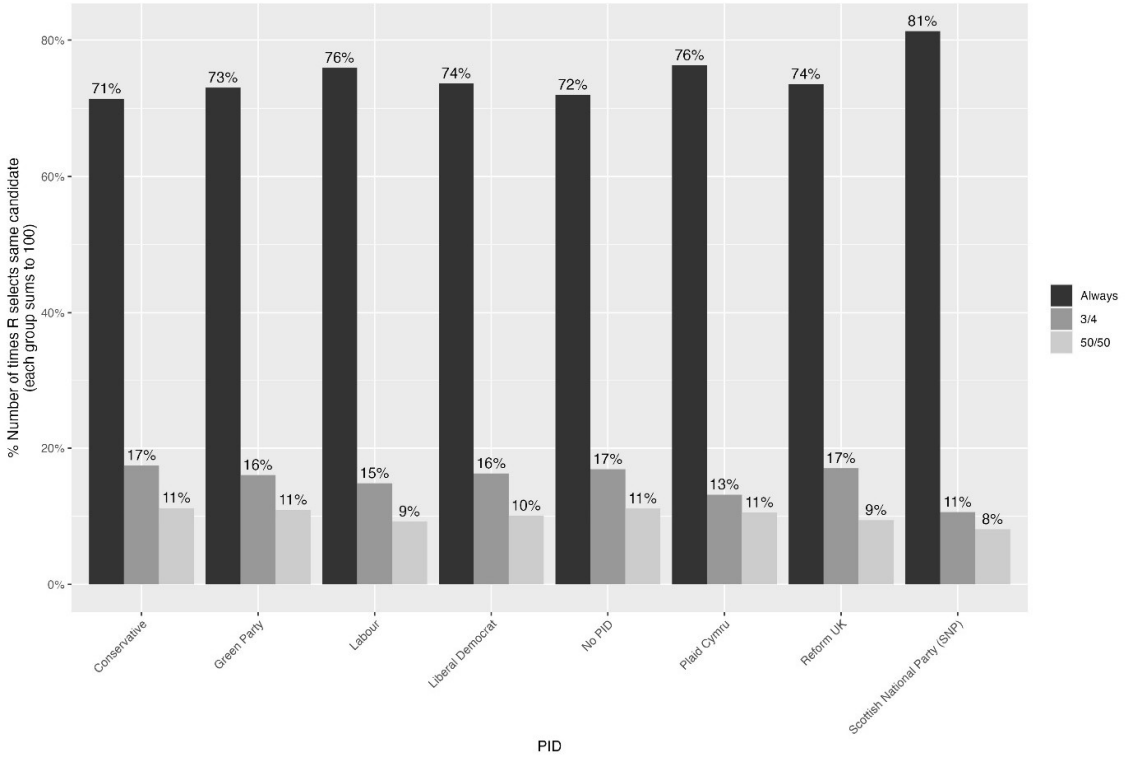


Figure 3.5: Variation across dependent variables (by respondents' party identification)



As discussed above, the conjoint candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis tests a large number of candidate occupations. In order to ensure that the amount of data collected was sufficiently large for reliable results to be generated, YouGov, to whom the BES subcontracts the running of their surveys, was instructed to present respondents with eight choice tasks, four of which would test respondents' views towards their MP and four of which would test their views towards their local councillor.

Unfortunately, YouGov only presented respondents with two choice tasks, one of which asked respondents about their MP and one of which asked respondents about their local councillor. A simulation-based power analysis was undertaken to test if this has led to the experiment being under-powered. As Table 3.1 shows, this mistake by YouGov has resulted in the experiment being underpowered at the level of candidate's occupations (hence the large confidence intervals for occupations in Figures 3.17 and 3.18). This is due to the fact that the occupation attribute has the most levels in the experiment, with 19 unique values. As the analysis of conjoint experiments requires marginalising over all the attributes included in the design excluding the attribute of interest, larger attributes require higher power to discover the same effect (5% effect in the simulation). Additional analysis (shown in Appendix M) demonstrates that with two task choices, the experiment would be sufficiently powered at the level of candidate's occupations.

A difference-in-marginal-means analysis (z-test for independent estimates) revealed only minor differences in Britons' views towards candidates for MP and candidates for

local councillor (see Appendix N). Therefore, the two sets of data were merged, in an effort to increase statistical power.

Table 3.1: Power analysis simulation (one choice task)

Attribute	Level	True effect size	Power	Type S error rate	Type M error	Simulation seed
Gender	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.18 (0.18)	202,028
Secondary education	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.18 (0.20)	202,028
Secondary education	2	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.18 (0.20)	202,028
Higher education	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.17 (0.19)	202,028
Higher education	2	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.15 (0.19)	202,028
Father's occupation	1	0.05	1.00 (0.07)	0.00 (0.00)	1.17 (0.21)	202,028
Father's occupation	2	0.05	1.00 (0.07)	0.00 (0.00)	1.16 (0.22)	202,028
Father's occupation	3	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.17 (0.22)	202,028
Occupation	1	0.05	0.62 (0.49)	0.00 (0.00)	1.42 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	2	0.05	0.60 (0.49)	0.00 (0.00)	1.43 (0.34)	202,028
Occupation	3	0.05	0.64 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.45 (0.32)	202,028
Occupation	4	0.05	0.64 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.45 (0.34)	202,028
Occupation	5	0.05	0.60 (0.49)	0.00 (0.00)	1.43 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	6	0.05	0.65 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.42 (0.33)	202,028
Occupation	7	0.05	0.67 (0.47)	0.00 (0.00)	1.41 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	8	0.05	0.65 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.38 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	9	0.05	0.62 (0.49)	0.00 (0.00)	1.45 (0.36)	202,028
Occupation	10	0.05	0.58 (0.50)	0.00 (0.00)	1.45 (0.33)	202,028
Occupation	11	0.05	0.63 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.46 (0.32)	202,028
Occupation	12	0.05	0.64 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.42 (0.36)	202,028
Occupation	13	0.05	0.65 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.41 (0.35)	202,028

Occupation	14	0.05	0.63 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.45 (0.32)	202,028
Occupation	15	0.05	0.64 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.41 (0.34)	202,028
Occupation	16	0.05	0.64 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.41 (0.33)	202,028
Occupation	17	0.05	0.65 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.45 (0.31)	202,028
Occupation	18	0.05	0.63 (0.48)	0.00 (0.00)	1.43 (0.34)	202,028

Notes: Power analysis conducted with a sample of 7600 respondents, each performing only 1 task.

Simulation is repeated 200 times to ensure the precision of the estimates.

3.2 Theory

It was noted above how the composition of the House of Commons has undergone substantial change over the last few decades. Particular attention was paid to the 'virtual eradication of the manual worker MP' (Criddle 2010, 328) and the resulting 'almost total middle-class takeover' of the lower house.[89] Especially prominent – and, it has been suggested, reviled – among these middle-class denizens are the ever-increasing cadre of career politicians. Further, attending university has become a sine qua non for those hoping to pursue a political career in Britain (and beyond – as Bovens and Wille (2017, 141) detail in their cross-European study, '[o]ver the course of the past decades, the low- and medium-educated have more or less disappeared from parliament, from cabinets, and from many other political arenas').[90] Although falling, the privately-educated, the Eton-educated, and the Oxford-educated remain vastly over-represented in the House of Commons. The result is a Parliament which fails in various respects to match the country.

[89] Rayner (2022) has argued that as low as the number of working-class MPs is, it appears even lower, due to pressures on working-class MPs to conform to the speaking patterns of the majority of the House of Commons. She contends that '[t]here are also many colleagues from different parties who have got working-class backgrounds like myself but it almost gets taken out of them…I am not unique in Parliament for my working-class socioeconomic background but you wouldn't necessarily think that because many that are from my background either think you don't talk about it because it's not what people think is a politician. They somehow think it weakens your standing as a politician and they think that they have to change the way they speak'. Further, she suggests that the low levels of trust in politicians is a result of this social disconnect between voters and representatives, which is exacerbated by working-class politicians confirming to the House style: 'I think far too often people are expected to change who they are to fit that mould and I think that is very damaging to getting new people from backgrounds like mine into politics and I think it really erodes that trust with the voters as well because voters don't feel that connection…because they feel…that those people are not like them.' Rayner concludes: 'Our public realm needs to look and sound like our public.' On politicians' speech – even that of those who profess themselves on the side of the working class – bearing little resemblance to the actual speech of workers, see G. K. Chesterton's (1927) poem 'The secret people': 'We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet, Yet is there no man speaketh as we speak in the street.'

[90] Gaxie and Godmer's (2007, 115) confirm that '[a] high level of education has become a tacit condition to begin a political career'.

The extent to which politicians reflect the wider population has been termed – first by A. Phillips Griffiths in 1960 and then, to greater acclaim, by Hanna Pitkin seven years later – 'descriptive representation'. Pitkin described how descriptive representation 'depends on the representative's characteristics, on what he *is* or is *like*, on being something rather than doing something [emphases in original]' (1967, 61).

On the assumption that Britons are aware of the mismatch and are in favour of descriptive representation, one would expect them to favour candidates from under-represented groups, such as the working class, those who did not attend university, those who did not attend private school, and so forth. There have been many advocates for descriptive representation, among them John Adams, the second president of the United States, who argued in 1776 that a representative assembly 'should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large' (1776, 9). Scholars have long advocated for descriptive representation of women and ethnic and racial minorities (Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Sapiro 1981). More recently, some have begun to argue that it is also required for the working class (Carnes 2015; Elsässer and Schäfer 2022; Lupu 2015; Mansbridge 2015; Pinto-Duschinsky and Middleton 2013; Pontusson 2015). Politicians have likewise noted the importance of descriptive representation and expressed their support for it. The UK Parliament's Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation (2010, 18), for example, highlighted that '[a] socially diverse House of Commons would not only represent people by constituency but also reflect the diversity of people's lives in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age and *social class* [emphasis added]', while Ed Miliband (quoted in Waugh and Macrory 2013, 23) promised when leader of the Labour Party that candidates would be selected 'from all class backgrounds because frankly I think Parliament is too middle class' and charged Jon Trickett, the Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, with finding more working-class candidates. Further, Labour's National Executive Committee amended its rules so that selection panels took social class into account when making decisions about candidates (as they already did with race and gender) (Cowley 2013). However, '[i]t does not…appear that these initiatives had any great measure of success' (Bukodi et al. 2024).

Support for descriptive representation has not, however, been universal. James Madison (2008 [1788], 282), for example, the Founding Father and fourth president of the United States, argued that the 'aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society', *not* rulers who reflect society. More recently, Manin (1997) has argued that the aim of representative government has never been to replicate the general populace; rather, '[r]epresentative government was instituted in full awareness that elected representatives would and should be distinguished citizens, socially different from those who elected them', while Brennan (2016) has advocated the replacement of democracy with 'epistocracy', the rule of the knowledgeable.

Various UK politicians have disdained the concept of descriptive representation. Hugo Young (1990, 305) has written of Margaret Thatcher's reluctance 'to treat women, politically, as any different from men. She was against this on principle, apparently

seeing nothing in her own rise to power which might prompt her to single women out for special attention…As for positive discrimination or anything which smacked of feminism, she was derisive.' Patrick Cosgrave (1985, 5–6), special adviser to Thatcher during her time as Leader of the Opposition, describes how '[i]n 1976, after studying a certain amount of psephological material of general relevance I came to the tentative conclusion that there was a significant female constituency to which she could make a particularly important electoral appeal…It seemed to me both legitimate and desirable to undertake an opinion research survey designed to identify the constituency and explore the aspirations of its members. Since, however, my draft idea for a poll depended on an emphasis on her sexual identity, she turned the scheme down flat'. More recently, Alan Mak (quoted in Simpson 2015), the first MP of East Asian descent, downplayed his race upon his election to the House of Commons, stating 'I am not standing for the Chinese population of Britain. I am standing for the people of Havant and my country…Having a Chinese-looking person stand for parliament and becoming an MP is not a story. It's no big deal.'[91]

It is possible that Britons may view candidates who have had less privileged upbringings favourably, based on feelings of empathy and/or because they view them as extremely competent, on the basis that they have made it onto the ballot paper without any advantages of birth. With regard to the first possibility, that respondents will feel empathy towards such candidates, a number of theories have been posited as to why people feel empathy towards others and wish to help them, with Haidt's (2001, 2012) social intuitionist model and Batson's (1987, 1991, 2011) empathy-altruism model among the most prominent. With regard to the second possibility, that respondents will view such candidates as highly competent, attribution theory, developed by Heider (1944, 1958) and later formalised by scholars like Jones and Davis (1965), Kelley (1967), and Weiner (1985), suggests that voters can attribute certain traits, such as intelligence, industry, and competence, to candidates who have made it onto the ballot despite difficult backgrounds.

However, there is an alternative theory, which suggests that voters may *penalise* working-class candidates. The stereotype content model, developed by Fiske and her

[91] Highlighting that views towards descriptive representation can shift over time, three years later Mak (2018) was describing how he had 'completed a journey which nobody else had ever made' as 'the first – and currently only – MP of British-Chinese heritage'. He went on to urge 'others from the British-Chinese community to repeat' to follow in his footsteps, explaining that '[i]f our voice is to be heard as decisions are made, we must be in the room, at the table, speaking up and influencing outcomes – not just in Parliament, but in councils and boardrooms across Britain. There are too few school governors, charity trustees, JPs, councillors and MPs from the Chinese community – and too few British-Chinese journalists and media personalities.' Further emphasising the link between descriptive and substantive representation, he wrote that '[w]hile our concerns and aspirations overlap substantially with everyone else's – we all want a strong economy, good schools, a clean environment – there are also unique challenges facing the 400,000-strong British-Chinese community. These are rarely articulated as I think they should be. From the social care needs of first-generation immigrants, who often don't speak English, to the racism many still face, it is only by having more representatives in public life that those challenges will be addressed.' Jackson Ng (quoted in Simpson 2015), Director of Conservative Friends of the Chinese, argues that the Conservatives are 'the natural party for British Chinese…Chinese values of thrift, family, education and business and investment, stability, self-reliance – these are Conservative values.'

colleagues (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske et al. 1999), contends that people primarily judge others along two axes: warmth and competence, and studies have shown that people can hold negative views towards the poor and the working class, considering them cold and incompetent, while viewing the rich as competent, if not necessarily warm (Cozzarelli et al. 2001; Lott and Saxon 2002).

Let us turn to views towards candidates from the public and private sectors. As discussed, only one experimental study has explored whether Britons hold differing views towards candidates from these two sectors and it has a serious methodological flaw. Further, that study does not theorise as to why Britons may prefer candidates from one sector or the other. Role congruity theory provides a possible explanation. Developed by Eagly and Karau (2002, 574) and building on Eagly's (1987) earlier work on social role theory, it postulates that when a 'group member and an incongruent social role become joined in the mind of the perceiver, this inconsistency lowers the evaluation of the group member as an actual or potential occupant of the role.' That is to say, people are penalised when they hold a role for which society deems them ill-suited. Initially invoked to help explain opposition to females in the workplace, it has more recently been employed to explore prejudice of race, age, and other characteristics (see, for example, Koenig and Eagly 2014). It has not, until now, been proposed as a possible explanation behind people's views towards politicians who worked in the public and private sectors. However, given that politicians help constituents navigate public services, pose questions in Parliament in an effort to improve the operation of public services, and indeed run the public services (as ministers), it is plausible that Britons believe that only 'insiders' (i.e. candidates who come from the public sector) have the requisite knowledge and experience required. Thus, role congruity theory may combine with self-interest (i.e. respondents desiring well-functioning public services) to generate a preference for candidates from public sector backgrounds.

Further, respondents may hold more positive evaluations towards candidates who work in the public rather than private sector on the basis of ethical considerations. It has been contended that those working in the public sector possess a 'public service ethos'. This ethos has been defined as behaviour motivated by and reflecting 'values such as honesty, integrity, accountability and probity' (Lawton, Rayner, and Lasthuizen 2013, 50). In 2001 then prime minister Tony Blair argued that '[p]ublic servants don't do it for money or glory. They do it because they find fulfilment in a child well taught or a patient well cared-for; or a community made safer and we salute them for it.' Evidence suggests that this ethos does exist. John and Johnson (2008), for example, find that 32% of Britons who work in the public sector consider it 'very important' to have 'a job that is useful to society', compared to 15% of Britons who work in the private sector, and that 27% of Britons who work in the public sector consider it 'very important' to have 'a job that allows someone to help other people', compared to 18% of Britons who work in the private sector. Conversely, just 12% of Britons who work in the public sector consider it 'very important' to have a job with a 'high income', compared to 18% of Britons who work in the private sector. As John and Johnson (2008, 109) conclude, 'the differences fit what a public service ethos should look like – public sector workers are more concerned with jobs where they can help other people and which are useful to society.'

Britons certainly appear to be believe that a public service ethos exists. In the latest edition of Ipsos MORI's (2024) veracity index, four of the five most trusted professions are public sector workers (nurses, doctors, professors, and teachers).

Surveys have long demonstrated the central importance of public services to Britons. Indeed, Ipsos MORI (2024) reported in September 2024 that the NHS and education had been the first- and third-most important issues to Britons over the previous half century, respectively. Further, as Curtice, Sivathasan, and Morton (2025) note in the most recent edition of *British Social Attitudes*, '[n]o other aspect of government spending has grown more in recent years than spending on health…[y]et, in our latest survey, just 8% say that the government is spending "too much" on the NHS, while over two-thirds (69%) think it is spending "too little".' This desire for greater government spending on public services is neither new nor confined to the NHS (Curtice 2017).[92] Given the importance of public services to Britons and their documented desire for more funding for them, it is plausible that respondents may view candidates who work in the public sector as those most committed to, and most likely to support greater funding for, said public services. In making this assumption, respondents would be utilising a heuristic, that is 'a simple procedure that helps find adequate, though often imperfect, answers to difficult questions' (Kahneman 2011, 98).

Let us turn to views towards candidates who did and did not attend university. It has been theorised that possessing a degree signifies competence (Collins 1979; Spence 1973). People certainly pay attention to these kinds of signals, employing the heuristics discussed above when making decisions (Fiske and Taylor 1984; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Nisbett and Ross 1980; Simon 1957; Tversky and Kahneman 1974), including when voting (Feldman and Conover 1983; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; 2006; Popkin 1991; 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). Studies have shown that people infer candidates' policy positions and personal traits from their sociodemographic characteristics. For example, studies have shown that Britons view candidates with high incomes to be unapproachable (Campbell and Cowley 2014b), candidates who work in factories to be left wing (Carnes and Lupu 2016), disabled candidates to be caring and honest (Reher 2021), female candidates to be more approachable than male candidates and male candidates to be more experienced than female candidates (Campbell and Cowley 2014b). However, the rise of populism in recent decades in Britain and the wider West (Norris and Inglehart 2019) suggests that candidates who attended university, especially the most prestigious universities, may be penalised rather than rewarded by voters. Populism, a 'thin ideology' (Freeden 1996; Mudde 2004, 543),[93] is characterised by its dichotomous division of society '*into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite"* [emphasis in original]'. As Michael Gove (2016), one of the leaders of the Leave

[92] Studies also show that Britons wish a variety of industries to be nationalised and to thus become public services rather than private businesses. More than three-quarters of Britons, for example, believe that water, electricity, gas, and the railways should be nationalised (Elliott and Kanagasooriam 2017).
[93] See Schroeder 2020 for a consideration of whether populism may meet the criteria for a 'thick' ideology; see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013 for a summary of the discussions around whether populism can be considered an ideology at all.

campaign, (in)famously opined in the run-up to Britain's 'Brexit' referendum, 'the people of this country have had enough of experts'.[94]

3.3 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 explores Britons' views towards candidates' class. It is based on three independent rationales, any or all of which could operate. The first is that respondents have noticed or been made aware of the aforementioned changes to the composition of the House of Commons, in particular the disappearance of working-class MPs, and believe that a body which more accurately reflects British society would be preferable. The second is that Britons will view candidates who have had less privileged upbringings favourably, based on notions of fairness and empathy. The third is that Britons will view working-class candidates as more competent than upper-middle-class candidates, on the basis that they have made it onto the ballot paper without any advantages of birth. It should be noted that this third potential reason stands in contradistinction to the aforementioned stereotype content model, developed by Susan Fiske and her colleagues (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske et al. 1999). The stereotype content model postulates that people primarily judge others by two criteria: warmth and competence. Studies have shown that people can hold negative stereotypes and views towards the poor and the working class, viewing them as cold and incompetent, and conversely can view the rich as more competent, if not necessarily warmer (Cozzarelli et al. 2001; Lott and Saxon 2002).

1. Britons, collectively, prefer working-class candidates over upper-middle-class candidates.

Hypothesis 2 explores Britons' views towards career politicians. As noted above, there has been much vituperation towards career politicians in the media and among insurgent politicians. Hypothesis 2 is predicated on this rhetoric reflecting the views of Britons and/or it engendering a similar mistrust and dislike of career politicians among them.

It should be noted that there is a countervailing theory. It is possible that Britons may utilise a similar heuristic to that discussed above and reason that just as candidates who have worked in the public services will be effective custodians and champions of those services, so candidates who have worked in the political field will be the most successful navigating the world of Westminster. Indeed, as discussed in the following chapter, a number of British MPs who have worked in politics make this exact point. Tom Hunt (n.d.), Conservative MP for Ipswich, for example, notes that he 'previously worked as the Chief of Staff to the elected Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough' and states that 'the knowledge and the skill set that I've acquired through this role makes me well placed to tackle many of the issues of concern for Ipswich residents.' John Glen (n.d.), Conservative MP for Salisbury, similarly argues that his experience in politics has

[94] The following chapter explores whether respondents' views towards the education of politicians is affected by their *own* level of education.

'helped him to understand the hard work involved in being a Member of Parliament' and 'the challenges of constituency work'.

2. Britons, collectively, prefer candidates who have not worked in politics over candidates who have.

Hypothesis 3 explores Britons' views towards the sector – public or private – which politicians worked in before running for office. It is informed by three potential rationales. The first is that respondents will view candidates who worked in the public sector as more competent stewards of the public services than candidates who worked in the private sector. Politicians help constituents navigate the public services, pose questions to ministers in an effort to improve the operation of the public services, and indeed run the public services as ministers, and Britons may well believe that 'insiders', as a result of their experience working in the public sector, are best equipped to fulfil these roles. The second is that respondents may hold more positive views towards candidates who worked in the public rather than private sector due to the documented commitment of these workers to society over self. The third is that Britons may prefer candidates who work in the public sector as they believe they are the most committed to the public services and most likely to support increased funding for them. As discussed above, surveys have shown the strong desire of Britons for well-funded public services and in a low-information context like this experiment, they may engage in heuristic reasoning and assume that a candidate from the public sector is more likely to support increased funding for them than a candidate from the private sector. Further, the surveys discussed above demonstrate the British public's preference for public services over privatisation, and Britons may similarly assume that a candidate from the public sector is more likely to oppose the privatisation of the public services than a candidate from the private sector. As noted in the following chapter, a number of British MPs who worked in the public sector do indeed argue that their former occupation makes them particularly well suited to defending and improving these services. Kieran Mullan (n.d.), Conservative MP for Crewe and Nantwich, for example, states that he 'worked as a doctor in A&E' and that '[a]s a doctor, I am championing our local health services. I am fighting for Leighton Hospital to be chosen as one of the hospitals which will receive a substantial rebuild in the Governments Hospital Building programme.'

3. Britons, collectively, prefer candidates who worked in the public sector over candidates who worked in the private sector.

Hypothesis 4 explores Britons' views towards the secondary education of politicians, specifically whether Britons hold different views towards candidates who attended state schools and candidates who attended unnamed private schools. As with hypothesis 1 above, it is possible that just as Britons feel empathy towards working-class candidates and prefer them over upper-middle-class candidates as they have not enjoyed the same privileges, so they will feel empathy towards state-educated candidates and prefer them over privately educated candidates for the same reason. Similarly, Britons may view state-educated candidates as extremely competent, given that they have made it onto the ballot without any of the advantages conferred by a private education. In addition, it

was noted above how state-educated MPs remain under-represented in the House of Commons (despite recent advances). On the assumption that Britons are aware of this under-representation, it is plausible that they will prefer state-educated MPs, due to a belief that the British legislature should reflect the sociodemographic profile of the wider country. Further, just as respondents may use a candidate's career in the public sector as a heuristic and reason that such candidates will be effective defenders of such services, so they may use a candidate attending a state school as a heuristic and reason that they are predisposed towards greater funding of secondary education.

Hypothesis 4 also explores Britons' views towards candidates who attended Eton. If, as suggested above, Britons feel empathy towards state-educated candidates and prefer them over privately educated candidates as they have not enjoyed the same privileges, then it is a logical extension to assume that they will prefer candidates who attended state schools and candidates who attended unnamed private schools over candidates who attended Eton. Further, just as Britons may prefer state-educated candidates over privately educated candidates on the basis that the latter are over-represented in Parliament, so they may prefer candidates who attended state schools and candidates who attended unnamed private schools over candidates who attended Eton on the basis that Old Etonians are vastly over-represented in Parliament. Britons would, of course, have to be aware of the over-representation of Old Etonians in Parliament for this reasoning to hold, but given the fact that a sizeable number of the most prominent politicians of recent years (David Cameron, Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, and Kwasi Kwarteng among them) attended Eton, and were regularly referenced in the media and by their political opponents as having done so, this seems a reasonable supposition.

4. Britons, collectively, prefer candidates who attended state secondary schools over candidates who attended private secondary schools and will view candidates who attended Eton least favourably, i.e. they will prefer candidates who attended state secondary schools and candidates who attended unnamed private secondary schools over candidates who attended Eton.

Hypothesis 5 explores Britons' views towards the higher education of politicians. It is possible that Britons are aware of the over-representation of university-educated MPs. As with a number of the hypotheses above, they may believe that the House of Commons should more accurately reflect British society and as a result may prefer candidates who did not attend university over candidates who did.

Further, it was noted above how there exists a widespread disillusionment with British politics and politicians. On the assumption that Britons are aware of the over-representation of university-educated MPs, it is possible that they prefer candidates who did not attend university over candidates who did on the basis that they want a different kind of politician.

Conversely, there are reasons to believe that Britons may prefer candidates who did attend university over candidates who did not. Studies have shown that people can view more highly-educated people as more competent (Van Noord et al. 2023), which could

translate into votes. Further, British politicians who did not attend university have been criticised for being 'undereducated'. Jeremy Corbyn, for example, who did not attend university, was depicted – and decried – by the novelist Martin Amis (2015) as follows: '[h]e is undereducated…His schooling dried up when he was 18, at which point he had two E-grade A-levels to his name; he started a course at North London Polytechnic, true, where he immersed himself in trade union studies, but dropped out after a year. And that was that.'

This hypothesis also explores Britons' views towards candidates from a specific university: Oxford. If, as suggested above, Britons penalise candidates who attended university due to the over-representation of university-educated candidates in the House of Commons, it stands to reason that they will penalise candidates who attended Oxford to an even greater extent, due to their vast over-representation in the House of Commons. Similarly, if Britons' disillusionment with current politicians leads them to penalise university-educated candidates, due to their over-representation on the benches of the House of Commons, it seems plausible that they will penalise Oxford-educated candidates even more, due to their even greater over-representation in the Commons. Further, there may be a reaction against Oxford-educated candidates for the same reason there may be a reaction against privately-educated candidates: disdain of privilege. Oxford has long been associated with wealth and privilege – see, for example, the Bullingdon Club and *Brideshead Revisited* – as Hirsch (2017), herself an Oxford alum, puts it, the university carries with it 'the stigma of being a place of study reserved for the most privileged'.

5. Britons, collectively, prefer candidates who did not attend university over candidates who did attend university and view candidates who attended Oxford University least favourably, i.e. they will prefer candidates who did not attend university and candidates who attended universities other than Oxford over candidates who attended Oxford.

3.4 Research design

A great deal of scholarly effort has been expended trying to uncover the views of Britons towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians. Two main approaches have been employed: (i) statistical analysis of electoral data and (ii) experiments.

Statistical analysis of electoral data has a number of advantages over experiments, chief among them the fact that it is far less affected by social desirability bias, i.e. 'the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than would be their "true" answer' (Callegaro 2008, 825).[95] As a

[95] For examples of studies demonstrating the existence and prevalence of social desirability bias, see Berinsky 1999; Belli et al. 1999; Burden 2000; Druckman et al. 2015; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012; Holbrook and Krosnick 2010; Jones and Forrest 1992; Karp and Brockington 2005; Katosh and Traugott 1981; Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997; LaBrie and Earleywine 2000; Persson and Solevid 2014; Phillips and Clancy. 1972; Presser 1990; Rasinski et al. 2005; Redlawsk, Tolbert, and Franko 2010; Sigelman 1982; Traugott and Katosh 1979.

result, it is often used to test Britons' views towards sociodemographic characteristics which are particularly susceptible to social desirability bias, such as race and ethnicity. For example, Rose (1970, 32) demonstrates how David Pitt, the Labour candidate for Clapham in 1970, suffered a swing against him of 10.2%, whereas the swing against Labour candidates in the other 41 Inner London constituencies was remarkably consistent, ranging from 2.1% to 6.7% with an average of 4.1%, a figure which was close to the national average. As a result, Rose suggests that '[t]he swing against Dr Pitt was probably a consequence of his West Indian origin.' Le Lohé (1993) compares the performance of the 18 minority candidates in 1983 with a control group comprising regional averages and with models which aggregate results in similar seats. He calculates that the electoral cost of being a minority candidate was around 3% of the vote. Mortimer (2002) calculates that changing from a white to a non-white candidate between the 1997 and 2001 General Elections cost Labour 3.6 percentages points and the Liberal Democrats 1.5 percentages points (both statistically significant).[96] Curtice, Fisher, and Steed (2005, 249) find that ethnic minority Conservative candidates 'clearly performed less well than their white counterparts' in 2005. Fisher et al (2015) find that non-white candidates suffered an average electoral penalty of around 4% from white voters in 2010 and Stegmaier, Lewis-Beck, and Smets (2013, 283), in the same election, that 'the constituency incumbent party gains votes when facing a BAME challenger…On average, that gain is just over 2 percentage points of the three-major-party vote share, when facing one BAME challenger. That expected value rises to above 4 points when facing two BAME challengers…examining the margin of victory (winning candidate over second place candidate) in the 606 contests analyzed here, we find that 37 elections were won by a margin of 2 percentage points or less. Thus, in a close contest, of which there are a fair number by this measure, a BAME challenge could spell the difference between victory and defeat.'

However, statistical analysis of electoral data also has great disadvantages. Among them are that scholars cannot know what – if anything – voters knew about the candidates they voted, and did not vote, for; it does not allow the disentangling of the impact of separate but correlated sociodemographic characteristics; it does not allow analysis of subgroups of voters; and it does not allow the identification of causal effects. These shortcomings have led to the emergence of an alternative approach which vastly reduces their impact: experiments.

The present study not only conducts a candidate choice experiment, but also conducts a number of surveys. This complement to the candidate choice experiment is necessary, because to fully understand voters' views about politicians' sociodemographic characteristics, a candidate choice experiment is not sufficient on its own. The reason is as follows: candidate choice experiments ask respondents to judge between two candidates in a single electoral contest. Therefore, the results – although extremely important – cannot be generalised for the House of Commons as a whole. To add this Commons-wide perspective, surveys must be conducted, as surveys can test

[96] Changing from a white to a non-white candidate *increased* the Conservative vote share, but not at statistically significant levels.

respondents' views towards MPs as a body. It may be that voters have differing priorities with regard to the kind of MP they want to represent them personally and the kinds of MPs they want to represent the country as a whole.

In order to test Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians, this study conducts a text-based candidate choice experiment and three surveys. The advantages of experiments over statistical analysis of electoral data have been enumerated above, and the potential downsides of experiments, alluded to above, can be mitigated by the use of a particular type of experiment, namely a conjoint experiment.

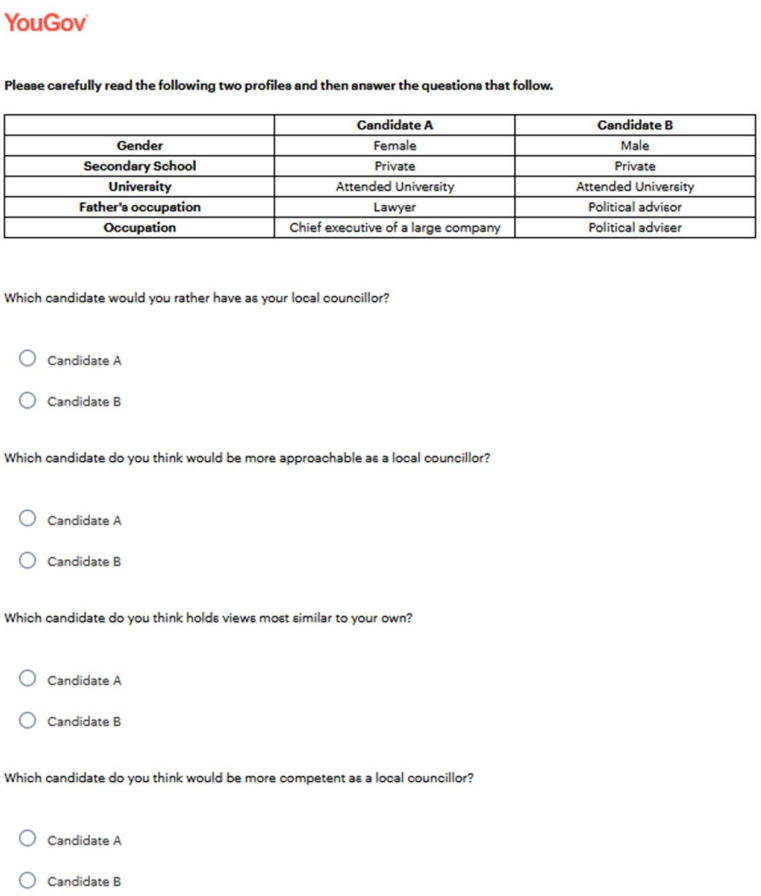
In conjoint experiments, respondents are asked to rate or choose between two or more alternatives, the attributes of which vary randomly (among a specified set of possible values).[97] They are thus ideally suited for testing people's views towards political candidates, who vary in multiple ways (by age, by gender, by occupation, etc). Moreover, they have been shown to be effective at reducing the impact of social desirability bias. Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto (2022), who tested and confirmed this, suggest that conjoint designs reduce social desirability bias via two mechanisms: imperceptibility, i.e. the large number of attributes included in conjoint designs can result in respondents overlooking the fact that a certain attribute has social norms attached to it, and rationalisation, i.e. the large number of attributes included in conjoint designs offer multiple ways for respondents to justify their choice, providing them with scope to make choices which subvert social norms. Further, conjoint designs have been shown to accurately reflect decisions made in the real world, i.e. they enjoy high levels of external validity – concerns with regard to external validity are another of the banes of experimental research. Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto (2015), for example, demonstrate that Swiss respondents make similar decisions in immigration-centred conjoint survey experiments as they do in real-life referendums on granting naturalisation to immigrants. As a result of these advantages, conjoint experiments have become an increasingly popular way of testing people's views towards politicians, with twenty-four of the aforementioned British candidate choice experiments – and almost all of the most recent – employing a conjoint design (Campbell et al. 2019a; Campbell et al. 2019b; Carnes and Lupu 2016; Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018; Frederiksen 2022; Greenwood-Hau 2023; Hobolt and Rodon 2020; Horne 2022; Kevins 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2022; Martin and Blinder 2021; Mckay et al. n.d.; Reher 2021; Saha and Weeks 2022; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016; Vivyan et al. 2020a; Wüest and Pontusson 2019).

A great many decisions must be made regarding the design of a conjoint experiment, all of which have the potential to invalidate the results if made poorly. For example, a decision must be made as to how the information about the candidates will be presented. Three approaches have been used in extant text-based British conjoint candidate choice experiments: vignettes, tables, and prose text presented in bullet

[97] Introduced by Luce and Tukey (1964) in 1964, conjoint analysis became a popular feature of marketing research following its use by Green and Rao (1971) seven years later.

points. The information in the conjoint experiment conducted for this thesis was presented in the form of tables (see Figure 3.6 for a screenshot of the candidate choice experiment). It was presented in this way for two reasons. First, because the (paired) table approach performed best in the aforementioned Swiss study, i.e. its results most closely matched those of the behavioural benchmark. Second, because it is crucial that the survey be kept as short and 'user-friendly' as possible, in an effort to reduce the impact of fatigue effects ('a well-documented phenomenon that occurs when survey participants become tired of the survey task and the quality of the data they provide begins to deteriorate' (Ben-Nun 2008, 742)) – tables include far fewer words than vignettes and leading scholars agree that they present information in a way that is 'more accessible' than vignettes (Hainmueller et al. 2015, 2396).

Figure 3.6: Screenshot of candidate choice experiment


YouGov

Please carefully read the following two profiles and then answer the questions that follow.

	Candidate A	Candidate B
Gender	Female	Male
Secondary School	Private	Private
University	Attended University	Attended University
Father's occupation	Lawyer	Political advisor
Occupation	Chief executive of a large company	Political adviser

Which candidate would you rather have as your local councillor?

- Candidate A
- Candidate B

Which candidate do you think would be more approachable as a local councillor?

- Candidate A
- Candidate B

Which candidate do you think holds views most similar to your own?

- Candidate A
- Candidate B

Which candidate do you think would be more competent as a local councillor?

- Candidate A
- Candidate B

The experiment conducted for this thesis presents respondents with profiles of two candidates, side by side, followed by four questions. This approach reflects the design employed by the vast majority of existing British candidate choice experiments – both conjoint and non-conjoint. Twenty-three of the twenty-four British conjoint candidate choice experiments present respondents with two candidate profiles, as do all twenty British non-conjoint candidate choice experiments; the sole exception – Anthony Kevins's (2021) experiment – employs a single-profile design.

The experiment will not be fully randomised. There are a small number of combinations of attributes which are either impossible or extremely unlikely and so will be prevented (or constrained) in order to prevent the experiment becoming unrealistic and/or nonsensical. Thus, only male candidates will have attended Eton and candidates who are doctors or lawyers must have attended university.

The candidates' party has not been included as an attribute. This allows the experiment to uncover the full effect of the variables being tested without the potentially dominating effects of partisanship. A growing number of candidate choice experiments, both in Britain (Greenwood-Hau 2023; Hobolt and Rodon 2020; Kevins 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2022; Reher 2021; Saha and Weeks 2022) and beyond (Aguilar, Cunow, and Desposato 2015; Armendariz, Farrer, and Martinez 2020; Arnesen, Duell, and Johannesson 2019; Dahl and Nyrup 2021; Ono and Yamada 2020; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018) take this same approach and exclude party. As the final chapter details, a future iteration of the experiment will include the candidates' parties to test whether any effects which are found withstand the introduction of party.

It is crucially important that an appropriate number of attributes are included. Too few and the profiles will not appear realistic. Further, the results will lack external validity (as candidates in real-life are multidimensional) and be biased, with the (small number of) attributes assuming an illusory importance. Too many and respondents will suffer from fatigue effects. As Table 2.6 shows, the number of attributes tested in British conjoint candidate choice experiments varies from four to nine, with a mode of 5, median of 6, and mean of 6.4. The number of attributes tested is broadly in line with the traditional guidance proffered by academics, with Bradlow (2005), for example, cautioning against including more than 8 attributes and Green and Srinivasan (1990) advising the inclusion of 6 or fewer. More recently, however, Bansak et al. (2021) have suggested that far greater numbers of attributes can be included without meaningful diminution in data quality. However, the studies conducted by Bansak et al. appear to have included 'one-shot' surveys rather than omnibus surveys. The British Election Study, by contrast, is an extremely large survey with a multitude of questions and the experiments are placed at the end, when fatigue effects are likely to be highest. This thesis, therefore, adopts a conservative approach and includes five attributes (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Attributes and levels tested

Attribute	**Levels**
Gender	Male; Female
Secondary school	State; Private; Eton
University or not; Type of university	Did not attend university; Attended university; Attended Oxford University
Father's occupation	Lawyer; Political adviser; Teacher; Factory worker
Occupation	See Table 3.3

The conjoint candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis asks respondents to answer four questions, namely:

- Which candidate would you rather have as your MP/local councillor?
- Which candidate do you think would be more competent as an MP/a local councillor?
- Which candidate do you think would be more approachable as an MP/a local councillor?
- Which candidate do you think holds views most similar to your own?

As well as the key question asking respondents which candidate they would rather have as their local councillor/MP, the experiment asks the additional three questions – sometimes referred to as 'trait' questions in the literature – in an effort to help identify the causal mechanism(s) behind respondents' overall choice of candidate. The most commonly asked trait questions in British candidate choice experiments revolve around warmth and competence. Such questions are derived from, and attempt to operationalise, the stereotype content model developed by Susan Fiske and her colleagues (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske et al. 1999). The experiment conducted for this paper includes warmth and competence trait questions, but also goes further, as focusing solely on warmth and competence may obscure a more important factor in Britons' voting decisions, namely, a desire for substantive representation. The experiment therefore also asks respondents which candidate they think holds views most similar to their own. This will allow for a comparison between the relative strength of association between respondents' overall choice of candidate and respondents' views with regard to warmth, competence, and substantive representation. The overall choice question should always be asked first, so that the trait questions do not influence answers to this question. The order of the following three trait questions was randomised.

When testing gender, as this experiment does, one faces a choice: should the attribute be coded as male/female[98] or should names be used? As Table 3.2 shows, this experiment used male/female rather than names. As with so much in experiments, a trade-off is involved. By using names, the experiment has an extra level of realism. However, doing so risks introducing potentially confounding elements. Different names, for example, have different class connotations, ethno-religious connotations, racial connotations etc, and may result in people reading far more into the attribute than was intended.[99] This experiment uses 'male' and 'female' rather than names and in so doing foregoes an element of realism in favour of heightened certainty with regard to causal mechanisms.

[98] This experiment does not consider the impact of a candidate being transgender, non-binary, etc.
[99] See Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Hoyt and DeShields 2021 for examples of experimental studies which use names to signify race.

As noted above, five existing candidate choice experiments attempt to test Britons' views towards the class of politicians. However, it was suggested above that they may use too few classes – doing so could obscure discrepancies between different strata within classes. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis therefore includes five[100] classes: higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations; lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations; small employers and own account workers; semi-routine occupations; routine and manual occupations (see Table 3.3). These classes are taken from the 8-class version of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC), which is based on the Goldthorpe schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992).[101] The Goldthorpe schema has been widely used to study the impact of class on social and political views in Britain (De Graaf, Nieuwbeerta, and Heath 1995; Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 1985; Heath et al. 1991; Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 2001; Marshall et al. 1988) and beyond (Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza 2006; De Graaf, Heath, and Need 2001; Evans and Whitefield 2006; Weakliem 1989). Further, it has been validated in numerous studies; that is to say, it has been demonstrated that its method of categorising occupations ties with various important outcomes, such as employment conditions, occupational characteristics, income, and future prospects (Evans 1992; 1996; Evans and Mills 1998; 2000; Goldthorpe and McKnight 2006).[102]

Table 3.3: Occupations tested and classes operationalised (5-class schema)

	Sector			
NS-SEC categories	**Public**	**Private**	**Third sector**	**Political**
Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations (from eight-class version)	Chief executive of a public sector body	Chief executive of a large company	Chief executive of a charity	Political adviser
	Doctor	Lawyer		
Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations (from eight-class version)	Teacher (at a state school)	Teacher (at a private school)		Works for a political party
	Nurse (at an NHS hospital)	Nurse (at a private hospital)		
		Self-employed electrician		

[100] The most classes used in an existing candidate choice experiment is four – in an article that has not yet been published (Wüest and Pontusson 2019).
[101] The Goldthorpe schema has also been adopted as the basis for the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC) (Rose and Harrison 2007; Rose, Harrison, and Pevalin 2010).
[102] Acclaim has not, however, been universal. For criticisms of the Goldthorpe schema and assertions of the superiority of their own 'Cambridge Scale' – first proposed in Stewart, Prandy, and Blackburn 1980 – see Blackburn and Prandy 1997; Prandy 1990; Prandy 1998; Prandy 1999; Prandy and Blackburn 1997. The competing claims of the Oxford-developed Goldthorpe schema and the Cambridge Scale were (perhaps inevitably) dubbed the 'Boat Race' (Gershuny 2000).

Small employers and own account workers		Owns a small business		
Semi-routine occupations	Postal worker	Receptionist		
Routine and manual occupations		Factory worker		
		Lorry driver		
		Shop assistant		
		Steel worker		

This 5-class schema is also collapsed into a 3-class schema, comprising the upper-middle class, an intermediate class, and the working class (see Table 3.4). This contraction will be done for two reasons. First, the greater familiarity of the general public with this tripartite division than with the more detailed NS-SEC schema. Second, dividing the occupations into three rather than five classes will greatly increase statistical power.

Table 3.4: Occupations tested and classes operationalised (3-class schema)

Class		
Upper-middle class	**Intermediate**	**Working class**
Chief executive of a public sector body		
Chief executive of a large company		
Chief executive of a charity		
Political adviser		
Doctor		
Lawyer		
	Teacher (at a state school)	
	Teacher (at a private school)	
	Works for a political party	
	Nurse (at an NHS hospital)	
	Nurse (at a private hospital)	
	Self-employed electrician	
	Owns a small business	
		Postal worker
		Receptionist
		Factory worker
		Lorry driver
		Shop assistant
		Steel worker

All five existing candidate choice experiments that test Britons' views towards the class of politicians operationalise the candidate's class by varying their occupation. The

candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis does likewise. However, as was noted above, a number of the existing candidate choice experiments use insufficiently precise occupations. Carnes and Lupu (2016a), for example, include 'business owner' as an occupation. Such a broad descriptor risks respondents imaging widely (and wildly) different people. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this paper provides much more precise occupations, in the hope of reducing the risk of respondents interpreting occupations in different ways. For example, in order to distinguish between different types of business people, the following, clearly very different, occupations are included: 'Owns a small business' and 'Chief executive of a large company'.

As was also noted above, a number of the existing candidate choice experiments use too few occupations per class. This raises the risk that data is collected on respondents' views towards specific occupations rather than the classes for which they are intended to act as proxies. Thus, the aforementioned 'business owner' in Carnes and Lupu (2016a) acts as proxy for the entire middle class, while 'factory worker' plays a similar role for the working class. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis improves on these designs by incorporating between 6 and 7 occupations per class.[103]

As discussed above, just one experimental study has explored whether Britons hold differing views towards candidates from the public and private sectors and it employs a flawed research design. It does not use the exact same occupations for each sector – testing, for example, a candidate who 'worked in the public sector as a teacher' and a candidate who 'worked in the private sector as a journalist' (Vivyan et al. 2020a, 6). As a consequence, results which have been interpreted as respondents' views towards the public and private sector may in fact be their reactions to specific occupations. The candidate choice experiment undertaken for this thesis avoids this possibility, by including two sets of occupations, which varied solely by sector, namely, (i) a teacher at a state school and a teacher at a private school; and (ii) a nurse at an NHS hospital and a nurse at a private hospital.

As discussed above, five candidate choice experiments have attempted to gauge Britons' views towards career politicians. However, all five use only one occupation.[104] As a result, there is a risk that respondents may be reacting the occupation rather than the category (politics) which is purportedly being tested. Perhaps corroborating this contention, the experiments yield conflicting results. In order to improve upon these designs, the candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis includes two occupations within the field of politics: political adviser and working for a political party. The two occupations have slightly different class connotations, with political advisers categorised as higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations in the eight-class version of the NS-SEC schema and working for a political party as lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations. The inclusion of these

[103] Under the collapsed 3-class schema

[104] 'Worked for two MPs and became a local councillor' (Campbell and Cowley 2014c); 'political advisor' (Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018); 'political career' (Frederiksen 2022); 'political advisor' (Horne 2022); 'press officer for a political party' (Vivyan et al. 2020a).

two occupations therefore enables an additional test of Britons' views towards the class of candidates.

As discussed in Chapter 2, no existing British candidate choice experiment has tested the independent effect of a candidate attending a state or private school (Kevins 2021 includes this variable but combines it with a second variable to create a measure of class).[105] The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis will add to the current stock of knowledge by including this variable. Further, the candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis will test whether Britons have differing views towards different *kinds* of private schools, by including both a generic 'private school' and a named elite institution.

When choosing an elite private school for inclusion in the candidate choice experiment, there was only one candidate: Eton.[106] It is not only 'the world's most famous school' (Woolcock 2023) and thus the school that respondents are most likely to have heard of and most likely to know is private, but its impact on British politics is unparalleled. It has supplied the most prime ministers of any school (and by some distance). When Boris Johnson ascended to the premiership in July 2019, he became the twentieth Old Etonian to hold the office – Harrow, in second place, has supplied fewer than half that number. Though the number of Old Etonians elected to Parliament has fallen over the postwar period,[107] it remained in 2019 the school which supplied the most MPs, with 11.[108] Not only are Old Etonians over-represented in the House of Commons, but they often hold prominent positions. Unelected Old Etonians do likewise. Of the 130 people who made up David Cameron's frontbench in 2006, 15 had attended Eton (Taylor 2006). By the time he assumed the premiership, his core team was comprised almost exclusively of Old Etonians. A disgruntled, anonymous Conservative MP complained in 2014 that '[t]here are six people writing the manifesto and five of them went to Eton; the other went to St Paul's' (quoted in Rigby and Bounds 2014).[109] The Old Etonians in question were Cameron, Ed Llewellyn, his chief staff and friend since their days at Eton,

[105] Weinberg (2020) tests Britons' views towards the secondary education of candidates in the *visual* conjoint candidate choice experiment he conducts. He includes a private school, state comprehensive school, state grammar school, and religious school as potential levels and finds that Britons prefer candidates who attended state comprehensive schools and state grammar schools over candidates who attended private schools (at statistically significant levels).

[106] More fully, Kynge's College of Our Ladye of Eton besyde Windesore (as it was named in 1440 when founded by Henry VI) (Eton College n.d.)

[107] The 1951 General Election, for example, returned 76 Old Etonians on the Conservative benches and 4 on the Labour side. Almost a quarter of Conservative MPs attended this single school.

[108] Bill Wiggin (Conservative, North Herefordshire), Andrew Selous (Conservative, South West Bedfordshire), Bim Afolami (Conservative, Hitchin and Harpenden), Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Conservative, The Cotswolds), Danny Kruger (Conservative, Devizes), Jacob Rees-Mogg (Conservative, North East Somerset), Jesse Norman (Conservative, Hereford and South Herefordshire), Kwasi Kwarteng (Conservative, Spelthorne), Philip Dunne (Conservative, Ludlow), Richard Graham (Conservative, Gloucester), and Boris Johnson (Conservative, Uxbridge and South Ruislip).

[109] Ed Miliband (2014) would reference the line in his response to the Conservative Budget of 2014. 'What do this lot now call themselves? They call themselves the workers' party. Who is writing the manifesto for this workers' party? We have a helpful answer from one Conservative MP: "There are six people writing the manifesto…five…went to Eton".' For the Conservatives' abortive attempt to rebrand themselves as the workers' party, see Smith 2014.

Jo Johnson, chair of the Number 10 policy board, Oliver Letwin, minister for government policy, and Rupert Harrison, chief of staff to the Chancellor George Osborne (who was the Old Pauline).[110] Pauline Latham, the Conservative MP for Mid-Derbyshire, admitted that Cameron 'does surround himself with people who are like him' (quoted in Rigby and Bounds 2014). Michael Gove (quoted in Parker and Warrell 2014), then Secretary of State for Education, called the concentration of Old Etonians at the heart of government 'ridiculous' and 'preposterous'. His condemnation was echoed by Foreign Office minister Sayeeda Warsi two days later (Eaton 2014). It was alleged that Shaun Bailey was ousted as an adviser to Cameron by the former public schoolboys surrounding him. Friends of Bailey reported that 'Shaun believes that the bottom line is that him being of a different class is probably equally, if not more, important that him being black' (quoted in Dominiczak 2013). Old Etonians would remain at the centre of government following Cameron's fall – there would be a Prime Minister who attended Eton (Boris Johnson), a (short-lived) Chancellor (Kwasi Kwarteng), and a Foreign Secretary (the returning Cameron). The impact of Old Etonians on British politics has been such that Andrew Adonis (2022) has suggested Britain might rightly be termed an 'Etocracy'; Iain Overton (2021), in the same vein, has suggested 'Etonocracy'.

Eton and its products remain a source of enduring fascination to the British press. No article on Tom Hiddleston (Brooks 2011), Damian Lewis (Hattenstone 2022), Eddie Redmayne (Lewis 2016), or Dominic West (Gilbert 2009), for example, is complete without a reference to the fact that they attended 'School', as Eton is known to its denizens.[111] However, it is Old Etonians who enter politics who perhaps encounter the most unremitting focus on their schooling; as Harry Mount (2010) remarked drily, 'at times it seems as if the Tory leader's real name is The Old Etonian David Cameron'. The British press may be captivated by Old Etonians, but are the British people? Moreover, does the fact that a politician attended Eton affect their likelihood of voting for him – it can only be *him*, of course, as Eton remains a single-sex establishment.

A number of Old Etonians have argued that their backgrounds have proved a hinderance to their political ambitions, among them Oliver Letwin (Lawson 2006), Rory Stewart (Balls 2019), and Douglas Hurd, the last of whom, sensing that his background was undermining his campaign to succeed Margaret Thatcher, resorted to 'absurd poor-mouthing' (Wheatcroft 2005, 190) and the affecting of a bizarre accent which led to

[110] Osborne was ridiculed and named the 'oik' by fellow Bullingdon Club members at Oxford for not attending Eton (Elliott and White 2014).

[111] A recent study on the backgrounds of British actors highlighted 'the striking underrepresentation of actors from working-class backgrounds' (Friedman et al. 2017, 993). A number of leading British actors have expressed dismay at the ever-smaller number of working-class actors in Britain and anger at how this state of affairs has come to pass. Christopher Eccleston (quoted in Zeldin-O'Neill 2023), for example, argues it is 'impossible' for a working-class Briton to become an actor today, David Morrissey (quoted in Plunkett 2014) that '[t]here's an economic exclusion of working-class people' in the acting profession, and Julie Walters (quoted in Hattenstone 2015) that she would not have been able to become an actor in modern Britain ('[p]eople like me wouldn't have been able to go to college today. I could because I got a full grant'). Then-Shadow Culture Minister Chris Bryant (quoted in Mason 2015a), addressing the arts more broadly, argued in 2015 that 'we can't just have a culture dominated by Eddie Redmayne and James Blunt and their ilk'. Living up to his name, Blunt (quoted in Mason 2015b) retorted that Bryant was a 'classist gimp.'

fears among his campaign team that he had suffered a stroke (Buckley 2005). Hurd, who complained that he 'was running for the leadership of the Conservative Party, not some demented Marxist sect' (Anderson 2016), admitted in his memoirs that his actions did not help; indeed, they 'made things worse. It looked as if I were pleading a humble, poverty-stricken background. How could that be reconciled with the fact that I was an Old Etonian, and the son of a peer; in short, a toff?' (Hurd 2003, 405) It could not, and John Major was duly elected leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister. Conversely, Kuper (2012) has suggested that 'most Britons do want to be ruled by toffs', a sentiment echoed by Freedland (2015)[112] and Rintoul (2021),[113] while Williams (2022) goes so far as to suggest that some 'form of stubborn self-hatred has taken hold of the electorate' for it to 'venerate' those with an 'expensive education'. Others maintain that British voters are largely ambivalent about whether or not a politician attended Eton. Macintyre, for example, suggested in 2005 that the fact that Cameron attended Eton 'elicit[s], from most people, little more than vague curiosity or polite indifference.' This study puts such intuitions and conjectures to rigorous examination.

Eton has also been included as it has been suggested that attending Eton is a transformative experience[114] and creates or exacerbates certain characteristics among its pupils. Among the traits that Eton allegedly imbues, are an 'unquestioning self-assurance' (Sampson 1965, 680)[115] and a lack of political beliefs: 'Etonians are the ultimate pragmatists, totally free of ideology. Other than the imperatives of getting – and gaining – power, no conspicuous motives inspire them…It's not clear that Etonian politicians really believe in much except themselves' (Fraser, 2005). Parker (2012) identifies this combination of self-confidence and minimal ideological baggage in one of Eton's most prominent recent products, David Cameron, whom he describes as 'a man whose most visceral political belief is that he is the best person to run the country.'[116]

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[112] 'We only have to see an Old Etonian and we salute'.

[113] '[O]bsequious deference to a certain type of public school educated man is bred in the bone in this country'.

[114] Fraser (2006, 58), himself an Old Etonian, describes how 'the Eton experience is fundamental and irreversible, more important than attending university…getting married…falling ill or dying', while the novelist Paul Watkins (1993, 102) recalls how on arrival he immediately realised he 'could never leave this place behind. One look around me and I knew that you did not stop being an Etonian.'

[115] Guttsman (1954, 17) terms it 'a natural feeling of superiority'. John Claughton (2023), a former master at Eton, argued that 'its most important mission will be to ensure that its pupils are saved from the sense of privilege, entitlement and omniscience that can produce alumni such as Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Kwasi Kwarteng and Ben Elliot and thereby damage a country's very fabric. Sadly, I failed in that purpose.' More broadly, Brooke-Smith (2019, 14–15) argues that 'the most important aspect of public school education remains the same as it was during the system's Victorian heyday: an almost subliminal confidence in one's own capacity to succeed.' Rintoul (2021) would lay the blame for what she perceived as the disaster of Brexit at the feet of the self-confidence of two public schoolboys, writing 'Boris Johnson (Eton College) and Nigel Farage (Dulwich College), the leading proponents of the madcap notion of leaving the EU with no plan B, both suffer from the bombastic, to-hell-with the-consequences overconfidence that only a public school education can provide.'

[116] On the emotional toll of attending Eton, Watkins (1993, 108, 111) describes how he 'felt a coldness and a harshness that I'd never felt before' and quickly came to the realisation that to survive 'you had to have a coldness in yourself.' Indeed, such are the deprivations that students endure, that Eton has often been compared to a another single-sex institution that one cannot leave – Alan Clark (1977), for example, stated that 'anyone who has been to Eton has already served the equivalent of five years in prison'. Similarly, following his conviction in 1999 for perjury and perverting the course of justice, Jonathan

Similarly, while a number of British candidate choice experiments have tested Britons' views towards university- and non-university-educated candidates, none have tested whether Britons' views vary depending upon the elite nature of the university that candidates attended.[117] The elite university to be include, as with the elite private school, is obvious: Oxford. Both historically and currently, graduates of Oxford have played a disproportionately large role in British politics. As Campbell (2014, 26) says, 'it is overwhelmingly from Oxford that the governing elite has reproduced itself, generation after generation.'[118] Of the fifty-eight British prime ministers, thirty-one attended Oxford. Fifteen of the sixteen postwar prime ministers who attended university went to Oxford.[119] Oxford was by far the most commonly attended alma mater among MPs elected in 2019. The collection of data on MPs conducted for this thesis reveals that 89 MPs elected in 2019 attended Oxford. Cambridge University, in second place, counted 56 alumni among the 2019 intake and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), in third place, 26.[120] So great has the influence of Oxford University been

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Aitken (quoted in Greaves 1999, 4) consoled himself with the thought that he had been through worse at school: 'As far as the physical miseries go, I am sure I will cope. I lived at Eton in the 1950s and know all about life in uncomfortable quarters', while Evelyn Waugh (1928, 248) applied the analogy more widely, contending that 'anyone who has been to an English public school will always feel comparatively at home in prison'.

[117] A number of non-British experimental studies have tested whether people's views towards candidates vary depending upon the nature of the university the candidate attended. Gift and Lastra-Anadón (2018), for example, include Harvard, Yale, and Princeton Universities as 'elite' universities and Lehigh, Northeastern, and Boston universities as 'non-elite' in the survey experiment they conduct in America, Eshima and Smith (2022a; 2022b) vary the university attended by candidates in the conjoint candidate choice experiment they conduct in Japan between 'Regional university' and the highly-esteemed University of Tokyo, and Lee and Sambanis (n.d.(a); n.d.(b)) vary the university attended by candidates in the conjoint candidate choice experiment they conduct in South Korea between Seoul National, Korea, and Yonsei Universities (their 'prestigious' universities) and 'three non-elite universities in Seoul, Korea' (their 'less prestigious' universities). Gift and Lastra-Anadón (2018) find that self-identified liberals prefer elite-educated candidates over non-elite-educated candidates (though not at statistically significant levels) and that self-identified conservatives prefer non-elite-educated candidates over elite-educated candidates (at statistically significant levels). Eshima and Smith (2022a; 2022b) find that Japanese citizens prefer candidates educated at the University of Tokyo over candidates educated elsewhere, while Lee and Sambanis (n.d.(a); n.d.(b)) find a statistically significant preference among South Koreans for candidates who attended elite universities (irrespective of candidate gender).

[118] Campbell (2014, 26) continues: 'Oxford has been the nursery of aspiring politicians ever since the young William Gladstone was President of the Union in 1830…The rise of the Labour Party interrupted the tradition only briefly. The pioneers naturally did not go to university at all. But by the time Labour came to maturity as a governing party after 1945 – under the Oxford-educated Attlee – its younger leaders were overwhelmingly Oxford graduates and very often dons, like Hugh Gaitskell, Douglas Jay, Patrick Gordon Walker, Dick Crossman and Harold Wilson. Almost half of the three twenty-three members of Wilson's first Cabinet in 1964 had been to Oxford, and five of the six contenders for the succession in 1976'.

[119] Clement Attlee (University College); Anthony Eden (Christ Church); Harold Macmillan (Balliol College); Alec Douglas-Home (Christ Church); Edward Heath (Balliol College); Harold Wilson (Jesus College); Margaret Thatcher (Somerville College); Tony Blair (St John's College); David Cameron (Brasenose College); Theresa May (St Hugh's College); Boris Johnson (Balliol College); Liz Truss (Merton College); Rishi Sunak (Lincoln College); Keir Starmer (St Edmund Hall).

[120] These figures differ slightly from those of the Sutton Trust (2019), which found 84 alumni of Oxford, 48 alumni of Cambridge, and 19 alumni of the LSE among the MPs elected in 2019. A likely explanation for this slight discrepancy is that the data collection for this thesis was undertaken a number of years after

on British politics that Kuper (2022b) has suggested Britain be termed an 'Oxocracy'.[121] [122]

Further, including Oxford allows a deeper exploration of the concept of the career politician, many of whom attended Oxford. Chris Mullin (2016, ix), for example, the former Labour MP, has highlighted both the growth of career politicians and their links to Oxford, describing the trajectory of 'many of today's brightest and most successful politicians' as follows: 'university (usually Oxford), a job in the office of an MP or as a policy wonk in a think tank, leading perhaps to work in the private office of a minister or a member of the Shadow Cabinet, before being shoehorned into a safe seat (often with the help of powerful allies acquired en route). This trend was especially apparent during the New Labour era.'[123]

It should be noted that Cambridge University, 'the other place' as Oxonians call it, dominated the upper ranks of British government for much of the 1980s and 1990s via the 'Cambridge Mafia', a coterie of Conservative Cantabrigians (comprising Leon Brittan, Ken Clarke, Norman Fowler, John Gummer, Michael Howard, Peter Lilley, and Norman Lamont) who befriended each other at university. However, their dominance was an aberration, and none managed to reach the highest office of all. Similar friendships have been forged at Oxford. Ted Heath (1998, 47) casually describes the intermingling at Oxford of a quartet of students who would go on to become four of the leading figures in postwar British politics: 'I also got to know Denis Healey, who came up to Balliol a year after me…In my final year at Balliol, we were joined by Roy Jenkins…His father was at that time parliamentary private secretary to Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party in opposition, and he frequently came to Oxford to take Roy out to lunch. He showed me great personal kindness in inviting me to join them on several occasions, sometimes together with Anthony Crosland, who was based next door to us at Trinity College.' Interestingly, three of these four future statesmen were from working-class backgrounds and all three pondered how their background might affect their lives at Oxford. Healey (1989, 25) describes how '[a]t first I was nervous, as a grammar-school boy from the North of England, about contact with the public-school boys who still predominated…So I sought my first friends among the many Americans, Commonwealth or Scottish undergraduates at Balliol, to whom social class was irrelevant', while Heath (1998, 23) notes 'I was the first member of my family ever to go to a university and my parents were, naturally, delighted. But I had already suspected that they were also

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that of the Sutton Trust – a great deal more information was likely in the public realm when the latter analysis was conducted.

[121] Although still over-represented, the number of Oxford-educated MPs has fallen markedly over the postwar period. The 1951 General Election, for example, returned 102 Conservative and 39 Labour MPs who had attended Oxford (Butler 1952). The 102 Conservative Oxonians represented just under 50% of university-educated Conservatives, and the 39 on the Labour benches just under a third of university-educated Labour MPs.

[122] Bryant (2023), noting that '[s]ix of the last 13 incumbents of The Lodge hold degrees from Oxford', suggests Australia be termed an 'Ozoxcracy'.

[123] Mullin himself was strongly opposed to such a career path and the career politicians it begets, recounting how '[e]very so often I am approached by a young person seeking advice about how to embark on a political career. My advice has always been the same: Go away and do something else first and then you will be more use if and when you are elected to Parliament.'

apprehensive about the financial difficulties that they were facing. They had also wondered, they told me some time later, whether our humble background would put me at a permanent disadvantage compared with many of my contemporaries. I was aware of this risk, but such was my sense of exhilaration at going up to Oxford for the first time that I cannot claim to have been deeply unsettled by such thoughts.' While Jenkins (1991, 32) says 'I did not feel remotely socially inhibited by my South Wales mining background', he was clearly aware of the social gulf between himself and many of his contemporaries. Johnston (2014) likens Jenkins's friendship – and romantic relationship – with the fourth member of this quartet, Tony Crosland, to a real-life *Brideshead Revisited*, with Jenkins ('the somewhat gauche grammar school boy from South Wales') cast in the role of Charles Ryder and Crosland (the 'dashing ex-public school boy, elegant in his long camel-haired overcoat, and noted around town for his powerful MG sports car') that of Lord Sebastian Flyte.

Further, Oxford has been a frequent topic of debate for politicians (and target for their ire), from Gordon Brown's criticisms of it for rejecting the state-schooled northerner Laura Spence[124] to Lis Truss's proposal to force it (and Cambridge) to interview all students who attain three A* grades at A Level (Shipman 2022).[125]

Two recent British films which explore the lives of the upper class – *The Riot Club* (based on Laura Wade's play *Posh*) and *Saltburn* – both revolve around students at Oxford. *The Riot Club* follows the antics of an all-male, highly exclusive dining club, very similar – though the connection has been denied – to the Bullingdon Club, past members of which include David Cameron, Boris Johnson, and George Osborne.

At Oxford, if not officially part of the university, is the Oxford Union, the (self-proclaimed) 'world's most prestigious debating society' (Oxford Union n.d.). Kuper (2022a) suggests that 'the main reason Oxford has produced so many prime ministers is the Oxford Union debating society', arguing that '[t]he institution perfected the articulacy that enabled aspiring politicians, barristers and columnists to argue any case, whether they believed it or not' and further that '[a] union career was good practice for Westminster. You learned when an ostensible ally was lying to your face, or when you should be lying to his; when it was safe to break a rule, and when it wasn't.' Alongside the development of such skills, the Oxford (and Cambridge) Union have provided recruiting grounds for the parties: 'the habit is long established that the parties watch the Oxford and Cambridge Unions as Premier League talent spotters sit in the wind-lashed stands of non-league clubs' (Paxman 2002, 52).[126]

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[124] Brown (quoted in Smithers 2000) called Spence's rejection 'a scandal'. Brown's intervention was in turn condemned as ''ill-informed and unhelpful' by the Independent Schools Council and 'opportunistic, simplistic and hypocritical' by Evan Harris, Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon (both quoted in Smithers 2000).

[125] Truss's proposal met with a mixed reception, with Simon Jenkins (2022) deriding it as 'vacuous and ill-thought-out' and Graham Virgo, pro-vice chancellor for education at Oxford, expressing concerns about 'political interference with the autonomy of universities' (Hennessey 2022).

[126] It is said that at the aforementioned Peterhouse, Cambridge, '[f]avoured students were sometimes summoned to meet, in select company, a visiting VIP. If you were the crème de la crème, it was said, John Casey [a fellow at Gonville and Caius College but associated with the Peterhouse right] would invite you to

It has been suggested that becoming President of the Oxford Union is 'the first step to becoming Prime Minister' (Michael Heseltine, quoted in Eyres 2019).[127] Perhaps because of this alleged place on the British *cursus honorum*, the importance of attaining the Presidency of the Union to aspiring politicians cannot be overestimated; reflecting on his time as a student, Roy Jenkins (1991, 26) described how he was 'shocked, looking back, to think that in June 1940 I was almost as cast down by defeat for the presidency of the Oxford Union as by the fall of France.' While a number of Presidents of the Oxford Union have made it to Number 10 (the most recent being Boris Johnson) – it is far from a necessary condition; William Hague and the aforementioned Michael Heseltine made it to the presidency but not the premiership, while Tony Blair (2010, 77) had 'nothing to do with the Oxford Union' and Clement Attlee (1954, 14) 'attended some debates at the Union but was much too shy to try to speak there.'[128] A number of British politicians appear keen to highlight the fact that they had higher pursuits at university than politics. John Penrose (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Weston-super-Mare, states – somewhat pointedly – on his website that he 'ran Cambridge University's Charity Appeal (raising a record amount of money, mainly to help starving children in Africa) rather than getting involved in student politics or debating societies'.[129] A particularly scathing view of the Oxford Union and the politicians who pass through it was voiced by Nigel Farage (2024) on his return to frontline politics, who contrasted the Reform Party's seriousness with its flippancy and frivolity, asserting that '[t]o us, this not just an

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drinks with Enoch Powell' (Mullan and Foden 1999) (Casey would become a 'mentor to a rising generation of young Conservatives' (Cockett 1995, 218)). The political clubs and societies at Oxbridge were also used by the parties to spot young talent; Ken Clark (2016, 23) describes how his membership of the Cambridge University Conservative Association (CUCA) enabled 'regular contact with most of the senior members of the Conservative Cabinet, who at that time saw Cambridge as an important recruiting ground.' One student who was 'spotted', future Prime Minister Ted Heath (1998, 51) describes the experience as follows: 'I gleaned further insights into the minds of other senior politicians during a memorable discussion at the Commons. For reasons which we never fully understood, Julian Amery, Hugh Fraser and I, all Balliol men, Conservatives and active in the Union, were invited to dine privately at the House of Commons by the Cabinet Minister Lord Winterton. On arrival at the House we found that both Sir John Simon, who was still Chancellor of the Exchequer, and David Margesson, then Chief Whip, were also present. After a fascinating discussion over dinner, the Chief Whip said to Simon, "Now, John, these three young men are all interested in coming into politics. Tell them when they should become Members of Parliament."'

[127] Vince Cable, whom Barker (2010) suggested should be viewed as a member of the Cambridge Mafia following his ascent to ministerial office as part of the Coalition Government of 2010 to 2015, noted the similar importance the Cambridge Union held for aspiring politicians at Cambridge as the Oxford Union held for those at Oxford. Cable (2009, 45) describes how the Cambridge Union in the 1960s formed 'the training ground for a whole generation of national politicians, mainly Conservatives, who came to dominance in the eighties and nineties.'

[128] David Waddington (2012, 21), Margaret Thatcher's last Home Secretary, was similarly 'very shy and terrified at the idea of speaking in public', but 'persuaded myself that I had to conquer my fears. I went, therefore, to speaking classes and spoke in the Union.' The Union taught him an important lesson. An ill-prepared speech ended in 'disaster…It was a while before I summoned the courage to have another try in the Union, and when I did, and in similar situations in later life, I made sure that I knew as much about the subject to be discussed as anyone I was likely to encounter.' Ted Heath (1998, 30), who would later ascend to the Presidency, was more circumspect: 'whereas many freshmen at once made their maiden speeches on the floor of the house, I did not feel confident enough to do so in my first term'. Instead 'spent the term sitting at the feet of the great men of the day, so that next term I may speak a bit better.'

[129] For an ethnographical study of the Oxford Union and the 'hacks' who seek to climb its greasy pole, see Graham 2005; for historical accounts, see Hollis 1965; Walter 1984.

extension of being in the Oxford Union, it isn't just some great big game. It's actually about our country and its people'. The Oxford Union retains the ability to generate headlines. President-elect George Abaraonye's comments celebrating the shooting of US political commentator Charlie Kirk were widely reported, both in Britain (see, for example, Badshah 2025) and the wider world (see, for example, Galvin 2025).

The combination of Eton and Oxford in the experiment is far from fanciful. On the contrary, of the seventeen British prime ministers since 1945, five attended both institutions.[130] With regard to the college destinations of Old Etonians at Oxford in the 1930s, Roy Jenkins (1991, 29) describes how they 'confined their patronage to Christ Church, Magdalen, New College (the nicer ones, it was sometimes said), Trinity (the stupider ones, it was sometimes said) and Balliol.'

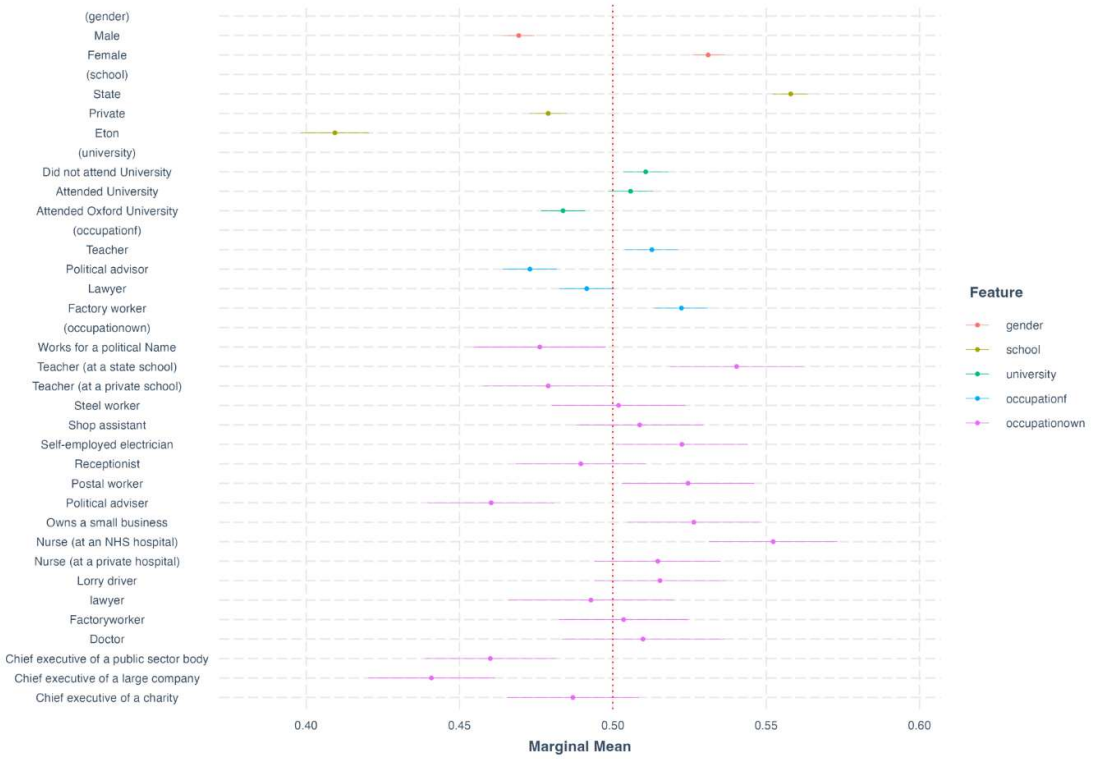
Alongside the candidate choice experiment, three surveys were conducted, all with large, nationally representative samples. As with experiments, a vast array of considerations must be taken into account when designing a survey; failure to do so can invalidate the data collected. These considerations, and the steps taken to ensure the reliability of the results, are discussed in the following chapter.

3.5 Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Britons, collectively, would prefer working-class candidates over upper-middle-class candidates. The candidate choice experiment tested Britons' views towards six upper-middle-class occupations (chief executive of a public sector body; chief executive of a large company; chief executive of a charity; doctor; lawyer; political adviser) and six working-class occupations (postal worker; receptionist; factory worker; lorry driver; shop assistant; steel worker), when occupations are collapsed into a 3-class schema. Figure 3.7 reveals that Britons clearly prefer working-class candidates over upper-middle-class candidates. Five of the six upper-middle-class occupations were viewed negatively by respondents (three at statistically significant levels) with the one exception – doctor – famed for its popularity.[131] Conversely, Britons were positive towards five of the six working-class occupations.[132]

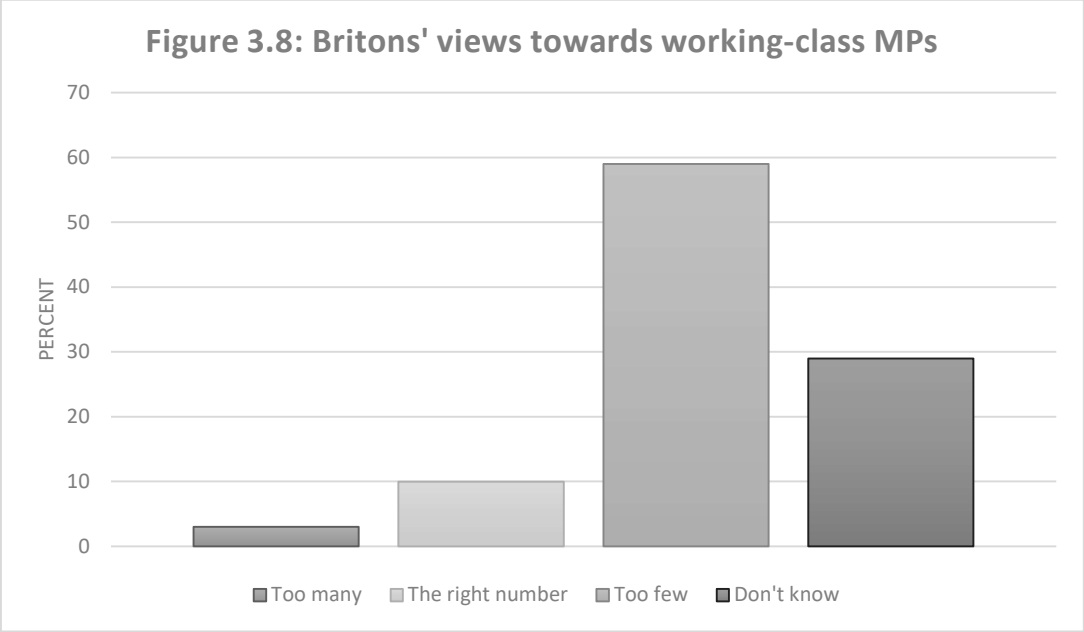
Figure 3.7: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative?

[130] All five – Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, David Cameron, and Boris Johnson – were Conservatives. There have also been a number of notable Old Etonian Labour politicians, for example Hugh Dalton, Tam Dalyell, Frank Pakenham (Lord Longford), and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence.
[131] The three statistically significant results being chief executive of a public sector body, chief executive of a large company, and political adviser. Chief executive of a charity narrowly missed conventional levels of significance.
[132] Just one, postal worker, reached conventional levels of significance, though lorry driver was very close to doing so.

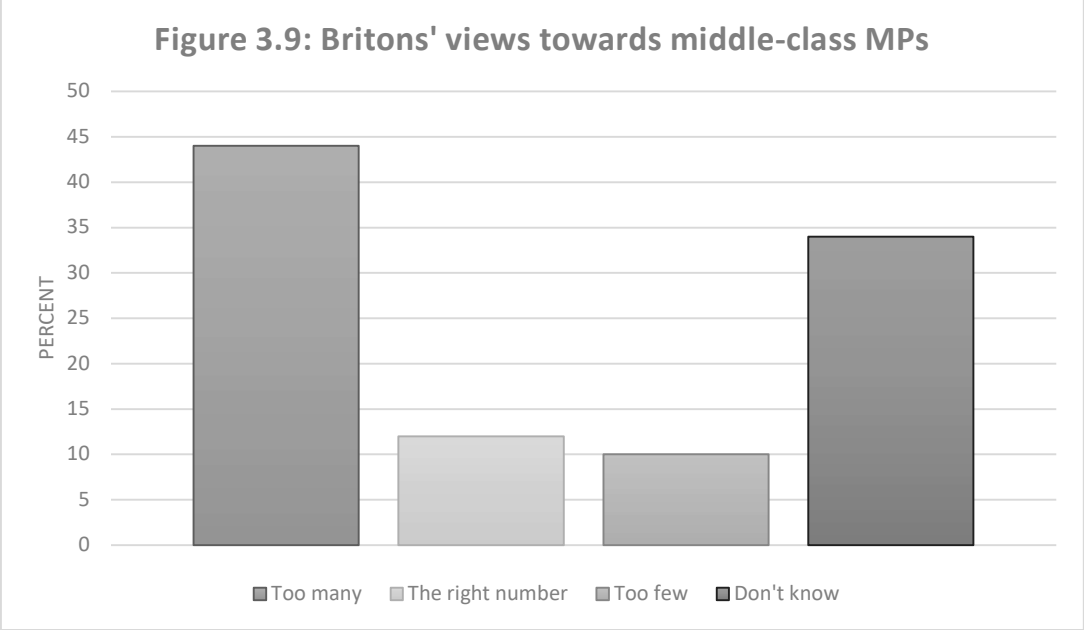


Note: Effect of candidates' attributes on voter preferences. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

The surveys reveal that this favourable view towards working-class candidates is not confined to respondents' views towards their own representative; it is generalisable to representatives as a group. The survey conducted in June 2022 asked half of the respondents whether they thought there were too many working-class MPs, the right number of working-class MPs, or too few working-class MPs, and half whether they thought there were too many middle-class MPs, the right number of middle-class MPs, or too few middle-class MPs ('don't know' was offered as a possible response in both questions). Just 3% of respondents stated that there were too many working-class MPs, compared with 59% who stated that there were too few (see Figure 3.8; see Appendix H for full details). Answers to the middle-class question produced a mirror image of these responses, with 44% of respondents stating that there were too many middle-class MPs and just 10% of respondents stating that there were too few middle-class MPs (see Figure 3.9; see Appendix H for full details).



Note: n=848



Note: n=830

It is instructive to note that, contra Fiske, Britons view working-class candidates as just as competent as upper-middle-class candidates. Three of the six working-class occupations were perceived as competent, compared to two of the six upper-middle-class occupations (see Appendix O for full details).[133] Further, working-class candidates

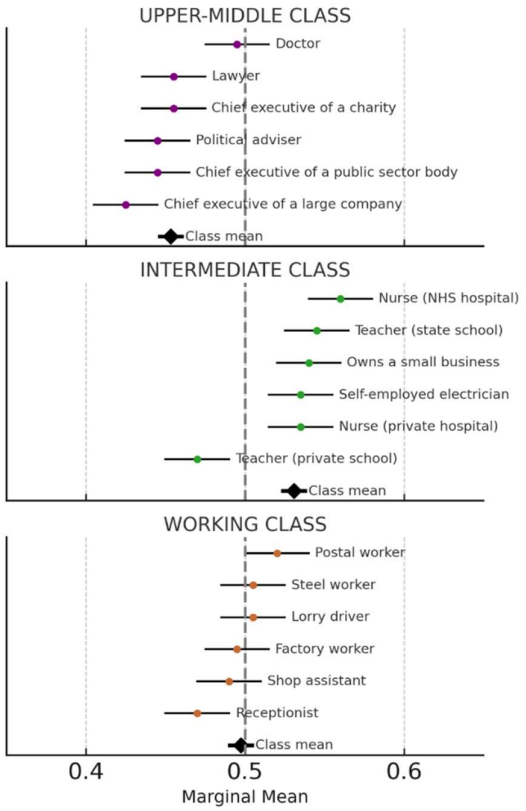
[133] Two working-class occupations and two upper-middle-class occupations reached conventional levels of significance. All four were perceived as incompetent.

were viewed as much more approachable than upper-middle-class candidates. Five of the six working-class occupations were perceived as approachable (and all five at statistically significant levels), while all six upper-middle-class occupations were viewed as unapproachable (five at statistically significant levels) (see Appendix P for full details). The third 'trait' question asked respondents which candidate they thought held views most similar to their own. All six working-class occupations were perceived as having views similar to respondents (two at statistically significant levels). By contrast five of the six upper-middle-class occupations were perceived as having dissimilar views (all five at statistically significant levels) and the one occupation which was perceived as having similar views to the respondent was not at statistically significant levels (see Appendix Q for full details).

It is important to note that alongside these differences across classes, there are substantial differences *within* classes. Indeed, as Figure 3.10 shows, the intra-class differences within the upper-middle-class and working-class are slightly larger than the inter-class differences. Thus, the difference between the most popular and least popular working-class occupations, steel worker and receptionist respectively, is greater than the difference between the mean for working-class occupations and upper-middle-class occupations. The difference between the most popular and least popular upper-middle-class occupations, doctor and chief executive of a large company respectively, is likewise greater than the difference between the mean for working-class occupations and upper-middle-class occupations. As is discussed below, contemporary British politicians appear well aware of the popularity of certain occupations, taking great care to highlight where they have previously served in roles which popular. The importance of intra-category levels will repeated below with regard to Britons' views towards the education of politicians (at both the secondary and higher levels).

Interestingly, many of the most popular occupations belong to the intermediate class category. However, their popularity raises fundamental questions about the construction of class schemas and their correlation – or lack thereof – with public views. For example, one of the most popular occupations is that of self-employed electrician, which the NS-SEC categorises as 'Small employers and own account workers' in the 8-class version of its schema and 'Intermediate' in its collapsed 3-class schema. It seems plausible that large numbers of Britons would classify self-employed electricians as belonging to the working class. Using only class schemas developed by scholars and specialists could obscure Britons' true feelings towards the class of politicians. Chapter 6 explains how the author plans to explore – and bridge – this potential disjuncture between objective and subjective views of class.

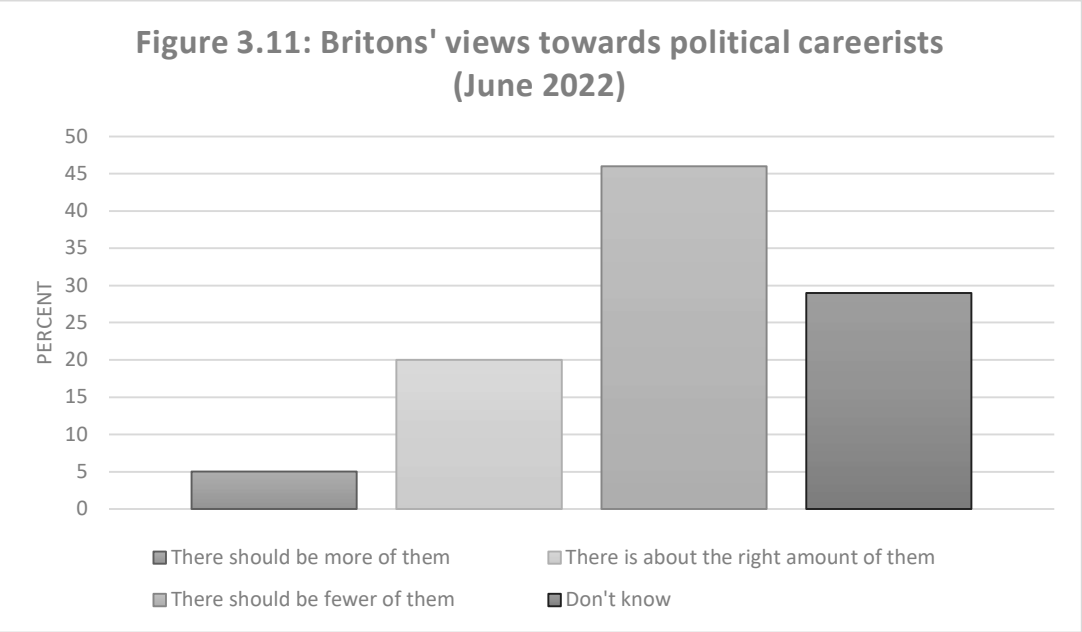
Figure 3.10: Comparison of variance: inter-class versus intra-class



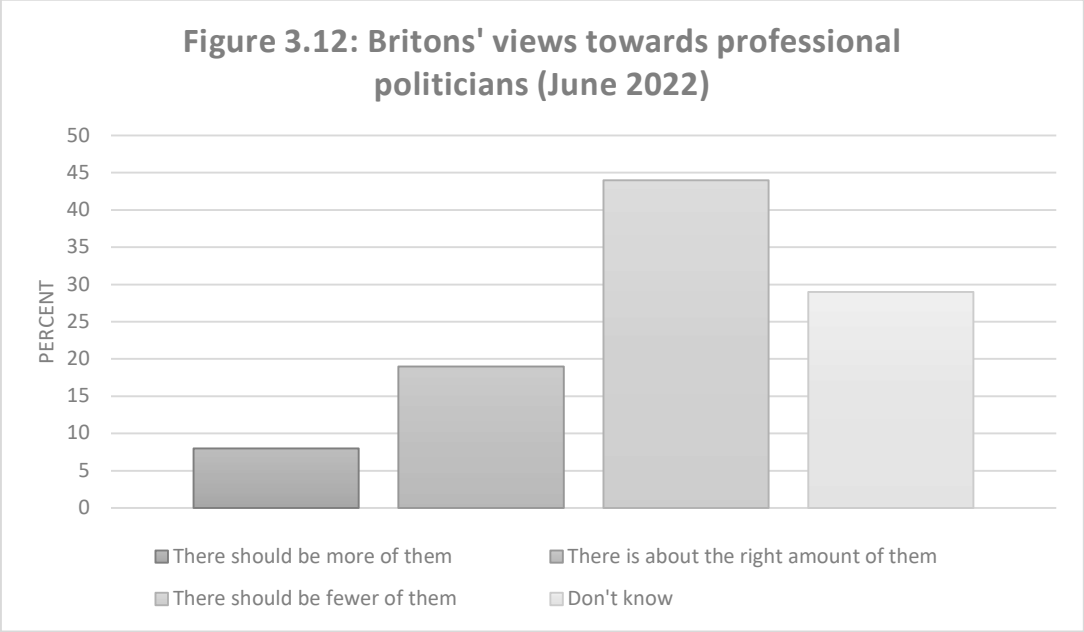
Hypothesis 2 predicted that Britons, collectively, would prefer candidates who had not worked in politics over candidates who had. As noted above, it was intended that two political occupations would be tested: 'Political adviser' and 'Works for a political party'. This was to be done for two reasons. First, given that the previous work (Campbell and Cowley 2014c; Eggers et al. 2018; Frederiksen 2022; Horne 2022; Vivyan et al. 2020a) which had tested Britons' views towards career politicians reached conflicting conclusions, it was hoped that testing two political occupations would ensure a thorough testing of British views towards career politicians. Second, it was hoped that including two political occupations from different classes, this variable could serve as an additional test of Britons' views towards the class of politicians, with political advisers categorised as higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations in the eight-class version of the NS-SEC schema and those working for political parties as lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations in the eight-class version of the NS-SEC schema. However, due to an error by YouGov, 'works for a political party' was presented to respondents as 'works for a political name'. All data relating to this occupation was therefore removed. Figure 3.7 reveals that the political occupation which was correctly tested – 'political adviser' – was greatly disliked (at statistically significant levels). Indeed, it was the second most unpopular of all of the occupations tested (behind chief executive of a large company).

The surveys conducted for this thesis show that opposition to career politicians extends to the House of Commons as a whole. The survey conducted in June 2022 asked half of

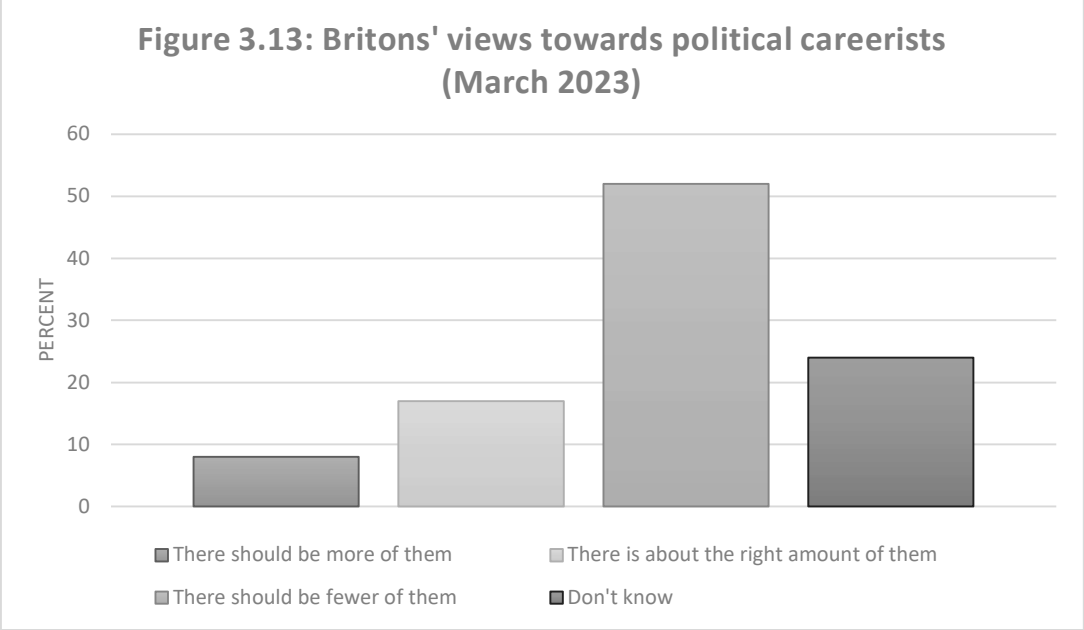
the respondents how they felt about 'MPs who are political careerists (i.e. people who have spent most of their working lives in politics)' and half how they felt about 'MPs who are professional politicians (i.e. people who have spent most of their working lives in politics)'. The response options in both cases were the same, namely, 'There should be more of them', 'There is about the right amount of them', 'There should be fewer of them', and 'Don't know'. Just 5% of respondents stated that there should be more political careerists, while 46% – the plurality response – stated that there should be fewer of them (see Figure 3.11; see Appendix H for full details). The alternative phrasing produced very similar results, with 8% of respondents maintaining that there should be more professional politicians and 44% that there should be fewer (see Figure 3.12; see Appendix H for full details). These two questions were replicated in the survey conducted in March 2023 and very similar results were obtained: 8% of respondents stated that there should be more political careerists, while 52% stated that there should be fewer of them; 9% of respondents maintained that there should be more professional politicians and 47% that there should be fewer of them (see Figures 3.13 and 3.14; see Appendix I for full details).



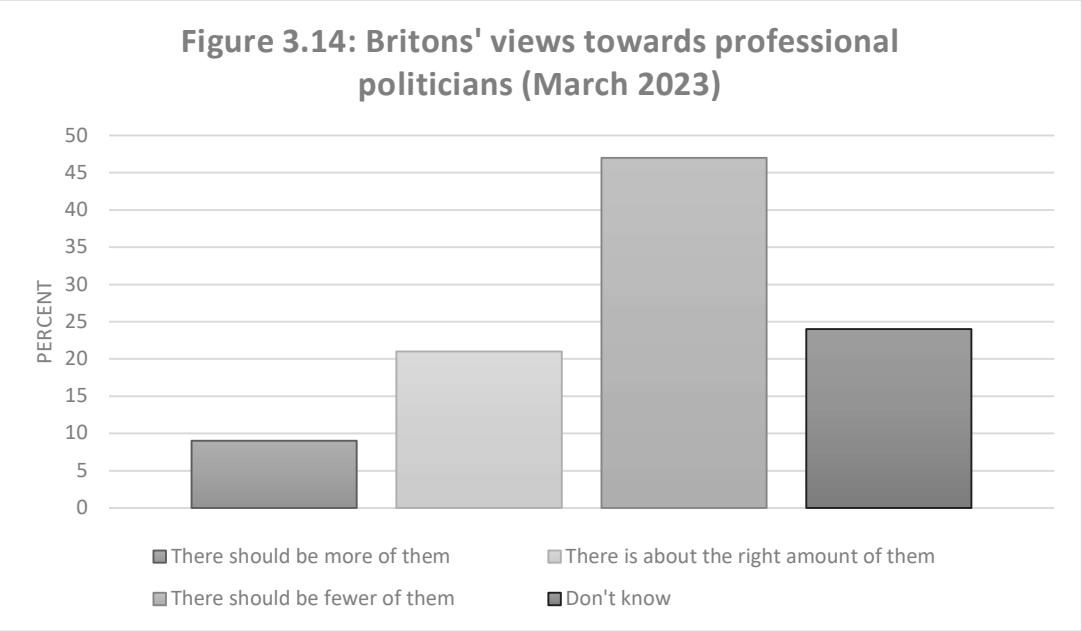
Note: n=820



Note: n=858



Note: n=1099



Note: n=1177

Hypothesis 3 predicted that Britons, collectively, would prefer candidates who worked in the public sector over candidates who worked in the private sector. This was tested in the candidate choice experiment by including two sets of occupations, which varied solely by sector: (i) a teacher at a state school and a teacher at a private school; and (ii) a nurse at an NHS hospital and a nurse at a private hospital.

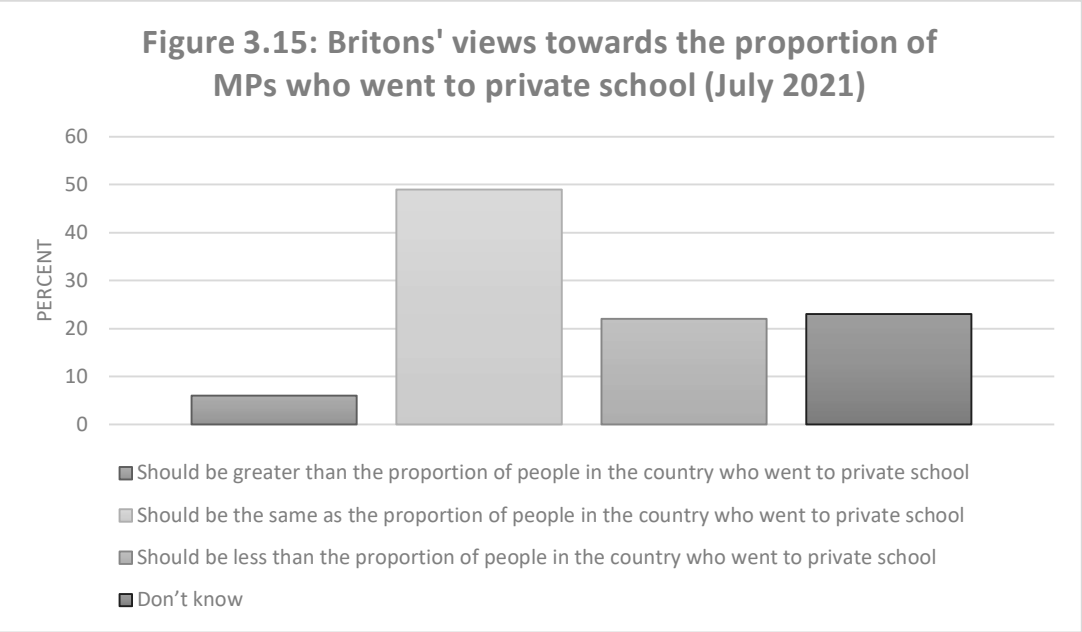
As Figure 3.7 demonstrates, Britons much prefer candidates who worked in the public sector. Teachers at state schools are viewed very positively by respondents (at statistically significant levels), while teachers from private schools are viewed negatively (at statistically significant levels). Similarly, nurses who work in the NHS are viewed positively (at statistically significant levels) while nurses who work at a private hospital are viewed with ambivalence. The two occupations which explicitly stated that they were in the public sector were in fact the two most popular of all the occupations that were tested.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that Britons, collectively, would prefer candidates who attended state secondary schools over candidates who attended private secondary schools and would view candidates who attended Eton least favourably of all. The conjoint experiment confirms that Britons have a clear preference for candidates who were educated at state rather than private secondary schools. They view candidates who were educated at state secondary schools positively (at statistically significant levels)[134] and view candidates who were educated at private secondary schools negatively (again,

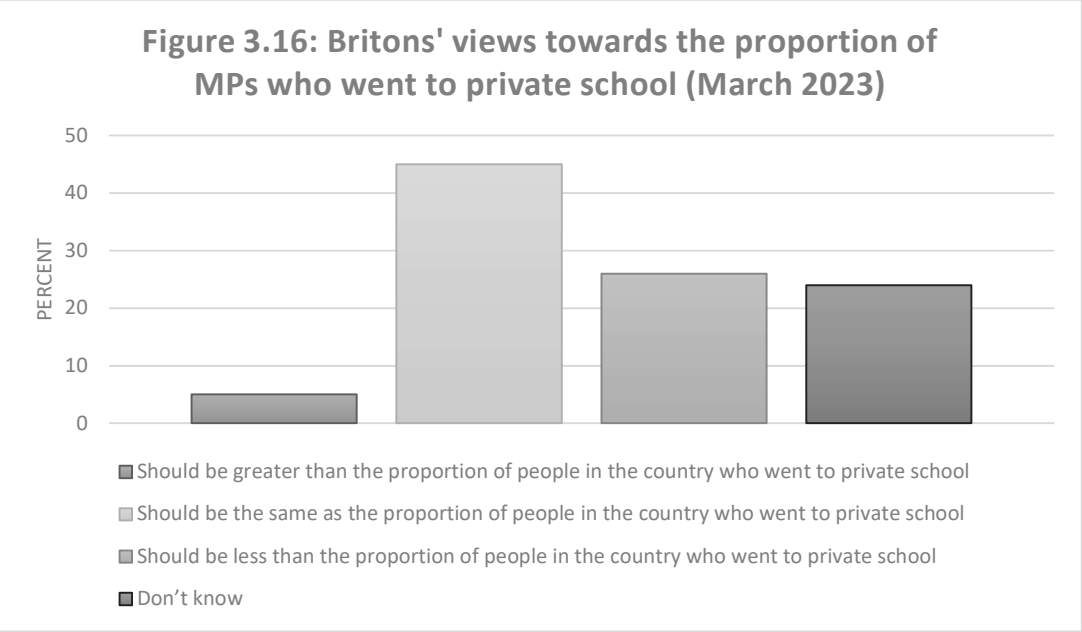
[134] The level of support for candidates educated at state secondary schools was second only to the support garnered by NHS nurses.

at statistically significant levels). The difference between the two types of school was also statistically significant.

The surveys provide additional depth and nuance to this finding. The survey conducted in July 2021 asked respondents whether they thought the proportion of MPs who attended private school should be greater than, the same as, or less than the proportion of people in the country who attended private school ('don't know' was also offered as a possible response). A plurality of 49% stated that the proportion should be the same. 22% of respondents answered that the proportion of MPs who attended private school should be less than the proportion of the country who attended private school, compared to 6 % who answered that the proportion should be greater (see Figure 3.15; see Appendix G for full details). These findings were confirmed in a second survey, conducted in March 2023, where 45% of respondents stated that the proportion should be the same, 26% that the proportion should be less, and 5% that the proportion should be more (see Figure 3.16; see Appendix I for full details). Thus, far greater numbers of Britons believe that the privately educated should be under-represented in Parliament than believe they should be over-represented. However, the plurality response was that the proportion of privately educated MPs should match the proportion in wider British society.



Note: n=1693



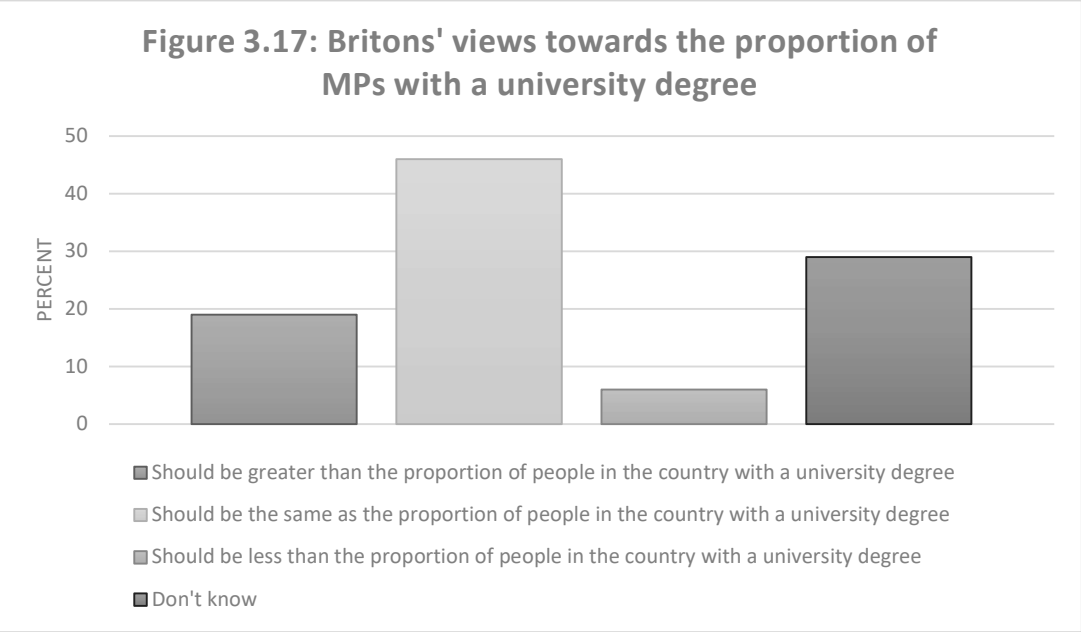
Note: n=2214

The testing of a specific school – one that has provided two prime ministers in the last decade and a half – adds further crucial nuance. The conjoint experiment reveals that Britons view candidates who attended Eton in extremely negatively terms (at statistically significant levels). Indeed, attending Eton was, by a distance, the most unpopular sociodemographic characteristic of all those tested in the experiment – far more unpopular than the much-vilified career politician. The large and statistically significant difference between candidates attending a state school and attending an unnamed private school was noted above; the difference between candidates attending an unnamed private school and attending Eton is just as large.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that Britons, collectively, would prefer candidates who did not attend university over candidates who did attend university and would view candidates who attended Oxford University least favourably of all. Let us begin with an exploration of the university/non-university divide, before turning to the addition of a specific university.

The conjoint experiment reveals that with regard to their own MP, Britons view university-educated candidates favourably (at statistically significant levels), whilst feeling indifferent towards non-university-educated candidates. The surveys provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of Britons' views towards the higher education of politicians, by exploring attitudes towards the House of Commons as a whole. The survey conducted in July 2021 asked respondents whether they thought the proportion of MPs with a university degree should be greater than, the same as, or less than the proportion of people in the country with a university degree ('don't know' was also offered as a possible response). A plurality of 46% answered that the proportion should be the same. Furthermore, 19% of respondents answered that the proportion of MPs

with a degree should be *greater* than the proportion of people in the country with a university degree, compared to just 6% who answered that the proportion of MPs with a degree should be *less* than the proportion of people in the country with a university degree (see Figure 3.17; see Appendix G for full details). Thus, the British public are not opposed to university-educated MPs; they want MPs to be at least as educated – in terms of holding a degree – as the wider country. Indeed, more than three times as many members of the public want MPs to be more educated than the wider country than want MPs to be less educated than the wider country. Britons do want MPs as a group to have attended university; what they do not appear to want is *every* MP to have attended university. Rather, as with so many of the other variables tested, a plurality of Britons want Parliament to reflect British society.

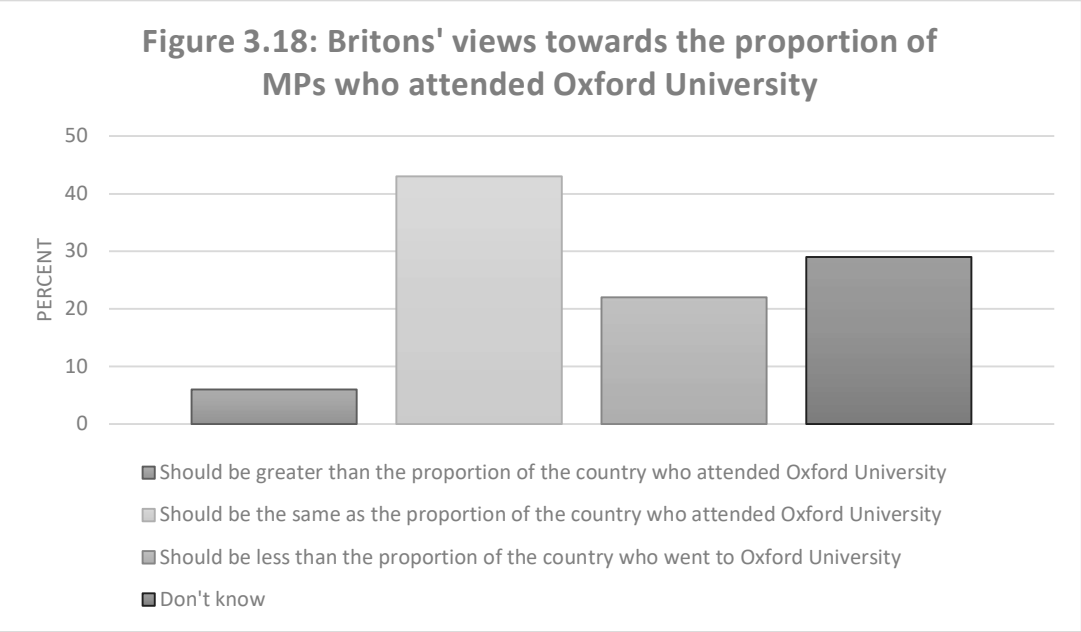


Note: n=1693

As detailed above, this is the first study to test Britons' views towards a specific university – doing so greatly enriches the findings and deepens our understanding of the type of politicians that British desire as representatives. The candidate choice experiment demonstrates that Britons, as a group, prefer politicians who did not go to university and politicians who were educated at unnamed universities over politicians who attended Oxford (both at statistically significant levels). Britons quite clearly do not want to be represented at the constituency level by an Oxford-educated MP. Thus, the candidate choice experiment undertaken for this thesis demonstrates, for the first time, that just as important to Britons as whether or not politicians attended university is *which* university they attended.

However, the surveys again highlight the nuanced views Britons' hold towards the sociodemographic characteristics of their representatives. The survey conducted in March 2023 asked respondents whether they thought the proportion of MPs who

attended Oxford University should be greater than, the same as, or less than the proportion of people in the country who attended Oxford University ('don't know' was also offered as a possible response). A plurality of 43% answered that the proportion should be the same. 6% of respondents answered that the proportion of MPs who attended Oxford University should be greater than the proportion of people in the country who attended Oxford University, while 22% answered that the proportion of MPs who attended Oxford University should be less than the proportion of people in the country who attended Oxford University (see Figure 3.18; see Appendix I for full details). Thus, once again, asking solely about respondents' views towards their own MP would have obscured Britons' views about the House of Commons as a whole.



Note: n=1153

3.6 Conclusion

This thesis employed a unique design, combining a candidate choice experiment which explored Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of their own MP with surveys which explored Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of MPs as a group.

The candidate choice experiment both clarifies existing work and goes far beyond it. With regard to clarifying existing work, it (re)tests variables which have already been tested by other scholars but via inappropriate or flawed designs and which (perhaps because of these faults) produce conflicting results.

Thus, while a number of existing candidate choice experiments attempt to Britons' views towards the class of politicians, these experiments use insufficiently precise occupations, categorise occupations into incorrect classes, use too few occupations per

class, use too classes, and come to conflicting conclusions. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis, which rectifies these flaws, finds that Britons collectively prefer candidates with working-class occupations over candidates with upper-middle-class occupations.

A number of existing candidate choice experiments attempt to test Britons' views towards career politicians. However, as detailed above, they generate conflicting results. The candidate choice experiment undertaken for this thesis, which tests a career in politics against far more non-political occupations than the existing experiments, provides clear and statistically significant evidence that the ever-growing number of career politicians in Britain are extremely unpopular.

Just one existing candidate choice experiment tests whether Britons have differing views towards politicians who worked in the public as opposed to the private sector. However, there is no theorising in the article as to what results they expect and the design itself fails to appropriately test any differences which may exist – by varying both occupation and sector it fails to allow the exact identification of the cause of the differences that emerge. The candidate choice experiment undertaken for this thesis rectifies this error by testing the exact same occupations across the two sectors i.e. altering just one variable to enable causal identification. It found that Britons much prefer candidates who worked in the public rather than private sector – indeed, the two occupations which explicitly stated that they were in the public sector were the two most popular of all the occupations that were tested.

A number of existing candidate choice experiments have tested Britons' views towards university- and non-university-educated candidates. However, as with the variables discussed above, there are flaws in the research designs employed which nullify the (conflicting) results which were found. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis therefore retested the university/non-university variable which has attracted increasingly attention from scholars in recent years and found that Britons view university-educated candidates favourably (at statistically significant levels), but are ambivalent towards non-university-educated candidates.

As well as (re)testing the above variables in a much-improved form, the candidate choice experiment conducted for these thesis also explored variables which had not previously been tested and found that they were as important if not more so than variables which have been mainstays of academic research. Thus, no existing candidate choice experiment had tested Britons' views towards politicians who attended private as opposed to state secondary schools.[135] The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis tested this variable and found that Britons have strong opinions with regard to it, viewing candidates who attended private schools unfavourably (at statistically significant levels) and candidate who attended state schools favourably (at

[135] As discussed in detail above, one existing British candidate choice experiment includes the state/private schooling divide but does not consider its independent impact; instead it is combined with another variable.

statistically significant levels) – indeed, more favourably than the most popular occupation (an NHS nurse).

As well as exploring the private/state divide, the candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis tested Britons' views – for the first time – towards a specific private school: Eton. Not only was it revealed that views towards Eton were far more negative than towards a generic, unnamed private school, but it was found that attending Eton was the most unpopular characteristics of all those tested in the experiment.

The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis similarly went beyond the university/non-university dichotomy by including a specific institution, again for the first time, and tested Britons' views towards Oxford. Doing so produced fascinating results. As noted above, Britons were positive towards candidates who attended university and indifferent towards those who did not; however, they were decidedly negative (at statistically significant levels) towards candidates who attended Oxford.

Thus, the candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis has demonstrated – for the first time – that Britons feel just as strongly about the specific schools and universities that politicians attended as whether they attended a state or private school or attended university or not.

Thus, the candidate choice experiment, on its own, went far beyond existing research. However, it was also combined, in an unique methodological advance, with surveys which explored Britons' views towards MPs as a group. Doing so has unearthed crucially important findings. It has revealed that Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians vary by proximity of government. Britons exhibit strong, statistically significant preferences with regard to the sociodemographic characteristics of their own MP, but they desire a Parliament which reflects the sociodemographic profile of the wider country, not their own views.

By specifically asking respondents about Parliament as a whole, the surveys enable a comparison to be made between Britons' desires towards their legislature and the reality. The data collected on the sociodemographic characteristics of contemporary MPs, fully reported in the following chapter, reveals a mismatch. Put simply, British politicians are not the kind of people that Britons want to represent them. Britons desire a Parliament which mirrors the sociodemographic makeup of Britain, to be 'in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large'. However, the working class, the state educated, and the non-university educated are greatly under-represented in Parliament while the middle class, the privately educated, the university educated, and the Oxford educated are vastly over-represented.

This disconnect between the views of voters and the reality of their representatives may be one of the keys to explaining the high levels of disillusionment and low levels of turnout which currently plague British politics. Research has shown that a lack of descriptive representation is associated with diminished levels of electoral participation

(see, for example, Geese 2023; Heath 2018; Rocha et al. 2010) and political satisfaction (see, for example, Arnesen and Peters 2018).

Attention naturally turns therefore to how and why certain groups are under-represented in politics, even when they are popular among voters. As is discussed in more detail in the final chapter, various reasons have been suggested for their absence from politics, from the biases and calculations of party gatekeepers to a limited supply of candidates (due to their lack of resources, purported lack of confidence, etc). This crucial complement to the work undertaken for this thesis is considered in detail in the final chapter, in particular how existing research must be revised and updated to reflect contemporary circumstances.

This chapter has considered the views of Britons as a whole. The following chapter explores the results in more depth, considering, for example, whether different social groups hold differing views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians, and whether they favour their own group over others.

Further, it expands the increasingly relevant concept of the career politician. It does so by exploring Britons' views towards the subject which politicians studied at university. This granular focus on the higher education of politicians is appropriate given the fact that almost all British – indeed, Western – politicians now attend university.

4. Experimental and survey results II: Subgroup analysis, detailed exploration of higher education, variation across versus within classes, and the impact of combinations of variables

ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the results of the conjoint candidate choice experiment and surveys at a more granular level. It conducts subgroup analysis and the combination of this analysis with the innovative approach adopted reveals that while middle-class respondents express a desire for more working-class representatives and fewer middle-class representatives when asked about Parliament as a whole, they display a marked class affinity bias when asked about their own MP. It is suggested that this discrepancy of views among the middle-class may help explain the continued under-representation of the working class in Parliament. It also details how the collective opposition to Eton-educated politicians discussed in the previous chapter is held by Britons of all classes and how the collective opposition to Oxford-educated politicians discussed in the previous chapter is held both by Britons who attended university and Britons who did not. Not only do these findings again underscore the value of including a specific private school and a specific university, but also highlight the fact Britons are united, across class and level of education, in their opposition to politicians of a certain type, and yet these very politicians have dominated British politics in recent (and past) years. Given the fact that almost all MPs now attend university, particular attention was paid to views towards the higher education of politicians. It is found that Britons hold strong opinions towards the subject that politicians studied at university, expressing a clear preference for politicians who studied politics. It is suggested that this reflects opposition to, and expands the concept of, the career politician. As the data collected on contemporary politicians for this thesis (discussed in the following chapter) reveals, this represents yet another example of a mismatch between the preferences of Britons and the reality of politicians in modern Britain.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the exploration of Britons' preferences towards politicians, but does so at a more granular level and with greater analytical complexity. Thus, where the previous chapter examined the views of Britons in aggregate, this chapter disaggregates their views by social class and level of education. Where the previous chapter explored Britons' views towards politicians attending university, this chapter explores their views towards specific universities and subjects. Where the previous chapter tested Britons' views towards candidates from different classes, this chapter tests whether there are larger differences in views towards different classes or towards different occupations *within* classes. Finally, where the previous chapter explored individual variables in isolation, this chapter considers the impact of combinations of variables.

Further, this chapter not only explores existing theories with regard to Britons' political preferences, but via the utilisation of an innovative design, it formulates and tests two entirely original theories. As described in more detail below, a number of existing British candidate choice experiments either directly test or collect the data which allows the testing of class affinity bias. Their findings, however, conflict. This thesis not only tests class affinity theory in an effort to settle this dispute, but by asking respondents about their views towards the class of politicians at both the local level (their own MP) and the national level (MPs as a group), this thesis is able to test a new theory: whether class affinity towards politicians is stronger the more local the context, i.e. whether a form of 'class NIMBYism' exists among middle-class Britons towards working-class politicians. In addition, as the surveys ask respondents about 'working-class' politicians while the candidate choice experiment presents respondents with fully-fleshed-out candidates with working-class occupations, it enables the testing of a second original theory: whether middle-class Britons hold different views towards working-class politicians at the abstract, general level versus the concrete, individual level.

It also expands the increasingly important concept of the career politician, by incorporating the subject that politicians studied at university. Discussions of career politicians frequently reference the subject that these people studied at university. Particular attention has been paid to the aforementioned PPE, particularly when combined with studying it at Oxford. Thus, Nigel Farage argues '[w]e have a career political class…They all go to Oxford. They all study PPE' (quoted in Goodwin and Milazzo 2015, 7) and Gloria De Piero has described how following Labour's victory in 1997 'the people who worked at No 10 had all done PPE at Oxbridge' (Turner 2017).

Many have noted the prevalence in British politics of those who studied PPE at Oxford. Beckett (2017), for example, calls it the 'degree that runs Britain' and Kelly (2010) 'the surest ticket to the top – for Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem politicians alike', while Crace (2013) suggests that when one 'stud[ies] philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) at Oxford University…you get power and influence thrown in with your degree certificate on graduation day.' Goodwin (2023), reflecting the thrust of this thesis, suggests that the education of politicians may be of greater importance than more frequently discussed characteristics like gender, sarcastically agreeing with Rachel Reeves's claim with regard to the significance of her potentially becoming the first female British Chancellor: 'Yes. Having an Oxford PPE graduate and former Bank of England'er as Chancellor would be a real "gamechanger"'. Moreover, the influence of studying PPE at Oxford extends beyond politicians and encompasses the entire political ecosystem. For example:

> Monday, 13 April 2015 was a typical day in modern British politics. An Oxford University graduate in philosophy, politics and economics (PPE), Ed Miliband, launched the Labour party's general election manifesto. It was examined by the BBC's political editor, Oxford PPE graduate Nick Robinson, by the BBC's economics editor, Oxford PPE graduate Robert Peston, and by the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Oxford PPE graduate Paul Johnson. It was criticised by the prime minister, Oxford PPE graduate David Cameron. It was defended by the

> Labour shadow chancellor, Oxford PPE graduate Ed Balls…On the BBC Radio 4 website, the Financial Times statistics expert and Oxford PPE graduate Tim Harford presented his first election podcast. On BBC1, Oxford PPE graduate and Newsnight presenter Evan Davies conducted the first of a series of interviews with party leaders. In the print media, there was an election special in the Economist magazine, edited by Oxford PPE graduate Zanny Minton-Beddoes; a clutch of election articles in the political magazine Prospect, edited by Oxford PPE graduate Bronwen Maddox; an election column in the Guardian by Oxford PPE graduate Simon Jenkins; and more election coverage in the Times and the Sun, whose proprietor, Rupert Murdoch, studied PPE at Oxford.

As Beckett (2017) concludes following the above prosopography, '[m]ore than any other course at any other university, more than any revered or resented private school, and in a manner probably unmatched in any other democracy, Oxford PPE pervades British political life.'

Further, it has been argued that PPE has a discernible – and deleterious – effect on those who study it – and on the country they govern. Cohen (2014), himself an Oxford PPE graduate, argues that the course has 'created a robotic governing class', the members of which spend their time at Oxford – and thereafter – 'banging out ideas with barely a moment's thought', a sentiment Pateman and Birtwhistle (1968, 19) concur with, contending that it provides '[n]o training in scholarship, only refining to a high degree of perfection his ability to write short dilettantish essays on the basis of very little knowledge.' The aforementioned Cummings (2016) agrees with and adds to this critique, positing that 'PPE…causes huge problems as it encourages people like Cameron and Ed Balls to "fool themselves" and spread bad ideas with lots of confidence and bluffing', while (satirical magazine) *Private Eye* (2022b, 34) announced that '[f]ollowing a series of appalling results from its alumni, OfS (Office for Students) is to investigate Oxford University, in particular the PPE Faculty, after the latest Prime Minister, Ms Truss, demonstrated no grasp of Politics, Philosophy or Economics.'[136]

4.2 Theory

Affinity bias theory contends that people vote for candidates who share their sociodemographic characteristics. It draws on the broader social identity theory – developed in the 1970s and 1980s by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1975; Turner et al. 1979),[137] who in turn built on earlier work by Allport (1954), Sherif (1966), and Sumner (1906) – the

[136] In the same edition, it announced that '[f]ollowing a series of appalling results from its alumni, Ofsted is to investigate Eton College with a view to closing it down. Said the Head of Ofsted, "There is now conclusive evidence that the education standards at the school are directly affecting national well-being. Successive old boys seem to have had no education at all in core subjects, like economy, politics, reality and morality. Cameron D., Rees-Mogg J., Johnson B., and now Kwarteng K., have displayed complete ignorance of how the country, or indeed the world, works"' (*Private Eye* 2022a, 14).
[137] See also Turner's (1982; 1987, 42) self-categorization theory, a 'cognitive (or social-cognitive) elaboration' of social identity theory.

idea that people are biased towards those in their 'in-group'. Defining social identity as 'that *part* of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership [emphasis in original]' (Tajfel 1978a, 63), social identity theory posits that '[i]ndividuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity…Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups' (Tajfel and Turner 1986: 16). Studies have shown that affinity bias exists for gender (Sigelman and Sigelman 1982; Plutzer and Zipp 1996)[138] and race (Sigelman and Sigelman 1982), and class (Vivyan et al. 2020a; Carnes and Lupu 2016). Affinity bias theory suggests that working-class respondents will prefer working-class candidates over middle-class candidates and that in a mirror image, middle-class respondents will prefer middle-class candidates over working-class candidates.

It is possible, however, that working-class respondents may prefer middle-class candidates over working-class candidates. It was discussed in the previous chapter how education can be a signal for competence – class may function similarly. Alexander Hamilton (2008 [1788], 165), Founding Father and first U.S. secretary of the treasury, argued in *The Federalist Papers* that '[t]he idea of an actual representation of all classes of the people by persons of each class is altogether visionary…Mechanics and manufacturers will always be inclined, with few exceptions, to give their votes to merchants in preference to persons of their own professions or trades…They know that the merchant is their natural patron and friend; and they are aware that however great the confidence they may justly feel in their own good sense, their interests can be more effectually promoted by the merchant than by themselves.' With regard to Britain, Walter Bagehot (1872, xi) described how 'the mass of the old electors…liked to have one of their "betters" to represent them; if he was rich, they respected him much; and if he was a lord, they liked him the better.' Lockwood (1966) identified in the 1960s the existence of the 'deferential' worker (alongside his 'traditional' and his 'privatised' brethren), who 'does not identify himself with his superiors or strive to reach their status; he defers to them socially as well as politically.' In a mirror image, it is possible that middle-class respondents may prefer working-class candidates over middle-class candidates. As suggested in the previous chapter, middle-class respondents may be aware of the under-representation of the working class in Parliament, feel that descriptive representation brings benefits and thus favour the election of more working-class MPs.

It is also possible that Britons' views towards the class of their representatives may vary by proximity. For example, middle-class Britons may exhibit stronger class affinity bias towards their own MP than towards MPs as a group, demonstrating a form of NIMBYism, the phenomenon whereby people approve of measures at the national level but oppose them locally. Social distance theory, pioneered by Bogardus (1925a; 1925b; 1947) and later refined and elaborated by various scholars (see, for example, Albrecht, Walker, and Levy 1982; Mather, Jones, and Moats 2017; Parrillo and Donoghue 2005; Shi et al. 2024; Tusini 2022) provides a framework for understanding how class-based

[138] Though see Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011 for a study showing where it did not occur for gender.

preferences may vary by context. It posits that tolerance towards out-groups declines as proximity increases. Thus, middle-class Britons may express relatively positive attitudes towards working-class representatives in Parliament as a whole – where social distance is greatest – but be far less accepting with regard to their own MP, where social distance is smallest. If they were to do so, they would be exhibiting a form of class NIMBYism which, to the best of the author's knowledge, has never previously been articulated or subjected to empirical scrutiny. As explained below, the innovative research design employed in this thesis allows this theory to be tested.

Further, discrepancies may exist between middle-class Britons' views towards the *idea* of working-class representatives and the reality of fully-fleshed-out working-class candidates, with the middle-class preferring the former over the latter. There are theoretical grounds for expecting differences. Construal level theory, developed by Liberman and Trope (Liberman and Trope 1998; 2008; Trope and Liberman 2010; Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007) posits that people understand objects and events in different ways as psychological distance increases. Studies have indeed shown that people tend to be more positive when the object of interest is framed in more abstract and psychologically distant ways (see, for example, Eyal et al. 2004; Herzog, Hansen, and Wänke 2007; Wakslak and Trope 2009; Wakslak et al. 2006; Wänke and Bless 2000). Further, there is empirical evidence demonstrating that voters are more receptive to objects the more abstract the context and can support groups whilst rejecting the individuals comprising them. Campbell and Heath (2017), for example, found that in the 2010 British General Election 'even among feminist women, the effect of candidate sex on vote choice is not particularly strong'.

However, there is a theory which predicts the opposite, that middle-class respondents will be more positive towards fully-fleshed-out working-class candidates than towards the idea of working-class candidates. In the early 1930s, LaPiere (1934) accompanied a Chinese couple across the US. He found that they were refused service in just 1 out of 251 establishments. However, when he surveyed these same establishments and enquired about their willingness to serve Chinese people, over 90% stated that they would not. Sears (1983) would later term this tendency for individuals to attract more favourable evaluations than aggregated groups of the same people 'person-positivity bias'.[139] It has long been found to exist with regard to politicians (see, for example, Lau, Sears, and Centers 1979).[140] More recently, it has shown that it also applies to immigrants (Iyengar et al. 2013) and sexual minorities (McCabe 2019). As Jonathan Swift (1924 [1725], 436) remarked: 'I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities, and all my love is toward individuals…principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth.'

[139] See Sears and Whitney (1973, 271) for Sears's earlier work on broader 'positivity biases', i.e. people's tendency 'to be positive than negative in evaluating people in general, and political figures in particular.'
[140] Studies have also demonstrated the role partisanship plays in the strength of person-positivity bias vis-à-vis politicians (Bolsen and Thornton 2021; Nilsson and Ekehammar 1987).

As is detailed below, the unique design employed in this thesis also enables the thorough testing of this second original line of enquiry, namely, whether middle-class Britons hold differing views towards the abstract idea of working-class representatives and the concrete reality of working-class politicians.

4.3 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 6 tests the importance of class to British voting patterns and seeks to shed light on the aforementioned theory, proposed by Heath (2018), that the British working class have noticed the decline in the number of working-class politicians and have responded by abstaining. It does so by testing the existence and strength of class affinity bias, that is to say, it tests the extent to which Britons prefer candidates from their own class.

As discussed in Chapter 1, class long formed the cornerstone of explanations of Britons' voting behaviour – all else was 'embellishment and detail' (Pulzer 1967, 98). With some exceptions, the working class identified with and voted for the Labour Party, while the middle class identified with and voted for the Conservative Party. The 1970s and 1980s, however, witnessed the beginning of a spirited debate among academics, some arguing that class voting in Britain was declining, others maintaining that it exhibited only 'trendless fluctuation' (Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 1985, 35).

The rise of New Labour in the 1990s appeared to settle the matter. The General Election of 1997 revealed an unmistakable decline in class voting, and by the election of 2001 Heath, Jowell, and Curtice (2001, 139) were describing Labour as 'the party of middle-income middle Britain'. Some went so far as to declare that class itself had 'dissolved' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, 205). However, reports of the death of class would prove to be greatly exaggerated. Subsequent research revealed that class remained central to British voting behaviour, but now determined *whether* Britons voted rather than *how* they voted (Heath 2018). A number of explanations have been proposed as to why class now shapes electoral participation rather than electoral choice, among them the fall in the number of class-based appeals by Labour politicians, ideological convergence between the Labour and Conservatives parties, and the precipitous decline in the number of working-class Labour MPs.

6. Britons prefer candidates from their own class.

Hypothesis 7 explores the idea of class affinity bias in more depth and with greater nuance. It makes use of the innovative research design implemented in this thesis and tests whether class affinity bias among middle-class Britons varies by proximity of representation and degree of abstraction.

With regard to proximity of representation, it tests whether middle-class Britons are more amenable to working-class candidates when asked about the House of Commons as a whole rather than when asked about their own MP i.e. whether they exhibit NIMBY attitudes. It is able to do this as the conjoint experiment examines respondents' views

about representation at the constituency level while the surveys ask respondents about their views towards Parliament as a body.

With regard to degree of abstraction, it tests whether middle-class voters' views towards working-class politicians vary depending upon the abstractedness of the context in which their opinions are solicited. There are, as was noted above, competing theories with regard to this question. Construal level theory indicating that middle-class voters will prefer working-class politicians at the abstract rather than substantive level while person-positivity bias suggests the opposite. It is predicted that construal level theory will prevail and the middle-class Britons will prefer the *idea* of working-class representatives rather than the more substantive alternative.

7. Middle-class Britons are more amenable to working-class candidates when asked about the House of Commons as a whole rather than when asked about their own MP and prefer the *idea* of working-class representatives over the reality of fully-fleshed candidates with working-class occupations.

Hypothesis 8 explores whether class affects Britons' views towards the secondary education of politicians. It is not strictly a test of educational affinity bias nor of class affinity bias, as class and secondary education are not synonymous, but they are very closely associated.

It explores whether working- and middle-class Britons hold differing views towards candidates who attended state secondary schools and candidates who attended private schools. One would expect the close ties between class and secondary education in Britain to result in working-class respondents favouring state-educated candidates over privately educated candidates and in middle-class respondents favouring privately educated candidates over state-educated candidates.

However, by including a specific private school – Eton – this thesis allows the probing of Britons' views towards the schooling of their politicians at a deeper level, beyond the state/private dichotomy. It is posited that where Britons' views towards state and (unnamed) private schools will divide by class, their views towards Eton will be uniformly negative, the reasons being a lack of empathy for those from the most privileged backgrounds, the absence of affinity bias given that so few if any respondents will have attended Eton, and frustration with recent political elites, so many of whom attended Eton.

8. Working-class Britons prefer state-educated candidates over privately educated candidates and middle-class Britons prefer privately educated candidates over state-educated candidates; both working-class Britons and middle-class Britons prefer candidates who attended state schools and (unnamed) private schools over candidates who attended Eton.

Hypothesis 9 explores the existence and strength of higher educational affinity among British voters. It predicts that it will play a role in evaluations of politicians and will

result in respondents who did not attend university preferring non-university-educated candidates over university-educated candidates, and in a mirror image, respondents who did attend university preferring university-educated candidates over non-university educated candidates. It should be noted that if the first of these two affinity-based voting patterns hold, that is to say, if respondents who did not attend university prefer non-university-educated candidates over university-educated candidates, it would militate against the theory, discussed above, that there is an underlying preference for highly-educated politicians (on the basis that their education signals a high level of competence).

In addition, just as the inclusion of a specific school allows an exploration of Britons' views towards the secondary education of politicians which goes beyond the state/private divide, so the inclusion of a specific university enables an examination of Britons' views towards the higher education of politicians that goes beyond the attended university/did not attend university dichotomy.

Oxford shares many of the same characteristics as Eton. It is an elite institution, is associated with wealth and privilege, very few respondents are likely to have attended, and is alma mater to many members of a despised political class. As a result, it is similarly predicted that Oxford will function as a unifier of sorts, uniting respondents of differing higher educational backgrounds with differing views on the university/non-university divide in antipathy.

9. University-educated Britons prefer university-educated candidates over non-university-educated candidates and non-university-educated Britons prefer non-university-educated candidates over university-educated candidates; both Britons who attended university and Britons who did not attend university prefer candidates who did not attend university and candidates who attended unnamed universities over candidates who attended Oxford University.

Hypothesis 10 continues this in-depth exploration of Britons' views towards the higher education of politicians. It investigates whether Britons have strong feelings towards the subjects politicians studied at university.

As noted above, this variable has not been adequately tested in the existing literature. Yet this intense focus on the higher education of politicians is needed, given that almost all modern British politicians attend university.

Further, exploring views towards the subjects that politicians studied at university may help shed light on the aforementioned record levels of political disillusionment besetting Britain today, by expanding the concept of the career politician. It was noted above how various public figures have criticised the British political class for all having studied politics at university (linking to hypothesis 9, they are often specifically criticised for all having studied PPE at Oxford). As discussed in the following chapter, data has been collected – for the first time at the necessary level of granularity – which supports these claims that vast swathes of the Commons did indeed study politics at

university. It is expected, as a result of this link between studying politics at university and being a career politician, that it will be the most unpopular subject about which respondents are asked.

By contrast, it is expected that Britons will view candidates who studied maths, science, and engineering at university much more positively. Surveys have shown the high regard in which scientists and engineers are held (Ipsos MORI 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)[141] – it is predicted that this will translate into votes. Efforts by successive UK governments to promote these subjects (Hoskins and Barker 2020; Smith 2010) may well have raised the esteem in which these subjects are held by Britons.

10. Britons, collectively, prefer candidates who studied science, engineering, or maths at university over candidates who studied politics.

4.4 Research design

In order to test these hypotheses an innovative approach had to be employed. This section details how this groundbreaking approach was conceived and adopted, explaining in turn how the research design operationalised in this thesis enabled the theories of class NIMBYism, of class-based differences in views towards politicians at the abstract and substantive levels, of educational affinity, and of the subject politicians studied at university holding importance for voters to be tested.

It was hypothesised above that Britons' views towards the class of politicians may vary by proximity. Specifically, it was posited that middle-class Britons may exhibit stronger class affinity bias towards their own MP than towards MPs as a group and in so doing demonstrate a form of behaviour which this thesis dubs 'class NIMBYism'. In order to test this theory, a number of requirements had to be met and steps followed. First, it was necessary to explore respondents' views towards the class of politicians at both the constituency and national levels. This was done by conducting a candidate choice experiment which asks respondents about their MP and surveys which ask respondents about MPs as a group. Second, it was necessary to have data on the class of respondents. Both the candidate choice experiment and the surveys contain this information. Third, the data in the candidate choice experiment on respondents' class had to be recoded to facilitate the testing of affinity bias. Respondents' class was recategorised from the 18-class NS-SEC to a 3-class schema (see Table 4.1). Finally, subgroup analysis had to be conducted. Analysis of conjoint experiments has, until very recently, tended to rely upon average marginal component effects (AMCEs) when calculating the quantity of interest. The AMCE represents the marginal effect of an attribute averaged over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). However, it has been demonstrated by Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley (2020) that AMCEs can be misleading when used for subgroup analysis, as regression interactions are sensitive

[141] Margaret Thatcher was said to be more proud of being the first prime minister with a science degree than being the first prime minister who was a woman (Runciman 2013).

to the reference category used in the analysis. They instead recommend that researchers use unadjusted marginal means, which is the approach taken in this thesis.[142]

Table 4.1: Recoding of respondents' class from 8-class NS-SEC to 3-class schema

NS-SEC categories	3-class schema
Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Upper-middle class
Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Intermediate
Intermediate occupations	
Small employers and own account workers	
Semi-routine occupations	Working class
Routine and manual occupations	

Let us turn to the testing of possible class-based differences in Britons' views towards politicians at the abstract and substantive levels. Many of the same requirements as discussed above applied: data on respondents' class; the recoding of this data from the 18-class NS-SEC to a 3-class schema; and subgroup analysis using marginal means. However, it was additionally necessary to employ a design which enabled any potential differences to be observed. Therefore, the surveys asked respondents about 'working-class' and 'middle-class' representatives, while the candidate choice experiment presented respondents with fully-fleshed-out, individual candidates holding specific working-class occupations.

Let us turn to the testing of educational affinity. Once again, a number of requirements had to be met and steps followed. First, it was necessary to possess data on the educational level of respondents. The candidate choice experiment contains this information. Second, this data had to be recoded to facilitate the testing of educational affinity. The candidate choice experiment was run as part of the BES, which divides respondents' level of education into 18 categories (Table 4.2). This 18-category schema was recoded into a binary attended university/did not attend university variable, with categories 1 to 15 comprising the non-university-educated, and categories 16 and 17 comprising the university-educated.[143] Subgroup analysis using marginal means was then conducted.

Table 4.2: Categorisation of educational level of respondents in the BES

Value	Label
1	No formal qualifications

[142] For other studies which critique the use of the AMCE, see Abramson, Kocak, and Magazinnik 2022; de la Cuesta, Egami, and Imai 2022; Ganter 2023. For a defence of the AMCE see Bansak et al. 2023.
[143] Category 18 was excluded due to its imprecise nature.

2	Youth training certificate/skillseekers
3	Recognised trade apprenticeship completed
4	Clerical and commercial
5	City & Guilds certificate
6	City & Guilds certificate – advanced
7	Onc
8	CSE grades 2-5
9	CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate
10	Scottish Ordinary/Lower Certificate
11	GCE A level or Higher Certificate
12	Scottish Higher Certificate
13	Nursing qualification (e.g. SEN, SRN, SCM, RGN)
14	Teaching qualification (not degree)
15	University diploma
16	University or CNAA first degree (e.g. BA, B.Sc, B.Ed)
17	University or CNAA higher degree (e.g. M.Sc, Ph.D)
18	Other technical, professional or higher qualification

Let us turn to testing whether the subject politicians studied at university holds importance for Britons. As discussed above, one of the candidate choice experiments conducted in Britain varies the subject candidates studied at university (Campbell and Cowley 2014c). However, as explained above in detail, issues with the research design employed in the study make it impossible to draw conclusions. Given that almost all British MPs now attend university, the subject that they study whilst there has arguably gained a new importance. Further, it has been suggested that the subject politicians studied at university is correlated with political opinions. With regard to Brexit, for example, Delingpole (2016) argued that '[a]lmost all the very worst MPs campaigning for Britain to remain in the European Union studied the same subject at Oxford University – Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE)' and Hall (2018) that 'it is no coincidence' that so many Brexiteers studied history or classics at university – he adduces Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Dominic Cummings, and John Redwood – nor that so many Remainers studied law or PPE. Hall suggests that it is not unreasonable 'to presume that many of the influential opponents of Brexit in politics and the media do so because of their education. If you studied modules on European law or international political economy at university, rather than, say, the Glorious Revolution, it is not surprising that you will come to prioritise the global over the national, the present over the past.' Support for the idea that university affects people's political views is provided by a British MP himself. Gareth Bacon (n.d.), the Conservative MP for Orpington, has described how '[t]he subject of my Master's Degree dissertation was an examination of the democratic deficit in the European Union – I concluded that this was a problem that

could not be resolved and that Britain would be better served by leaving the European Union. This forms much of the foundation for my support for Brexit.'

The testing of Britons' views towards the subject politicians studied at university occurred solely via the surveys. It was not included in the candidate choice experiment for fear of overwhelming respondents with too many variables. Doing so would also have necessitated a large and unwieldy number of constraints. Politics, rather than PPE, was tested. This decision was made for a number of reasons. First, it is far from certain that all of those surveyed will know what PPE is (in an academic context). Second, as described below, the research conducted for this thesis into politicians' sociodemographic backgrounds reveals that while a sizeable number of MPs did indeed study PPE at Oxford, they are part of a much broader phenomenon of British politicians studying politics at university.

As noted in the previous chapter, a vast array of considerations must be taken into account when conducting surveys if the results obtained are to be reliable. For example, surveys are susceptible to acquiescence bias, i.e. 'the tendency for survey respondents to agree with statements regardless of their content' (Holbrook 2008, 3). The existence and impact of acquiescence bias has been demonstrated by two of the pioneers of surveys: Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser. They (1981, 208) ran an experiment, in which one group was asked if they agreed with the statement '[i]ndividuals are more to blame than social conditions for crime and lawlessness in this country', and a majority did so, and a second group was asked if they agreed with the statement '[s]ocial conditions are more to blame than individuals for crime and lawlessness in this country', and again, a majority did so. Thus, in order to generate unbiased data, surveys should avoid using dichotomous agree/disagree questions, as these give rise to acquiescence bias. The surveys fielded for this paper did not include any such questions.

Further, the way in which a survey is carried out can affect the results obtained. Self-administered surveys have been shown to generate more plausible data than interviewer-administered surveys. It has been demonstrated, for example, that they lead to higher reports of illegal behaviour than those conducted by an interviewer (Schober et al. 1992; Tourangeau and Smith 1996; Turner, Lessler, and Devore 1992). In order to maximise the possibility of truthful responses, the surveys conducted for this paper were self-administered internet surveys.

The response options offered, in particular the inclusion or exclusion of a 'Don't know' option, can also affect the results. It is thus important to consider whether or not to include a 'Don't know' option. The University of Michigan's Survey Research Center's (1976, 17) *Interviewer Manual* cautions that 'Don't know' answers can simply mean that the respondent is thinking, and that such answers should therefore be probed. However, although it is undoubtedly important not to rush respondents, it is equally important to recognise that 'Don't know' is a legitimate response. Further, excluding it leads to inaccurate results for the other categories. Schumann and Presser (1981), for example, have shown that offering 'Don't know' as a response, as opposed to only accepting it

when it is put forward by respondents, leads to a 22% increase in the number of 'Don't know' responses.

The tone of the wording used in survey questions can also affect the responses obtained. For example, in September 1940 Donald Rugg carried out a famous experiment, asking one group 'Do you think the United States should allow public speeches against democracy?' and asking another 'Do you think the United States should forbid public speeches against democracy?' Unsurprisingly, fewer people were prepared to forbid speeches against democracy (46%) than were prepared to not allow them (62%) (1941, 92). Thus, the questions asked in the surveys conducted for this paper use neutral rather than emotive wording (to the extent that words can ever be neutral).

Even something as seemingly inconsequential as the order in which questions are asked can have a major impact on the answers obtained. Donald Rugg and Hadley Cantril (1944), for example, conducted an experiment in 1939 which asked one group of respondents if US citizens should be allowed to join the British and French armies and then if they should be allowed to join the German army. A second group of respondents were asked the same questions, but with the order reversed. When joining the German army was asked first, just 22% of respondents agreed that US citizens should be allowed. However, when they had first been asked whether US citizens should be allowed to join the British or French armies, 31% of respondents agreed that US citizens should also be free to join the German army. As Rugg and Cantril (1944, 28) put it, 'after endorsing enlistments in the armies of the Allies, people evidently felt obliged to extend the same privilege to those wishing to join the German army'. Just as the order in which questions are asked can affect the survey's results, so can the order in which response options are listed. Payne (1951) demonstrated in a series of experiments how the last option is chosen a disproportionately high percentage of the time, a phenomenon known as 'recency effect'. In order to eliminate the possibility of recency bias affecting results, the order in which responses were listed in the surveys conducted for this paper were randomised.

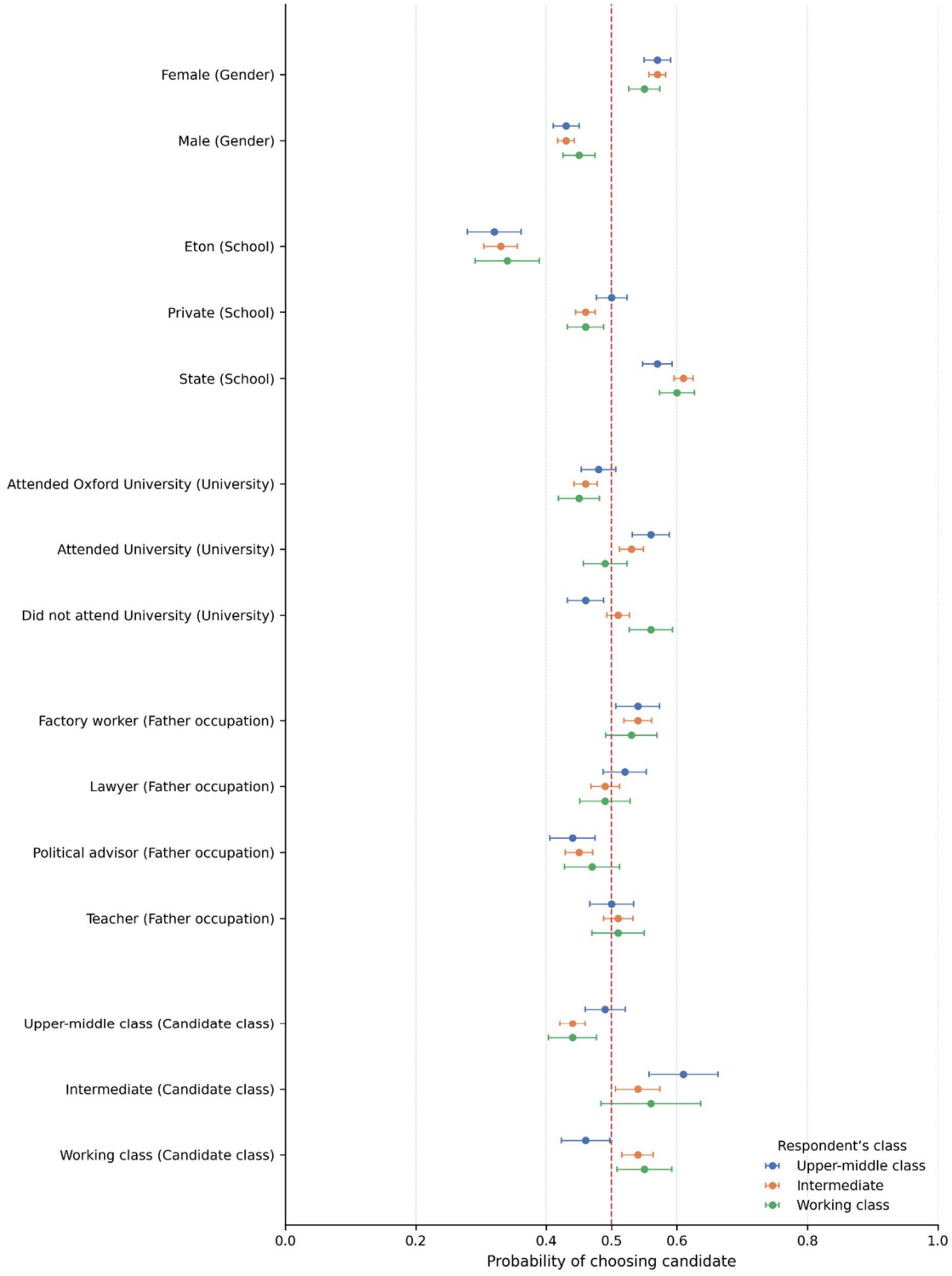
4.5 Results

Hypothesis 6 predicted that working-class Britons would prefer working-class candidates over middle-class candidates and that middle-class Britons would prefer middle-class candidates over working-class candidates, while hypothesis 7 delved deeper into the impact of different levels of representation and predicted that middle-class Britons would be more amenable to working-class candidates when questioned about the House of Commons as a whole rather than when asked about their own MP. Let us begin an exploration of working-class Britons' views, before turning to those of their middle-class compatriots. As shown in Figure 4.1,[144] the candidate choice experiment reveals that working-class Britons view working-class candidates positively (at statistically significant levels) and upper-middle-class candidates negatively (again,

[144] See Appendix F for results using the more detailed 5-class schema.

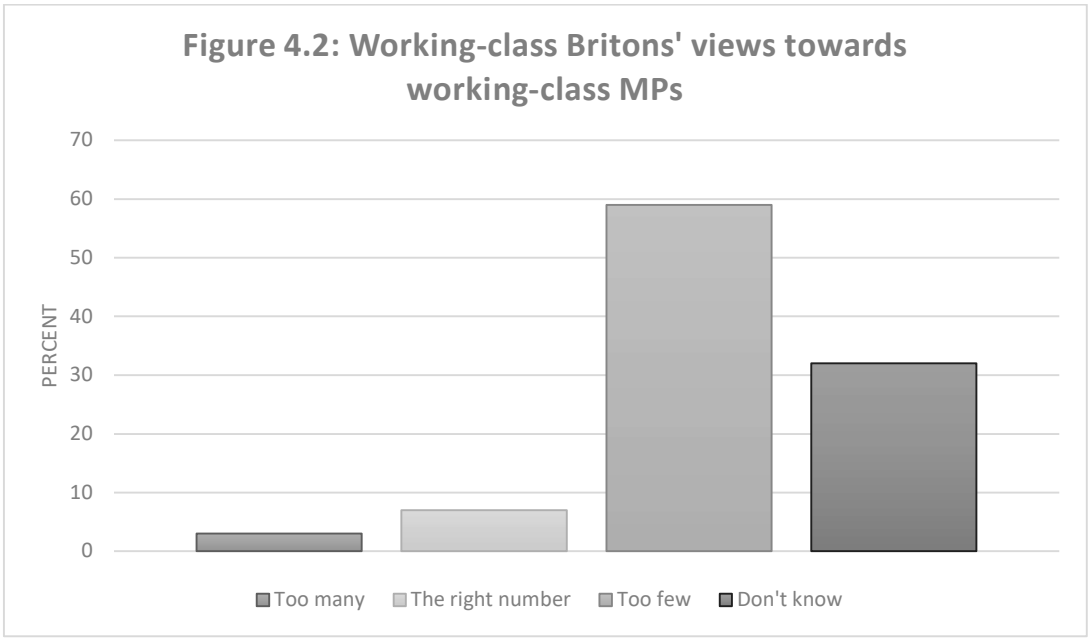
at statistically significant levels). The difference between the two groups is also statistically significant.

Figure 4.1: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? (by respondents' social class) (3-class schema)

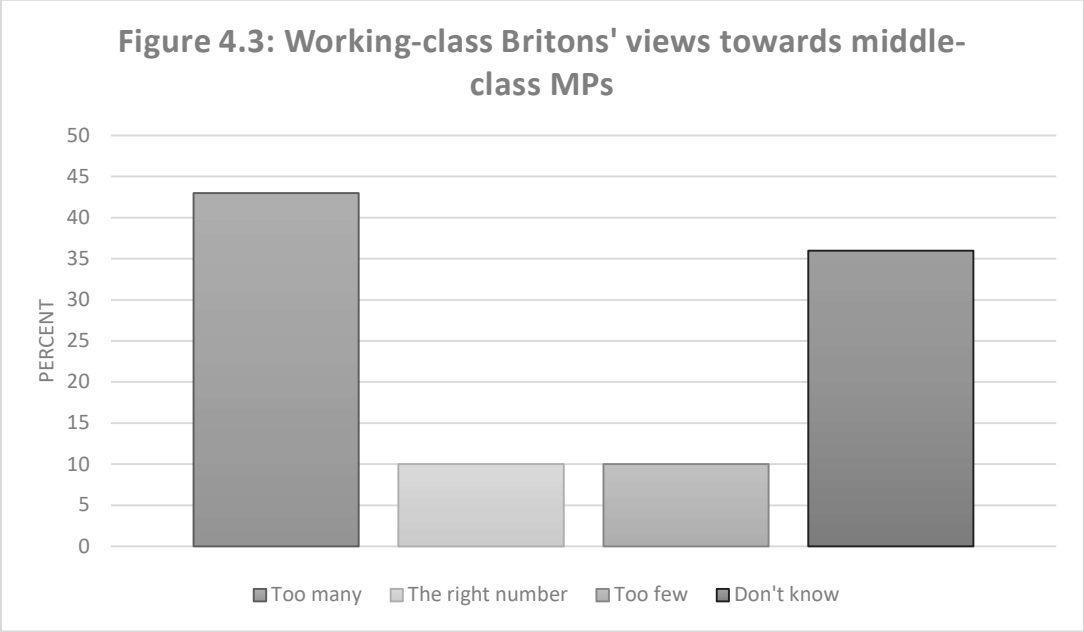


Note: Effect of candidates' attributes on voter preferences (at the national level). Respondents subdivided by social class. Horizontal bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

The surveys conducted for this paper demonstrate that these results are generalisable to the House of Commons as a whole. Just 3% of working-class respondents in the survey conducted in June 2022 stated that there were too many working-class MPs, compared with 59% of working-class respondents who stated that there were too few (see Figure 4.2; see Appendix H for full results). Similarly, 43% of working-class respondents stated that there were too many middle-class MPs, while just 10% of working-class respondents stated that there were too few middle-class MPs (see Figure 4.3; see Appendix H for full results).

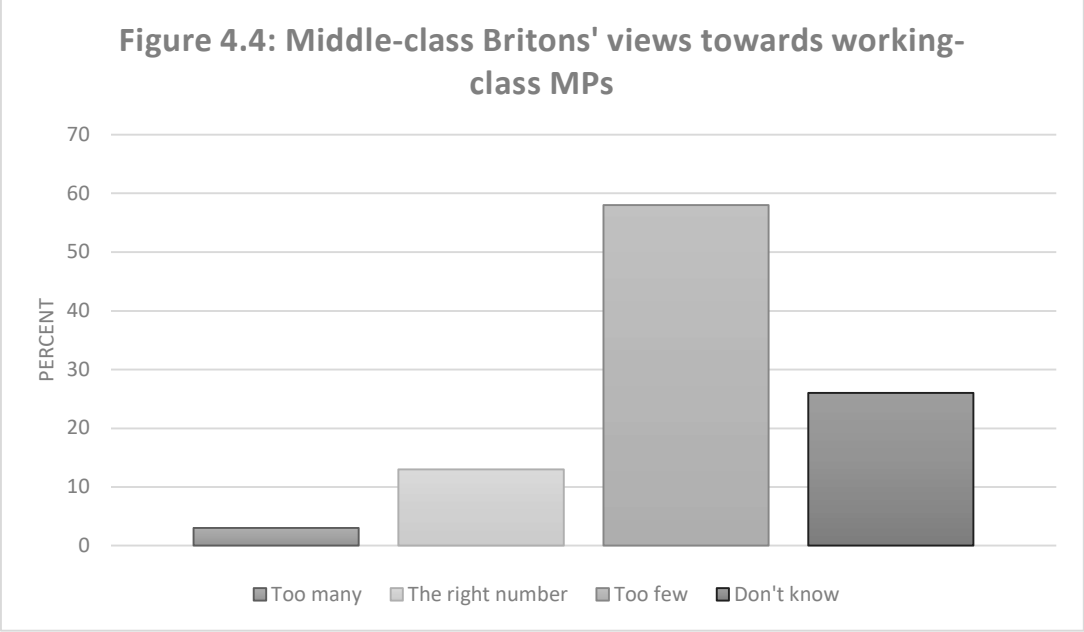


Note: n=722

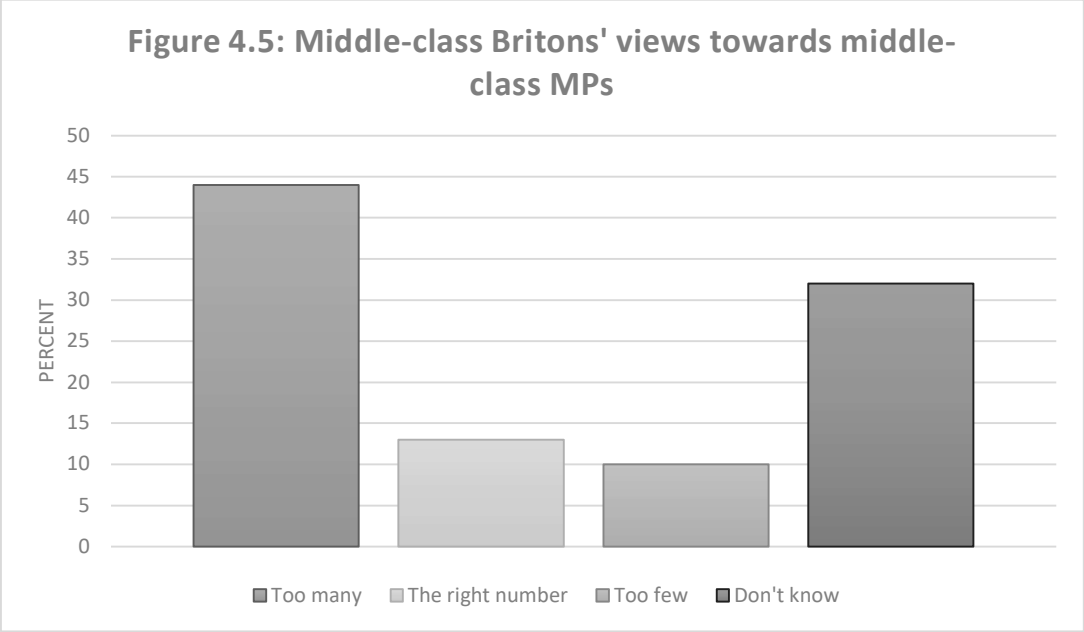


Note: n=722

The surveys reveal that middle-class respondents agree that there are too many middle-class MPs in Parliament and too few working-class MPs. Just 3% of middle-class respondents in the survey conducted in June 2022 stated that there were too many working-class MPs, compared with 58% of middle-class respondents who stated that there were too few (see Figure 4.4; see Appendix H for full results). Similarly, 44% of middle-class respondents stated that there were too many middle-class MPs, while just 10% of middle-class respondents stated that there were too few middle-class MPs (see Figure 4.5; see Appendix H for full results).



Note: n=956



Note: n=956

However, when it comes to their *own* MP, as tested in the candidate choice experiment, middle-class respondents express very different sentiments. Figure 4.1 shows that upper-middle-class Britons are more positive towards upper-middle-class candidates than working-class candidates and that their negative views towards working-class candidates reach statistically significant levels. Thus, middle-class voters do exhibit the class NIMBYism hypothesised above. It is interesting to note that both upper-middle-class respondents and working-class respondents demonstrate very positive views towards candidates who hold intermediate occupations. The main explanation for this is the inclusion of two extremely popular occupations in this category: nurse and teacher. Moreover, as the experiment also tested whether Britons' views towards candidates varied by the sector they worked in – public or private – *two* nurses and *two* teachers were included. It appears that this testing of sectors may have skewed the results of the intermediate category somewhat. There is also a broader point, noted in the previous chapter, concerning how occupations are categorised into classes and the extent to which official classification schemas align with public perceptions. For example, the candidate choice experiment found that electrician was among the most popular of all the occupations tested. While electrician is classified by NS-SEC as belonging to the intermediate class, it seems very plausible that a large number of Britons would regard it as a working-class occupation. The need for further work around this potential incongruence between official class schemas and public understandings of class – and the way in which it may obscure public attitudes – is discussed in the final chapter.

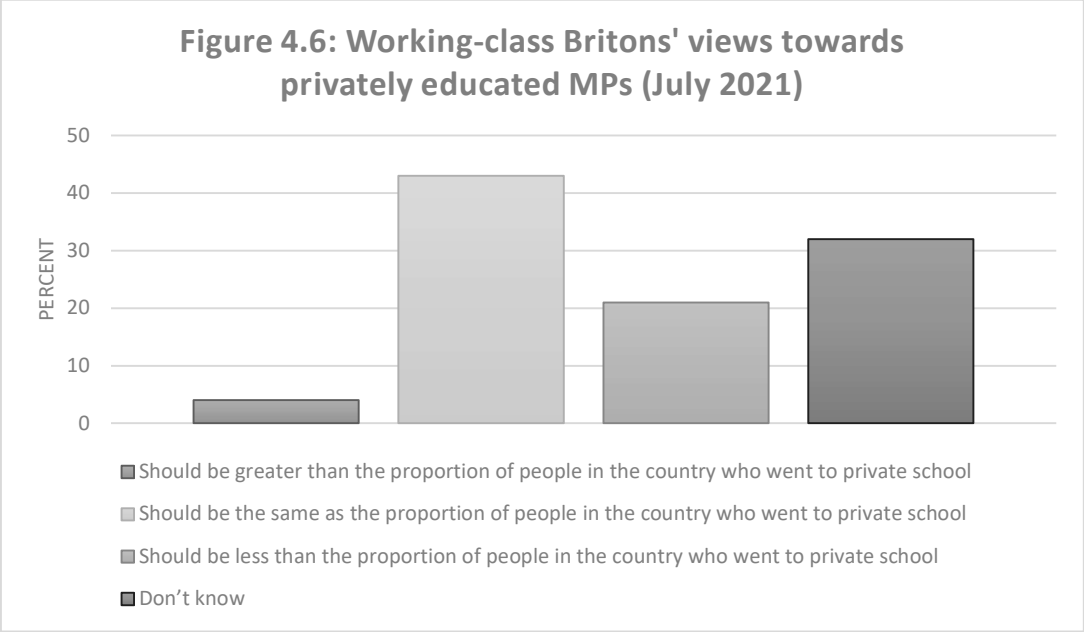
It was also predicted that middle-class Britons' receptivity towards working-class representatives would fall as the contextual framing became less abstract. This was also found to be accurate. Middle-class Britons were far more enthusiastic about working-class politicians when asked about them as an abstract group in the surveys than when presented with fully-fleshed out individuals with working-class occupations in the candidate choice experiment.

Hypothesis 8 predicted that working-class Britons would prefer state-educated candidates over privately educated candidates, that middle-class Britons would prefer privately educated candidates over state-educated candidates, and that both working-class Britons and middle-class Britons would prefer candidates who attended state schools and (unnamed) private schools over candidates who attended Eton.[145] Let us begin with Britons' views towards candidates who attended state schools and (unnamed) private schools, before turning to explore what the addition of a specific, named private school reveals.

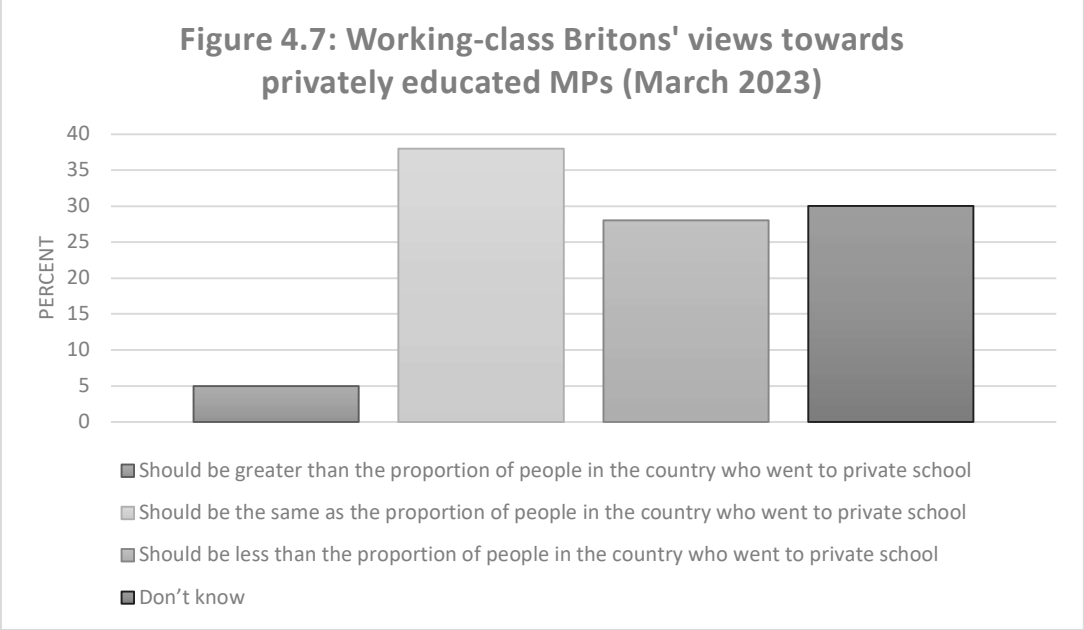
The candidate choice experiment (see Figure 4.1) reveals that working-class Britons view state-educated candidates positively (at statistically significant levels) and privately educated candidates negatively (at statistically significant levels). Interestingly, and counter to the hypothesis, it reveals that this overall preference for state-educated candidates is shared by middle-class Britons, who view state-educated candidates positively (at statistically significant levels) whilst remaining ambivalent towards privately educated candidates. Both working-class Britons and middle-class Britons prefer state-educated candidates over privately educated candidates at statistically significant levels.

However, once again demonstrating the crucial insights enabled by the research design employed, the surveys reveal that both working-class and middle-class Britons, whilst not wanting a privately-educated candidate to represent them personally, believe that the House of Commons should contain (some) privately educated members. The survey conducted in July 2021 asked respondents whether they thought the proportion of MPs who went to private school should be greater than, the same as, or less than the proportion of people in the country who went to private school ('don't know' was also offered as a possible response). A plurality of working-class respondents (43%) stated that the proportion of MPs who were privately educated should match the proportion of the public who were privately educated (see Figure 4.6; see Appendix G for full results). The survey was repeated eighteen months later to ensure the results were accurate and the plurality of working-class respondents (38%) again stated that the proportion of MPs who were privately educated should match the proportion of the country who were privately educated (see Figure 4.7; see Appendix I for full results).

[145] As discussed in the previous chapter, Britons as a group viewed candidates who were educated at state secondary schools positively (at statistically significant levels), candidates who were educated at private secondary schools negatively (at statistically significant levels), and candidates who were educated at Eton very negatively (at statistically significant levels).



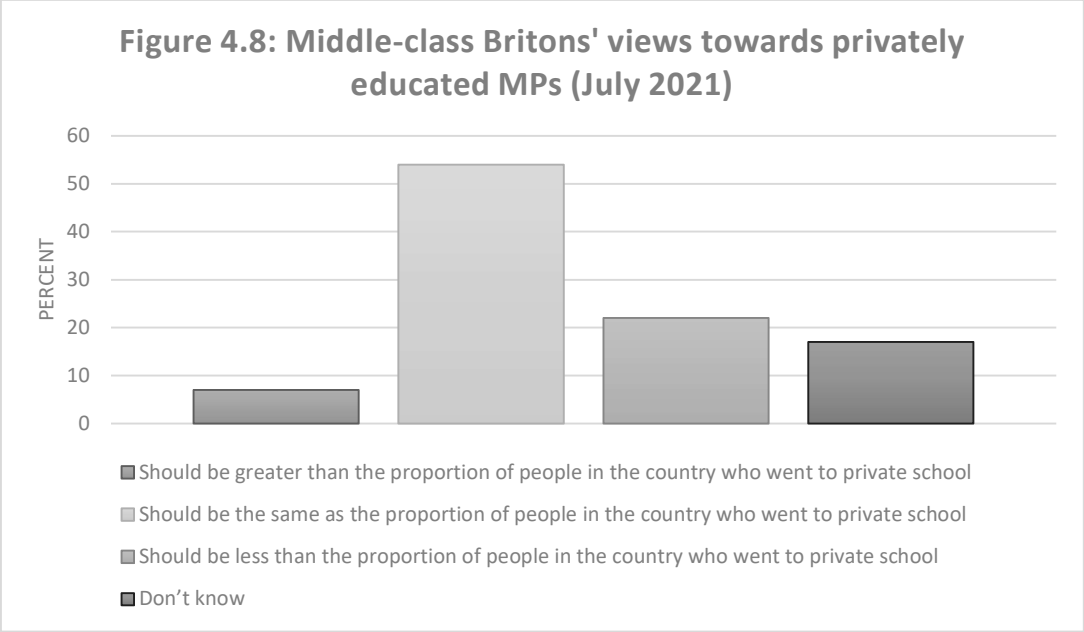
Note: n=728



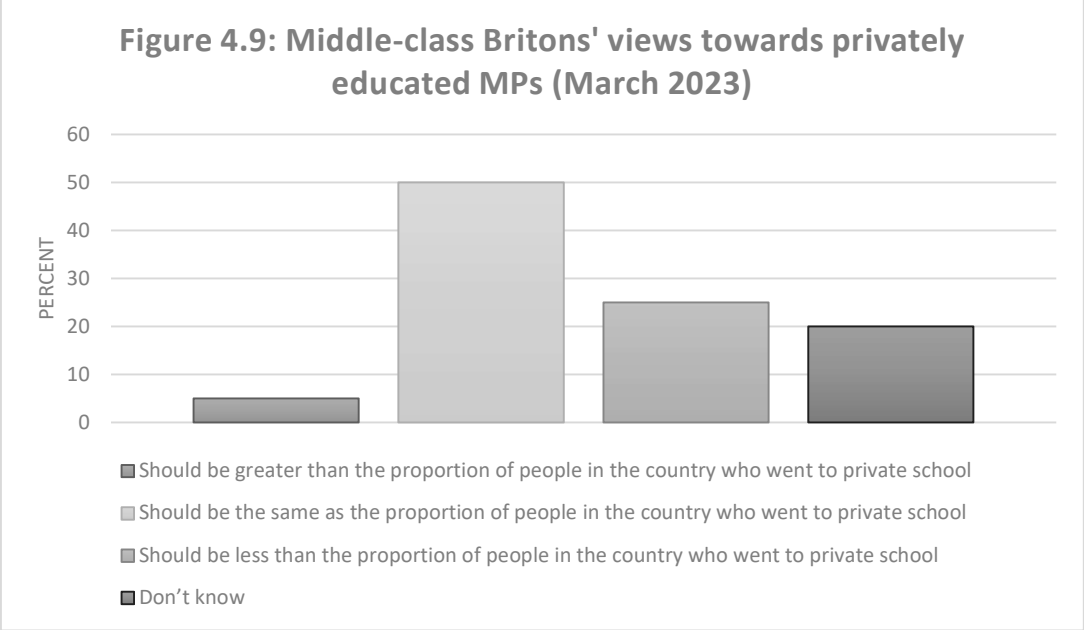
Note: n=952

Similarly, middle-class Britons' positive views towards state-educated candidates and ambivalence towards privately educated candidates does not mean that they wish to have a House of Commons that is devoid of the privately educated. Rather, a majority of middle-class respondents (54%) stated in the July 2021 survey that the proportion of MPs who were privately educated should match the proportion of the public who were privately educated (see Figure 4.8; see Appendix G for full results). When the survey was

repeated in July 2023, the most popular response (50%) among middle-class respondents was again that the proportion of MPs who were privately educated should match the proportion of the public who were privately educated (see Figure 4.9; see Appendix I for full results).



Note: n=965



Note: n=1262

Let us turn to Britons' views towards Eton. As discussed above, the candidate choice experiment revealed that Britons, collectively, viewed candidates who had attended Eton extremely negatively. It can now be revealed that this overall antipathy towards candidates who attended Eton *does not* mask subgroup heterogeneity. On the contrary, working-class Britons' and upper-middle-class Britons' views towards Old Etonian candidates are almost identical. Both classes view candidates who attended Eton negatively (at statistically significant levels) and for both classes the difference between candidates who attended Eton and candidates who attended an unnamed private school was statistically significant (in favour of candidates who attended unnamed private schools). Indeed, for both classes, attending Eton was by a distance the least popular sociodemographic characteristic.

Hypothesis 9 explores the existence and strength of educational affinity bias among Britons. Specifically, it predicted that university-educated Britons would prefer university-educated candidates over non-university-educated candidates; that non-university-educated Britons would prefer non-university-educated candidates over university-educated candidates; and that both Britons who attended university and Britons who did not attend university would prefer candidates who did not attend university and candidates who attended unnamed universities over candidates who attended Oxford University.

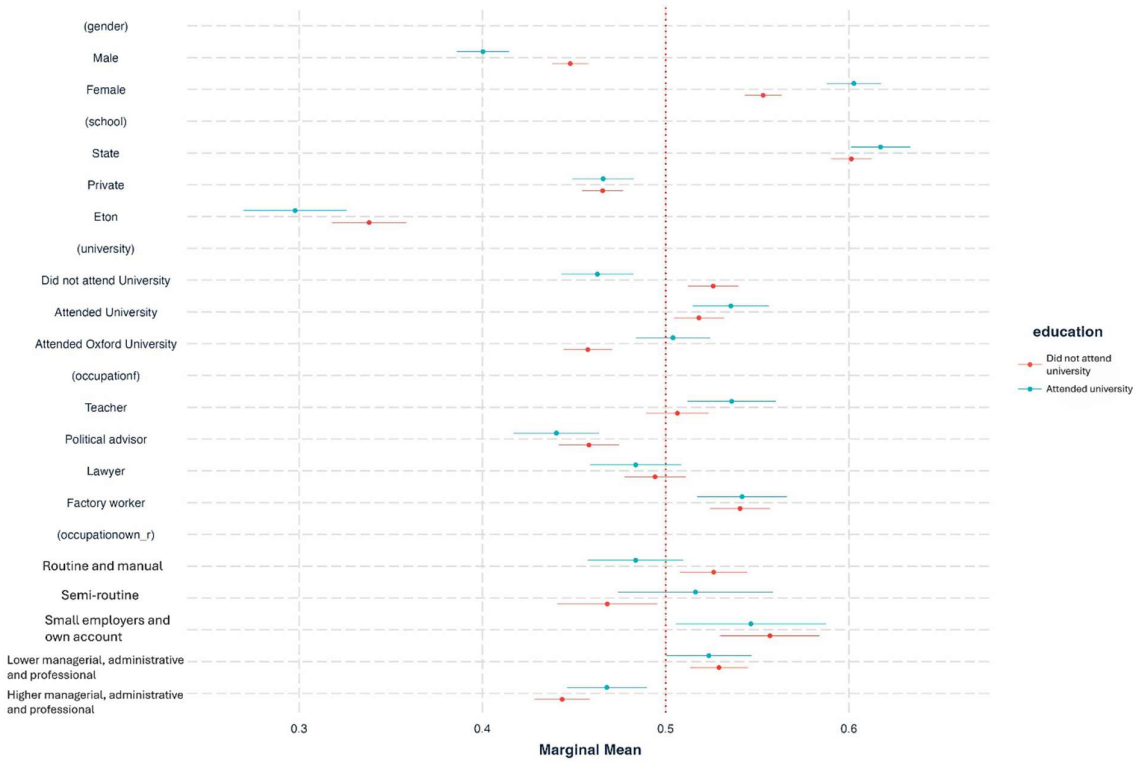
Let us begin with an exploration of the university/non-university divide, before turning to the addition of a specific university. As can be seen in the previous chapter's Figure 3.7, Britons collectively viewed candidates who did not attend university positively (at statistically significant levels) whilst remaining ambivalent towards candidates who did attend university. However, demonstrating the importance of the conjoint approach taken for this thesis and the subgroup analysis it makes possible, these overall findings mask crucial differences among subgroups.

Figure 4.10 reveals that university-educated Britons do indeed prefer university-educated candidates over non-university-educated candidates, demonstrating the existence and strength of educational affinity bias. They view university-educated candidates positively (at statistically significant levels) and non-university-educated candidates negatively (at statistically significant levels). However, non-university-educated Britons do not display the hypothesised mirror views. They view non-university-educated candidates positively (at statistically significant levels), but also view university-educated candidates positively (also at statistically significant levels).

As noted in the research design, the candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis breaks new ground in testing Britons' views towards a specific university – Oxford. This elaboration reveals that the type of university attended by politicians is just as important to British voters as whether or not they attended university. Both university-educated and non-university-educated respondents viewed candidates who attended an unnamed university positively (both at statistically significant levels). However, university-educated respondents are ambivalent towards candidates who

attended Oxford and non-university-educated respondents view them negatively (at statistically significant levels).

Figure 4.10: Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? (by respondents' level of education)



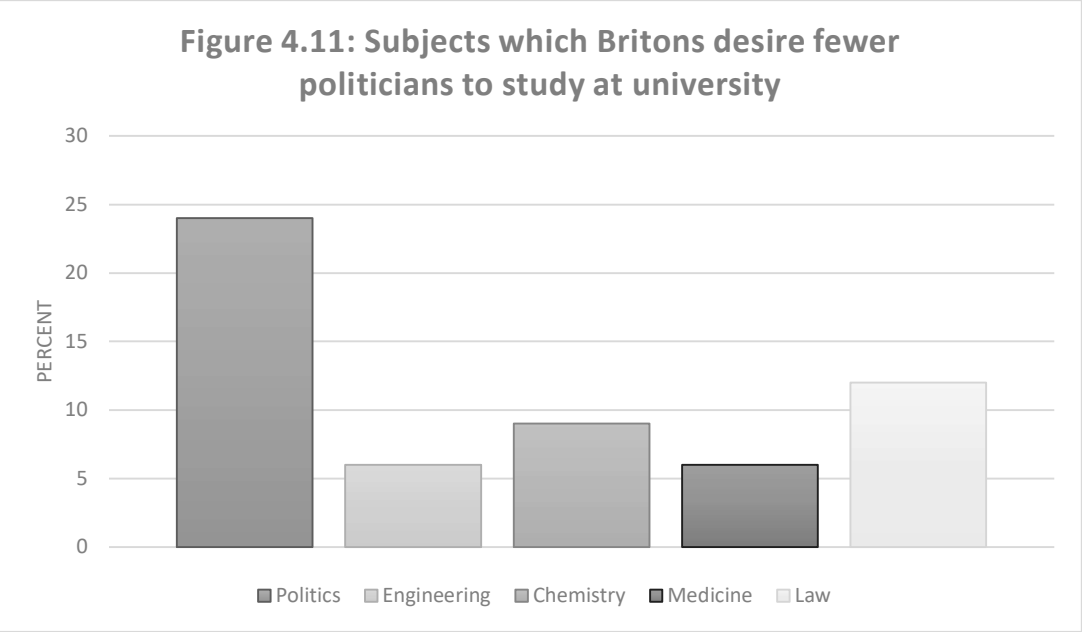
Note: Effect of candidates' attributes on voter preferences (at the national level). Respondents subdivided by level of education. Horizontal bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

As well as breaking new ground by testing Britons' views towards a specific university, this thesis also corrects existing research which was inappropriately designed. As discussed in Chapter 2, Campbell and Cowley (2014c) alter the subject studied by candidates at university in an experiment, but it is not a conjoint design and by altering more than just the subject studied they do not allow a true comparison between subjects to be made. This thesis addresses this lacuna. Hypothesis 10 tests Britons' views towards the specific subject that politicians studied at university. Specifically, it predicted that Britons prefer candidates that studied science, engineering, or maths at university over candidates that studied politics.

The survey conducted in March 2023 presented respondents with a list of five subjects – politics, engineering, chemistry, medicine, and law – and for each one asked respondents whether they felt there should be more or fewer MPs who studied the subject or whether there was about the right number of them ('don't know' was offered as a

possible response). Hypothesis 10 predicted that Britons would prefer candidates who studied subjects other than politics and the results confirm this prediction.

The least popular subject, by far, was politics. 24% of respondents desired fewer politicians who had studied politics at university. By comparison, just 6% of respondents felt that there should be fewer MPs who studied engineering or medicine, 9% felt that there should be fewer MPs who studied chemistry, and 12% felt that there should be fewer MPs who studied law (see Figure 4.11; see Appendix I for full details).



Note: n=2214

This preference for fewer politicians who studied politics at university crossed the social divide. Thus, 27% of middle-class respondents and 20% of working-class respondents expressed a desire for fewer politicians who studied politics at university, compared to 5% of middle-class respondents and 7% of working-class respondents who expressed a desire for fewer politicians who studied engineering at university, 9% of middle-class respondents and 10% of working-class respondents who expressed a desire for fewer politicians who studied chemistry at university, 6% of middle-class respondents and 7% of working-class respondents who expressed a desire for fewer politicians who studied medicine at university, and 13% of middle-class respondents and 11% of working-class respondents who expressed a desire for fewer politicians who studied law at university. It similarly knew no divergence by party allegiance, with 24% of Conservative voters and 25% of Labour voters expressing a desire for fewer politicians who studied politics at university, compared to 6% of Conservative voters and 4% of Labour voters who stated that they wished to see fewer politicians who studied engineering at university, 12% of Conservative voters and 5% of Labour voters who stated that they wished to see fewer politicians who studied chemistry at university, 7% of Conservative voters and 5% of Labour voters who stated that they wished to see fewer politicians who studied

medicine at university, and 12% of Conservative voters and 13% of Labour voters who stated that they wished to see fewer politicians who studied law at university.[146]

4.6 Conclusion

This thesis employed a unique design, combining a constituency-focused candidate choice experiment which explores respondents' views towards their own representative with surveys which explore their views towards politicians as a group. As a result, it has unearthed original findings with important consequences.

It has revealed that middle-class Britons hold different views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians depending upon the level and proximity of government. Specifically, they display what is termed 'class NIMBYism', professing a desire for more working-class representatives and fewer middle-class representatives when asked about Parliament as a whole, but exhibiting a marked class affinity bias when asked about their own MP.

The research design was unique in a second way, testing whether Britons views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians vary by conceptual level, and this innovation likewise gave rise to original results with potentially far-reaching consequences. The surveys explored respondents' views towards working-class politicians as an abstract group while the candidate choice experiment presented them with fully-fleshed-out individuals. This two-pronged approach revealed that middle-class Britons are much more amenable towards the abstract idea of working-class representatives than the reality of fully-fleshed-out working-class candidates.

As noted above, no existing candidate choice experiment had adequately examined Britons' views towards the secondary education of politicians, despite the prominence of the state/private divide in the national discourse. One candidate choice experiment (Kevins 2021) varied candidates' educational background between state and private but it did not consider its independent effect; instead its impact was merged with that of a second variable. Further, no existing candidate choice experiment had included a specific school, meaning there was no empirical data as to whether or not Britons care about politicians attending the most elite institutions in the country as opposed to a 'bog standard private school'. The work conducted for this thesis rectified and expanded existing work by (re)testing the views towards the state/private divide and including a specific, elite private school.

[146] There was, however, a sizeable gap by gender, with more than twice as many men (34%) as women (16%) wishing to see fewer politicians who studied politics at university. The genders were far less polarised with regard to the other subjects tested, with 6% of both male and female respondents wishing to see fewer politicians who studied engineering at university, 11% of male respondents and 8% of female respondents wishing to see fewer politicians who studied chemistry at university, 8% of both male and female respondents wishing to see fewer politicians who studied medicine at university, and 13% of male respondents and 17% of female respondents wishing to see fewer politicians who studied law at university.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the testing of these variables produced critically important results, revealing that Britons collectively much prefer candidates educated at state schools over candidates educated at unnamed private schools (at statistically significant levels) and much prefer candidates educated at unnamed private schools over candidates educated at Eton (again at statistically significant levels). The addition of subgroup analysis unearths a further crucially important finding, namely that all three British classes – working class, intermediate, and upper-middle class are united in this structure of preferences, that is to say, there is no heterogeneity of views across classes. Further, these preferences, shared by all three classes, are not reflected in Parliament, where the state-educated are under-represented, the privately educated are over-represented, and the Eton-educated are vastly over-represented. Reasons as to how this can be the case are considered in the final chapter.

Two existing candidate choice experiments had tested whether Britons display educational affinity bias with regard to the higher education of politicians. However, they reached conflicting results, with Carnes and Lupu (2016a) finding no evidence of educational affinity bias among either graduates or non-graduates, while Magni and Reynolds's (2021; 2022) find that it exists among graduates but not non-graduates. The candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis broadly aligns with the results of Magni and Reynolds. It finds that graduates display statistically significant levels of educational affinity bias, much preferring candidates who attended university over candidates who did not, while non-graduates view both candidates who attended university and candidates who did not positively (both at statistically significant levels). There is thus an underlying desire for university-educated politicians among Britons which transcends affinity bias.

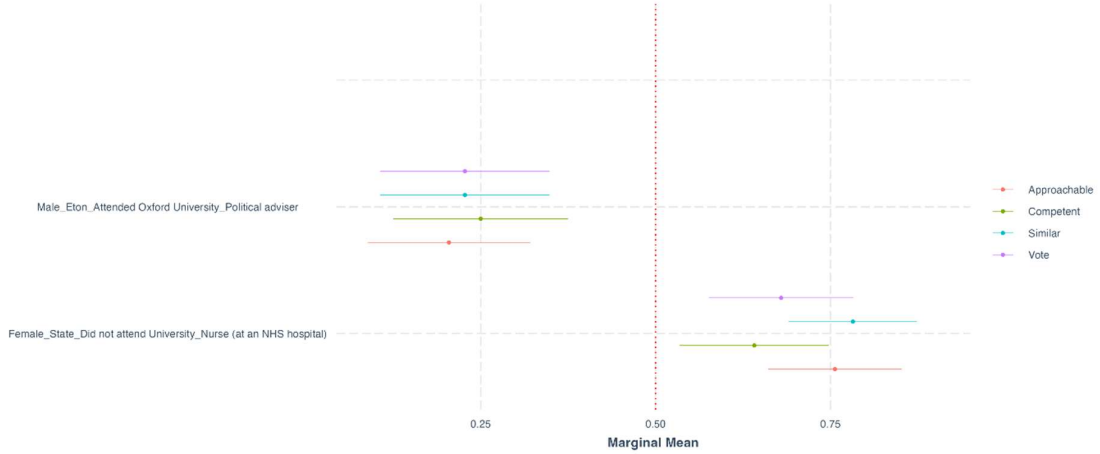
However, this thesis goes far beyond existing research by also testing Britons' views towards a specific university. The preceding chapter highlighted the value of this approach, revealing that while Britons were ambivalent towards candidates who attended unnamed universities, they were negative (at statistically significant levels) towards candidates who attended Oxford. The subgroup analysis conducted in this chapter further enriches these findings. It reveals that both graduates and non-graduates prefer candidates who did not attend university and candidates who attended unnamed universities over candidates who attended Oxford (all results at statistically significant levels). Thus, graduates do not appear to share a sense of educational affinity with Oxonians. Further, as with Old Etonians, a group that is vastly over-represented on the benches of the House of Commons is viewed very negatively by voters. This causes and consequences of this mismatch are considered in detail in the final chapter. The testing of other universities, in particular universities which are also considered elite but do not carry the taint of privilege associated with Oxford, is discussed in the final chapter.

Continuing the granular investigation of public attitudes towards higher education, this chapter also tested whether Britons care about the subject that politicians studied at university. This was only tested in the surveys, for fear of overwhelming those participating in the candidate choice experiment with an excessive number of variables

and collecting low-quality data as a result. The surveys reveal that Britons do indeed care, an important finding given the ever-greater numbers of politicians – in both Britain and the wider West – who attend university. Further, it is revealed that the most unpopular subject is the one that the greatest number of contemporary MPs studied: politics. Demonstrating the value of the multi-dimensional approach employed in this thesis, the following chapter reveals that politicians appear aware of the views of the public and seek to craft an image of themselves which matches the public's preferences. It details how a much higher percentage of MPs who studied STEM subjects at university reference the subject they studied than MPs who studied politics (the difference is statistically significant).

As well as testing the impact of individual variables, it is instructive to consider the impact of bundles of attributes. Thus, analysis was undertaken which quantifies how Britons feel towards what might be dubbed extreme or stereotypical candidates, that is to say, a male, Eton-educated, Oxford University-educated, political adviser and a female, state-educated, NHS nurse who did not attend university.

Figure 4.12: Extreme/stereotypical candidates (bundles of attributes)



Note: Effect of extreme/stereotypical bundles of candidate attributes across dependent variables (perceived approachability; perceived competence; perceived similarity of views; vote preference). Horizontal bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

It should be noted that these candidates, though they are extremes, are far from fanciful: the first matches David Cameron's profile and the second Angela Rayner's. As Figure 4.12 shows, the candidate choice experiment reveals that Britons have very different views towards these two candidates; they are 45% more likely to vote for the profile which matches Angela Rayner.

Lastly, this chapter has revealed the importance of the occupations which are included as proxies for social classes in candidate choice experiments. The author spent much of Chapter 2 criticising scholars for the occupations they chose to include as proxies in

their candidate choice experiments. By including four extremely popular intermediate occupations (two nurses and two teachers), the candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis appears to have skewed respondents' views towards this intermediate class, artificially inflating support for it.

5. British MPs' sociodemographic profiles and self-presentation online

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports the results of the collection of data on MPs' sociodemographic characteristics and a content analysis of these same MPs' websites. The collection of data on MPs' sociodemographic characteristics allows a comparison to be made between the preferences of Britons towards their representatives (as ascertained in the conjoint candidate choice experiment and surveys) and the reality. The results are troubling. British MPs are largely *not* the sort of people that Britons want to represent them. This raises questions around how such a divergence can occur in a democracy and whether Britain can in fact properly be labelled a (fully functioning) democracy, if the wishes of the people are so clearly not being met. The content analysis of MPs' websites finds that British MPs, perhaps cognisant of this mismatch between the preferences of Britons towards their representatives and the reality, engage in what is termed the strategic release of information. That is to say, British MPs emphasise aspects of their lives that are popular with Britons and downplay elements that are not. Further, it is noted how MPs, when they *do* reference possessing unpopular characteristics, frame the information in such a way as to present it in the best possible light.

5.1 Introduction

The conjoint candidate choice experiment and the surveys discussed above have helped delineate what kind of person Britons want to represent them, with regard to both the House of Commons as a whole (via the surveys) and their own constituency (via the conjoint candidate choice experiment). This chapter builds on these results, by exploring the relationship between these preferences and the reality of contemporary British political representation. Specifically, it addresses the following three questions:

- what are the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs;
- what do British MP publicise about their sociodemographic characteristics; and
- do British MPs – consciously or otherwise – emphasise aspects of their lives that are popular with Britons and downplay elements that are not?

It answers the first via a comprehensive collection of data. It answers the second and third via content analysis of MPs' websites.

As noted in Chapter 1, there has been much debate in recent years, among politicians and the commentariat, around an alleged increase in mis- and dis-information and a concomitant growth in the study of these phenomena by academics. Far less academic attention, however, has been devoted to a related, but distinct, practice: not

misinforming nor disinforming, but rather *not informing at all* – what has been referred to as being 'economical with the truth'.[147] These 'sins of omission' represent one of the primary objects of investigation in this chapter; it tests whether British politicians are more likely to reference sociodemographic characteristics which are popular among the British public and less likely to reference sociodemographic characteristics which are unpopular among the British public. The second object of study is a logical correlate of the first; it tests whether, when British politicians *do* reference sociodemographic characteristics which are unpopular among the British public, they couch the information and present it – and themselves – in the best light possible.

Although there have been a great many studies of British politicians' and parties' websites (Auty and Nicholas 1998; Bowers-Brown and Gunter 2002; Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward 2007; Gibson and Ward 1998; Gibson and Ward 2000; Jackson 2007; Lee 2014; Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Margolis, Resnick, and Wolfe 1999; Southern and Lee 2019; Stanyer 2005; Ward 2005; Ward and Gibson n.d.; Ward and Gibson 1998),[148] most tend to focus on the functionality of the sites, and none have conducted a systematic content analysis of the biographical information provided.

The focus on MPs' websites is appropriate given the increasingly prominent role the internet plays in British politics. As the internet has increasingly penetrated British society, so its impact on British politics has increased. After false dawns in 1997 (Butler and Kavanagh 1997; Coleman 2001; Ward and Gibson 1998), 2001 (Coleman n.d.; Coleman 2001; Downey 2001; Ward and Gibson 2003), 2005 (Bartle 2005; Downey and Davidson 2007; Ward 2005), and 2010 (Kavanagh and Cowley 2010; Southern and Ward 2011; Worcester et al. 2011; Wring and Ward 2010), it was widely agreed that the internet played an important role in the British General Election of 2015 (Cowley and Kavanagh 2016; Lilleker and Jackson 2017; Williamson 2015).[149]

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[147] The phrase 'economical with the truth' entered the lexicon following then Cabinet Secretary Robert Armstrong's ill-fated appearance at the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 1986 during the '*Spycatcher* trial'. Questioned by then barrister, later prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, Armstrong (quoted in Knowles 2007, 14) explained that his letter to the publishers requesting a copy of the book, when he was already in possession of the manuscript, 'contains a misleading impression, not a lie. It was being economical with the truth.' Alan Clarke (quoted in Knowles 2007, 70) would later elucidate the discrepancy between his testimony in court during the Matrix Churchill trial and official documents by explaining that in the latter he had been 'economical…with the *actualité* [emphasis in original]', while John Scott, Earl of Dalkeith (1968), had earlier asked the Prime Minister Harold Wilson whether he had been 'over-economical with the truth' in his famed ('pound in your pocket') devaluation broadcast. Demonstrating the long reach of Oxford University and the multiplicity of ties that are made there, Turnbull (2020) attended Brasenose College, Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and there befriended a young Theresa Brasier. It was Turnbull's encouragement which led a hesitant Philip May to propose to her. Brasier and May had first been introduced to each other by Benazir Bhutto, the future prime minister of Pakistan, at an Oxford University Conservative Association disco (Wheeler and Stamp 2019).

[148] Studies have also been conducted on British politicians' blogs (Coleman and Moss 2008; Coleman and Wright 2008; Francoli and Ward 2008; Jackson 2008; Wright 2008) and e-newsletters (Jackson 2006).

[149] As these various authors explain, in 1997 'it cannot be said that the Internet exerted a significant impact on the campaign' (Butler and Kavanagh 1997, 213), in 2001 'the online campaign…inspired heady expectations and resulted in prevalent disappointment' (Coleman 2001, 679), in 2005 '[t]he internet…promised to do so much for the conduct of electoral politics but it failed to deliver' (Bartle 2005, 710), and in 2010 'it was the traditional platform of broadcasting that dominated the campaign…The idea that it was going to be the Internet election was always flawed' (Wring and Ward 2010, 815, 816).

This study will also cast further light on a major debate in political science, namely, whether the internet has had an equalising or normalising impact on politics. The emergence of the internet led many to argue that it would level the political playing field, enabling minor parties to compete with larger parties. Known as the equalisation thesis, it posits that the internet possessed the 'capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy's monopoly on powerful communications media' (Rheingold 1993, 14). Early empirical research by Ward and Gibson (1998) in the UK, D'Alessio (2000) in the US, and Margolis, Resnick, and Wolfe (1999) in the UK and US supported the equalisation thesis.

However, this initial burst of enthusiasm was replaced by growing evidence that 'the prime beneficiaries' of the internet 'most likely will be those parties, candidates, and interests that are already politically active and influential' (Margolis and Resnick 2000, 72). This view, dubbed the normalisation thesis, was supported in subsequent studies in the UK (Ward and Gibson 2003), US (Gibson et al. 2003), Russia and Ukraine (Semetko and Krasnoboka 2003), Japan (Tkach-Kawasaki 2003), Ireland (Sudulich and Wall 2009), France (Vaccari 2008), Germany (Gibson and Römmele 2005; Gibson, Römmele, and Ward 2003; Schweitzer 2008), and Italy (Newell 2001).

However, the emergence of social media has caused the pendulum to swing back somewhat, with many academics arguing that while the larger parties continue to dominate (the now-traditional) medium of websites, smaller parties are proving more adept at utilising the newer social media platforms (Gueorguieva 2008; Kalnes 2009; Southern 2015; Southern and Lee 2019; Strandberg 2009). Though as Southern and Lee (2019) note, a similar pattern may develop with social media as it did for websites, where the larger parties are slower out of the gate but eventually catch and overtake their smaller competitors.

5.2 Theory

As demonstrated by the surveys and experiment undertaken for this thesis, politicians' sociodemographic characteristics are of great import to Britons. It was found, for example, that respondents of all classes strongly support the idea of more working-class and state-educated MPs.[150] As noted above, there are various theories which attempt to explain why people might prefer candidates who come from these less privileged backgrounds, from feelings of empathy to perceptions of exceptional competence, given that they have made it on to the ballot without any advantages of birth. Given the potential electoral benefits, one would imagine that politicians would seek to craft a

Conversely, by 2015 it was recognised that '[d]igital is now a critical part of any campaign' (Williamson 2015, 29). The long running 'Nuffield studies' series of books declared the 2015 General Election 'the first election in which digital campaigning really mattered' (Cowley and Kavanagh 2016, 366) and by the time of the Brexit Referendum a year later, Vote Leave would spend 98% of its budget on digital rather than traditional adverts (Bakir and McStay 2017, 90).

[150] Though, as detailed above, middle-class Britons are more reticent about working-class MPs when it comes to their own representative.

particular image of themselves, one that aligns with the preferences of voters. There have been various cases of politicians (allegedly) exaggerating the difficulties and levels of destitution faced during their childhood years, from the many American presidents who 'delighted in poor-mouthing themselves' (Pessen 1984, 75) to Harold Wilson's much-questioned claim to have attended school barefoot (Pimlott 1992). Wilson (1986, 15) maintained he was 'set up by the newspapers' and long harboured a grudge against them, describing in his autobiography how '[t]he Conservative press had a field-day…Labour ministers must expect this literary style. As Confucius, or perhaps some other philosopher, said: "What do you expect from a pig but a grunt?"' Perhaps somewhat uncharitably, Jeremy Paxman (2002, 22) suggested that 'if Harold Wilson had ever had to walk to school without any boots on his feet, it was simply because he was too big for them.' Perhaps the most diplomatic characterisation of politicians' tendency to 'misremember' their past, comes from Bernstein (2007, 552), of Watergate fame, who references Hillary Clinton's tendency 'to apprehend truths about herself and the events of her life that others do not exactly share.'

People's efforts to influence how others perceive them have been termed 'impression management'. Developed by Goffman (1956, 1959) and expounded first in his *The presentation of self in everyday life* in 1956 and more fully three years later in a larger work of the same name, impression management explores 'the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.' Jones and Pittman (1982) would later develop a five-fold taxonomy of the various strategies people utilise in impression management (or self-presentation, as they term it)[151]: ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication. The number of purported strategies has proliferated in the decades since to the point that 'the labels given to IM [impression management] tactics tend to outnumber the range and diversity of actual or distinct behaviors described' (Bolino et al. 2008, 1100). The first person, to the best of the author's knowledge, to apply Goffman's concept of impression management to the political realm was Hall (1972), in his theoretical work in the early 1970s. Empirical studies, of political actors as diverse as bureaucrats in China (Ding 2022), Pentagon spokespersons (Audia, Rousseau, and Stimmler 2023), and US city commissioners (Futrell 1999) have since followed.

Whilst it seems (highly) doubtful that any politician or political party has ever been utterly unconcerned with presentation, such efforts rose to unprecedented levels in Britain under New Labour. Under the watchful gaze of Peter Mandelson and Alastair Campbell, New Labour 'professionalised and politicised media handling' (Woodward 2007) and 'raised the business of political communication to a new plane' (Scammell 2001, 509).[152] However, Labour's 'fixation with image' (Rawnsley 2000, 20) may have

[151] While most scholars use the two terms interchangeably, see Schlenker (1980) and Schneider (1981) for attempts to delineate between the two.

[152] As Scammell (2001, 509) catalogues, Tony Blair was the first British Prime Minister 'to meet weekly with his party's private pollster, the first to write regularly in the mass circulation tabloid newspapers. He is the first to model his Number 10 press machinery, in structure and personnel, on his party's election

done great harm, not only to the party, as Garnett and Lynch (2016) suggest, but to mainstream political parties more broadly. As Mandelson (2002) himself admitted, 'crude, clumsy handling of the media by overly controlling and politicised press officers causes more problems than no handling at all, because it undermines trust.' Indeed, it is possible that fatigue on the part of voters with impression management and the lack of trust it engenders has helped fuel the aforementioned rise of populism in the West. An alleged authenticity has certainly been a central pillar of populists' platforms (see, for example, Curato 2021; Moffitt 2016). Fieschi (2019) goes so far as to argue that 'the value of authenticity and the claims to it are the secret ingredient that hold populism together as an ideological project.'

It has been suggested that political communications have assumed an increased importance in British politics (Bartle 2001). Early theories of the political implications of the (then novel) mass media emphasised its ability to 'manufacture' opinion. As Lippmann put it in *Public Opinion* (1922, 248), 'the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place…persuasion has become a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government. None of us begins to understand the consequences, but it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political premise.'

The first empirical studies of the impact of the mass media, however, suggested that it reinforced, rather than created, opinions. The works in question – *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 1948) and *Voting* (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954), known as the 'Columbia studies', after the eponymous university where the authors were based – instead posited a 'minimal effects' paradigm. Further, they argued that what influence the mass media does have is the result of human interlocutors: 'ideas often flow *from* radio and print *to* the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less active sections of the population [emphases in original]' (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, 151). They christened their hugely influential theory the 'two-step flow of communications'. Early explorations of the impact of television on British politics lent support to the reinforcement-rather-than-change theory (Blumler and McQuail 1968; Trenaman and McQuail 1961).

However, just as it was argued that the initial studies had overestimated the influence of the mass media, it was in turn argued that the revisionist studies underestimated it. 'Post-revisionist' theories contend that the media does in fact have a substantial impact. Agenda-setting theory, for example, developed most fully by Maxwell McCombs (Guo and McCombs 2016; McCombs 1997; McCombs 1981; McCombs 2004; McCombs 2014; McCombs, Danielian, and Wanta 1995; McCombs and Shaw 1972; McCombs and Shaw 1993; McCombs and Valenzuela 2021), posited that, as Cohen put it in 1963 (13), the press 'may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is

campaign team. He is the first to have, in addition to his press office, a strategic communications unit at Number 10. His press secretary, Alastair Campbell, is the first to regularly attend full Cabinet meetings, the first to make public the content of his briefings of political Lobby correspondents, the first to allow cameras into those once-secret meetings…Blair's Labour represents a landmark in communication terms'.

stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about* [emphasis in original].' Lippmann (1922, 364) memorably described this function of the media as akin to 'the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision.' The related priming theory, developed by Shanto Iyengar, contends that '*[b]y priming certain aspects of national life while ignoring others, television news sets the terms by which political judgments are rendered and political choices made* [emphasis in original]' (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 4), while framing theory highlights the impact the way in which the media and politicians present – or frame – issues can have on public opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001; Iyengar 1990; Iyengar 1996; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997). Cultivation theory, founded by Gerbner (1967; 1969a; 1969b; 1970), posits that the media has cumulative effects over the long-term, while Noelle-Neumann (1973, 78) argued that it can have sizeable effects when there is 'a large extent of similarity in the presentation of certain material in all the media'. Thus, as Iyengar (1997, 215–216) notes, 'research into the effects of mass communication has come full circle. Initial concern about the vulnerability of voters to propaganda campaigns gave way to findings of "minimal consequences". Effects research was rejuvenated by more limited priming paradigms. As these paradigms have matured, discussions of "massive consequences" have been revived'.

5.3 Hypotheses

Building on the work of Goffman and others discussed above, it is hypothesised that British politicians will engage in impression management on their websites. Specifically, it is anticipated that they will selectively disclose information about themselves, highlighting those details which studies and opinion polls – including the conjoint candidate choice experiment and surveys conducted for this thesis – have shown to be popular and omitting those which studies and opinion polls have shown to be unpopular.

If politicians do act as predicted, highlighting aspects of their lives which are popular and failing to disclose aspects which are not, they will, ironically, be revealing a great deal. Namely, that they are aware of public attitudes towards certain sociodemographic characteristics and are consciously crafting an image of themselves which aligns with these preferences. In doing so, they would demonstrate that individual politicians act in the rational, vote-maximising ways that Downs (1957), predicted for parties. Building upon work by Black (1948), Hotelling (1929), and Smithies (1941), Downs contended that if political parties were to act rationally and follow a strategy which maximised the number of votes they attracted, they would cluster their policy offerings around the median voter (the 'median voter theorem'). If hypothesis 11 is correct, it would show that just as parties tailor their policies for the median voter so politicians tailor the image of themselves they present to match the average voter's preferences.

11. British MPs will reveal information about themselves that studies and opinion polls have shown to be popular and omit information about themselves that studies and opinion polls have shown to be unpopular.

If politicians are rational, vote-seeking actors and parts of their sociodemographic profile are unpopular with voters, one strategy – discussed above – is simply to omit these aspects of their lives when presenting themselves. An alternative strategy is to acknowledge these unpopular elements, but to also explain why voters' preconceptions are misguided. For example, if a politician has only ever worked in politics, and is aware that career politicians are extremely unpopular, rather than not mention their background, they may mention it but then discuss how their background actually *benefits* constituents. They may, for example, argue that having spent so much time in politics means that they have the knowledge and experience to be a far more effective representative than someone new to the political world. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

12. When politicians *do* reveal information about themselves that studies and opinion polls have shown to be unpopular, they will engage in framing. That is to say, they will seek to present unpopular information in the best possible light.

5.4 Research design

This thesis employs content analysis to compile what politicians state – and don't state – about themselves on their websites. Defined by Berelson in his seminal *Content analysis in communication research* (1952, 18) as 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication',[153] content analysis has become one of the fastest-growing research methods in the social sciences (Neuendorf 2002).[154] Its growth has been primarily attributed to technological advances, such as new software (for example, NVivo), and the increasing availability of digitised texts (Krippendorff 2019); as Benoit (2020, 461) puts it with regard to the latter advance, 'the fields of political science and international relations face a genuine embarrassment of riches. Never before has so much text been so readily available on such a wide variety of topics'.

Content analysis is particularly well-suited to the task of analysing the biographical sections of MPs' websites. As Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002, 587) note, content analysis 'is specifically appropriate and necessary for (arguably) the central work of communication scholars, in particular those who study mass communication: the analysis of messages.' The suitability of content analysis for analysing political communications is reflected in the fact that it is the most popular research method employed by scholars in the field (Graber 2005).

The biographical sections of MPs' websites were hand-coded. The number of webpages involved – just under 600, of (greatly) varying lengths – is at the upper limit of what can realistically and feasibly be hand-coded by a single person. As the content analysis was

[153] See also Holsti's (1969, 14) equally popular definition 'Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages [emphasis in original].' For a discussion of the various ways content analysis has been defined, see Benoit 2011.
[154] Krippendorff (2019, 23) describes the use of content analysis as 'growing exponentially'. See Riffe and Freitag (1997) for the growth of content analysis in scholarly work.

conducted solely by the author, the study is not affected by one of the banes of content analysis: intercoder (un)reliability.[155] The study utilises both manifest and latent analysis. As Lune and Berg (2017, 186) explain, 'manifest analysis describes the visible content (text), while latent analysis seeks to discern its meaning (subtext).' For example, the study will both chart whether MPs mention the type of school they attended (manifest analysis) and explore how they couch this attendance (latent analysis).

The content analysis employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches, depending upon the research question it attempts to answer. Although quantitative content analysis 'remains the dominant method in political communication', the use of more qualitative approaches in analysing political messages has been growing (Neuendorf and Kumar 2016, 224). Examples of content analyses of political communication which utilise a qualitative approach include Engesser et al.'s (2017) study of populist messaging in Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and the UK, Enli and Skogerbø's (2013) exploration of Norwegian politicians' use of social media, and Liebhart and Bernhardt's (2017) examination of the visual communications (on Instagram) of Alexander Van der Bellen during his (successful) campaign for the Austrian presidency in 2016.[156]

The content analysis was conducted between 20 July and 25 August 2023. The content analysis was recorded in Excel. The Excel spreadsheet containing the content analysis has been submitted alongside this thesis.

Alongside this content analysis, the thesis reports the results of the collection of data on the sociodemographic characteristics of MPs elected at the 2019 General Election. This data was collected so that a comparison could be made between MPs' statements about their backgrounds and the reality. It does so by comparing what British MPs publicise about themselves, with regard to a number of sociodemographic characteristics, with the objective reality.

It is a well-known feature of elite studies that it is easier to collect information on the dead as opposed to the living (Bukodi, Goldthorpe, and Steinberg 2022). Given that the vast majority of those elected in 2019 are still alive,[157] collecting the required data was an onerous task. A variety of sources have been used, the main ones being *Who's Who*, the latest edition of *Butler's British Political Facts* (Mortimore and Blick 2018), the 2020 edition of *Dods Parliamentary Companion* (Dods 2020), newspaper interviews and profiles, and correspondence with schools and universities.

[155] A number of methods are commonly used to calculate intercoder reliability, among them Scott's (1955) pi, Cohen's (1960) kappa, Fleiss's (1971) kappa, and Krippendorff's (1970a; 1970b) alpha. As the webpages were all coded (solely) by the author, none of these were required for this thesis.
[156] See also the related but distinct critical discourse analysis, which also adopts a qualitative approach (Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard (eds.) 1996; (eds.) 2023; Fairclough 1992; 1995; 2012; Gee 1999; 2005; 2011; van Dijk 1993). See Fairclough 2000 for a critical discourse analysis by one of the leading practitioners of the language used by New Labour.
[157] With the tragic exceptions of David Amess, James Brokenshire, Jack Dromey, and Cheryl Gillan.

The data collection on MPs' sociodemographic characteristics was conducted concurrently with the content analysis. The data collection was recorded in Excel. The Excel spreadsheets containing the data have been submitted alongside the thesis.

5.5 Results

There is a potential population of 650, as 650 MPs were elected at the 2019 General Election. However, a number of the MPs elected in 2019 were no longer in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted. These 17 (former) MPs, who are listed in Appendix J, have been excluded from the content analysis. The Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, was nominally elected as a Labour candidate, but the Speaker does not vote in divisions and is not traditionally counted as a member of his or her party. Further, Hoyle does not maintain a party or personal website; rather, he (n.d.) has a page dedicated to him on the Parliament website. For these reasons, the Speaker has been excluded from the content analysis.

Of the resulting 632 MPs, 6 did not have a functioning website when the content analysis was conducted (listed in Appendix K) and 33 had websites but no biographical section (listed in Appendix L), leaving a population of 593 MPs.[158] Thus, 94% (593 of 632 MPs) of the MPs who were sitting in the House of Commons at the time the content analysis was conducted had a website with a biographical section. By comparison, just 4% of Conservative and Labour MPs had working websites in 1998 (Gibson and Ward 1999) and just 16% of MPs in the run-up to the 2001 General Election (Walker 2001).

The number of MPs with websites with biographical sections is broken down by party in Table 5.1.[159] There is a striking difference between the two main parties. Just 2% of the 347 Conservatives who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted did not have a functioning website with a biographical section, compared to 10% of Labour's 188 MPs (see Figure 5.1); the difference is statistically significant at the 0.001 level (chi-square test).[160] The figures for Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrat MPs who did not have functioning websites with biographical sections, at 12% and 9% respectively, are much closer to Labour than to the Conservatives.

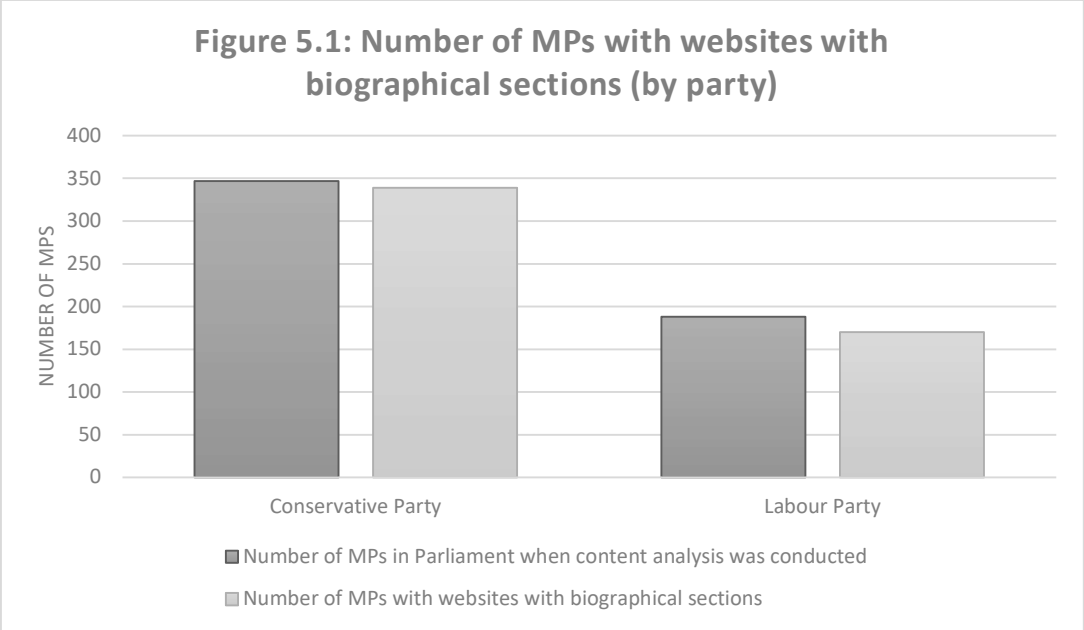
Table 5.1: Number of MPs with functioning websites with biographical sections (by party)

Party	Number of MPs following 2019 General Election	Number of MPs when content	Number of MPs when content analysis was

[158] With regard to the 39 MPs who were in Parliament but were not included from the content analysis – either because they did not have a functioning website at the time the content analysis was conducted or had a functioning website but did not have a biographical section within it – 10 are Conservatives, 19 Labour, 5 Scottish National Party, 1 Liberal Democrats, 1 Sinn Féin, 1 Plaid Cymru, and 2 Independents.
[159] A number of MPs changed parties or had the whip removed between holding of the General Election in December 2019 and the conducting of the content analysis (see Appendix T for a list of these MPs).
[160] $x^2 = 12.41$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

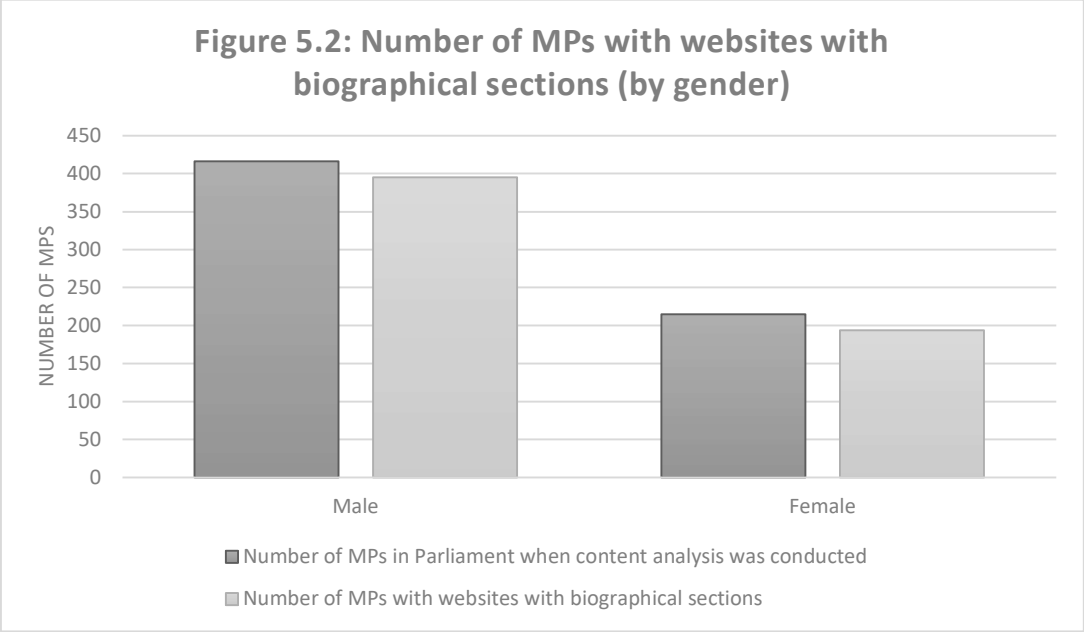
		analysis was conducted[2]	conducted with functioning websites with biographical sections[2]
Conservative	365	347	339
Labour	202	188	170
Scottish National Party	48	43	38
Liberal Democrat	11	11	10
Democratic Unionist Party	8	8	8
Sinn Féin	7	7	6
Plaid Cymru	4	3	2
Social Democratic and Labour Party	2	2	2
Greens	1	1	1
Alliance	1	1	1
Alba	0	2	2
Independent	0	18	13
Reclaim	0	1	1
Total[1]	649	632	593

1 Speaker excluded from all calculations.
2 Excludes by-elections.

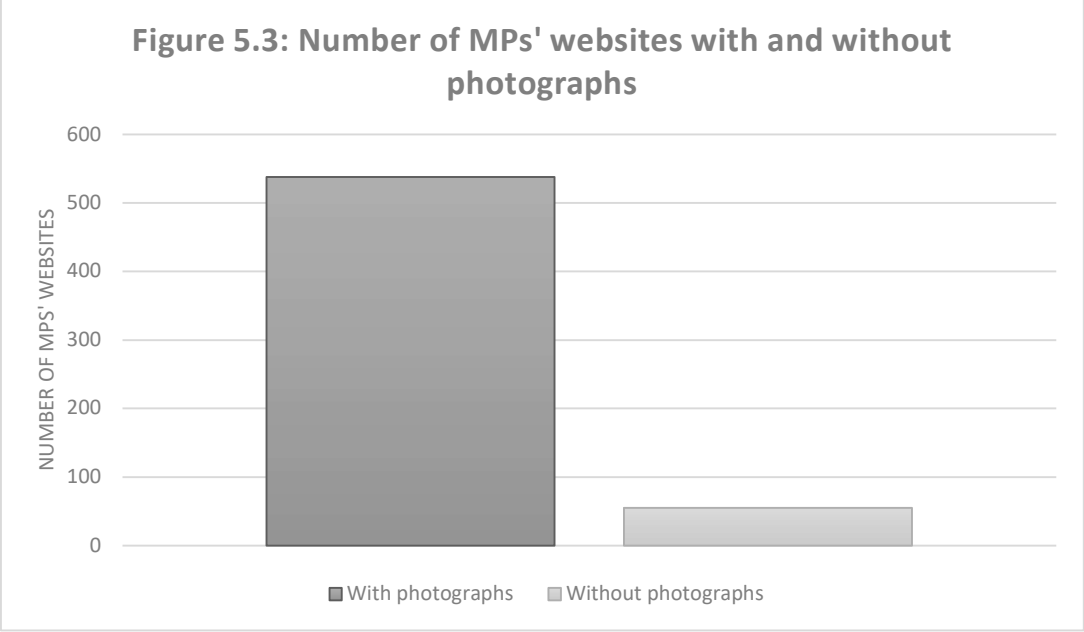


There is also a difference – albeit smaller – when it comes to gender. Of the 416 men in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted, just 5% (21) did not have a

functioning website with a biographical section, compared to 8% (17) of the 215 women (see Figure 5.2).[161]

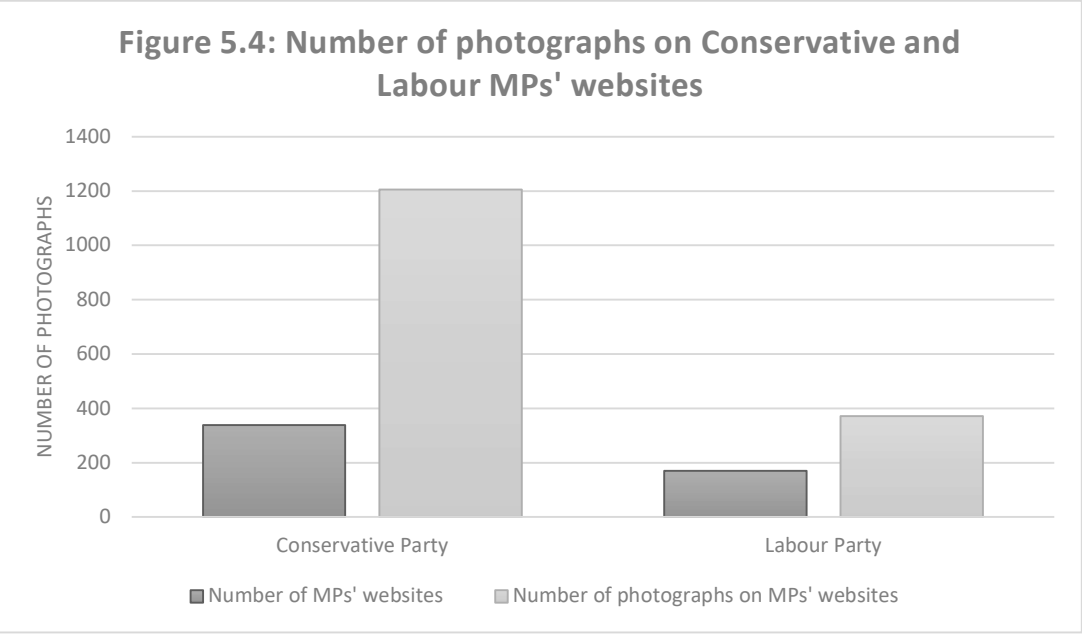


The vast majority of websites include photographs. Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section, just 55 fail to include a photograph of some description (see Figure 5.3).



[161] The difference, however, is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test) ($x^2 = 1.573$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.).

The 339 Conservative MPs' websites contain a total of 1,205 photographs (3.5 photographs per website), the 170 Labour MPs' websites contain a total of 372 photographs (2 photographs per website), the 38 Scottish National Party MPs' websites contain a total of 79 photographs (2 photographs per website), the 10 Liberal Democrat MPs' websites contain a total of 25 photographs (2.5 photographs per website), the 8 Democratic Unionist Party MPs' websites contain a total of 7 photographs (1 photograph per website), the 6 Sinn Féin MPs' websites contain a total of 6 photographs (1 photograph per website), the 2 Plaid Cymru MPs' websites contain a total of 2 photographs (1 photograph per website), the 2 Social Democratic and Labour Party MPs' websites contain a total of 2 photographs (1 photograph per website), the 1 Green MP's website contains a total of 1 photograph (1 photograph per website), the 1 Alliance MP's website contains a total of zero photographs (zero photographs per website), the 2 Alba MPs' websites contain a total of 2 photographs (1 photograph per website), the 13 Independent MPs' websites contain a total of 82 photographs (6 photographs per website), and the 1 Reclaim MP's website contains a total of 1 photograph (1 photograph per website). See Figure 5.4 for a graphical representation of the disparity between the number of photographs on Conservative MPs' websites and Labour MPs' websites; the difference is statistically significant at the 0.0001 level (two-sample t-test assuming equal variance).[162]



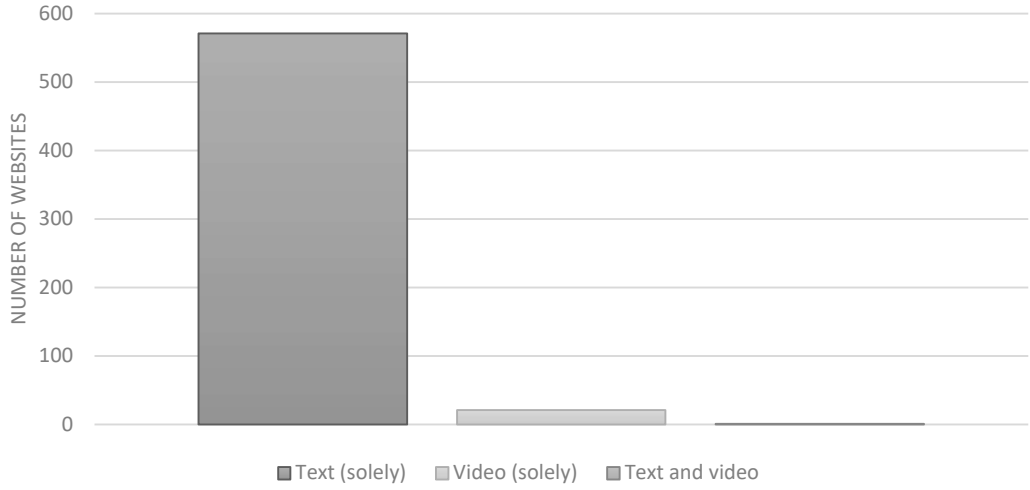
The above statistics strongly suggest that the Conservative Party is making a concerted effort to have its MPs include multiple photographs on their websites, with the average Conservative MP having 75% more photographs on their website than the average Labour MP. Further, the gulf between the number of photographs on Conservative MPs' websites and the number of photographs on the MPs of other parties is in fact understated by the above. Matt Hancock, for example, sat as an Independent at the time

[162] $t = 4.85$, $df = 507$, $\alpha = 0.05$.

of the content analysis. However, his website (Hancock n.d.(b)), was identical to the one he had before the whip was withdrawn (Hancock n.d.(a)), with the exception of references to being a Conservative MP being erased.[163] Further, a single Labour website, that of Jim McMahon (n.d.), MP for Oldham West and Royton, accounts for almost 15% of the total number of photographs on Labour websites. Removing this Labour outlier and returning Hancock to the Conservatives results in Conservative MPs' websites containing an average of closer to 4 photographs and Labour MPs' websites an average of 1.5 photographs.[164]

Of the 593 biographies, 571 provide information solely via text, 1 solely via video,[165] and 21 via a combination of text and video (see Figure 5.5). Content analysis of videos raises the risk of transcription errors. However, given that there are only twenty-two websites which contain videos, this risk is low, as extra care can be – and was – taken to ensure that the words which were spoken are the ones that were transcribed. There are a total of 27 videos. Christian Wakeford's (n.d.) biography, the sole biography to be comprised only of video, contains 6 videos, while the 21 biographies which are a combination of text and video each has a single video.

Figure 5.5: Means of providing information on MPs' websites



[163] It was withdrawn for following in Nadine Dorries's footsteps and appearing on *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!* Like Dorries, Hancock (2022, 2023) assured the public that he was appearing on the show in order to boost Britons' engagement with politics ('I think it's a great opportunity to talk directly to people who aren't always interested in politics, even if they care very much about how our country's run…It's as clear as day that politicians like me must go to where the people are – particularly those who are politically disengaged') and to raise awareness of dyslexia – and not for the £320,000 fee he received.
[164] 340 Conservative MPs with a total of 1,259 photographs and 169 Labour MPs with a total of 317 photographs.
[165] Christian Wakeford (n.d.), Labour (elected as a Conservative, crossed the floor in January 2022) MP for Bury South.

The vast majority of the biographical sections of MPs' websites are solely in English. 7 websites out of 593 are in both English and at least one additional language.[166] However, 3 of these websites include just a few words in a second language – in all three cases the second language is Welsh. Jessica Morden (n.d.), Labour MP for Newport East, includes a single word ('Amdanaf'),[167] Alex Davies-Jones (n.d.), Labour MP for Pontypridd, four words ('Amdanaf i' and 'Shwmae Pawb'),[168] and Geraint Davies (n.d.), Labour MP for Swansea West, ten words ('o Abertawe ac yn gweithio dros Abertawe' and 'Diolch yn fawr').[169] Three websites, those of Anna McMorrin (n.d.), Labour MP for Cardiff North, Virginia Crosbie (n.d.), Conservative MP for Ynys Môn, and Ruth Jones (n.d.), Labour MP for Newport West, contain full biographies in both English and a second language – again, the language is always Welsh (see Appendix V for a screenshot of the dual-language biographical section of Virginia Crosbie's website).[170] One website, that of Afzal Khan (n.d.), Labour MP for Manchester Gorton, utilises five languages. His full biography appears in English, Arabic, and Polish while parts of it appear in Urdu and Bengali (see Appendix W for the various iterations of Khan's website). Somewhat surprisingly, none of the three Plaid Cymru MPs has any Welsh in their biographical section, though one of their MPs, Liz Saville Roberts (n.d.), does mention that she 'learnt Welsh whilst at university in Aberystwyth' and later worked as 'a further education lecturer with Coleg Meirion Dwyfor where she led on Welsh language education.'[171]

Examples of the biographical sections from MPs' websites are provided in Appendix U. A screenshot is included for every party that had an MP at the time the content analysis was conducted. Multiple websites for the Conservative and Labour Parties are included to give a sense of the variety of their MPs' offerings. A number of the smaller parties, by contrast, for example Sinn Féin, Plaid Cymru, and Social Democratic and Labour Party, have a template for their MPs' biographies, all of which are hosted on a single website. A number of screenshots of the biographical sections of Independent MPs' websites are also included.

Turning to content, Campbell and Cowley (2018, 757) identified a vast gulf in the amount of information provided in MPs' biographical sections. They note how '[s]ome MPs provide only very cursory information, others are much more detailed.' This remains true today. Some MPs, like Kirsty Blackman (n.d.), Scottish Nationalist Party MP for Aberdeen North, adopt a laconic approach and provide very limited information (Blackman's biography runs to just 57 words), while others, like Ian Murray (n.d.),

[166] A number of MPs' websites refences constituencies that are not in English. Liz Saville Roberts (n.d.), for example, says she is 'the first woman to represent Dwyfor Meirionnydd' and Angus MacNeil (n.d.), that he was 'was elected MP for Na h-Eileanan an Iar in 2005'. These have not been coded as using languages other than English.
[167] 'About'.
[168] 'About me' and 'Hello everyone'.
[169] 'From Swansea and works for Swansea' and 'Thank you very much'.
[170] One of these MPs – Virginia Crosbie (n.d.) – references the Welsh language, stressing the importance of 'keeping our communities together and the Welsh language alive.'
[171] See Cunliffe 2008 for a study on the provision of Welsh-language information on party websites during the 2007 Welsh Assembly Election.

Labour MP for Edinburgh South, channel their inner Tolstoy and provide a much fuller picture (Murray's biography runs to just shy of four and a half thousand words).

It was hypothesised above that British MPs will selectively reveal information about themselves on their websites. Specifically, it was hypothesised that they will highlight information about themselves which studies and opinion polls have shown to be popular and fail to reference information about themselves which studies and opinion polls have shown to be unpopular (hypothesis 11). It was further hypothesised that when British MPs do reference information that studies and opinion polls have shown to be unpopular, they will engage in framing activities, in an effort present the information in the best possible light (hypothesis 12).

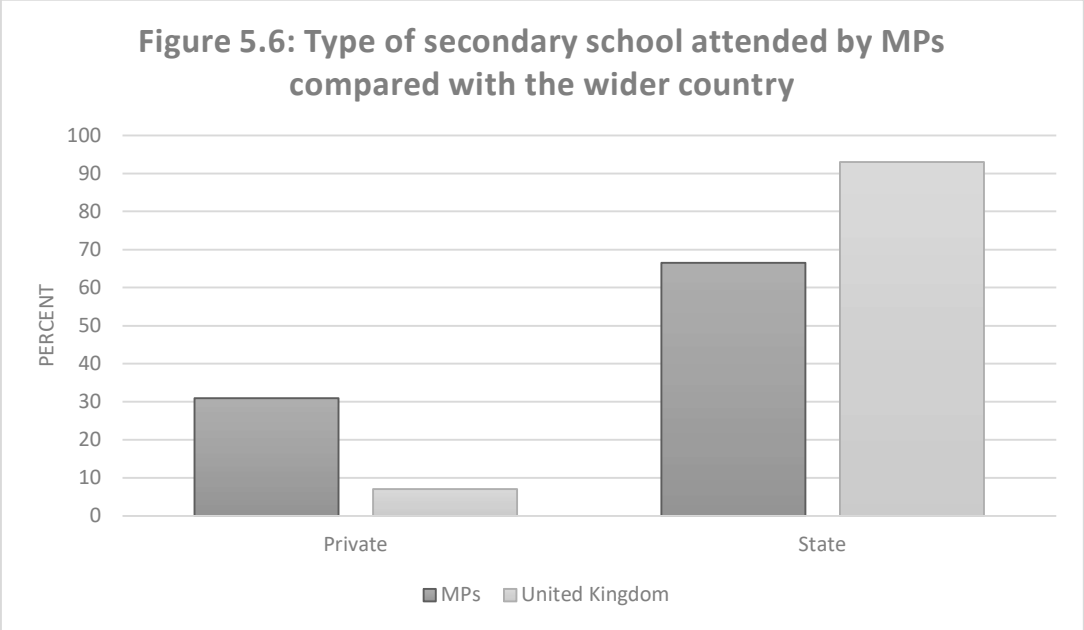
This chapter systematically tests these hypotheses by analysing what British MPs state – and don't state – about themselves on their websites in connection with a number of sociodemographic characteristics. It also explores how they frame the information they provide. It utilises a quantitative and qualitative approach, respectively, to answer these questions.

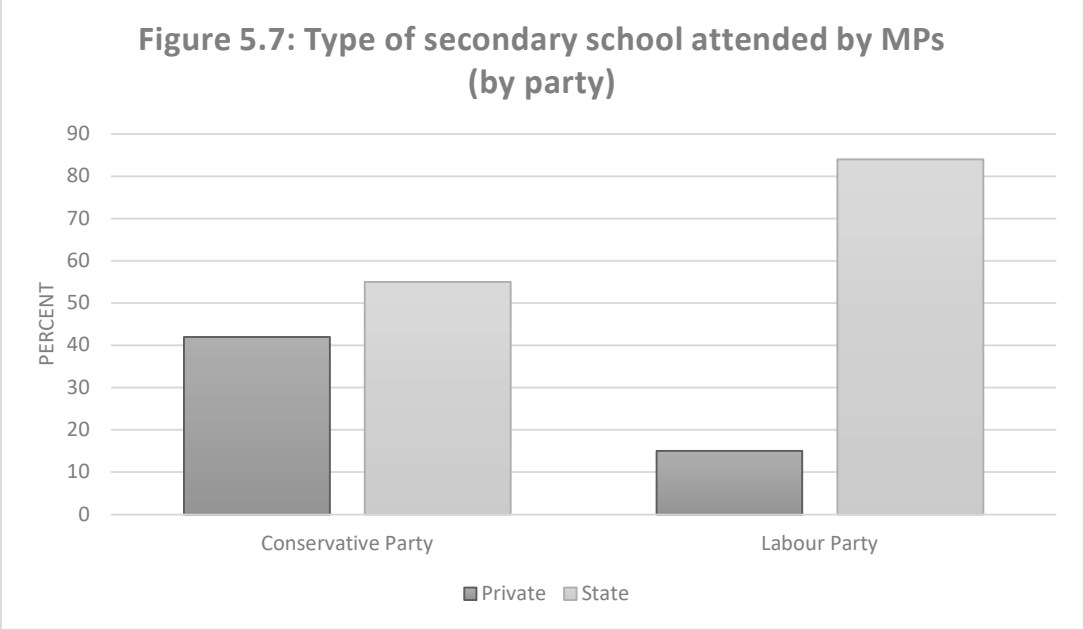
The sociodemographic characteristics which are included have all been tested – whether by the author or other scholars – and found to be important to Britons, some in a positive way, i.e. Britons value the characteristic in politicians, others more negatively i.e. Britons do not value the characteristic in politicians.

The chapter tests a wide variety of sociodemographic characteristics: secondary education, higher education, prior occupation, class, links to the NHS and healthcare more generally, local ties, propensity to rebel, marital status, parental status, and outside interests. It also tests combinations of these sociodemographic characteristics, such as marital and parental status.

5.5.1 Secondary education

Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section, information was obtained on the secondary education of 517. Of these 517 MPs, 31% (160) attended only private schools, 67% (344) attended only state schools, and 3% (13) attended a combination of both. Of the 160 MPs who attended only private schools, 81% (130) were Conservatives, and 14% (22) Labour. Of the 344 MPs who attended only state schools, 50% (171) were Conservatives and 36% (123) Labour (see Figure 5.6). Of the 517 MPs for whom information was obtained on their secondary education, 312 were Conservatives and 146 Labour. Of these 312 Conservative MPs, 42% (130) attended only private schools and 55% (171) attended only state schools. Of these 146 Labour MPs, 15% (22) attended only private schools and 84% (123) attended only state schools (see Figure 5.7).

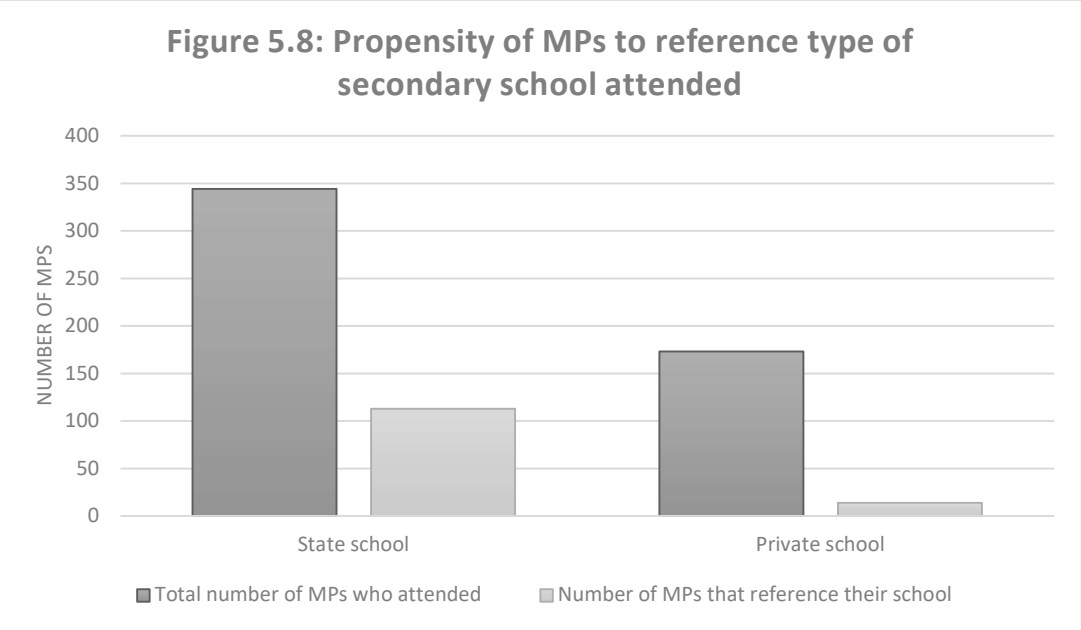




The conjoint experiment conducted for this thesis revealed that Britons prefer state-educated over privately educated politicians (at statistically significant levels). In line with the theory proposed above, that MPs will downplay unpopular characteristics and emphasise popular characteristics, 33% (113) of the 344 MPs who only attended state schools state or imply on their websites that they attended a state school,[172] while just

[172] Either by explicitly stating the type of school they attended or by giving the name of the school. Examples of the former include Edward Argar (n.d.), Conservative MP for Charnwood ('Edward attended his local state grammar school') and Sarah Champion (n.d.), Labour MP for Rotherham ('I went to a comprehensive school'). Examples of the latter include Graham Brady (n.d.), Conservative MP for Altrincham and Sale West ('[h]e was educated at Altrincham Grammar School') and Hilary Benn (n.d.), Labour MP for Leeds Central ('[h]e attended Holland Park Comprehensive School').

8% (14) of the 173 MPs who attended private school explicitly state that they attended a private school (see Figure 5.6).[173] The difference is statistically significant at the 0.0001 level (chi-square test).[174]



Further, all 14 provide context as to why they attended a private school – what this thesis terms the framing of unpopular information. Eight explain that they attended private school as a result of scholarships, assisted places, and bursaries. James Wild (n.d.), for example, the Conservative MP for North West Norfolk, explains that he 'was lucky enough to win an assisted place at Norwich School', John Redwood (n.d.), the Conservative MP for Wokingham, how he 'won a free place at Kent College, Canterbury', Jeremy Wright (n.d.), the Conservative MP for Kenilworth and Southam, how he 'won a scholarship to Taunton School', and Mark Menzies (n.d.), the Conservative MP for Fylde, how he 'benefit[ed] from the assisted places scheme with a place at a nearby independent secondary'. Two explicitly state that they attended a private school but add that they also attended a state school. Theresa May (n.d.), for example, the Conservative MP for Maidenhead and former prime minister, describes how she 'had a varied education spanning both the state and private sectors'. Three explain that they both attended a state school as well as attending a private school *and* add that they attended

[173] In his speech to the 2012 Labour Party Conference, which, reflecting the increased personalisation of politics in Britain he introduced as 'my story. I want to tell you who I am', Ed Miliband (2012) highlighted his education in the state sector. He described how he 'went to my local comprehensive…I learned at my school about a lot more than how to pass exams. I learned how to get on with people from all backgrounds, whoever they were. I wouldn't be standing on this stage today without my comprehensive school education.' Andrea Leadsom (quoted in Sylvester 2016), when running to succeed David Cameron as leader of the Conservative Party and prime minister, would state 'I hugely admire David Cameron…but I do think that there is something good about people being able to identify with their politicians. There could be an advantage in having people who have gone through the state system. People feel more comfortable with somebody who knew what it was like in their playground or in a class that's too big.'
[174] $x^2 = 27$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

the private school as a result of a scholarship, assisted place, etc. Suella Braverman (n.d.), for example, the Conservative MP for Fareham, describes how '[a]fter attending a local state school, my parents decided to send me to a local independent school where I won a scholarship to help with school fees.' Of the remaining two, one explains that he was sent to private school following a family tragedy while the other implies that, in the finest tradition of the British Empire,[175] he was sent to private school as a result of his parents working abroad. Thus, the website of Barry Gardiner (n.d.), the Labour MP for Brent North, explains how 'by the time Barry was eight his father had died of cancer and his mother then moved him to an English boarding school', and the website of Bob Stewart (n.d.), the Conservative MP for Beckenham, how he 'spent most of his early years abroad in the Middle East with his parents but in 1959, together with his younger brother, he was sent to boarding school at Chigwell in Essex'.

The conjoint experiment revealed that while Britons have little affection for politicians who attended an unnamed private school, they hold Old Etonians in near contempt. Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section, 10 attended Eton.[176] Of these 10,[177] all of whom are Conservatives, just 1 mentions that they attended Eton. It seems reasonable to assume that the 9 who do not make a conscious choice not to mention the name of the school they attended. Further, it seems highly probable that the one MP who *does* mention attending Eton – Jacob Rees-Mogg – likewise made a strategic decision to do so. A number of profiles of Rees-Mogg argue that he does not actually possess the aristocratic background one might assume; that he 'wasn't ancestrally posh' (Kuper 2022a), 'has always been, without doubt, privileged, but that is quite distinct from being born into great prosperity or being truly "posh"' (Ashcroft 2019), and is from a family that is 'emphatically minor gentry, without a whiff about them of the aristocratic' (Self 2022). It has been suggested that he is playing a part – '[a]lthough it has been revealed that his maternal grandfather once worked as a dairyman and a lorry driver while his paternal grandmother was the actress daughter of poor Irish immigrants to New York, Jacob Rees-Mogg will no doubt continue to try to pass himself off as a true blue blood' (Mandrake 2022) – and referencing attendance at Eton is entirely in keeping with such a performance.[178]

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[175] 'For centuries the public schools had taken in British children while their parents were governing or guarding far-flung parts of the empire' (Turner 2015, 233).

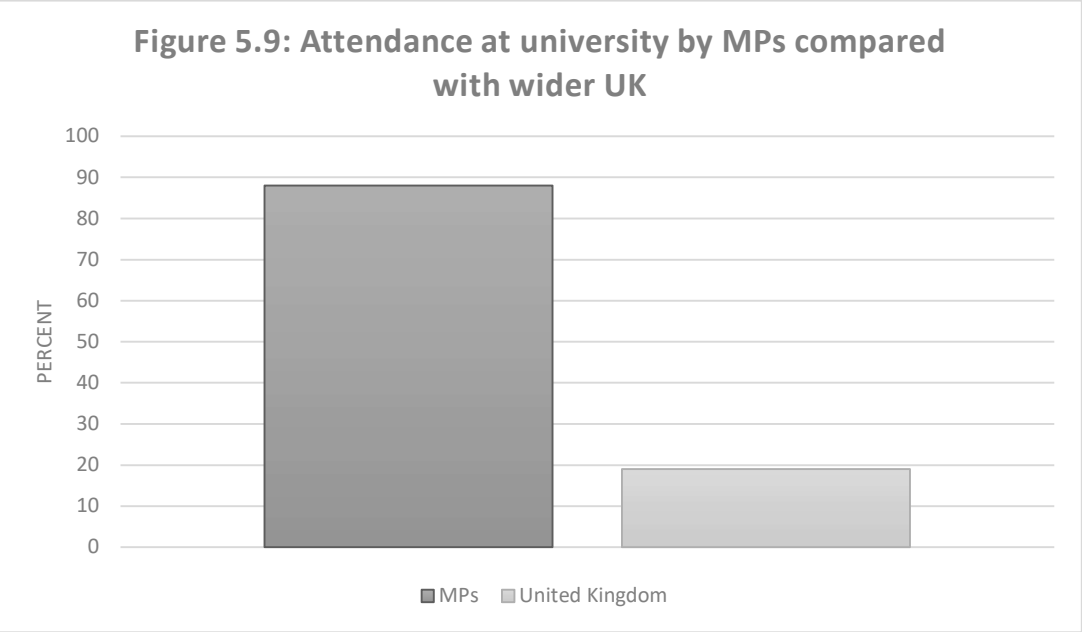
[176] 11 Old Etonians were elected to Parliament at the 2019 General Election. By the time the content analysis was conducted, one of them – Boris Johnson, Conservative MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, former Prime Minster, and Old Etonian – had left Parliament.

[177] Bim Afolami, Conservative MP for Hitchin and Harpenden; Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Conservative MP for The Cotswolds; Philip Dunne, Conservative MP for Ludlow; Richard Graham, Conservative MP for Gloucester; Danny Kruger, Conservative MP for Devizes; Kwasi Kwarteng, Conservative MP for Spelthorne; Jesse Norman, Conservative MP for Hereford and South Herefordshire; Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP for North East Somerset; Andrew Selous, Conservative MP for South West Bedfordshire; and Bill Wiggin, Conservative MP for North Herefordshire.

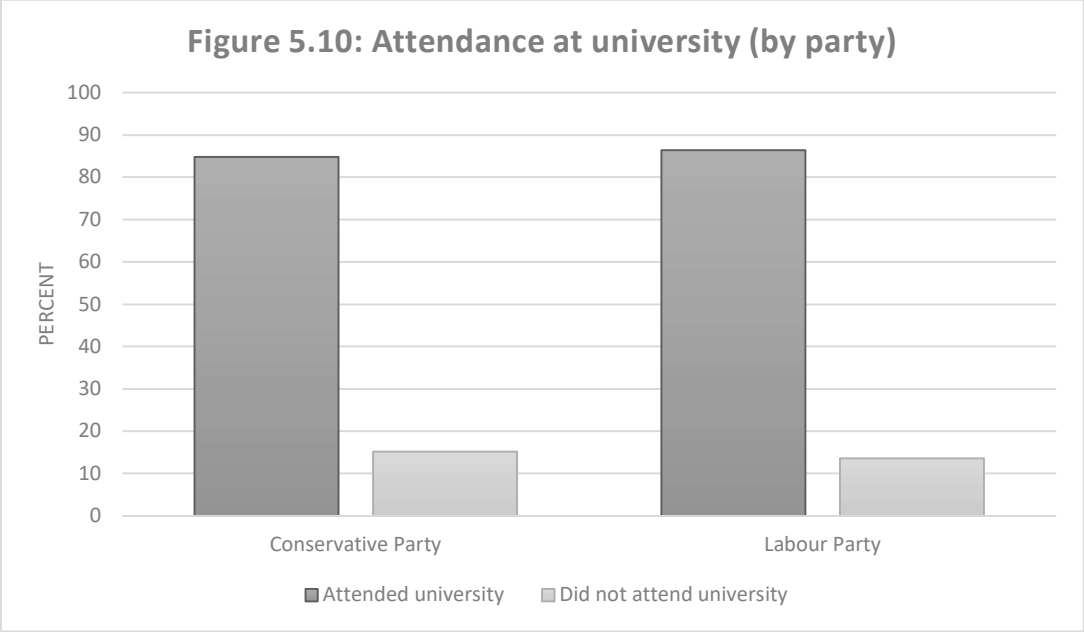
[178] Some suggest they have seen the mask slip, with Marina Hyde (2017), for example, noting a 'a slight but perceptible inauthenticity' in him, a suspicion echoed by Matthew Parris (2017), who writes of Rees-Mogg: 'The self-caricature is ridiculous, of course (and slightly naff: the seriously grand don't dress up, don't stand on ceremony and don't hyphenate; the Rees-Moggs are just rich people from Somerset whose boy never outgrew a silly phase at Oxford)'. Hyde (2024b) would revisit the topic some years later, by then

5.5.2 Higher education

Turning to higher education, of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section, information was obtained on the higher education of 572. Of these 572 MPs, 85% (484) attended university and 15% (88) did not (see Figure 5.9). Of the 484 MPs who attended university, 59% (285) are Conservatives, and 30% (146) Labour. Of the 88 MPs who did not attend university, 58% (51) are Conservatives and 26% (23) Labour. Of the 572 MPs for whom information was obtained on their higher education, 336 were Conservatives and 169 Labour. Of these 336 Conservative MPs, 85% (285) attended university and 15% (51) did not. Of these 169 Labour MPs, 86% (146) attended university and 14% (23) did not (see Figure 5.10).

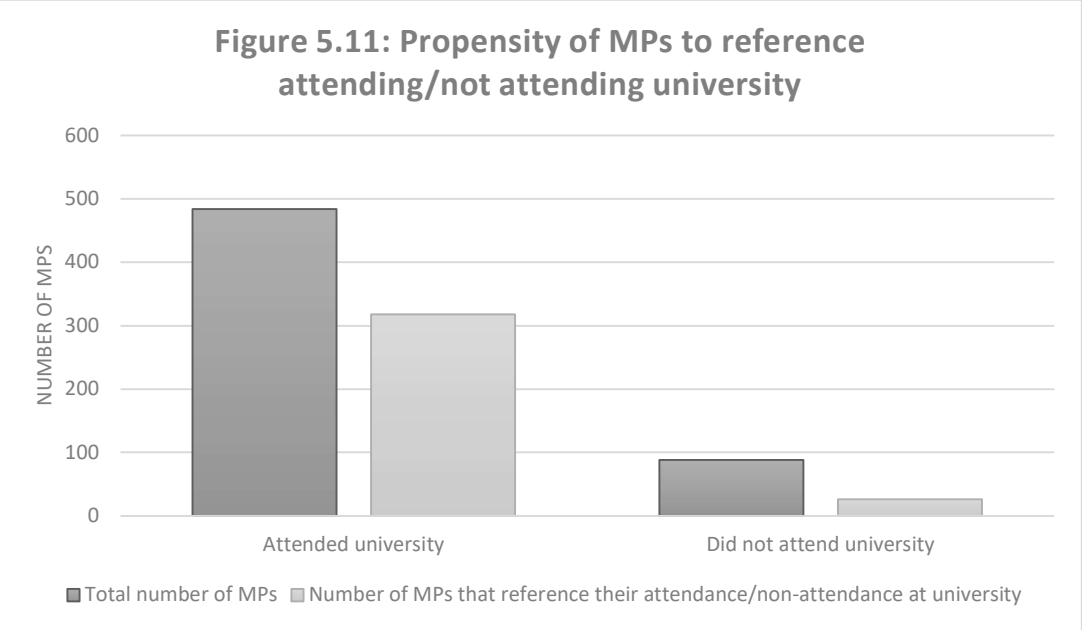


surer in her assessment, writing that '[a]t Eton, Jacob was regarded as a joke, in large part for his obviously adopted airs, which hung on him then as ill-fittingly as his silly suits do now.'



The conjoint experiment revealed that Britons prefer university-educated MPs over non-university-educated MPs. Once again, content analysis revealed that MPs highlight this popular characteristic. Of the 484 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and attended university, 66% (318) state or imply that they attended university. Of the 88 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and did not attend university, 30% (26) state or strongly imply that they did not attend university (see Figure 5.11).[179] The difference is statistically significant at the 0.001 level (chi-square test).[180]

[179] Admittedly, it is more natural to reference doing a thing than not doing a thing.
[180] $x^2 = 12.48$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.



Turning to the type of university attended, of the 484 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and attended university, 27% (132) attended Oxford or Cambridge,[181] either as an undergraduate or postgraduate. Of these 132 MPs, 71% (94) are Conservatives, and 27% (35) Labour. Of the 336 Conservative MPs who attended university, 28% (94) attended Oxford or Cambridge, while 21% (35) of the 169 Labour MPs did so. Focusing solely on Oxford, of the 484 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and attended university, 17% (84) attended Oxford, whether as an undergraduate or postgraduate. Of these 84 MPs, 71% (60) are Conservatives, and 26% (22) Labour. Of the 336 Conservative MPs who attended university, 18% (60) attended Oxford, while 13% (22) of the 169 Labour MPs who attended university attended Oxford.

The conjoint experiment revealed that while Britons may look favourably on politicians who attended university, they punish those who attended Oxford. However, the content analysis reveals no clear pattern with regard to MPs referencing the university they attended. 65% (55) of the 84 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and attended Oxford reference the name of the university they attended. Higher percentages referenced attending Cambridge (79%)[182] and Manchester University (81%),[183] lower percentages referenced attending the London School of Economics (LSE) (50%),[184] Birmingham

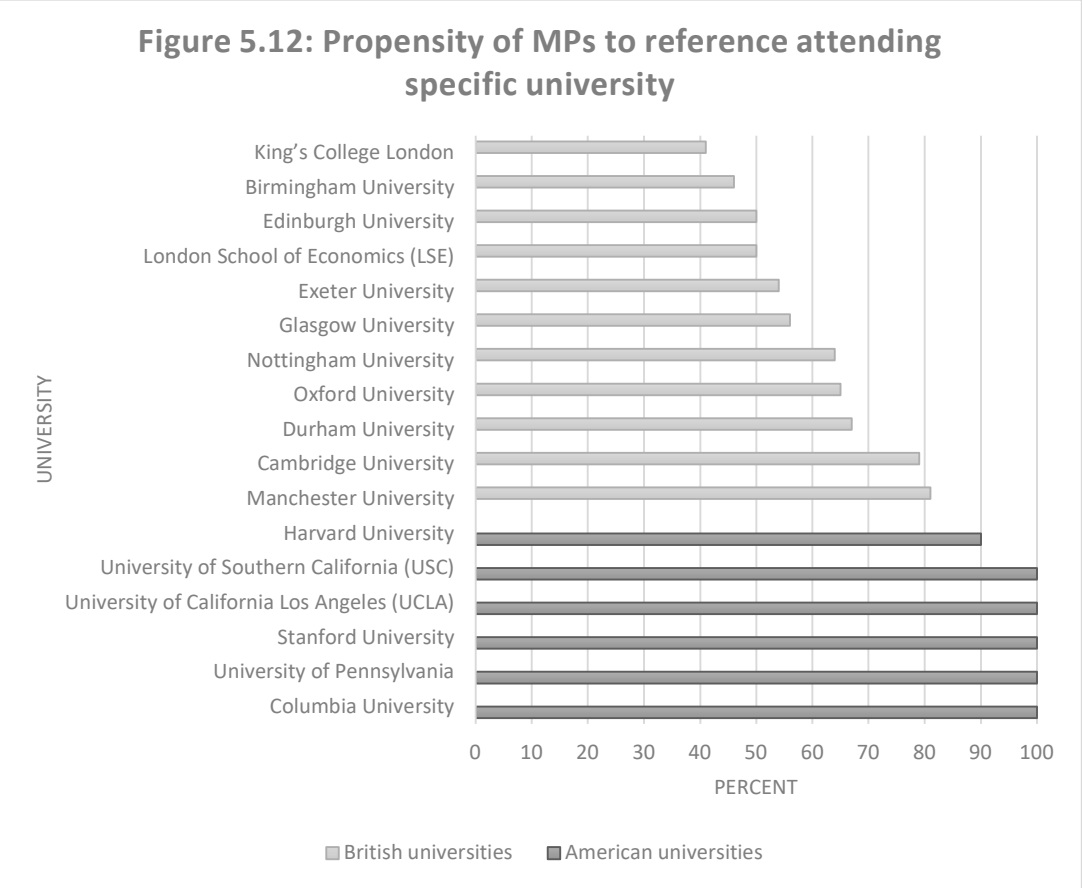
[181] Some MPs, like Matt Hancock, Alan Mak, Dominic Raab, and John Glen, attended both.
[182] 41 of 52 MPs.
[183] 13 of 16 MPs.
[184] 12 of 24 MPs.

University (46%),[185] Edinburgh University (50%),[186] Glasgow University (56%),[187] Exeter University (54%),[188] and King's College London (41%),[189] while near identical percentages referenced attending Nottingham University (64%)[190] and Durham University (67%).[191]

The null finding can be explained in various ways. First, that MPs are not thinking strategically with regard to whether or not they mention their university. Second, that given that this is the first study which tests Britons' views towards Oxford-educated politicians, MPs are simply unaware of voters' views. Third, that MPs are caught in a bind. They may well be keen to reference attending an elite university, given that doing so implies they are intelligent, hard-working, and highly competent, but at the same time nervous as Oxford has class connotations and is associated with a political class that is largely despised. Support for this third alternative is provided by an analysis of references to elite American universities. Attending elite American universities brings the benefits listed above without the negatives. And a pattern is indeed found. Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section 10 attended Harvard; fully 90% of these MPs reference attending this university on their websites.[192] Other MPs attended other extremely prestigious American universities. 1 attended Columbia University and 1 MP attended the University of Pennsylvania – like Harvard, both are members of the Ivy League and both MPs reference attending these universities.[193] Moving beyond the Ivy League to the West Coast of America, a number of MPs attended leading universities situated in California. 1 attended Stanford, 1 the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), and 1 the University of Southern California (USC) – again, all three reference attending these institutions on their websites (see Figure 5.7). Although the numbers involved are too small to make definitive judgements, there does again appear to be a process of selective revelation by MPs when it comes to the university they attended, with MPs keen to highlight that they attended elite universities, but wary when these

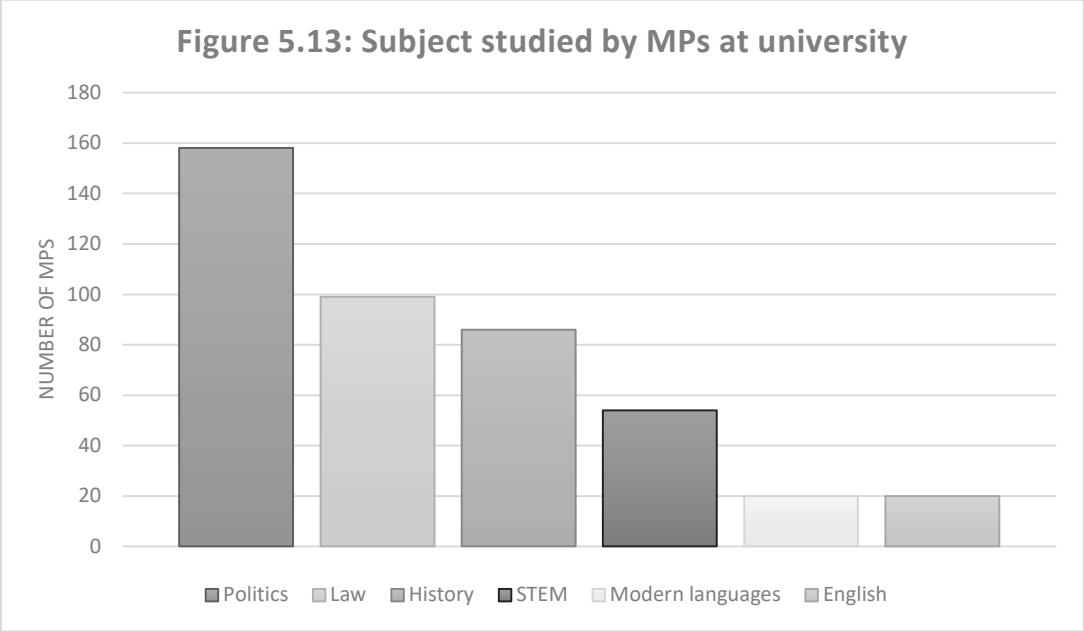
[185] 6 of 13 MPs.
[186] 7 of 14 MPs.
[187] 9 of 16 MPs.
[188] 7 of 13 MPs.
[189] 7 of 17 MPs.
[190] 7 of 11 MPs.
[191] 10 of 15 MPs.
[192] David Lammy (2010), the sole Harvard alumnus who does not mention attending the university, has been loudly critical of the racial, social, and geographical apartheid of Oxford and Cambridge, writing that 'getting a place remains a matter of being white, middle class and southern.'
[193] At a rally in South Carolina, Donald Trump (2015) would lambast the Obama administration and contrast them with himself, arguing 'we have incompetent leadership…I used to use the word incompetent, now I just call them stupid. I went to an Ivy League school, I'm very highly educated', while during a speech in Arkansas he (2016) would compare himself with his then rival for the Republican nomination for president Marco Rubio, saying 'I went to the Wharton School of Finance [part of the University of Pennsylvania] which is considered the best business school, okay? Got to be very smart to get into that school, very smart. The Rubios of the world cannot get into that school, believe me, they don't have the capacity.'

universities have class connotations or are associated with an increasingly unpopular British political class.[194]



Let us turn to the subject studied at university. Of the 484 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and attended university, information on the course of study undertaken – at undergraduate and postgraduate level – was obtained for 95% (458). Of these 458 MPs, 34% (158) studied politics, 20% (99) studied law, 18% (86) studied history, 11% (54) studied a STEM subject, 4% (20) studied modern languages, and 4% (20) studied English (see Figure 5.13).

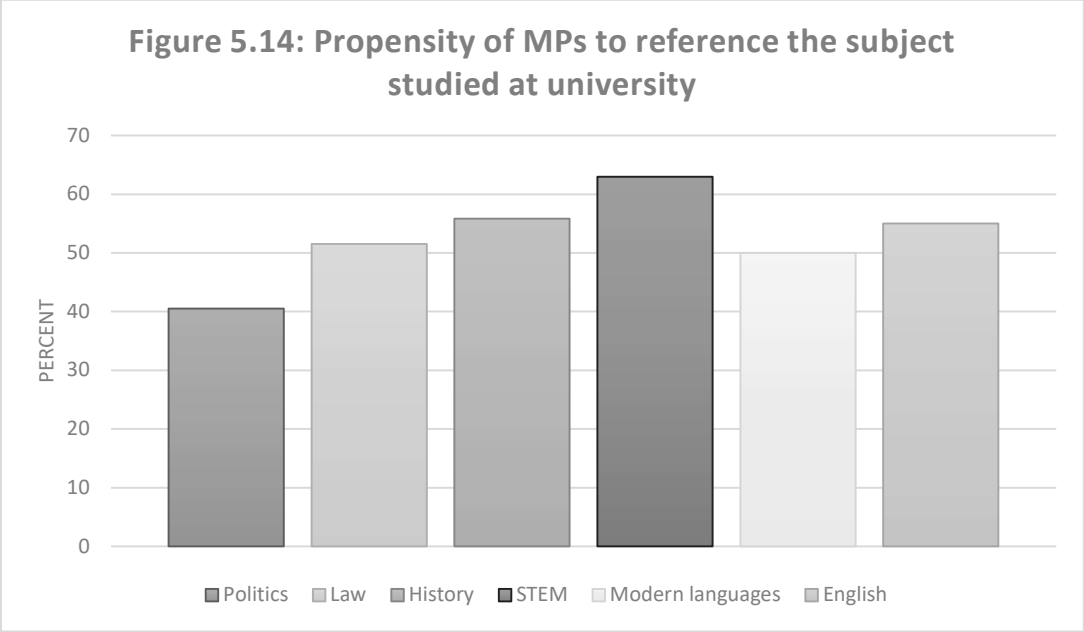
[194] Tying together two of the themes of this thesis, the Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch's claim that she won a place at one of America's leading universities has been questioned. Upon being elected to the Commons in 2017, Badenoch (quoted in Bennett 2017) recalled how by the age of just 16 and living in Nigeria she had already 'got into Stanford pre-med – and I got into medical school in Nigeria but I came here because being a citizen it was just a lot cheaper.' However, Jon Reider (quoted in Allingham 2025), the Stanford admissions officer responsible for international students at the time of Badenoch's application, said he would remember making such an offer and that he did not. When asked about this apparent discrepancy, Badenoch (quoted in Allingham 2025) reiterated that she had been offered a place, but 'I don't have the papers'.



Given the aforementioned ties between studying politics at university and being viewed as a member of the political class and the near universally high regard in which STEM degrees appear to be held by members of the British public, the strategic release of information theory suggests that MPs who studied politics at university would be the least likely to reference the subject they studied and MPs who studied a STEM degree at university the most likely to reference the subject they studied. This is indeed the pattern that is found. 63% (34) of the 54 MPs who studied a STEM subject at university reference the subject they studied on their website compared to 41% (64) of the 158 MPs who studied politics. The difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (chi-square test).[195]

Other, less polarising subjects, are, as per strategic release of information theory, referenced at middling rates: 52% (51) of the 99 MPs who studied law at university reference the subject they studied, 50% (10) of the 20 MPs who studied modern languages, 56% (48) of the 86 MPs who studied history, and 55% (11) of the 20 MPs who studied English.

[195] $x^2 = 7.56$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.



5.5.3 Prior occupation

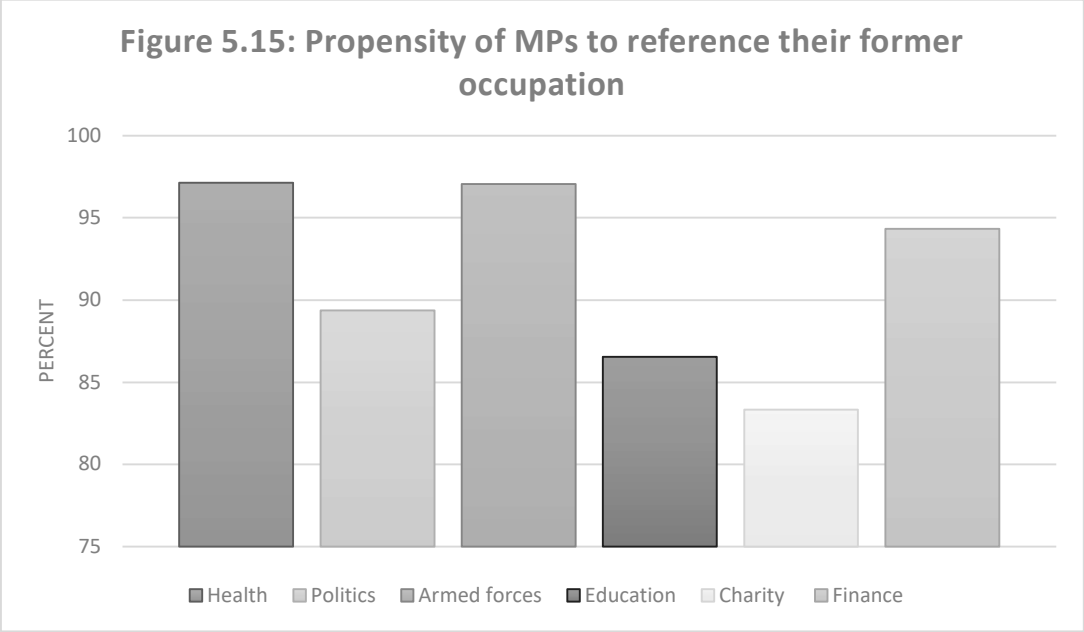
Let us turn to the occupations that politicians held before they ran for office. Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section, information on the occupation(s) held before election was obtained for 97% (575).[196] Of these 593 MPs, 84% (498) include information on their previous occupation(s) on their websites.

The conjoint experiment demonstrated that Britons have strong preferences with regard to the occupations politicians held before putting themselves forward as candidates. As discussed in Chapter 1, there has been much criticism of 'career politicians' and, as the conjoint experiment demonstrates, this criticism reflects popular opinion, with respondents penalising candidates who had worked in politics. Conversely, the experiment demonstrates that Britons hold politicians who worked in the health sector in high regard. The most popular occupation of all those tested was the nurse who worked in the NHS. Further, although not as popular as the NHS nurse, the nurse who worked in a private hospital was also viewed positively (at statistically significant levels).

One would therefore expect, if the strategic release of information which has been noted above were to continue to hold, that politicians who worked in politics would be less likely to reference their former occupation than those who worked in healthcare – and this is indeed the pattern that is found. Fully 97% (34) of the 35 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section and had worked in the health sector reference their former

[196] This figure rises to 587 (99%) if councillor is included. However, councillor tends to be a part-time role, held in addition to a primary occupation, and so has been excluded.

occupation on their website, compared to 89% (84) of the 94 MPs who worked in politics (see Figure 5.15).[197] [198]



Various MPs highlight on their websites that they were not career politicians; some subtly, others less so. Examples of the latter include Theo Clarke (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stafford, who declares 'I'm not a career politician!' and Bill Esterson (n.d.), Labour MP for Sefton Central, who avers he 'is not like other MPs…He is not a career politician.' Alex Chalk (n.d.), Conservative MP for Cheltenham, and Kate Kniveton (n.d.), Conservative MP for Burton, likewise leave little room for doubt, with their websites

[197] The difference, however, misses conventional levels of significance.

[198] It was noted above how Andy Burnham (MA Cantab) has raged against the ubiquity of the university-educated in Westminster. Again demonstrating both the prevalence of a certain sociodemographic characteristic on the benches of the House of Commons and the tendency for the occupants of said House to be – to put it charitably – 'economical with the truth', Burnham has proven famously keen to condemn the iniquities of the 'Westminster bubble'. He has declared 'I'm the right person to get Labour out of the Westminster bubble', that '[f]racking is one of those issues that gets politics a bad name. It is being driven ahead at speed by people in the Westminster bubble', that 'Labour's been trapped in the Westminster bubble for far too long', that he will 'take the party out of the Westminster bubble', that '[f]or too long, education policy in this country has been stuck inside the Westminster bubble', and – inevitably – that he was 'going to pop the Westminster bubble' (quoted in Burton 2015; quoted in Watt 2015; quoted in Cowley 2015; quoted in Shennan 2015; quoted in Woan 2015; quoted in Boland 2017). To paraphrase Joe Biden's comments about Rudy Giuliani, it can sometimes seem as though Andy Burnham's sentences have three components: a noun, a verb, and the Westminster bubble (during a debate in 2007, in the midst of the Democratic Presidential Primary, Biden (2007) said of the former Mayor New York: 'there's only three things he mentions in a sentence: a noun, and a verb, and 9/11'). Burnham has been noticeably less keen on discussing the fact that he himself entered that bubble in his early twenties as a researcher for Tessa Jowell. By 28 he was a special adviser to Culture Secretary Chris Smith and by 31 an MP (Steerpike 2021). Paul Maynard (n.d.), Conservative MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, with refreshing candour and self-reflection, charts the progress of his life and admits that 'in a sense, I am precisely what lots of people now object to – someone who has been stuck in a Westminster bubble.'

stating respectively 'Alex is not a career politician' and 'Kate is not a career politician'.[199] Examples of MPs taking a (somewhat) more subtle approach include Wes Streeting (n.d.), Labour MP for Ilford North, who explains that he is 'not your typical politician…I spent my professional career working outside politics' and Rachel Hopkins (n.d.), Labour MP for Luton South, who states she is 'an MP who has real-life experience'.

A number of the MPs who highlight that they are not career politicians contend that this makes them better representatives. A number contend that their former occupations provide them with 'real world' experience'. Thus, Clive Lewis (n.d.), Labour MP for Norwich South, for example, argues that his 'life outside of politics has given me experience of the real world'[200] and Duncan Baker (n.d), Conservative MP for North Norfolk, that he has 'real-world experience learned outside the world of politics.' Chris Green (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolton West, explains how '[p]rior to entering Parliament, I worked as an engineer in the Mass Spectrometry industry for nearly twenty years, so I feel that I bring a wealth of real world experience to the House of Commons Chamber' and Richard Fuller (n.d.), Conservative MP for North East Bedfordshire, who 'was a partner in the strategy consulting firm, LEK Consulting, and a founding partner of the venture capital group at Investcorp' and 'helped start a number of small businesses' that he 'is eager to put this broad life experience to work in Parliament.'[201]

Some specify how their experience in the 'real world' aids their role as a representative. Huw Merriman (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bexhill and Battle, for example, who avers that he is 'a firm believer that politicians should experience a career outside of politics', explains how his 'twenty years in the private sector has given me a strong sense of perspective that has proved invaluable in my political work in Westminster', Michael Fabricant (n.d.), Conservative MP for Lichfield, how his role as shadow trade minister involved him 'drawing on my experience selling radio and tv studio systems abroad', Grant Shapps (n.d.), Conservative MP for Welwyn Hatfield, how 'his experience of creating and running his own business has been very helpful in providing the necessary skills to be a Government Minister, particularly when it comes to working with the Civil Service. He has also found the skills he picked up in business have been invaluable in representing the concerns of his constituents', and Chris Philp (n.d.), Conservative MP for Croydon South, who 'set up and ran my own businesses', how '[t]his kind of real-world experience means I know how to get things done.'

[199] Other examples include Andrew Griffith (n.d.), Conservative MP for Arundel and South Downs ('Andrew had an unusual route into politics and wouldn't consider himself a "Career Politician"') and Sarah Champion (n.d.), Labour MP for Rotherham ('I do not consider myself a career politician').
[200] Lewis (n.d.) adds that this 'real world' experience means he is 'not your typical politician.'
[201] A number of MPs, without emphasising that they are not career politicians, highlight how their previous job(s) outside of politics equip them for their role *in* politics, often in terms of skills they have acquired, their ways of working, and the areas they will focus on as MPs. Helen Hayes (n.d.), Labour MP for Dulwich and West Norwood, for example, relates how she has 'spent my entire working life – both as a town planner and an MP – involving local people in decision-making', Andrew Stephenson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Pendle, how '[a]s a former small businessman, Andrew has put jobs and employment at the top of his agenda', and Matt Vickers (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stockton South, how '[h]aving came from a background in retail and business, Matt has the interests of our highstreets and towns at heart and the solutions to go with it.'

Some highlight the specific policy areas informed by their previous experience working outside politics. Mel Stride (n.d.), Conservative MP for Central Devon, for example, who 'believes that it is valuable for politicians to have had career experience outside of politics before entering Parliament', describes how 'his background in entrepreneurship has made him a valuable contributor in Westminster on business issues', Craig Mackinlay (n.d.), Conservative MP for South Thanet, who recounts 'qualifying as a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales. He later went on to also qualify as a member of the Chartered Institute of Taxation', how '[t]axation also remains a focus of interest, with Craig using his experience and working with professional institutions to achieve sensible tax simplification', Neil Hudson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Penrith and The Border, who proudly notes that he is 'the first vet in the House of Commons since 1884', how he 'brings extensive real-life experience to help inform policy in areas such as education, rural affairs, animal welfare, science and health', and James Morris (n.d.), Conservative MP for Halesowen and Rowley Regis, how '[b]efore becoming an MP I ran a small business specialising in computer software…I regularly use the experiences I gained before 2010 to help me understand the challenges of local people and businesses and think about how I can best support them.'

A number of MPs argue that working outside Westminster enables them to better understand the lives and concerns of their constituents. Bill Esterson (n.d.), Labour MP for Sefton Central, for example, describes how he 'knows what it is like to face the challenges of owning your own business' and Maria Miller (n.d.), Conservative MP for Basingstoke, how '[b]efore entering Parliament, Maria worked for 20 years in marketing, including board level experience, and appreciates some of the pressures faced by working parents.'[202]

Some MPs contend that their careers outside of politics have furnished them with the skills necessary to be a good MP. Luke Evans (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bosworth, for example, a former doctor, says 'there are a lot of similarities between a good local MP and a good GP – you have to communicate clearly and effectively, you have to be able to deal with complex information and make decisions, and you have to problem solve. Above all, however, you have to care about the people you look after, and work hard to earn their respect', while Rebecca Harris (n.d.), Conservative MP for Castle Point, who argues that 'now more than ever, the House of Commons needs people with her sort of practical business experience', explains how utilising the 'negotiation skills' she acquired during her aforementioned business career, she 'achieved a cross party consensus on issues of local importance such as preventing Deans School from closing in 2014 and securing higher levels of Police funding.'

[202] In also highlighting her parental status, Miller combines two popular traits – see below for more on Britons' views towards politicians who are parents.

A number of MPs echo Harris in contending that a career outside of politics translates into effective constituency MPs.[203] Mark Logan (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolton North East, for example, who clarifies that he 'is not a career politician having worked in business before and after serving the UK in the Foreign Office' and indeed 'believes too many people in parliament have worked in the political and London bubble for too long, and thus are detached from the realities of life in modern Britain', emphasises the importance of 'attracting more foreign investment into Bolton' and assures readers of his website that '[t]his can happen as Mark has spent the best part of his career in the Foreign Office where he brought huge investment from Asia into all parts of the U.K., including to the North West.' Julie Marson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Hertford and Stortford, similarly describes herself as 'keen to use my experience in business and finance to promote local businesses'.

Some MPs who worked in both the public and private sectors argue that this makes them uniquely qualified to be effective MPs. Royston Smith (n.d.), Conservative MP for Southampton Itchen, for example, argues that a career spanning both the public and private sectors makes him particularly well suited to help his constituents and constituency. He describes how he has 'worked in both the private and public sectors, which offers useful experience to help me approach the key issues that face Southampton most effectively.'

It was noted above how almost all of the MPs who referenced attending a private school explained the circumstances behind them doing so. This framing phenomenon similarly occurs with many of the MPs who reference working in politics. Just as MPs who worked outside politics argue that doing so equipped them with the skills required to be an effective MP, so many of those who worked *in* politics make the same argument. Matt Vickers (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stockton South, for example, describes how 'having acted as constituency agent for titans of the political scene Matt knows how to get his point across.'

Similarly, just as various MPs who worked outside politics argue that this makes them a better local MP, so a number of those who worked in politics make the same argument. Tom Hunt (n.d.), Conservative MP for Ipswich, for example, details how he 'previously worked as the Chief of Staff to the elected Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Mayor James Palmer. This role involved me working closely with both local and national government to bring about significant improvements to infrastructure and housing' and as a result 'I feel strongly that the knowledge and the skill set that I've acquired through this role makes me well placed to tackle many of the issues of concern for Ipswich residents', while the aforementioned Matt Vickers argues that as a result him 'working for William Hague and later running Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak's successful election campaign, Matt gives Stockton South a known name in places of Government.' John Glen (n.d.), meanwhile, Conservative MP for Salisbury, describes how his experience in politics not only 'helped him to understand the hard work involved in

[203] Studies have shown that Britons believe MPs should prioritise their constituency over questions of national import (Campbell et al. 2019a; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; 2016).

being a Member of Parliament', but laid the groundwork for him being an effective MP, as he had 'extensive exposure' to 'the challenges of constituency work'. Anthony Mangnall (n.d.), Conservative MP for Totnes, focuses on the national rather than local picture, but similarly argues that spending time in politics before becoming an elected representative has aided him in his role. His website describes how '[i]n 2016 Anthony was offered the post of Senior Adviser to Lord Hague of Richmond and spent two years working on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and helping to close the UK's domestic ivory market. It was during this time, that Anthony expanded his knowledge of UK politics and how to succeed in developing policy into legislation.'

Some MPs who worked in politics highlight that they worked in other, often menial, roles as well i.e. they appear keen to point out that they are not *solely* career politicians. Kevin Foster (n.d.), Conservative MP for Torbay, for example, charts how before he 'found work with an MEP for the West Midlands on a project opposing the then Labour Government's plan to implement regional government', he 'spent a few years working as a barman and doing factory work', Matt Vickers (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stockton South, how he 'stacked shelves, pulled pints and laid bricks' before he began 'working for William Hague and later running Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak's successful election campaign', Zarah Sultana (n.d.), Labour MP for Coventry South, how she 'worked in retail throughout my studies' before becoming 'a community organiser for Labour', and Virendra Sharma (n.d.), Labour MP for Ealing Southall, how he 'started out as a bus conductor' before becoming 'National Ethnic Minorities Officer for the Labour Party'.

Some MPs who worked in politics emphasise the serendipitous nature of them doing so, implying it was less a conscious desire (and the result of ambition) and more the result of happenstance. Tracey Crouch (n.d.), Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford, for example, describes how 'after graduation she accidentally found herself working as a researcher to a Conservative MP rather than training to become a solicitor.'

Given the bravery and self-sacrifice that are associated with service in the armed forces, the strategic release of information theory posited above suggests that politicians who served in the military would highlight this. Again, the content analysis of MPs' websites provides support for the strategic release of information theory, with 97% (33) of the 34 MPs who served (or trained – see below) in the armed forces referencing their former occupation on their website.[204] Among the MPs who disclose their service are Daniel Jarvis (n.d.), Labour MP for Barnsley Central, who 'served my country as a soldier', Sarah Atherton (n.d.), Conservative MP for Wrexham, 'the first female MP that has also served in the regular Armed Forces', and John Baron (n.d.), Conservative MP for Basildon and Billericay, who 'served on a number of tours and postings including Berlin, Northern Ireland and Cyprus'. Leo Docherty (n.d.), Conservative MP for Aldershot, combines referencing his service with highlighting his local ties, writing 'I'm a former

[204] A number of soldier-MPs have written about their experiences in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq Wars; see, for example Leo Docherty's (2007) *Desert of death: A soldier's journey from Iraq to Afghanistan* and Johnny Mercer's (2017) *We Were Warriors: One Soldier's Story of Brutal Combat*.

soldier…After graduating from the Royal Military Sandhurst I completed operational tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. My regiment – 1st Battalion Scots Guards – were previously based in Mons Barracks in Aldershot as part of 12th Armoured Infantry Brigade.'

Just as many MPs who worked in politics, who worked outside politics, and who worked as lawyers suggest that their prior occupation equipped them to be an MP, so a number of those who served in the armed forces make the same argument. James Sunderland (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bracknell, for example, promises that '[m]y priority as your MP is to the people I serve, in the same way that I loyally served my country for 26 years in the Army', while Darren Henry (n.d.), Conservative MP for Broxtowe, describe show he 'joined the Royal Air Force as a young man because I wanted to serve my country and that's exactly what I want to do here. To serve Broxtowe. The highest held military values of loyalty and integrity are instilled into me and through this I believe I can offer Broxtowe a Forces-style positive ability to get things done whilst listening to and understanding our community.'

MPs whose family members serve(d) in the armed forces are keen to highlight this. James Cleverly (n.d.), Conservative MP for Braintree and Home Secretary, for example, states that 'when I left school I followed family tradition and joined the army', Fay Jones (n.d.), Conservative MP for Brecon and Radnorshire, that her 'husband Tim is serving abroad with the British Army', and Bob Stewart (n.d.), the Conservative MP for Beckenham and himself a veteran, that '[h]is father, Jock Stewart MC, was an RAF officer and his mother, Joan Stewart, had been a member of the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War, a fact of which Bob is especially proud.'[205] David Johnston (n.d.), Conservative MP for Wantage, combines a parental link to the armed forces with the suggestion of an unprivileged background, describing how his 'father left school at 14 and joined the army as soon as he could', while Penny Mordaunt, Conservative MP for Portsmouth North, and Luke Pollard (n.d.), Labour MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, combine a parental link to the armed forces with the highlighting of a local connection, with the biographical sections of their websites stating respectively that '[h]er father was born in Hilsea barracks and served in the Parachute Regiment' and '[h]is father was a submariner in the Royal Navy based in Devonport'.

A number of MPs are keen to highlight their time in the Territorial Army. James Cleverly (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Braintree, describes how 'when I left school I followed family tradition and joined the army. That ambition was cut short by injury, so I went back into education and got a business degree and joined the Territorial Army', Simon Hart (n.d.), Conservative MP for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, how he 'served with the Territorial Army for seven years', Philip Hollobone (n.d.), Conservative MP for Kettering, how he 'served over eight years in the Territorial Army,

[205] Stewart (n.d.) highlights his own military service too, writing that '[w]hen he was 17 years old Bob was selected to attend the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and he graduated from there in 1969 as an infantry officer, commissioned into The Cheshire Regiment. Thereafter Bob was an Army officer for a total of 26 years.'

latterly as a paratrooper', and David Davies (n.d.), Conservative MP for Monmouth, how he 'joined the Territorial Army, serving for 18 months as a Gunner with 104 Air Defence Regiment at Raglan Barracks Newport.'[206]

Indeed, so keen are MPs to associate themselves with the armed forces, that a number include elements on their websites which take the selective release and framing (or spinning) of information to extreme levels. Andrew Bridgen (n.d.), Reclaim MP for North West Leicestershire,[207] for example, states on the biographical page of his website that he 'trained as an officer in the Royal Marines.' One is left with the distinct impression that Bridgen was an officer in the Royal Marines. The reality is that he did in fact *train* with the Royal Marines – he began but dropped out of officer training and never actually served in the Royal Marines, as an officer or otherwise (Anglesey 2019). Gagan Mohindra (n.d.), Conservative MP for South West Hertfordshire, meanwhile, has a single photograph on the biographical page of his website, of him wearing British Army camouflage.[208] Again, one's immediate reaction is that he must have served in the army. The extent of his military career, however, appears to be participating in the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme.[209]

Let us complete our analysis of politicians' former occupations with four areas which are both well-represented in Parliament and about which we have data as to public opinion: the law, education, charity, and finance. The conjoint experiment found little appetite among Britons for politicians who had formerly been lawyers,[210] support for those who had been teachers, and a preference for the chief executive of a charity over the chief executive of a public sector body and company. With regard to finance, much enmity has been directed towards bankers following the 2007/8 crash and subsequent recession(s) (Critchlow 2015; Jenkins 2015; Spencer 2019) and those working the sector remain among the least trusted in Britain (Ipsos MORI 2022).[211]

However, the pattern detected above, of the strategic release of information (i.e. the highlighting of biographical information which sits favourably with public opinion and the nondisclosure of that which does not), fails to hold. 87% (45) of the 52 MPs who

[206] Service in the Territorial Army has not been coded as an occupation as, like acting as a councillor, it tends to be a part-time rather than full-time occupation.
[207] Elected as a Conservative, he had the whip withdrawn in January 2023 and subsequently became the upstart party's first MP in May 2023.
[208] See Appendix X for a screenshot of the biographical section of Mohindra's website and the photograph in question.
[209] He is listed as having attended the course in 2020–21 and 2021–22 (Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust n.d.(a); n.d.(b)).
[210] Antipathy towards lawyers, of course, has a long history, both in Britain, see *Henry VI, Part 2*: '[t]he first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers' (Shakespeare 1981 [1594], 131), and beyond: 'And he said, "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers: for ye load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers"' (*The Bible* 2006 [1611], 1637)
[211] In 2012, Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, would urge Britons to '[s]top bashing the bankers', writing '[i]t is time for British politicians to say it loud and clear and in unison: we need bankers…we need the political establishment in this country to stop slagging off a sector that is utterly crucial to the British economy and the current system of global capitalism…We need to maintain or lengthen London's lead as the best place to raise and allocate that capital, and we won't succeed in that objective if we keep on bullying, berating and generally beating up anyone who has anything to do with a bank.'

worked in education and 83% (45) of the 54 MPs who worked for a charity reference their former occupation on their website, compared to 93% (75) of the 81 MPs who worked in the legal sector and 94% (50) of the 53 MPs who worked in finance.[212]

These MPs do not appear to be engaging in strategic release of information. However, those who mention that they come from less than revered occupations certainly *do* engage in the framing of unpopular information. Echoing the arguments of many of the MPs who reference that they worked in politics, many of the MPs who reveal that they were lawyers contend that a career in the law makes them effective MPs. Jake Berry (n.d.), Conservative MP for Rossendale and Darwen, for example, who 'trained as a solicitor', describes how '[b]efore becoming a Member of Parliament for Rossendale & Darwen in 2010, Jake specialised in Housing and Development Law. This valuable experience has enabled him to effectively champion affordable housing and the Construction Sector within the House of Commons', while Sarah Dines (n.d.), Conservative MP for Derbyshire Dales, who 'worked as a family law practitioner for over 30 years' explains that '[m]y thirty years of experience as a family lawyer has meant that I have dealt with many of the issues facing today's society.'

Just as MPs who worked outside politics contend that doing so provided them with the skills and experience which enable them to be effective representatives, so MPs who were lawyers make the same argument. Jeremy Wright (n.d.), Conservative MP for Kenilworth and Southam, for example, describes how his time as a lawyer involved him 'helping someone to make their case'. As an MP, 'rather than just representing one person as a barrister, I could represent thousands of people as their Member of Parliament.'

Just as various MPs who worked in politics argue that this would benefit the constituency they represent, so Jonathan Djanogly (n.d.), Conservative MP for Huntingdon, who states he 'practised law since 1990 and became a partner in a commercial law firm specialising in advising trade and both smaller and larger businesses. In 1994, Rebecca and I set up a mail order retail business', explains that his 'real life practical understanding of the challenges facing business, both through having run a business myself and advising others, have helped forge my political ambitions to free business from red tape and actively support enterprise and job creation in the Huntingdon constituency.'

A number of MPs who worked as lawyers, especially those on the Labour benches, argue that their work as a politician is a continuation by other means of the fights for justice they undertook as lawyers. Keir Starmer's (n.d.(a)) website, Labour MP for Holborn and

[212] A number of MPs worked in retail banking; they have not been coded as having worked in finance. Interestingly, many of those who worked in retail banking seem keen to emphasise the specific sector of the banking world they inhabited and in so doing to differentiate themselves from the pinstriped financiers of the City. Thus, Mike Freer (n.d.), Conservative MP for Finchley and Golders Green, details how he 'spent most of his career in *retail* banking [emphasis added]' and Douglas Chapman (n.d.), SNP MP for Dunfermline and West Fife, how he 'had a busy working life for some 26 years before I got involved in politics. Most of that time was spent with TSB Scotland in *retail* banking [emphasis added].'

St Pancras, for example, portrays him as a 'former lawyer who has fought for fairness his whole working life…For decades, Keir has stood up against the powerful on behalf of ordinary people who needed help. Keir is driven by his passion to make the world a better, fairer place for working people. This drive led him to stand as an MP and later become leader of the Labour Party.' It describes how as a lawyer he 'spent a lot of his time providing free legal advice defending ordinary people against the powerful. He worked on some high-profile cases, taking on fights against the odds with Shell and McDonalds, as well as working with the National Union of Mineworkers to prevent the Tories' pit closures', how '[h]is entire career has been about securing justice for those that need it. From representing people on death row as a human rights lawyer, to working on setting up the Northern Ireland Police Board in the wake of the Good Friday agreement, to making the law work for victims as Chief Prosecutor', and how his 'drive to make the world a fairer place saw him enter politics.'[213] Imran Hussain (n.d.), Labour MP for Bradford East, depicts an almost identical path, as he 'trained and worked in the legal profession as a Barrister defending the rights of the vulnerable and upholding justice. Here I learnt a strong sense of fairness and of justice, of the right thing to do, and fighting abuse and intolerance led to my involvement to become more keenly involved in politics and our local communities.' Emily Thornberry (n.d.), Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, similarly describes how as a barrister she spent her time 'representing striking miners, Wapping print-workers and P&O seafarers', Ellie Reeves (n.d.), Labour MP for Lewisham West and Penge, how she 'worked as an employment rights lawyer for over 10 years. I mainly represented Unite and UCATT trade union members as a trade union lawyer and then set up my own business providing help to working mums and women facing maternity discrimination', Harriet Harman (n.d.), Labour MP for Camberwell and Peckham, how she 'was legal advisor to the Trico Equal Pay strike committee and the Grunwick Strike Committee. She represented tenants and residents groups' before becoming 'Legal Officer to Liberty (then the National Council for Civil Liberties) where she took the first cases for women under the then new Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts', Imran Hussain (n.d.), Labour MP for Bradford East, how his work as a barrister involved him 'defending the rights of the vulnerable and upholding justice.'[214]

It was noted above how some MPs who referenced working in politics also highlighted the other, often lower-class, jobs they held. Many of the MPs who mention that they were lawyers engage in this practice too. The aforementioned Thornberry (n.d.), for example, describes how she took on a 'variety of jobs to make ends meet, from working in a care home to cleaning toilets on cross-Channel ferries' before 'qualifying as a barrister in the mid-1980s', Afzal Khan (n.d.), Labour MP for Manchester Gorton, how he 'worked as a labourer in a cotton mill, a bus driver and a Greater Manchester Police Officer, before qualifying as a solicitor', and the aforementioned Imran Hussain (n.d.),

[213] Interestingly, later versions of Starmer's (n.d.(a); n.d.(b)) website substitute the word 'Chief Prosecutor' for 'lawyer', with the opening sentence of his biography being altered from 'Keir Starmer is a husband, father, and former lawyer' to 'Keir Starmer is a husband, father, and former Chief Prosecutor.'
[214] Victoria Atkins (n.d.), Conservative MP for Louth and Horncastle, describes how as a lawyer she had the 'privilege to represent the decent, law-abiding majority' and speaks of her ambition 'to put my experiences in the criminal courts to good use in the political world.'

how he worked 'in Morrisons in Bradford, cleaning aisles and stacking shelves' before he 'worked in the legal profession as a Barrister'.

As with MPs who worked in politics and the law, many of those who worked in finance and mention their prior career on their website emphasise that their banking experience redounds to the constituency's benefit. Marcus Fysh (n.d.), Conservative MP for Yeovil, who 'joined Mercury Asset Management, a British fund management firm based in London', says that '[b]ecause of his strong ties with business investment, Marcus is a strong supporter of local businesses. Similarly, Mark Garnier (n.d.), Conservative MP for Wyre Forest, who 'had a 27 year career in the City, 15 years of which were specialising as an investment banking [sic] covering South East Asia and other emerging markets, and a further 10 years as an asset manager', highlights that '[t]hrough his extensive career, Mark brings a wealth of practical and specific business and economic experience to his role as Wyre Forest's MP' and '[w]ith extensive experience in business and finance, Mark is championing the cause of the local economy and business in Wyre Forest.'

A number of MPs who reference working in finance highlight the wider good that they did in their roles.[215] Vicky Ford (n.d.), Conservative MP for Chelmsford, for example, describes how she 'had a successful career in financing, raising money for large infrastructure projects including the first mobile phone networks in the UK and many other countries.'

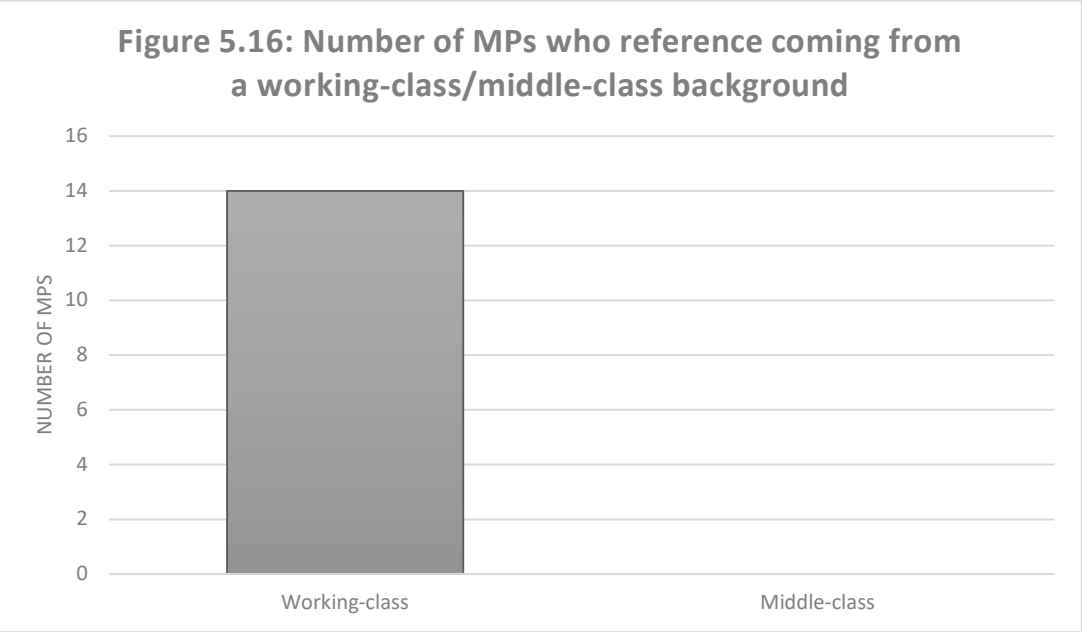
It was noted above how some MPs who referenced working in politics and the law also highlighted other, often less prestigious jobs. A number of MPs who were bankers employ this same framing technique. Jack Lopresti (n.d.), Conservative MP for Filton and Bradley Stoke, for example, notes how after 'finishing school at 15, he worked in his fathers [sic] ice cream and catering business locally for over ten years' before he 'worked in the financial services and residential property sectors', Greg Hands (n.d.), Conservative MP for Chelsea and Fulham, how he 'worked at a swimming pool, a department store and at McDonalds' before he 'began a career in finance', and Ian Blackford (n.d.(a)), Scottish National Party MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, how '[f]ollowing his first job working at Bank of Scotland as a teller, life quickly took Ian to London. It's in this city that his career and expertise in finance began, working his way from the bottom all the way up the ladder, eventually culminating in him leading Deutsche Bank operations in both the Netherlands and Scotland.'

5.5.4 Class

Let us turn from specific occupations to classes. The first point to note is that few MPs reference class. Just 2% (14) of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the

[215] Aaron Bell (n.d.), Conservative MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, references that he worked for a betting company. Perhaps mindful that many people have mixed views with regard to gambling companies, he is quick to say of the company – bet365 – 'they contribute a huge amount to our local economy and provide thousands of well-paid and secure jobs. They are also a big export success for the UK and have always paid their taxes.'

content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section refer to themselves as being working class or coming from a working-class background,[216] while not a single MP refers to themselves as middle-class or coming from a middle-class background (see Figure 5.16). This updates and provides further support for the work of Evans and Tilley (2017), who chart the precipitous decline in reference to class in British politics. Further, the greater number of references to being or coming from the working rather than middle class again provides support for the strategic release of information theory. The conjoint experiment and surveys show that Britons want more working-class politicians and fewer middle-class politicians. British MPs appear to be aware of public opinion on this topic and to be responding, either by mentioning that they are or were working class or staying silent about being or coming from the middle class.



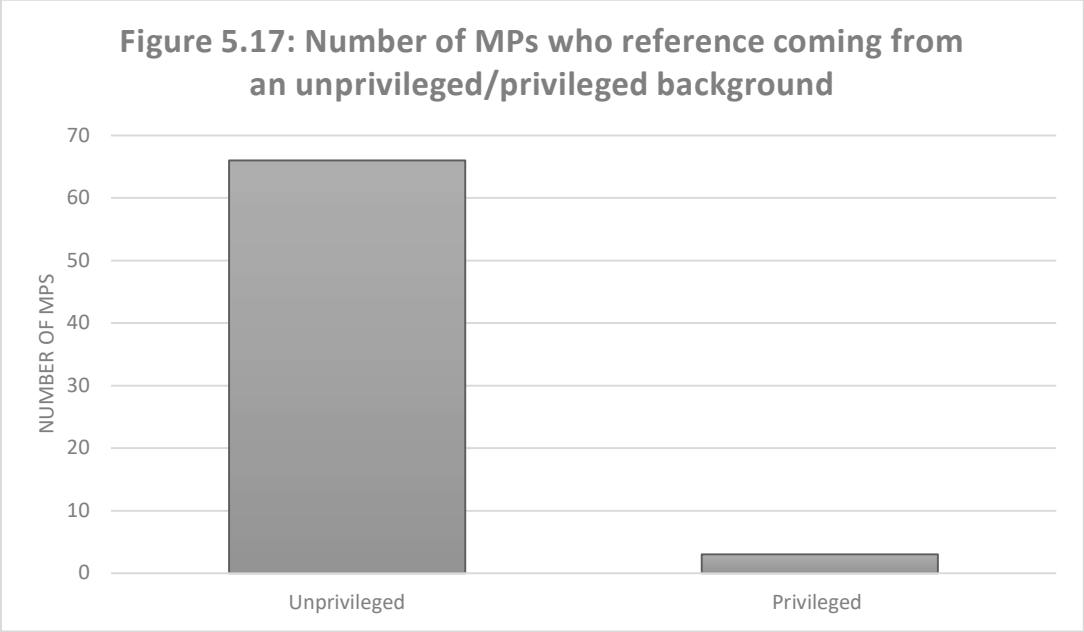
With regard to party, more Conservative MPs (8) refer to themselves as working class or coming from a working-class background than do Labour MPs (6). One of the MPs who refers to themselves as working class or coming from a working-class background highlights that this makes him very different from the vast majority of the House of Commons. Thus, Wes Streeting (n.d.), Labour MP for Ilford North, declares 'I'm not your typical politician. I come from a working class [sic] family in Tower Hamlets.' Two MPs – one Conservative, one Labour – link their working-class background to their politics.

[216] Sarah Dines (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Derbyshire Dales, states that she is 'a working-class, council house-reared, comprehensive school-educated Conservative', Darren Henry (n.d.), Conservative MP for Broxtowe, that he comes from 'a traditional British working class family', Steve Reed (n.d.), Labour MP for Croydon North, that 'grew up in a working-class family', Jonathan Reynolds (n.d.), Labour MP for Stalybridge and Hyde, that he comes from 'a loving working-class family.' See Appendix S for a list of all the MPs who refer to themselves as working class or coming from a working-class background and the words they use to do so. Nadia Whittome (n.d.), Labour MP for Nottingham East, enjoins people to '[r]ise with your class'. However, as there is not an explicit reference to her being a member of a class, this has not been included.

Mark Fletcher (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolsover, states that he 'believe[s] in a compassionate politics driven by my working-class British values' and Mike Amesbury (n.d.), Labour MP for Weaver Vale, similarly explains that his 'Labour politics are shaped by my working class [sic] background.'

If few MPs are willing (or able) to call themselves working class, many are eager to highlight that they came from deprived backgrounds. Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section, 11% (66) highlight that they came from unprivileged backgrounds (see Figure 5.17).[217] Alan Mak (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Havant, states that he 'wasn't born into a wealthy or powerful family', Emily Thornberry (n.d.), Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, that '[w]hen she was seven her father left, and the family spent many years on benefits. A Labour councillor helped them find a house on a local council estate', Alun Cairns (n.d.), Conservative MP for Vale of Glamorgan, that he 'first became aware of politics whilst growing up in a deprived community near Swansea', and Clive Lewis (n.d.), Labour MP for Norwich South, that he 'grew up on a council estate in Northampton. I attended a local comprehensive, becoming the first member of my family to attend university.'

[217] A number of MPs highlight that they encountered great difficulties during childhood. However, unless there was a clear reference to economic deprivation as well as tragedy, these cases have not been included. A number of MPs state that it was these tragic experiences early in life which drove them into politics. Mark Fletcher (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Bolsover, describes how he 'had a difficult life growing up, my mum died tragically while I was young, and I know what it's like to feel ignored while the rest of the world moves forward without you. This is why I got into politics, I wanted to make a real difference and make sure opportunity is spread to everyone no matter where you grew up or what has happened to you in your past' and Dehenna Davison (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bishop Auckland, how she is 'often get asked why I got involved in politics. People often assume that it's because my family are political, or because I'm just interested in my career, but that really couldn't be further from the truth. It all started when I was 13, and my Dad was killed by a single punch…Having learnt early about injustice, I didn't want other young people to have to go through the same experiences. I wanted to make a difference and try and do some good. But, at such a young age, I wasn't sure how best to do that. Then, totally by accident, at age 16, I discovered politics. I realised that going into politics would provide an opportunity to shape the future of our society. To fix injustices. To make life better for people. And that is exactly what I will do here as the MP for Bishop Auckland.' George Freeman (n.d.), Conservative MP for Mid Norfolk, describes how 'his politics has been shaped by his early life experience of a broken home and family turmoil…Freeman has spoken powerfully about how his experiences as a child career [sic] of his then alcoholic mother with an absent father shaped his core Conservative values'.



Although not coded as highlighting an unprivileged background, a number of MPs reference the lower-class status of their grandparents. Trudy Harrison (n.d.), Conservative MP for Copeland, for example, states she is the '[g]randdaughter of a miner', Chi Onwurah (n.d.), Labour MP for Newcastle Upon Tyne Central, that '[m]y maternal grandfather was a sheet metal worker in the shipyards of the Tyne during the depression. My mother grew up in poverty in Garth Heads on the quayside', and Julie Marson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Hertford and Stortford, that her mother was 'the daughter of an East End docker'. Then-Prime Minister Theresa May made similar ancestral references in her 2017 Conservative Party Conference speech, noting that '[m]y grandmother was a domestic servant, who worked as a lady's maid below stairs. She worked hard and made sacrifices, because she believed in a better future for her family.' The conjoint candidate choice experiment conducted for this thesis reveals that this is a sensible strategic decision; of the four paternal occupations, factory worker was by a margin the most popular. However, (continually) referencing the manual work performed by one's parents can backfire. Keir Starmer (n.d.(a)), for example, describes on his website how '[h]is dad worked as a toolmaker on the factory floor'. However, he repeated his 'son of a toolmaker' line so often during the 2024 General Election campaign that its utterance during *Sky News*'s 'Battle for Number 10' townhall 'was met with groans and laughs from the audience' (Browning 2024).[218]

A number of MPs link coming from a deprived background with the ability to be a good MP. Mark Eastwood (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Dewsbury, explains that he 'was brought up by a single parent who worked as a nurse at Dewsbury Hospital for 25 years and lived on a council estate in Batley until his late teens…Mark believes that his humble upbringing and knowledge of the area allows him a good understanding of the

[218] 'Starmer…seemed surprised to find his trusty "my father was a toolmaker" line drawing a burst of jaded cackles' (Hyde 2024a).

challenges and obstacles that hard working people and their families face on a daily basis.'

A (very) small number of MPs suggest – mildly – that they come from privileged backgrounds: Ed Davey, Rishi Sunak, and Bob Seely (see Figure 5.17). However, as with MPs acknowledging that they attended private schools, there is additional information in each case. Ed Davey (n.d.), Liberal Democrat MP for Kingston and Surbiton and leader of the Liberal Democrats, states that while his family had 'no financial hardships', there were many other – emotional – hardships, writing, '[a]lthough my childhood was happy and we had no financial hardships, my father, John George, a solicitor, died when I was four and my mother, Nina Joan (nee Stanbrook), a teacher, died when I was fifteen.' Rishi Sunak (n.d.), Conservative MP for Richmond (Yorks) and Prime Minister, admits that he 'was lucky to study at Winchester College', but emphasises that this was because his 'parents sacrificed a great deal' and that 'as a result I am passionate about ensuring everybody has access to a great education.'[219] Lastly, Bob Seely (n.d.), Conservative MP for the Isle of Wight, explains that his family once enjoyed great wealth. However, he adds that they were philanthropists, did not exploit their workers, and that the money is long since gone. He writes that '[t]he Seely family wealth was built on the agricultural revolution – milling in Lincoln – and afterwards the industrial revolution – coal in Nottinghamshire. The family were known for their philanthropic work, establishing schools in Nottinghamshire as well as recognising union representation in the family coal mines as far back as the late 19th century. On the Island, they established a library service and Reading Rooms, built housing for the rural poor and helped to establish a lifeboat service along the southwest coast of the Island. The family's wealth was whittled away during the 20th century.'

More MPs reference their sex than their class. Tonia Antoniazzi (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Gower, notes she is 'the first woman to have been elected to represent Gower', Rebecca Pow (n.d.), Conservative MP for Taunton Deane, that she is 'the first female Conservative Member of Parliament that Taunton Deane has ever had', and Órfhlaith Begley (n.d.), Sinn Féin MP for West Tyrone, that she is 'the first female Member of Parliament for West Tyrone.'

As many MPs reference their race as reference their class. Alan Mak (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Havant, notes that he is 'the first-ever Member of Parliament from

[219] Sunak's defensive of his private and very expensive education matches – almost verbatim – that of his predecessor as Prime Minister, David Cameron (2012), who defended himself against accusations of privilege with the line 'I went to a great school and I want every child to have a great education.' The son of a GP father and pharmacist mother, Sunak (2024), in widely ridiculed and much lampooned comments, cited Sky TV when asked what he had 'gone without' as a child. As with seemingly all things in Britain, there is also a class aspect to the young Sunak missing out on satellite television, with Emily Dugan (2024) of *The Guardian* pondering 'the role that snobbery may have played in that choice. As satellite dishes multiplied across the country, Sky was derided by critics as "council house TV" – and many wealthier families demurred from more than four channels' and Michael Hogan (2024) of *The Daily Telegraph* 'the part that old-fashioned class division might have played in his family's decision.' Hogan concludes it 'wasn't about thrift but snobbery. He didn't have Sky TV but not because he was too poor. It was because he was too posh.'

any political party with British-Chinese heritage', Adam Afriyie (n.d.), Conservative MP for Windsor, that he was '[b]orn in 1965 to a white English mother and a black Ghanaian father', Layla Moran (n.d.), Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, that 'her mother is a Christian Arab from Jerusalem, and her father is a British EU Ambassador', Darren Henry (n.d.), Conservative MP for Broxtowe, that he is 'proud to be the first Conservative MP of West Indian heritage. Black, British with all my heart, immensely proud of my West Indian heritage, and Conservative to my fingertips', Nadhim Zahawi (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stratford-on-Avon, that he 'was born in Baghdad to Kurdish parents', and Claudia Webbe (n.d.), elected as the Labour MP for Leicester East, sitting as an Independent as of September 2020, that she is 'the first British born Member of Parliament of African descent from the beautiful Caribbean Island of Nevis'. A number of MPs reference non-British origins – these have not been included as they are not explicit references to race. Saqib Bhatti (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Meriden, mentions that '[b]oth of his parents are of Pakistani origin', Valerie Vaz (n.d.), Labour MP for Walsall South, that she 'was born in Aden and her family re-located from Yemen to the UK when she was ten years old', Afzal Khan (n.d.), Labour MP for Manchester Gorton, that he 'was born in Pakistan', and Virendra Sharma (n.d.), Labour MP for Ealing Southall, that he 'was born in India'.[220]

As well as being as likely to reference their race as their class, MPs are more likely to state that they are representing and furthering the interests of their race than their class. Kate Osamor (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Edmonton, describes how '[s]ince being elected, [she] has consistently used her voice as an MP to speak out for the most vulnerable in society; highlighting the impact policies will have on BAME communities, arguing for much fuller representation of Black and Ethnic Minority communities in political bodies, more investment in public services and campaigning on social justice issues.'

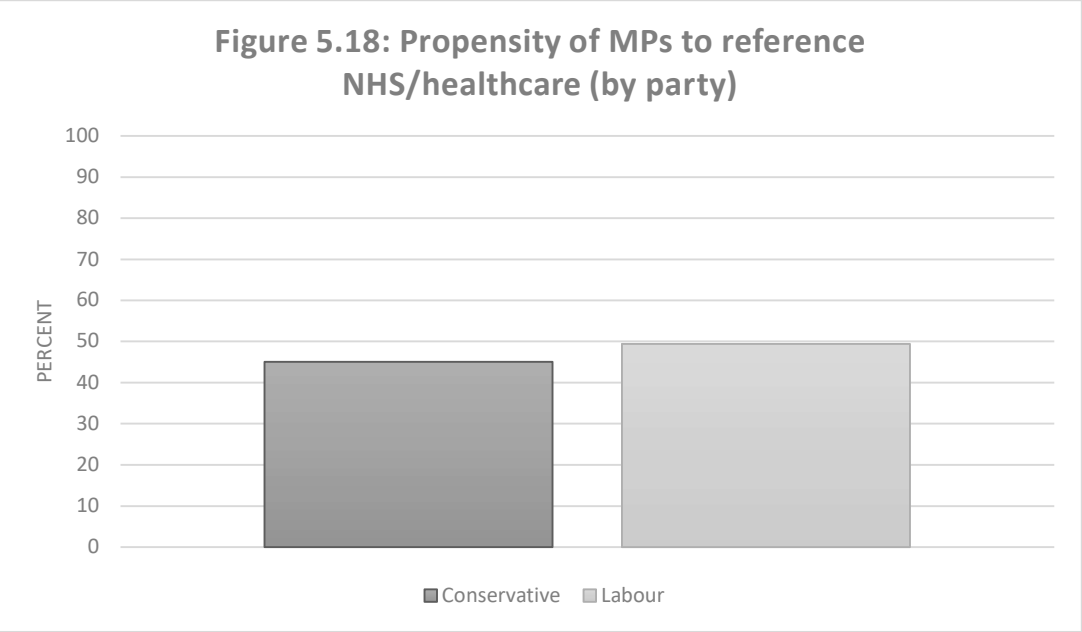
A number of MPs highlight the fact that they are both female and a racial minority. Diane Abbott (n.d.), for example, notes that she 'made history by becoming the first black woman ever elected to the British Parliament', Helen Grant (n.d.), Conservative MP for Maidstone and The Weald, that '[s]he is the first Anglo-African female Conservative MP and Minister, Dawn Butler (n.d.), Labour MP for Brent Central, that she 'became the first elected African-Caribbean woman to become a Government Minister in the UK', and Abena Oppong-Asare (n.d.), Labour MP for Erith and Thamesmead, that she was driven 'to challenge the barriers that I faced as a Black woman'. Two MPs highlight the fact that they are female, a racial minority, and working class or come from a working-class background. Bell Ribeiro-Addy (n.d.), Labour MP for Streatham, describes herself as 'a black working-class woman' and Sarah Owen (n.d.), Labour MP for Luton North, as 'a mixed race [sic] daughter of an immigrant with working class [sic] roots'.

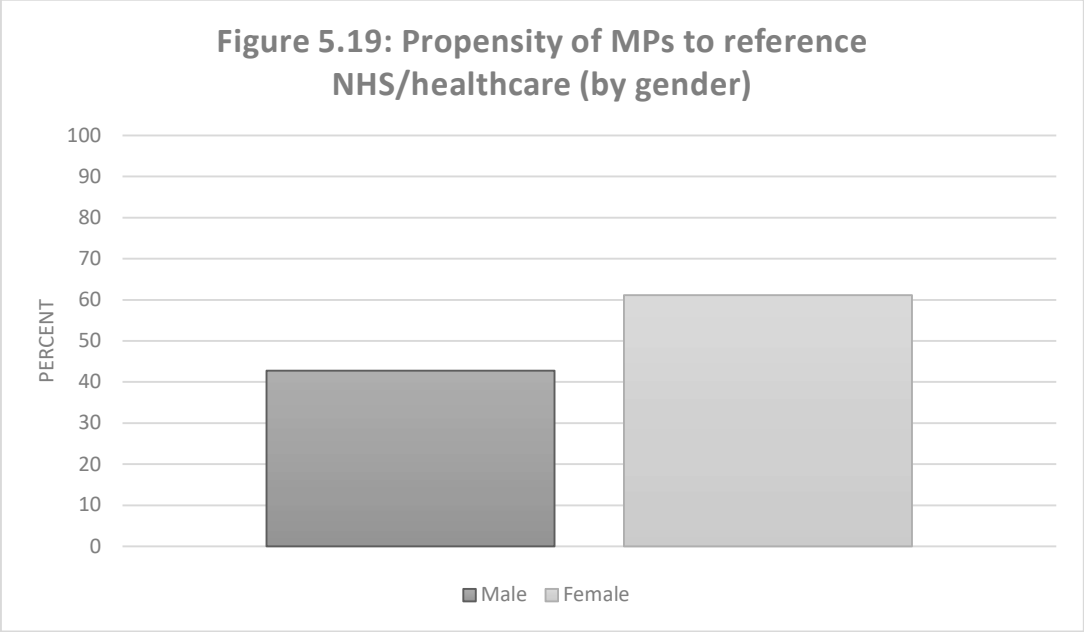
[220] Similarly, a number of MPs mention their adherence to a religion with racial overtones – Nus Ghani (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Wealden, describes herself as 'the first female Muslim to speak from the Dispatch Box', Preet Gill (n.d.), Labour MP for Birmingham Edgbaston, as 'the UK's first female Sikh MP', and Tan Dhesi (n.d.), Labour MP for Slough, as 'the first ever turbaned Sikh in any European Parliament' – these too have been excluded as they do not contain explicit references to race.

5.5.5 NHS and healthcare

It was noted above that all but one of the 35 MPs who worked in healthcare highlighted this fact on their websites. However, references to healthcare go well beyond whether or not an MP worked in this sector and provide further support for the strategic release of information theory posited above. Healthcare, specifically, the NHS, continues to play a central role in British politics – former Chancellor Nigel Lawson (1992, 613) famously quipped that '[t]he National Health Service is the closest the English have to a religion' – and MPs seem extremely keen on highlighting their links to the NHS and healthcare more broadly.

Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section, nearly half (290) highlight a connection to the NHS or healthcare more broadly. Focusing on party, 45% (177) of the 393 Conservative MPs with websites with biographical sections reference the NHS or healthcare more broadly, while 49% (84) of the 170 Labour MPs with websites with biographical sections do so (see Figure 5.18). Given the historic ties between the Labour Party and the NHS, it is perhaps no surprise that Labour MPs reference the NHS at higher rates than Conservative MPs. However, more revealing is the fact the gap is so narrow – politicians from both parties appear desperate to wrap themselves on the flag of the NHS. A focus on gender reveals a greater disparity. Of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament when the content analysis was conducted and had a website with a biographical section, 395 were men and 198 women. Of the 395 men, 43% (169) reference the NHS or healthcare more broadly, compared to 61% (121) of the 198 women (see Figure 5.19).





Some highlight that they worked in the NHS. Kieran Mullan (n.d.), Conservative MP for Crewe and Nantwich, for example, states that '[p]rior to my election I worked as a doctor in A&E', Karin Smyth (n.d.), Labour MP for Bristol South, that she 'worked as an NHS manager', Maria Caulfield (n.d.), Conservative MP for Lewes, that '[u]pon leaving school she became an NHS nurse', Liam Fox (n.d.), Conservative MP for North Somerset, that '[h]e worked as a GP in Nailsea before becoming a member of Parliament', and Ruth Jones (n.d.), Labour MP for Newport West, that '[s]he spent over 30 years in the National Health Service'.

Some MPs, who did not work for the NHS directly, nevertheless highlight the work they did in connection with the NHS and its employees in their former careers. Richard Burgon (n.d.), Labour MP for Leeds East, for example, describes how he 'became a trade union lawyer. For more than a decade I helped care workers, nurses, factory workers, teachers, transport workers and other working people in Leeds who face redundancy, discrimination, pay cuts they simply can't afford or other problems at work through no fault of their own,' Helen Whately (n.d.), Conservative MP for Faversham and Mid Kent, how she 'established a career in healthcare consultancy. For nearly a decade, she worked with NHS hospitals, helping them improve care and make the most of resources. She has also advised healthcare regulators and commissioners, and worked on healthcare policy,' Rebecca Long Bailey (n.d.), Labour MP for Salford and Eccles, how she was 'a solicitor, where, for many years I acted on behalf of NHS Bodies on a range of governance and contractual issues.'

Many MPs highlight that a family member works or worked in the NHS. Sometimes this is a parent. Graham Stuart (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Beverley and Holderness, calls himself 'the son of a doctor' and Peter Gibson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Darlington, the 'son of an NHS Midwife', while Suella Braverman (n.d.), Conservative MP for Fareham and former Home Secretary, notes that her mother 'worked as a nurse

for 45 years', James Cleverly (n.d.), Conservative MP for Braintree and Home Secretary, that his 'mother worked as a midwife at the hospital where I was born', and Rishi Sunak (n.d.), Conservative MP for Richmond (Yorks) and Prime Minster, that '[m]y dad was an NHS family GP'.[221] Sometimes it is a grandparent (Simon Clarke (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, notes that 'his grandfather Patrick was a neurosurgeon at Middlesbrough General Hospital'). Sometimes it is a sibling. Peter Bottomley (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Worthing West, relates that a 'sister worked in the NHS' and Alexander Stafford (n.d.), Conservative MP for Rother Valley, that he 'is passionate about the NHS, where his brother and mother-in-law both work'. Sometimes it is a spouse. Keir Starmer (n.d.(a)), Labour MP for Holborn and St Pancras, notes that 'his wife, Victoria…works for the NHS'[222] and Vicky Ford (n.d.), Conservative MP for Chelmsford, that her 'husband Hugo [is] a cancer specialist.' Some highlight that both they *and* their family members work or worked in the NHS. Antony Higginbotham (n.d.), Conservative MP for Burnley, for example, 'followed in the footsteps of his grandma, mum and stepdad when he started working in the NHS in a variety of roles' while Luke Evans (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bosworth, describes how 'my father worked as a GP and my mother worked first as a nurse, and then a school nurse…myself and my two brothers have all gone into medicine in our careers…Charlie and I met at Medical School, and in May 2019 we got married at a beautiful spot near Kidderminster. Charlie grew up in the Midlands and is also a GP herself.'

Many emphasise their efforts to defend or improve the NHS within their constituency. Steve Reed (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Croydon North, '[l]ed the campaign that saved Croydon University Hospital from closure', Robin Walker (n.d.), Conservative MP for Worcester, 'helped to secure £29.6 million in capital funding to increase bed capacity, improve waiting times and expand parking facilities at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital', Marie Rimmer (n.d.), Labour MP for St Helens South and Whiston, 'secured two new hospitals to cover the local community', Kate Kniveton (n.d.), Conservative MP for Burton, 'secured additional funding for Queen's Hospital to upgrade A&E facilities ahead of winter', Eddie Hughes (n.d.), Conservative MP for Walsall North, 'secured £36 million in funding for a new A+E at Walsall Manor Hospital', John Cryer (n.d.), Labour MP for Leyton and Wanstead, 'successfully fought to save Leyton Green Clinic and also campaigned against the closure of two remaining wards of what was Wanstead Hospital', and Alex Chalk (n.d.), Conservative MP for Cheltenham, 'save[d] Cheltenham's A&E, after it had been earmarked for closure.'

A number of MPs who worked in the NHS argue that their experience makes them uniquely qualified to improve the NHS locally. The aforementioned Kieran Mullan (n.d.), for example, who opines that 'we need more MPs who have real-life experience. Too often, MPs have done nothing but politics their whole lives', writes that '[a]s a doctor, I

[221] A number of MPs not only highlight that one or more of their parents worked for the NHS but add that they worked in the local area. Dan Carden (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Liverpool Walton, states that his 'mum has served our National Health Service for over 40 years on the frontline in Liverpool' and Paul Bristow (n.d.), Conservative MP for Peterborough, that his 'parents moved here to work in our local NHS.'
[222] Starmer (n.d.(a)) also notes that 'his mum was a nurse for the NHS.'

am championing our local health services. I am fighting for Leighton Hospital to be chosen as one of the hospitals which will receive a substantial rebuild in the Governments Hospital Building programme.' Similarly, Dan Poulter (n.d.), who was elected the Conservative MP for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich but crossed the floor to Labour in April 2024, who likewise 'is a strong believer in MPs having experience of life outside of politics', asserts that 'he uses his background and real life experience from his work as an NHS hospital doctor to fight for the needs of the people of Suffolk.'

Poulter (n.d.) argues that as well as enhancing his ability to improve healthcare locally, his experience as a doctor has enabled him to improve the healthcare system more broadly. Thus, he describes how '[a]s a Government health minister between 2012 and 2015, Dr Dan used his first-hand knowledge and expertise working as an NHS hospital doctor to introduce new language checks for overseas doctors and nurses, to ensure they are able to speak a good standard of English before treating patients. He oversaw improvements in the healthcare and support available to our brave armed forces veterans, and also a massive expansion in our NHS early years' workforce with more than 4000 additional health visitors now available to help new mums and families to give their new babies the very best start in life.'[223] Indeed, it was when he resumed working as a doctor during the junior doctors' strike that Poulter (2024) says he decided to defect from the Conservative to Labour Party, as a result of the seeing first-hand the state into which the NHS had descended. He describes how he 'spent more than 20 night shifts over the past year or so working as a mental health doctor in a busy hospital A&E department…Working on the frontline of a health service under great strain left me at times, as an MP, struggling to look my NHS colleagues, my patients and my constituents in the eye.' Other MPs who argue that their former careers in the health sector make them uniquely qualified to improve healthcare across the country include Paul Beresford (n.d.), Conservative MP for Mole Valley, who describes how '[a]s a trained dentist Sir Paul frequently inputs to policy on the topic, advising Ministers, acting as a voice for the profession in Parliament and advocating for bold policies which will have a lasting, noticeable impact – including water fluoridation' and Mark Fletcher (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolsover, who charts how he 'moved into a role working on innovation in the healthcare sector therefore I know the great challenges that face the NHS and I understand the need for creative thinking to meet them.'

Some highlight a generalised commitment to the NHS. Daisy Cooper (n.d.), for example, Liberal Democrat MP for St Albans, says she is 'a passionate supporter of the NHS' and Kate Hollern (n.d.), Labour MP for Blackburn, 'a fervent supporter of the NHS'. Some accentuate and personalise this commitment to the NHS with descriptions of how the NHS helped themselves or family members. Barry Gardiner (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Brent North, describes how '[i]n 1985 their first son was born. Caroline though suffered difficulties during the pregnancy. Premature and weighing only 2lbs 13ozs the baby needed seven weeks of round the clock nursing in the Special Care Baby Unit. I will be forever grateful to the NHS. They saved both Caroline and our son Jesse', Robert Halfon (n.d.), Conservative MP for Harlow, how he 'was born with a walking disability, a

[223] Lest anyone forget he is a doctor, Poulter (n.d.) refers to himself throughout his biography as 'Dr Dan'.

form of cerebral palsy known as spastic diplegia. Yet, thanks to an extraordinary professor at Great Ormond Street Hospital, having numerous leg operations and going to that hospital week after week as a child, I managed not only to walk, but over thirty years later, to achieve my childhood dream of serving my local community in Parliament. The chance that was given to me by Great Ormond Street Hospital ignited my love for the NHS. It is why, as MP for Harlow since 2010, I have worked continuously to strengthen our NHS', and Keir Starmer (n.d.(a)), Labour MP for Holborn and St Pancras and prime minister, how '[h]is mum battled a rare, severe illness for all her life. Keir spent lots of his childhood seeing his mum go into hospital, where his father would always be at her side. Despite the challenges this presented for Keir, he was hugely influenced by his mother's courage and determination to live her life despite her illness. It also gave him a deep gratitude for the NHS.'

A number of MPs specifically mention that it was the NHS within the constituency which helped them or a family member, combining two hugely important considerations for Britons: the NHS and localism. Thus, Chris Philp (n.d.), Conservative MP for Croydon South, says that '[t]he NHS is particularly close to my heart. In 2013, my twins were born very prematurely at 25 weeks. The NHS saved their lives. That is why helping the NHS in Croydon is one of my priorities' and Aaron Bell (n.d.), Conservative MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, that 'I am married with three young children, two of which were born at the Royal Stoke, so we both appreciate hugely all that the NHS does for us here in Newcastle.' Neil O'Brien (n.d.), Conservative MP for Harborough, manages to combine a commitment to the NHS, localism, and a family member working for the NHS. He describes how his 'wife Jemma is a doctor, and their son was born in a local NHS hospital – so fighting for good NHS services locally is very important to him.' One MP explains that he entered politics in the first place out of a desire to protect the NHS facility which saved a family member's life. Guy Opperman (n.d.), Conservative MP for Hexham, describes how he 'first got interested in national politics after giving up his time as a barrister for free to lead a campaign to fight the closure of Savernake NHS Hospital, which he credited with saving his mother's life from cancer.' Healthcare was also the motivating factor behind Andrea Jenkyns (n.d.), Conservative MP for Morley and Outwood, entering politics, but more tragically. Her website references her 'late and beloved father, whose tragic death in 2011 was the driving force behind Andrea's entry into politics. Following the loss of her father, Andrea became a Trustee and the Regional Representative (Voluntary) for the charity MRSA Action UK and has been campaigning for compassionate patient care since then.' Other MPs who state that it was a desire to protect and improve the NHS that brought them into politics include Maria Caulfield (n.d.), Conservative MP for Lewes, who describes how 'concerned by the state that the NHS had been left in following many years of Labour Government, Maria joined the Conservative Party' and Victoria Atkins (n.d.), Conservative MP for Louth and Horncastle, who asserts that her 'belief in our National Health Service, and its founding principles, is one of the reasons I came into politics'.

Some use the NHS as a cudgel to attack government, whether the former Conservative Government in Westminster,[224] the preceding Labour Government in Westminster,[225] or the Labour Government in Cardiff.[226]

A number of MPs highlight specific policies with regard to the NHS. While no MP declares an interest in privatising the NHS, a number highlight their determination to *oppose* privatisation. Margaret Greenwood (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Wirral West, avers that she 'will always oppose NHS privatisation', Beth Winter (n.d.), Labour MP for Cynon Valley, that she 'will work to save our NHS from the onslaught of Tory privatisation', Clive Lewis (n.d.), Labour MP for Norwich South, that he has 'campaigned against the privatisation of local NHS services', Imran Hussain (n.d.), Labour MP for Bradford East, that he 'stood up against privatisation of our NHS', and Daniel Zeichner (n.d.), Labour MP for Cambridge, that he 'has been a leading voice…against privatisation of local health services'.

A great many MPs express their desire for more funding for the NHS. Darren Henry (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Broxtowe, declares that 'I want to see more money in our NHS' and Liz Twist (n.d.), Labour MP for Blaydon, that 'the NHS…must be funded properly', while Sarah Dines (n.d.), Conservative MP for Derbyshire Dales, explains that '[a]s someone who has benefited from the National Health Service, I am absolutely committed to increases in its funding'. Just one indicates a desire to reform and streamline it and in so doing spend less on it. Jonathan Djanogly (n.d.), Conservative MP for Huntingdon, arguing that 'economic circumstances have, and will continue to put further strain on hard pushed local schools and the Health Service. I will continue to fight for reform of these services to cut bureaucracy and save much needed money.'[227]

Some reference roles leading the NHS. Helen Whately (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Faversham and Mid Kent, 'serve[d] as Minister of State for Health and Social Care in the Health Department', Stephen Barclay (n.d.), Conservative MP for North East Cambridgeshire, 'was Minister of State for the Department of Health and Social Care', Caroline Dinenage (n.d.), Conservative MP for Gosport, 'was appointed Minister of State at the Department of Health & Social Care', Philip Dunne (n.d.), Conservative MP for Ludlow, 'was appointed Minister of State for Health at the Department of Health', and Matt Hancock (n.d.(b)), elected as the Conservative MP for West Suffolk, sitting as an

[224] Bell Ribeiro-Addy (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Streatham, complains that '[t]he Tories have failed communities like ours. They have run our NHS into the ground', Helen Hayes (n.d.), Labour MP for Dulwich and West Norwood, that '[o]ur local NHS and social care staff have been inspiring but have too often been let down by the Tory Government', and Gill Furniss (n.d.), Labour MP for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough, '[t]his Government's punishing austerity policies have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable here and across the UK…local hospitals have been stretched to breaking point'.

[225] Henry Smith (n.d.), Conservative MP for Crawley, recalls 'the closure of A&E at Crawley Hospital under Labour in 2005'.

[226] Sarah Atherton (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Wrexham, who describes how '[h]aving returned to front line nursing during the pandemic and witnessed residents and NHS staff being let down by the Welsh Labour Government, Sarah launched her Health Campaign to send the Welsh Government a message.'

[227] Though he does not say that less money should be spent on the NHS, Brendan Clarke-Smith (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bassetlaw, highlights the need for 'an improved and more efficient NHS.'

Independent as of November 2022, was 'promoted to Secretary of State for Health and Social Care by Theresa May'. Others reference positions of oversight. Johnny Mercer (n.d.), Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor View, for example, 'served on both the Defence and Health Select Committees, chairing inquiries into historical prosecutions of servicemen and women and the misuse of prescription drugs', James Murray (n.d.), Labour MP for Ealing North, 'served as a member of the House of Commons Health and Social Care Select Committee', Chris Green (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolton West, 'sit[s] on the Health and Social Care Select Committee', Andrew Percy (n.d.), and Conservative MP for Brigg and Goole, 'sat on the Health Select Committee', and Anne Marie Morris (n.d.), Conservative MP for Newton Abbot, 'chaired an All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Health and Social Care'.

A number of MPs highlight their health-related charity work. Rehman Chishti (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Gillingham and Rainham, 'participated in the London Marathon to fundraise for Cancer Research', Dehenna Davison (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bishop Auckland, 'completed the Great North Run for the first time to raise funds for Butterwick Hospice', and John Penrose (n.d.), Conservative MP for Weston-super-Mare, is 'President of the League of Friends of Weston-super-Mare Hospital'.

A number of MPs highlight the work they have done on specific health issues. Sarah Jones (n.d.), for example, Labour MP for Croydon Central, 'campaigned alongside Baroness Tessa Jowell for better treatment for brain tumours and led a high-profile debate in the House of Commons', Pauline Latham (n.d.), Conservative MP for Mid Derbyshire, 'campaign[ed] to raise the awareness of aortic dissection', Emma Hardy (n.d.), Labour MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle, 'fought a successful campaign to get the Government to back down on the routine use of vaginal surgical mesh in the NHS', Will Quince (n.d.), Conservative MP for Colchester, 'set up a cross-party group working with the Government to half the stillbirth and neo-natal death rate', Nickie Aiken (n.d.), Conservative MP for Cities of London and Westminster, 'speaks out to break the taboos of women's health issues such as the menopause', Chris Heaton-Harris (n.d.), Conservative MP for Daventry, 'raised the problems surrounding the very emotional subject of Stillbirth in Parliament.'

Numerous MPs highlight their commitment to raising awareness of, and improving care for, mental health conditions, suggesting that the stigma which once surrounded this domain is waning. Marco Longhi (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Dudley North, 'made it a priority of mine to support a local mental health charity', Charles Walker (n.d.), Conservative MP for Broxbourne, 'has championed the issue of mental health', and the aforementioned Emma Hardy (n.d.) 'lobbied successfully to bring money to Hull for a new Children and Adolescent Mental Health Unit.'

These multifaceted efforts by MPs to wrap themselves in the flag of the NHS lend further support to the strategic release of information theory.

5.5.6 Local ties

Let us now move beyond what was tested in the conjoint experiment and surveys and, exploiting the work of other scholars, test whether additional characteristics of politicians are being strategically discussed. A number of candidate choice experiments have demonstrated the great importance that Britons attach to MPs who have ties to the area they are representing (Campbell et al. 2019b; Campbell and Cowley 2014c; Vivyan et al. 2020a).[228] Further, analysis of electoral data reveals that the closer candidates live to voters, the better they do, both in Britain (Arzheimer and Evans 2012; Arzheimer and Evans 2014; Evans et al. 2017) and beyond (Black and Black 1973; Blais et al. 2003; Cunningham 1971; Garand 1988; Górecki and Marsh 2012; Hunt 2021; Jankowski 2016; Johnston 1973; Key 1949; Kjar and Laband 2002; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983; Mixon and Tyrone 2004; Rice and Macht 1987; Tatalovich 1975).[229] [230] [231]

Britain's MPs appear well aware of the value that Britons ascribe to local ties. Fully 405 of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section – more than two-thirds – underscore their local ties to the constituency they represent. Once again, it appears that British MPs engage in strategic release of information when it comes to local ties, i.e. they know what Britons want and tell them that they are getting it.[232]

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[228] Experimental studies reveal that the desire for local candidates extends beyond Britain, see Hunt and Fontana (2024), Jacobs and Munis (2019), Munis (2021), Panagopoulos, Leighley, and Hamel (2017) for America and Schulte-Cloos and Bauer (2023) for Germany.

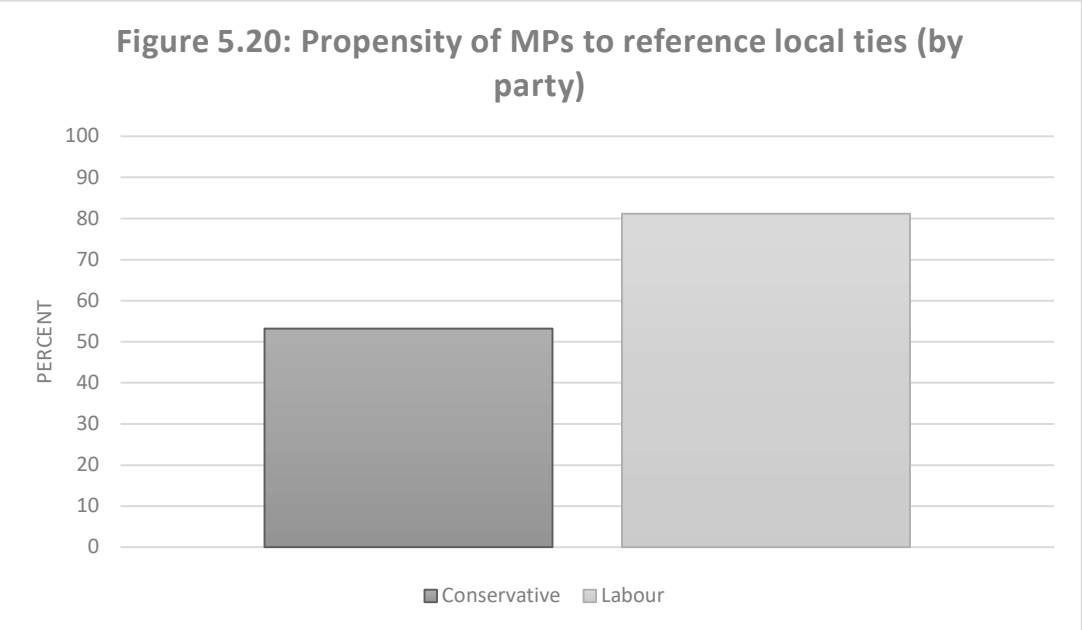
[229] Though see McAllister (2015) and Tavits (2010) for contrasting data from Australia and Estonia, respectively.

[230] Key (1949) famously dubbed the phenomenon the 'friends-and-neighbors' effect. He argued that 'the friends-and-neighbors appeal can assume overriding importance only in an immature politics in which issues are either nonexistent or blurred' (1949, 110).

[231] Nyholt (2024) has conducted innovative experimental work which attempts to ascertain why voters prefer voter candidates with local ties. His results suggest that it is due to voters believing 'that such candidates are more likely to act in the substantive interests of their local community', a position supported by Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen (2005) rather than in-group favouritism, as contended by Collignon and Sajuria (2018), Panagopoulos, Leighley, and Hamel (2017), and Schulte-Cloos and Bauer (2023). Evidence demonstrating that local candidates do indeed provide place-based substantive representation is cited above in the section which considers the links between descriptive and substantive representation (Binderkrantz et al. 2020; Carozzi and Repetto 2016; Fiva and Halse 2016).

[232] Despite the importance Britons attach to local representatives, a study of 16 West European democracies found that Britain had the highest proportion of 'parachutist' parliamentarians (Pedersen, Kjær, and Eliassen 2007). Wheare (1963, 44) noted some time ago that '[t]he "carpet-bagger" is a familiar figure in British elections in all parties' and Roy Jenkins (2001, xvii) that 'many of the most famous figures [in British politics] have been elected in the course of their careers from a bewildering geographical spread…Neither Margaret Thatcher nor Tony Blair had any connection with their constituencies until they came to represent them in Parliament. Churchill's electoral contests embraced not only Lancashire and Scotland, but also London suburbia, as well as the East Midlands city of Leicester and the Abbey division of Westminster'. However, it should be noted that a recent study by Cowley, Gandy, and Foster (2024), encompassing the four general elections between 2010 and 2019, found that the proportion of British MPs with local ties is increasing. Whilst one might imagine that this trend will continue as a result of Labour's overwhelming victory in the 2024 General Election (given the greater propensity of Labour MPs to have local ties than Conservative MPs), it has been highlighted that the snap election allowed Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer to impose favoured, often non-local, candidates on local constituency parties (Heale 2024; Maddox 2024). Some have suggested there is a link between parachuted candidates and career politicians (see, for example, Baxter 2014). Two non-locals whose candidacies caused particular disquiet in 2024, the Conservative Richard Holden in Basildon and Billericay and Labour's Torsten Bell in Swansea West, could both be classed as 'careerists'. Holden 'has a long history in politics, joining the Conservative Campaign Headquarters straight after graduating from LSE as a data administrator. Holden

MPs from the two main parties differ considerably in their propensity to emphasise local connections. 81% (138) of the 170 Labour MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section reference ties to their constituency, compared to 61% (207) of the 339 Conservative MPs (see Figure 5.20). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.00001 level (chi-square test).[233] One should note that even the lesser of these figures is still substantial, reinforcing the importance MPs appear to believe Britons attach to their representatives having local ties. The greater propensity of Labour MPs to reference their local ties appears to reflect the greater propensity of Labour MPs to *have* local ties. The recent study of MPs' local ties by Cowley, Gandy, and Foster (2024, 256) found that '[i]n all four elections [between 2010 and 2019], Labour MPs were noticeably more likely to be local compared to Conservatives'.



Many MPs highlight that they were born in the constituency and have lived there their entire lives. Imran Hussain (n.d.), Labour MP for Bradford East, states that 'Bradford is the city that I have called home my entire life', Holly Mumby-Croft (n.d.), Conservative MP for Scunthorpe, that she 'was born in Scunthorpe hospital and has lived in the local area all of her life', Nick Fletcher (n.d.), Conservative MP for Don Valley, that he 'has spent his entire life working and living in the Doncaster area', Ian Lavery (n.d.), Labour MP for Wansbeck, that 'I have called Northumberland home my entire life', Marcus Jones (n.d.), Conservative MP for Nuneaton, that he 'has lived in Nuneaton all his life', Derek

rose through the Conservative ranks, becoming deputy head of press and…became a special adviser to several cabinet ministers including the then defence secretary Michael Fallon, Chris Grayling at the Department for Transport, and finally Gavin Williamson at the Department for Education', while Bell served as special adviser to Chancellor Alistair Darling and Ed Miliband's director of policy (Mace n.d.; Grice 2015).

[233] $x^2 = 20.07$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Twigg (n.d.), Labour MP for Halton, that he 'has lived all his life in Halton', and Julie Elliott (n.d.), Labour MP for Sunderland Central, that she 'was born in Whitburn, Sunderland, in 1963 and have lived in and around the city all my life'.

Declaring oneself 'born and bred' in the constituency is a popular formulation. Exponents of this phrasing include Alex Davies-Jones (n.d.), Labour MP for Pontypridd, states he is 'Pontypridd born and bred', Julian Sturdy (n.d.), Conservative MP for York Outer, that he 'is born and bred in North Yorkshire', Ruth Jones (n.d.), Labour MP for Newport West, that she was '[b]orn and bred on the Gaer in Newport', Karl Turner (n.d.), Labour MP for Kingston upon Hull East, that he 'was born and bred in East Hull', Jack Brereton (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stoke-on-Trent South, that he 'was born and bred in Stoke-on-Trent', Craig Williams (n.d.), Conservative MP for Montgomeryshire, that he 'was born and bred in Montgomeryshire', and Michael Kane (n.d.), Labour MP for Wythenshawe and Sale, that he is 'Wythenshawe born and bred'.

Some MPs go further than simply saying that they were born in the constituency; some highlight that their ancestors lived there too. Among those with the most impressive lineages are Richard Burgon (n.d.), Labour MP for Leeds East, whose 'family have lived and worked here for over a hundred years', Geraint Davies (n.d.), Labour MP for Swansea West, that his 'family has lived in Swansea for five generations', Anne Marie Morris (n.d.), Conservative MP for Newton Abbot, 'I live in Newton Abbot and have a family history in Devon that can be traced back some 200 years', Simon Fell (n.d.), Conservative MP for Barrow and Furness, whose 'family have lived in and around Furness since the 1600s, and still do so today', George Eustice (n.d.), Conservative MP for Camborne and Redruth, whose 'family have lived and worked in the Camborne and Redruth area for over four hundred years', and Ian Levy (n.d.), Conservative MP for Blyth Valley, who 'can trace his ancestry back 500 years in the town'.

Many highlight that while they may not have been born in the constituency, they have nevertheless lived locally for a substantial amount of time. Peter Kyle (n.d.), Labour MP for Hove, states that 'has lived in Hove for over 20 years,' Pauline Latham (n.d.), Conservative MP for Mid Derbyshire, that she 'has lived in Derbyshire since 1970', and Eleanor Laing (n.d.), Conservative MP for Epping Forest, that she 'Eleanor has lived in the constituency for well over 20 years.'

A number of MPs who lack ties to the areas they represent highlight that their spouses are local. Darren Henry (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for Broxtowe, highlights that his 'wife Caroline is a born and bred Eastwood girl who lived in Giltbrook when we first met in 1994' and Ian Blackford (n.d.(a)), Scottish National Party MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, that he 'along with his wife Ann, moved to the Isle of Skye in 2004, buying a croft that had previously been in Ann's family for hundreds of years.'[234]

[234] This information was later scrubbed from Blackford's website, after he left his wife (Blackford (n.d.(b)); Sanderson 2024).

Some MPs, not included in the 400 figure above, who do not have ties to their constituency, highlight that they grew up in areas similar to the constituency they represent. Thus, Mark Fletcher (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolsover, explains that 'I'm not from here originally, I grew up in Doncaster, a similar former mining area which feels unloved and left behind', Alistair Carmichael (n.d.), Liberal Democrat MP for Orkney and Shetland, that he 'was born and brought up on Islay. His parents are hill farmers rearing sheep and cattle. Being an islander and a farmer's son have shaped who he is and his politics more than anything', and Victoria Atkins (n.d.), Conservative MP for Louth and Horncastle, that she 'was raised in a market town in Lancashire, about the size of Horncastle.'

A number of MPs suggest that being a local MP makes them a *better* MP, as they understand the constituency and the concerns of constituents in a way that an outsider never could. Steve Double (n.d.), for example, Conservative MP for St Austell and Newquay, argues that as 'he was born and raised in St Austell…[he] understands first-hand the challenges local people face', while Rob Butler (n.d.), Conservative MP for Aylesbury, explains that 'was born at the Royal Bucks Hospital in Aylesbury…so Rob knows the local area well, both town and country, and understands the issues that matter here' and Elliot Colburn (n.d.), Conservative MP for Carshalton and Wallington, that 'I'm a life-long local resident, I was born at St Helier Hospital, I went to school at Carshalton Boys and I worked for our local NHS. I really get the issues that matter most to you and your family – because they're the issues that affect me and my family too.' Matt Vickers (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stockton South, similarly points out that '[b]orn locally, raised locally and educated locally, he knows the problems our area faces and is determined to solve them' and Paul Scully (n.d.), Conservative MP for Sutton and Cheam, that he has 'lived in Sutton for 32 years, building a small business and raising a family…I understand the local issues that concern you because I shop in the same shops and drive on the same roads.'

As with these 'lifers', various MPs who were not born in the constituency they represent but have lived there for a substantial amount of time argue that this qualifies them to be the MP, again because they understand the lives of their constituents. Thus, Jane Hunt (n.d.), Conservative MP for Loughborough, describes how she 'lives in Quorn, in the constituency, where she has lived since 1995. This has given her an in-depth understanding of the local area, as well as the concerns and priorities of local residents', and Kate Hollern (n.d.), Labour MP for Blackburn, how '[i]t is an Honour to represent Blackburn in Parliament – I made the town my home over 40 years ago and I brought my daughters up here…Kate has direct personal experience of the difficulties that local families face'.

5.5.7 Propensity to rebel

Experimental studies demonstrate that Britons hold positive views towards MPs who regularly rebel against the party line (Campbell et al. 2019a; Campbell and Cowley

2014a; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016).[235] Further, the Electoral Commission and Hansard Society's (2006) *Audit of Political Engagement* report found that Britons value politicians being 'independent minded' above all other qualities, with 58% of respondents stating that they considered this to be an important trait for politicians. It was viewed as more important than being brought up in the area they represent (54% stated that this was important to them), being well educated (50%), and knowing what being poor means (43%). Once again, with regard to this characteristic, British MPs appear to employ strategic release of information, with many of them stressing their independence and their willingness to vote against their party on their websites.

Chris Pincher (n.d.), for example, independent MP for Tamworth (elected as a Conservative), asserts that '[n]ormally loyal to Government, Chris will stand up when he thinks it is right, he did not back the extension of Article 50 (to block Brexit), he voted against daylight savings time being implemented. He also campaigned against HS2 as he felt the business case was flawed', while Johnny Mercer (n.d.), Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor View, describes how he 'was sacked from Government in April 2021 after refusing to pass legislation that did not protect Northern Ireland veterans from repeated and vexatious prosecutions from *the troubles* [emphasis in original]', Adam Holloway (n.d.), Conservative MP for Gravesham, how he 'joined the Government as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Europe, but resigned from the job in October 2011, when he was asked to vote against a non-binding Backbench Motion offering the British people a Referendum on Europe. A vote for the motion would have gone against all he'd been saying to his constituents as a Eurosceptic', and Conor Burns (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bournemouth West, how he 'resigned from the Government in 2012 in order to vote against the House of Lords Reform Bill…Conor has gained a reputation for speaking his mind and has on occasion voted against a three line whip in the House of Commons when he regards an issue he disagrees with as particularly important.'

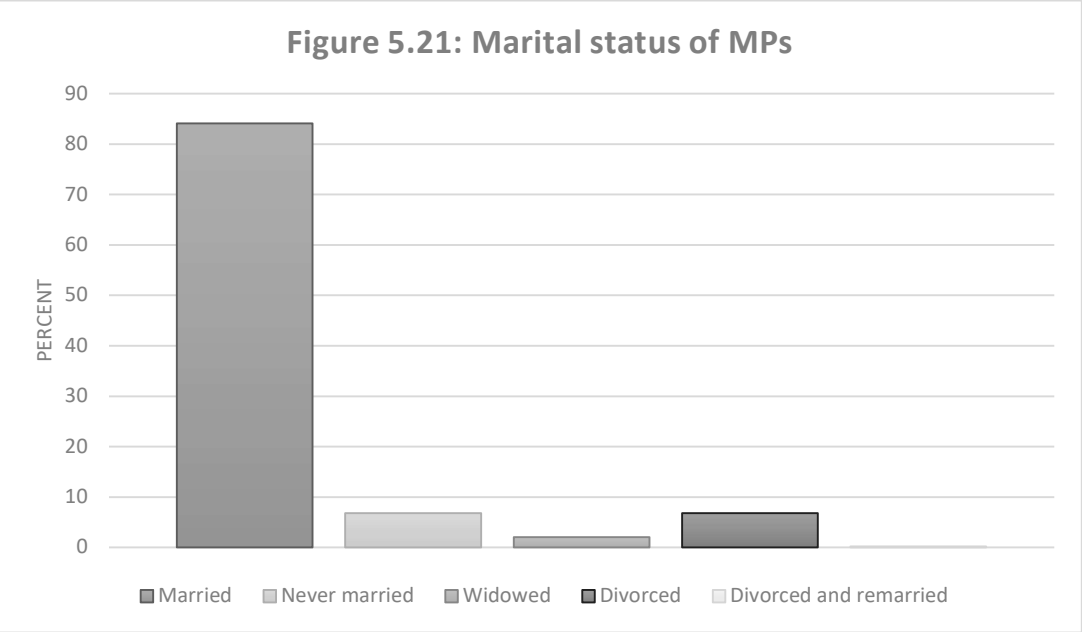
A number of MPs link their independence to their commitment to their constituency. Luke Pollard (n.d.), Labour MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, for example, states 'I'm my own man. I think Plymouth has been let down by people putting their party ahead of Plymouth. I want to be fiercely independent in Parliament, putting Plymouth above party each and every time', Andrew Percy (n.d.), Conservative MP for Brigg and Goole, that 'I made clear during my election campaign that I wanted to be a strong independent voice for our area and I meant it. I have never been afraid to speak up for our area, no matter who is in power', and Andrea Jenkyns (n.d.), Conservative MP for Morley and Outwood, that she 'has been an outspoken and independent voice, for the residents of Morley and Outwood, during her time in Parliament. She hasn't been afraid

[235] For studies of the levels of rebelliousness in recent British Parliaments, see Cowley 1999; 2001; 2002; 2005; Cowley and Childs 2003; Cowley and Norton 1999; Cowley and Stuart 2003a; 2003b; 2004; 2005; 2008; 2012; 2014. For historical analyses, see Crowe 1980; Franklin, Baxter, and Jordan 1986; 1987; Norton 1975; 1978; 1980; 1987; Piper 1974.

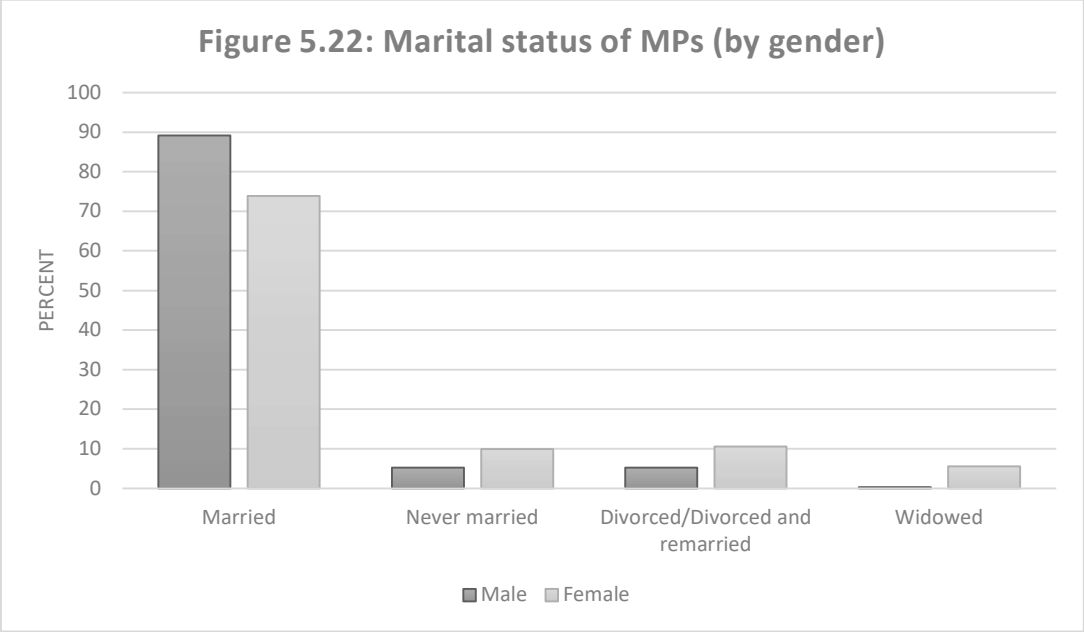
to challenge Government, putting Morley and Outwood ahead of party political interests.'

5.5.8 Marital status

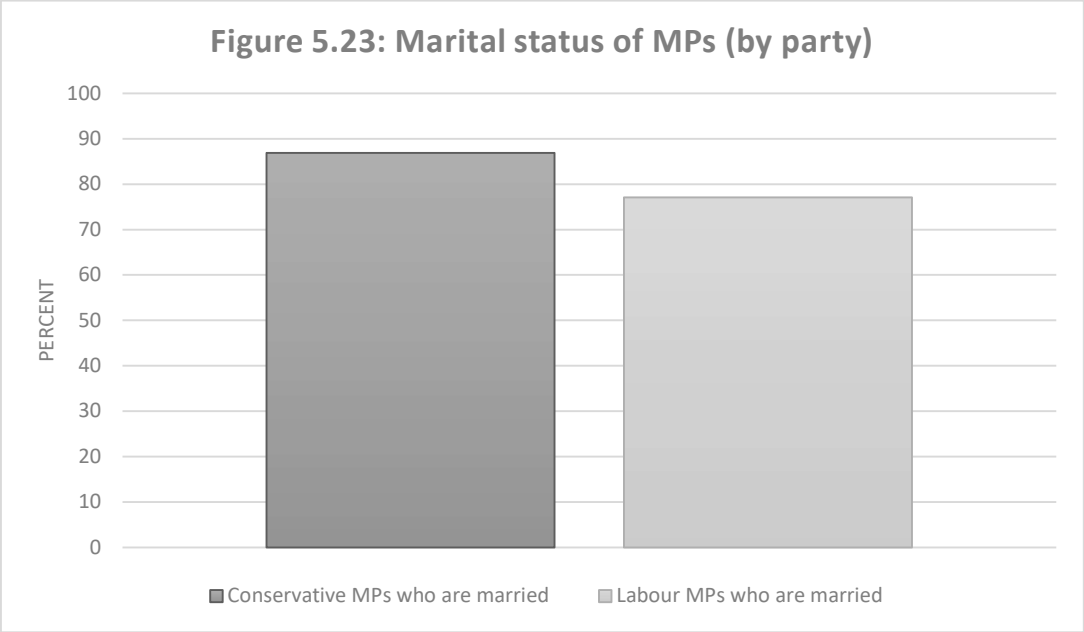
As part of the work collating information on the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs, data was collected on MPs' marital status. Information was obtained on the marital status of 485 (75%) of the 650 MPs elected at the 2019 election.[236] Of these 485, 84% (408) were married, 7% (33) had never married, 2% (10) were widowed, 7% (33) were divorced, and less than 1% (1) were divorced and remarried (see Figure 5.21). Of the 408 MPs who were married, 71% (288) were male, 29% (119) female, and less than 1% (1) were transgender. Of the 485 MPs for whom information on their marital status was obtained, 323 were male, 161 female, and 1 transgender. Male MPs were more likely to be married than their female counterparts: 89% of the 323 men in Parliament were married compared to 74% of the 161 women (see Figure 5.22).[237] The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[238]



[236] As stated above, data was collected between 20 July and 25 August 2023.
[237] Of the 323 men, 89% (288) were married, 5% (17) had never married, 5% (16) were divorced, less than 1% (1) divorced and remarried, and less than 1% (1) were widowed. Of the 161 women, 74% (119) were married, 10% (16) had never married, 11% (17) were divorced, and 6% (9) were widowed.
[238] $x^2 = 18.41$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.



Analysing by party, Conservative MPs were more likely to be married than Labour MPs. Of the 485 MPs for whom information on their marital status was obtained, 290 were Conservative and 140 Labour. Of these 290 Conservative MPs, 87% (252) were married, compared to 77% (108) of the 140 Labour MPs (see Figure 5.23). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[239]



Let us turn to the 593 MPs who had functioning websites with biographical sections. Information was obtained on the marital status of 442 (75%) of these MPs. Of these 442,

[239] $x^2 = 6.59$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

84% (373) were married, 7% (30) had never married, 2% (9) were widowed, 7% (29) were divorced, and less than 1% (1) were divorced and remarried. Of the 373 MPs who were married, 71% (263) were male and 29% (110) female.

In terms of gender, of the 442 MPs for whom information on their marital status was obtained, 67% (296) were male and 33% (146) female. Of the 296 men, 89% (263) were married, 5% (16) had never married, 5% (15) were divorced, less than 1% (1) divorced and remarried, and less than 1% (1) were widowed. Of the 146 women, 75% (110) were married, 10% (14) had never married, 10% (14) were divorced, and 5% (8) were widowed.

In terms of party, of the 442 MPs for whom information on their marital status was obtained, 62% (275) were Conservative and 27% (119) Labour. Of the 275 Conservative MPs, 87% (239) were married, 4% (12) had never married, 8% (21) were divorced, less than 1% (1) were divorced and remarried, and less than 1% (2) were widowed. Of the 119 Labour MPs, 76% (91) were married, 7% (6) were divorced, 13% (16) had never married, and 5% (6) were widowed.

Let us turn to politicians' likelihood of referencing their marital status. Surprisingly, there has been no experimental testing of Britons' views towards the marital status of politicians. This is particularly puzzling given the weight British politicians appear to believe voters place on representatives being married. It has been suggested, for example, that both Gordon Brown (Ahmed 2000) and Ed Miliband (Moir 2011) married due to fears that remaining otherwise could stymie their political ambitions.

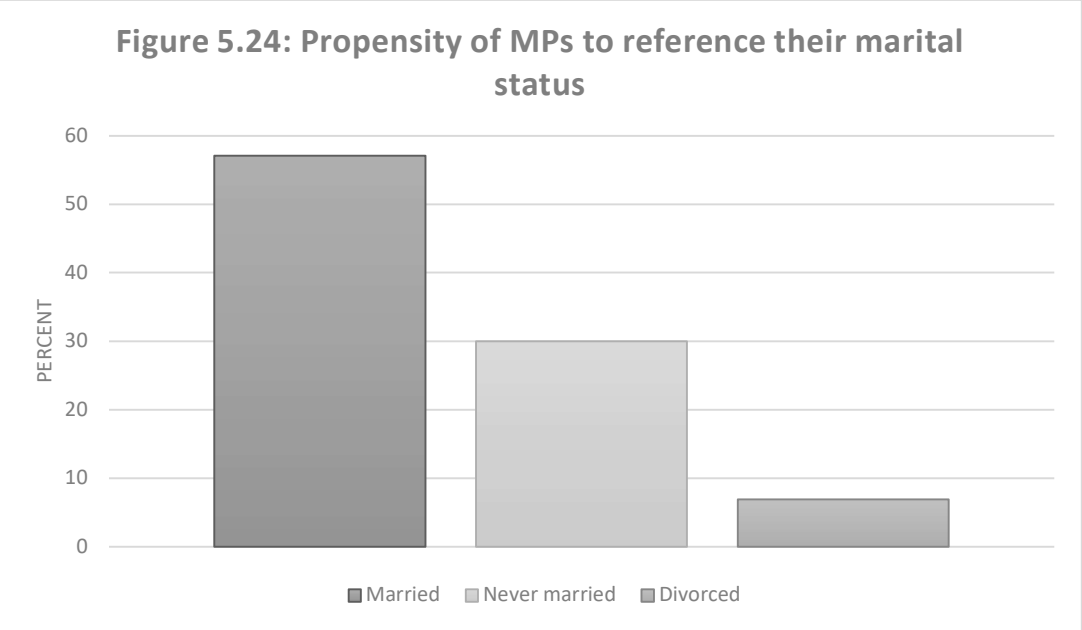
The content analysis of MPs' websites certainly supports the idea that British politicians view being married as an electoral boon.[240] As noted above, of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section and for whom information on their marital status was found, 373 were married. Of these 373, 57% (213) reference being married on their websites. Conversely, just 30% (10) of the 30 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section and were identified as having never married reference their marital status (see Figure 5.24). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[241]

Lending further credence to the idea that MPs act strategically with regard to the release – or non-release – of information on their marital status, just 7% (2) of the 29 of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section and were identified as being

[240] Paxman (2002, 233) suggests that politicians reference their families as 'a way for unusual people to demonstrate that they are, in fact, "normal". For both men and women, a posed picture on the election leaflet with husband or wife, children and doting dog is a way of saying, "Hey, look, I'm just like you. I am fertile, upstanding and yet understanding. I know what real life is like. If you vote for me, you will get someone like you in parliament."'

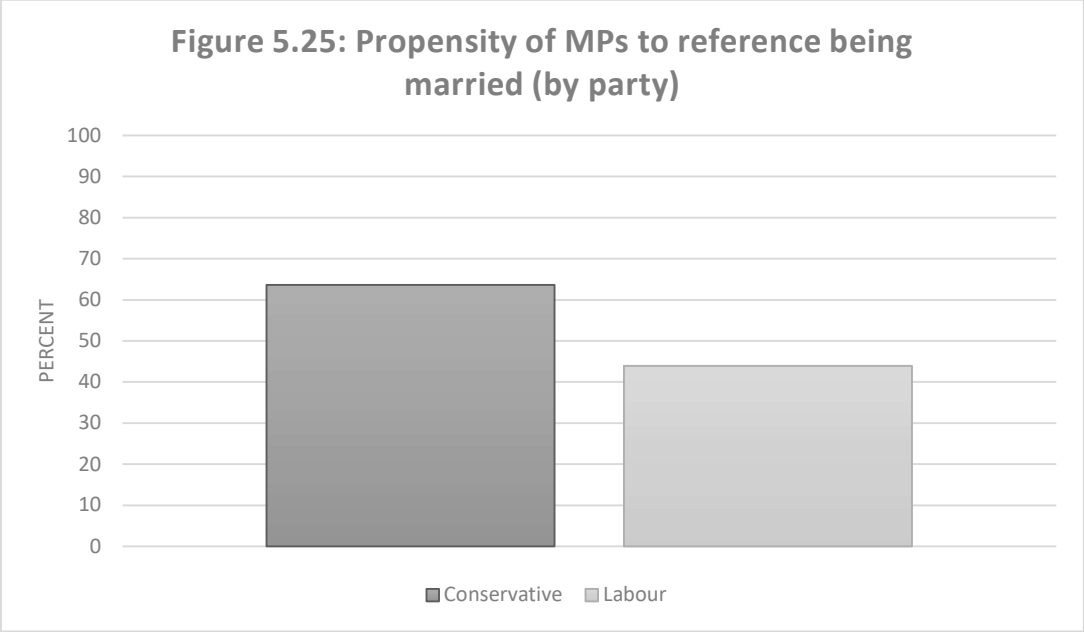
[241] $x^2 = 8.25$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

divorced reference their marital status. Britons' views towards divorced politicians have not yet been tested (to the best of the author's knowledge),[242] but it seems plausible that MPs fear that a stigma remains attached to being divorced and are thus reluctant to provide this information as a result.

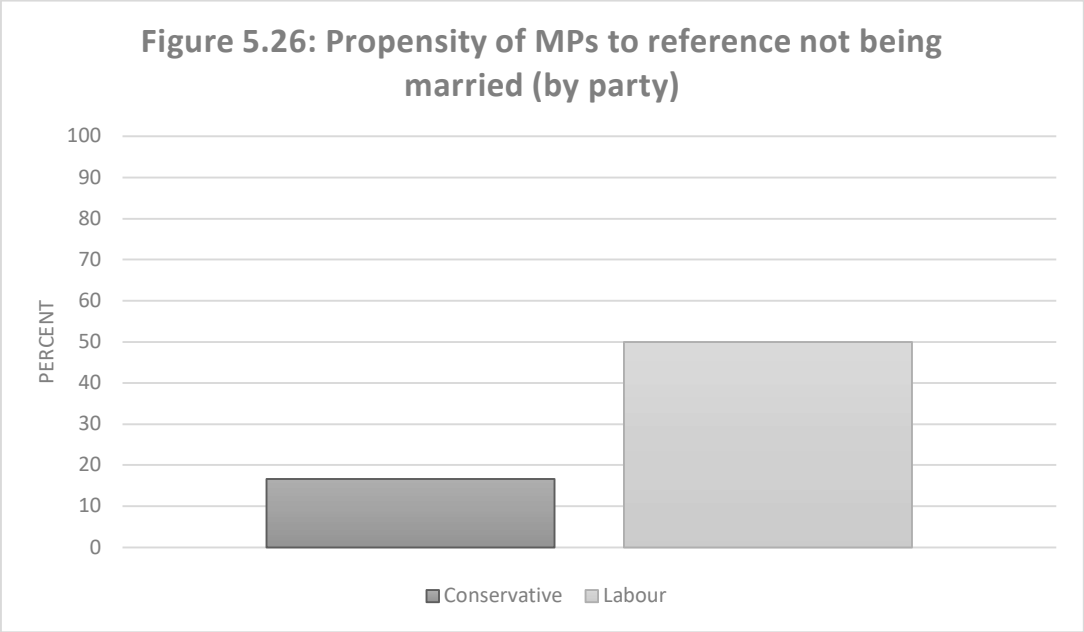


In terms of party, Conservative MPs who were married were far more likely to highlight their marital status than Labour MPs. Of the 239 Conservatives who were married, 64% (152)[243] reference their marital status on their website, compared to 44% (40) of the 91 Labour MPs who were married (see Figure 5.25).[244] The difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (chi-square test).[245]

[242] Though see below for further work the author hopes to conduct.
[243] In total, 65% (156) of these 239 Conservative MPs reference their marital status. Alongside the 152 who state they are married, 2 state they are single, 1 that he is divorced, and 1 that he divorced and remarried.
[244] In total, 55% (50) of these 91 Labour MPs reference their marital status. Alongside the 40 who state they are married, 7 state they are single, 2 that they are widowed, and 1 that he is divorced.
[245] $x^2 = 7.98$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.



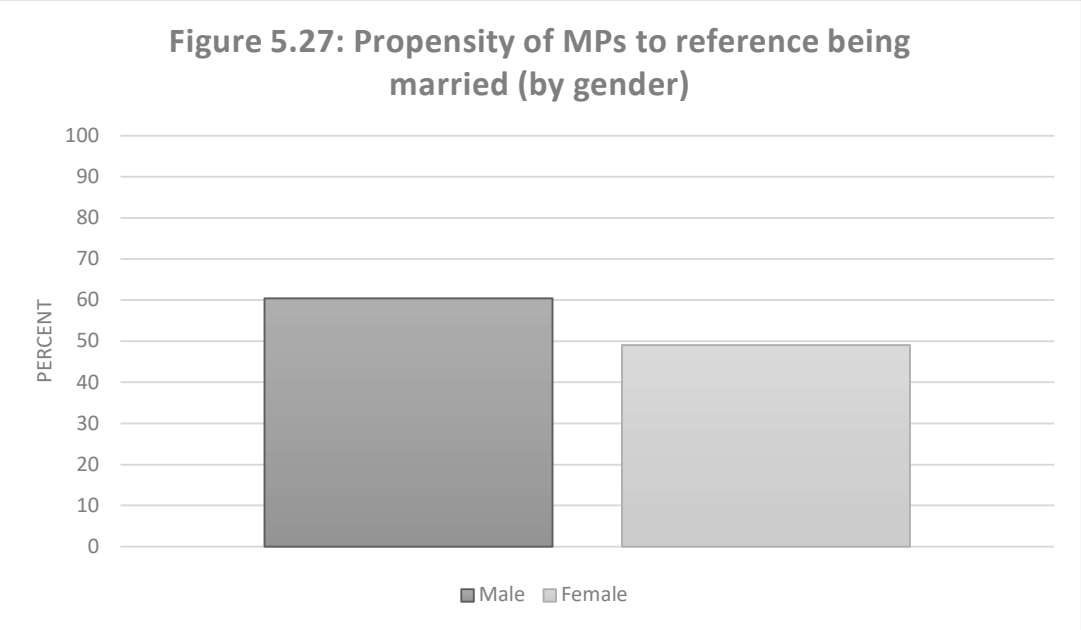
Conversely, Labour MPs who had never married were far more likely to reference their marital status than Conservative MPs who had never married. Of the 12 Conservative MPs who had never married, 17% (2) reference their marital status on their website, compared to 50% (8) of the 16 Labour MPs who had never married (see Figure 5.26). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[246]



In terms of sex, male MPs who were married were more likely to reference their marital status than female MPs; of the 263 male MPs who were married, 60% (159) reference

[246] $x^2 = 4.31$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

their marital status on their website, compared to 49% (54) of the 110 female MPs who were married (see Figure 5.27). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[247]

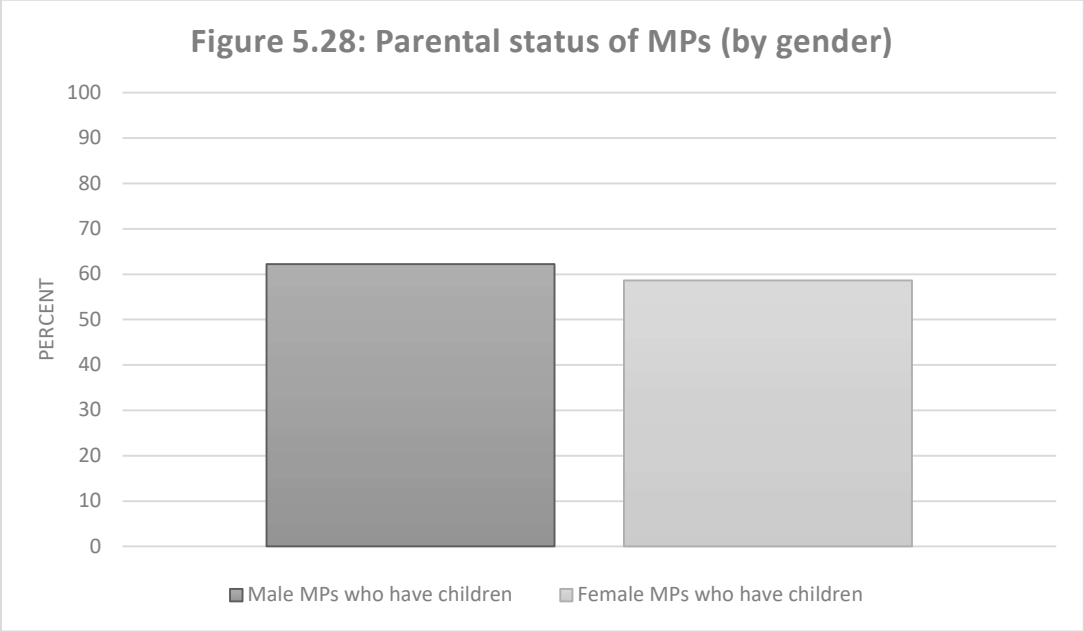


5.5.9 Parental status

As part of the work collating information on the sociodemographic characteristics of British MPs, data was collected on MPs' parental status. Information was obtained on the parental status of 403 (62%) of the 650 MPs elected at the 2019 election.

A decade ago, utilising a survey of MPs and analysis of public sources, Campbell and Childs (2014) found that female MPs were less likely to have children than their male colleagues. The data collected for this thesis confirms that this pattern still holds. Of the 650 MPs elected at the 2019 election, there were 429 men, 220 women, and one who identifies as transgender.[248] 62% (267) of the 429 male MPs were identified as having children, compared to 59% (129) of the 220 female MPs (see Figure 5.28).[249] [250] The difference, however, is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[251]

[247] $x^2 = 3.97$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.
[248] Jamie Wallis (2022), Conservative MP for Bridgend, revealed that he was Britain's first openly transgender MP in March 2022.
[249] Information was obtained on the parental status of 62% (403) of these 650 MPs.
[250] A number of MPs, for example Mark Pritchard, Conservative MP for The Wrekin, and Gillian Keegan, Conservative MP for Chichester, have stepchildren – these MPs have been coded as having children.
[251] $x^2 = 0.65$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.



Turning to the 593 MPs who had functioning websites with biographical sections, information was obtained on the parental status of 364 (61%) of these MPs. Of these 364, 99% (361) were parents and less than 1% were not.[252] Of the 361 MPs who were parents, 67% (243) were male and 33% (118) female.

In terms of gender, of the 364 MPs for whom information on their parental status was obtained, 67% (243) were male and 33% (121) female. Of the 243 men, 100% (243) were parents. Of the 121 women, 98% (118) were parents and 2% (3) were not.

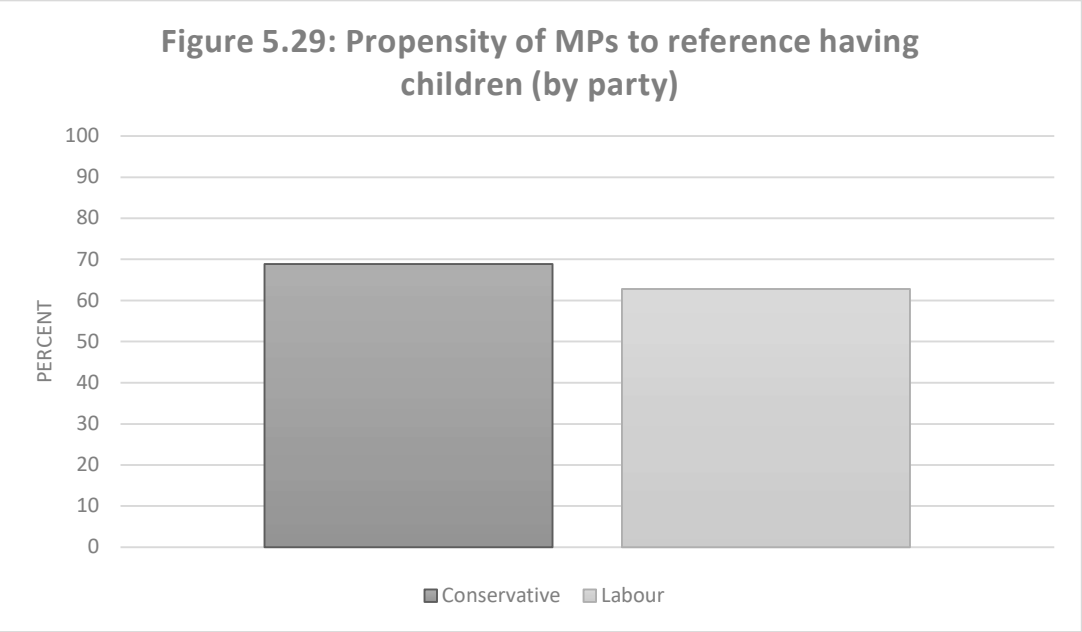
In terms of party, of the 364 MPs for whom information on their parental status was obtained, 63% (231) were Conservative and 26% (94) were Labour. Of the 231 Conservative MPs, 99% (228) were parents and 1% (3) were not. Of the 94 Labour MPs, all were parents.

Let us turn to politicians' likelihood of referencing their parental status. A number of experimental studies have demonstrated that Britons reward hypothetical politicians with children; indeed, that the more children they have, the more they are rewarded (Campbell and Cowley 2018; Saha and Weeks 2022). As Campbell and Cowley (2018, 764) put it when summarising their work: 'children are an electoral asset'.

British politicians appear well aware of the positive connotations of being a parent. As noted above, of the 593 MPs who were in Parliament at the time the content analysis was conducted and maintained both a website and a biographical section and for whom information on parental status was found, 361 were parents. Of these 361, fully 67% (241) reference being a parent on their websites. Not a single MP who does not have children highlights this on their website.

[252] It is extremely difficult to find conclusive evidence that an MP does not have children.

An earlier study found that Conservative MPs with children were far more likely to mention it on their websites than Labour MPs with children, with 79% of Conservative MPs mentioning their children compared to 55% of Labour MPs (Campbell and Cowley 2018).[253] The current study finds that Conservative MPs remain more likely to reference having children than their Labour peers, but that the gap has narrowed considerably, with 69% (157) of the 228 Conservative MPs who have been identified as parents referencing their parental status on their website, compared to 63% (59) of the 94 Labour MPs who have been identified as parents (see Figure 5.29).[254] The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[255]



As well as highlighting that they are parents, British MPs often frame their parental status. A number of MPs argue that having children makes them better MPs, as they share the (parental) concerns of their constituents. Janet Daby (n.d.), Labour MP for Lewisham East, for example, writes that 'I've lived in Lewisham East for over 25 years. This is my home – where I have worked, where my children go to school, where my family and friends live. The issues that matter to people in Lewisham East also matter to me' and Stephen Metcalfe (n.d.), Conservative MP for South Basildon and East Thurrock, that '[a]s a married father of two and having worked many years in his own design and printing business, his priorities are much the same as many of the people he prides himself in representing in South Basildon & East Thurrock.'

Some argue that having children provides them with the perspective and motivation required to address issues which extend beyond the constituency. Mary Foy (n.d.),

[253] Campbell and Cowley conducted their content analysis of MPs' websites in April 2014.
[254] Of the 157 Conservative MPs who reference being parents, 75% (118) are male and 25% (39) female. Of the 58 Labour MPs who reference being parents, 53% (31) are male and 47% (27) female.
[255] $x^2 = 4.38$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Labour MP for the City of Durham, describes how she was 'a carer for her daughter for 27 years. This experience means Mary understands the issues that our communities are facing', while Barry Sheerman (n.d.), Labour MP for Huddersfield contends that '[h]aving children and now grandchildren makes me feel even more acutely the need to give them the very best future possible by fighting to save our fragile planet from the growing climate crisis.'[256]

Some MPs reference their children in ways which emphasise their roots in their community. Thus, a number of MPs highlight that their children were born locally. Caroline Ansell (n.d.), Conservative MP for Eastbourne, expounds how she has 'lived in Eastbourne for 35 years, it's where my children were born, and it's where I truly consider to be my home', Siobhan Baillie (n.d.), Conservative MP for Stroud, how her 'husband and I adore our energetic daughter, who was born in Gloucester Royal hospital in 2020 (following a lot of help from the Stroud maternity team!)', and Stephen Brine (n.d.), Conservative MP for Winchester, how he has 'daughter Emily (born in November 2007), a son William (born in November 2010) Emily & William were both born at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester.' Others emphasise that their children were raised in the constituency. Fleur Anderson (n.d.), Labour MP for Putney, for example, describes how she has 'lived in Wandsworth for 25 years, brought up my four children and lovely dog Toto here' and the aforementioned Barry Sheerman (n.d.), how '[m]y wife Pam and I have raised our children in the constituency'. Some highlight that their children attended local schools. Douglas Chapman (n.d.), SNP MP for Dunfermline and West Fife, for example, writes that '[b]oth my children have gone to school in Dunfermline', Geoffrey Cox (n.d.), Conservative MP for Torridge and West Devon, that he has 'lived in West Devon for many years' and his 'three children were brought up here, attending local schools', and Simon Hoare (n.d.), Conservative MP for North Dorset, that he 'lives in the constituency with his wife and three daughters who attend a local school.' Some MPs highlight that their children were born locally *and* attended local schools. Jane Hunt (n.d.), Conservative MP for Loughborough, for example, says she 'is married with two adult children, both of whom were born at Leicester General Hospital and went to school and college locally.'

[256] Andrea Leadsom would invoke the fact that she had children and Theresa May did not as reasons why she would make a better prime minister. She (quoted in Sylvester 2016) would muse: 'I am sure that Theresa will be really sad that she doesn't have children so I don't want this to be "Andrea has children, Theresa hasn't" because I think that would be really horrible, but genuinely I feel that being a mum means you have a very real stake in the future of our country, a tangible stake. She possibly has nieces, nephews, lots of people, but I have children who are going to have children who will directly be part of what happens next.' Leadsom would face a storm of criticism as a result of her comments. J.D. Vance (2021) made similar comments in 2021 and would be met with a similar backlash for them following his announcement as the Republican nominee for vice-president. He would argue that '[w]e're effectively run in this country, via the Democrats, via our corporate oligarchs, by a bunch of childless cat ladies who are miserable at their own lives and the choices that they've made and so they want to make the rest of the country miserable too. And it's just a basic fact. You look at Kamala Harris, Pete Buttigieg, AOC, the entire future of the Democrats is controlled by people without children and how does it make any sense that we've turned our country over to people who don't really have a direct stake in it.' He (2024b) would later claim that his comments were 'sarcastic', whilst simultaneously reiterating them, stating 'the substance of what I said, Megyn, I'm sorry, it's true'.

Others reference their children when discussing their leisure time and recreational pursuits.[257] Julie Elliott (n.d.), Labour MP for Sunderland Central, for example, notes how '[w]hen I am not working hard for Sunderland I enjoy spending time with my four adult children and seven young grandchildren', Lia Nici (n.d.), Conservative MP for Great Grimsby, how '[o]utside of politics I enjoy family time with my husband and son', and Martin Vickers (n.d.), Conservative MP for Cleethorpes, how '[o]utside of politics I enjoy spending time with my wife and daughter'. Victoria Atkins (n.d.), Conservative MP for Louth and Horncastle does this this and more, emphasising her links to the constituency too. She describes how she and her husband 'spend what little spare time we have going to running around after our son, Monty, building sandcastles on the beautiful Lincolnshire coastline and pulling our boots on to walk the Wolds.'

Some link having children to their political priorities. Chris Philp (n.d.), Conservative MP for Croydon South, for example, explains how '[t]he NHS is particularly close to my heart. In 2013, my twins were born very prematurely at 25 weeks. The NHS saved their lives. That is why helping the NHS in Croydon is one of my priorities.' Some link having children *and* their former occupation to their political priorities. Paul Howell (n.d.), Conservative MP for Sedgefield, for example, describes how '[t]he catalyst for returning to being active in local politics was the Darlington Labour party planning to close the Crown Street library, something which as a father to a daughter who was an incessant reader as a child, I did not want to see happen. I felt that the local Labour party were not listening to public mood, it was clearly a very unpopular decision that they had taken. As an accountant I certainly felt the library had the potential to become financially stable and provide an essential service to the people of Darlington and was something I worked very hard to achieve.'

One MP, Rachel Maclean (n.d.(b)), Conservative MP for Redditch, states that the impetus behind her running for political office was her daughter. She describes how 'I became interested in active politics when my daughter, then a teenager, encouraged me to stand as an MP because she was frustrated with the lack of women MPs.'[258]

5.5.10 Marital and parental status combined

Let us consider a combination of marital and parental status: single parents. One would imagine that MPs would be reluctant to highlight this on their websites, given the stigma which has traditionally been attached to such arrangements.[259] Only a handful of MPs reference the fact that they are single parents, suggesting once again that MPs are engaging in strategic release of information. Further, many of those that do so utilise the framing techniques discussed above, arguing that being a single parent makes them an

[257] See final chapter for further research the author plans to undertake on Britons' views towards politicians' outside interests – cultural, sporting, etc.
[258] These words were added to a later version of the biographical section of her website – it was not present when the content analysis was undertaken (Maclean (n.d.(a))).
[259] Though given the propensity noted above of MPs highlighting the tribulations they encountered growing up, one could reasonably hypothesise that MPs who are single parents could see their situation as an opportunity to emphasise their current struggles.

effective MP. Kate Kniveton (n.d.), Conservative MP for Burton, for example, notes that '[a]s a working single mum, Kate understands life can sometimes be quite tough and that everyone needs a helping hand from time-to-time. That is why Kate's door will always be open to residents to help resolve their problems and to be a voice for them and other local people in Westminster' and Rosie Duffield (n.d.), Labour MP for Canterbury, that 'I know from my experience before being elected as a working single parent that many people face daily challenges with the very high cost of housing, with the rising cost of energy and food, and with accessing public services that have been decimated by 14 years of Conservative cuts and mismanagement.'

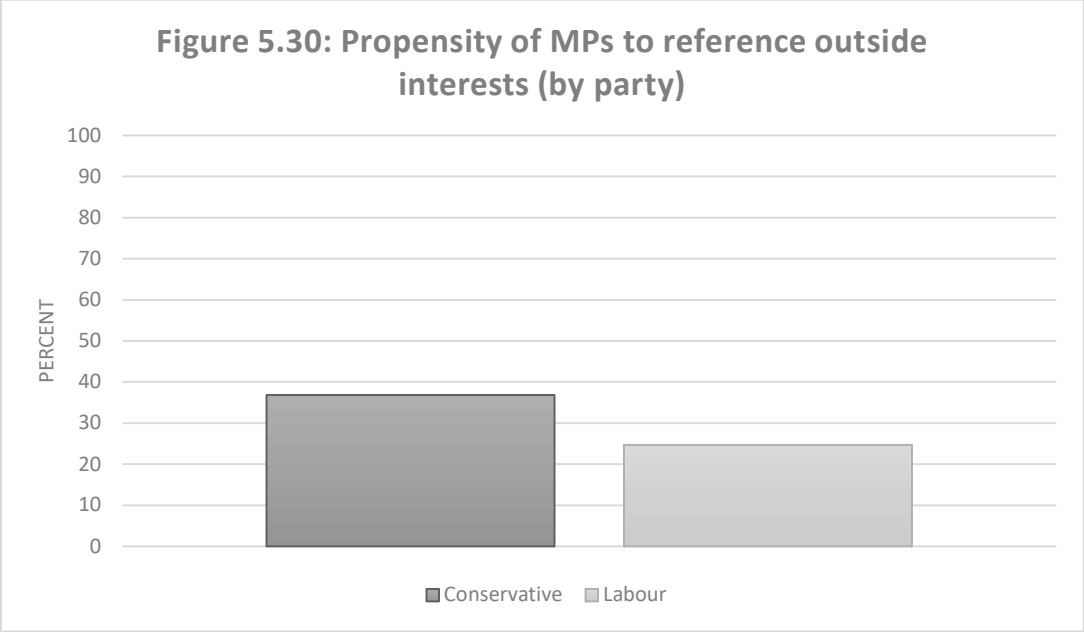
5.5.11 Outside interests

Let us turn to MPs' interests and lives beyond politics, what Denis Healey referred to as a 'hinterland'. In an unpublished study, Greenwood-Hau (2023) found that Britons held statistically significant views with regard to the outside interests of politicians. Further, the existence of outside interests has been held up as proof of not belonging to the political class. Nigel Farage (2011, 132), for example, attributes part of his success to his outside interests. He describes how '[t]he diversity of my interests too – ridiculously rare in an age of "professional politicians" – enabled me to answer questions about business, sport, sex, drugs and rock'n'roll and other subjects of more interest to the discerning public than the intricacies of some impertinent bureaucratic Brussels directive.'[260]

It appears that politicians are aware of the importance to voters of their outside interests. Of the 593 MPs who had functioning websites with biographical sections, 32% (190) reference interests beyond politics.

The likelihood of referencing outside interests varies greatly by party. Where 37% (125) of the 339 Conservative MPs who had functioning websites with biographical sections referenced their outside interests, just 25% (42) of the 170 Labour MPs with functioning websites with biographical sections did so (see Figure 5.30). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square test).[261]

[260] However, tying to another theme of this thesis – politicians' relationship with the truth – Farage's insistence on having a broad array of non-political interests has been questioned. An interviewer once declared 'Farage has zero hinterland. I once asked him about his favourite movie, and for an agonising stretch it was quite clear he couldn't actually think of the names of any movies at all' (Hyde 2023).
[261] $x^2 = 7.56$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.



As with the number of photographs on MPs' websites discussed above, this suggests there has been a major effort by Conservative central command to encourage MPs to reference their lives beyond politics on their websites.

There is also a striking discrepancy by gender, with 46% (143) of the 309 male MPs who had functioning websites with biographical sections referencing their outside interests compared to 24% (47) of the 198 female MPs who had functioning websites with biographical sections. The difference is statistically significant at the 0.001 level (chi-square test).[262]

As with many of the variables tested above, it appears that MPs frame their outside interests. Thus, among the many MPs who declare an interest in sports,[263] a substantial

[262] $x^2 = 24.86$, df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05$.

[263] Proclaiming a love of football has become de rigueur for male British politicians. Among the many examples of male MPs pronouncing their love for the beautiful game are Steven Bonnar (n.d.), SNP MP for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, who has 'a keen interest in football', Scott Benton (n.d.), elected as the Conservative MP for Blackpool South but had the whip withdrawn in April 2023, who is 'an avid football fan', Ian Blackford (n.d.(a)), Scottish National Party MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, who 'has a love of football', Justin Tomlinson (n.d.), Conservative MP for North Swindon, who 'is a huge sports fan, particularly football', and Stephen Brine (n.d.), Conservative MP for Winchester, who 'is a great lover of football'. A number of female MPs also highlight their passion for football. Thérèse Coffey (n.d.), Conservative MP for Suffolk Coastal, for example, 'enjoys watching football', Hannah Bardell (n.d.), SNP MP for Livingston, 'enjoys…watching most sports – but in particular, football', Jo Stevens (n.d.), Labour MP for Cardiff Central, is an 'avid follower of many sports, particularly…football', and Tracey Crouch (n.d.), Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford, as well as 'playing football has become a FA qualified football coach.' Tying to a theme of this thesis, it has been questioned how deep various politicians' professions of love for football really run. David Cameron (2015), for example, was pilloried after confusing his (allegedly) beloved Aston Villa for West Ham. Tying to another theme – the desire for authenticity – Alastair Campbell (2015) tweeted in response to Cameron's (quoted in Boffey 2015) self-described 'brain fade' that he has 'more respect for people like Nick Soames who once told me he hates football and loves Foxhunting [sic].' The journalist Peter Oborne (2007, 15) has noted the prevalence of (purported) football

number link their passion to their constituency, in what could be construed as a means of emphasising the depth of their local ties. Clive Betts (n.d.), Labour MP for Sheffield South East, for example, 'can frequently be found in the stands at Sheffield Wednesday FC', Jacob Rees-Mogg (n.d.), Conservative MP for North East Somerset, 'has supported Somerset County Cricket Club since he was a child', Kevin Brennan (n.d.), Labour MP for Cardiff West is 'a passionate supporter of Cardiff Rugby Club', Jo Stevens (n.d.), Labour MP for Cardiff Central, is 'a regular at Cardiff City FC and on the terraces at Cardiff Blues', and Gavin Newlands (n.d.), SNP MP for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, 'played rugby for Paisley Rugby Club for seventeen years and can still be found at the club cheering on the team on a Saturday.'

The linking of outside interests to local ties extends beyond sports. A number of MPs highlight that they not only enjoy walking, but that they like walking *in the constituency*. Thus, Richard Holden (n.d.), Conservative MP for North West Durham, 'enjoys…walking in the Durham Dales', Karen Bradley (n.d.), Conservative MP for Staffordshire Moorlands, 'enjoys walking in the beautiful Staffordshire Peak District', Tonia Antoniazzi (n.d.), Labour MP for Gower, 'enjoys walking and exploring the many beautiful areas in the constituency', and Dan Poulter (n.d.), elected the Conservative MP for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich but defected to Labour in April 2024, 'enjoys walks in our beautiful Suffolk countryside.'

Similarly, a number of MPs highlight that they not only enjoy swimming, cycling, eating, and shopping, but enjoy doing so *locally*. Thus, Luke Pollard (n.d.), Labour MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, 'swims regularly in Plymouth Sound', Ben Bradshaw (n.d.), Labour MP for Exeter, 'likes…wild swimming in Devon, James Cartlidge (n.d.), Conservative MP for South Suffolk, 'enjoys cycling around South Suffolk', Felicity Buchan (n.d.), Conservative MP for Kensington, 'enjoys…meeting friends and family in Kensington's excellent restaurants', Jacqueline Doyle-Price (n.d.), Conservative MP for Thurrock, 'enjoys…shopping at Lakeside.'

As noted above, Britons prefer politicians with children to those who do not. Whether calculated or not, a number of MPs link their outside interests to their children. Caroline Dinenage (n.d.), Conservative MP for Gosport, for example, describes how she 'and her two sons like to make the most of Gosport's waterfront location with her qualifications in powerboat driving, yacht sailing and open-water diving' and Alan Brown (n.d.), SNP MP for Kilmarnock and Loudoun, how he is 'an avid supporter of Kilmarnock Football Club, and I make it a point to attend matches regularly with my two sons, Kyle and Dylan.'

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obsessives in the House of Commons and suggests that MPs' declarations of love for the beautiful game is linked to the rise of the political class, arguing that they offer career politicians a means of connecting with the rest of society, writing that '[f]ootball has assumed an overwhelming position as the favoured sport of the Political Class, even among those who are privately indifferent to the sport. This is because it is thought to afford an easy way of communicating with voters…this is a manifestation of one key characteristic of the British political elite: the price for membership is the simulation of anti-elite sentiments, characteristics and habits.'

A number of politicians link their outside interests to politics. Ian Blackford (n.d.(a)), for example, Scottish National Party MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, 'passionately follows the Scottish football team', Simon Baynes (n.d.), Conservative MP for Clwyd South, notes how '[t]he arts and heritage are also a key area of interest as Simon is a musician, including playing the organ for church services', and Justin Tomlinson (n.d.), Conservative MP for North Swindon, is 'a fan of video games and has been involved in supporting the UK Gaming industry, championing its contribution to the UK economy.'

A number of MPs describe how politics has seeped into their outside interests. Vicky Ford (n.d.), Conservative MP for Chelmsford, for example, 'enjoys cricket' and as a member of the board of Essex County Cricket Club 'she has helped tackle historic racism at the club and support expansion of the women's and ability teams', while Jane Stevenson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Wolverhampton North East, describes how she 'was elected to serve on the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, where she fought for football fans to have a greater say in the running of their clubs. A lifelong Wolves fan, she has recently backed fans by speaking out against season ticket price hikes.'

A number of politicians take the opportunity afforded by discussion of their outside interests to display a sense of humour, humility, and self-deprecation. Simon Fell (n.d.), Conservative MP for Barrow and Furness, describes himself as 'a keen (but really quite bad) runner, a worse cyclist', Bob Seely (n.d.), Conservative MP for the Isle of Wight, 'plays guitar badly', and Keir Starmer (n.d.(a)) 'still plays 5 a-side every Sunday with friends. He describes himself as a "box-to-box midfield general," although his teammates may have different views.' Jones and Pittman (1982, 242) suggest that this kind of self-deprecatory behaviour is also a strategy aimed at emphasising their competence in other areas. They write: 'We laugh at our own ineptitude at music, bridge, or ping pong, but we are deadly serious about our ability to design a house, or to raise a family. Many self-promoters parade their ineptitude in minor areas to establish the credibility of their claims of competence in crucial areas'.

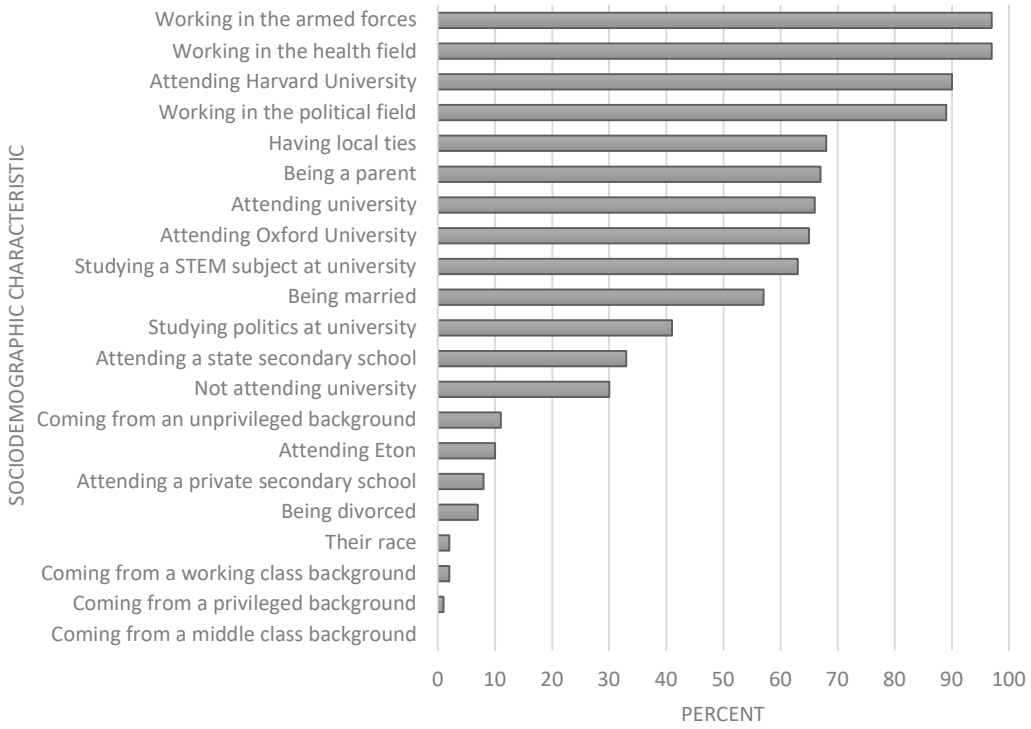
5.6 Conclusion

There has been much discussion in recent years around the rise of mis- and disinformation in politics, both in Britain and beyond. This chapter addresses a different, much less discussed, phenomenon: the emphasising of information which plays well with the public and the omission of information which does not, practices which the thesis dubs the strategic release of information.

Quantitative-based content analysis of MPs' websites reveals that MPs are indeed engaging in the strategic release of information. This was established by comparing the likelihood of MPs referencing different sociodemographic characteristics, the popularity of which had been tested both by the candidate choice experiment and surveys conducted for this thesis and the experimental survey work of others. It was found that for a variety of variables, MPs with sociodemographic characteristics which are popular among Britons highlight these characteristics, while MPs with sociodemographic

characteristics which are unpopular among Britons often fail to mention these characteristics. For example, the candidate choice experiment revealed that Britons much prefer state-educated politicians over privately educated politicians (at statistically significant levels). The content analysis revealed that MPs who were educated at state schools exhibited a far greater likelihood of referencing the type of school they attended than their privately educated colleagues (again, at statistically significant levels). Similarly, being a nurse in the NHS proved the most popular of all the occupations tested in the candidate choice experiment, and the content analysis revealed that working in the health sector was the sociodemographic characteristic most likely of all to be referenced by MPs (see Figure 5.31).

Figure 5.31: Propensity of MPs to reference different sociodemographic characteristics



Alongside this quantitative analysis, a more qualitative approach was also employed, which revealed that as well as appearing to engage in the strategic release of information, British politicians also frame the information they provide about their sociodemographic characteristics. Thus, where elements of their lives are unpopular with Britons, MPs strain to present this piece of information in the best possible light. Returning to the above example, the few MPs who *do* reference attending a private school provide contextual information around their attendance, highlighting, for example, that they attended as a result of a scholarship or because their parents were

abroad. Similarly, large numbers of MPs are former – or current[264] – lawyers. The conjoint candidate choice experiment revealed that Britons hold negative views towards politicians who worked in the legal profession. Perhaps sensing this, a number of MPs who were lawyers frame their previous careers as fights for justice (which they often argue they are continuing as politicians) or as providing them with the skills and experience necessary for them to be effective representatives.

That politicians appear to be aware of, and to be responding to, public opinion may seem a very natural phenomenon; indeed, it forms the basis of the immensely influential Downsian theory of party competition, wherein parties converge on the median voter. However, recent work by Butler (2023) demonstrates that British politicians can and do misread and/or disregard public opinion on crucially important issues,[265] and Deborah Mattinson (2010, 133–134), long-time Labour pollster, has described how '[i]mmigration, perhaps more than any other issue, illustrates the disconnect between the voter and the Westminster Village', recounting how in the focus groups she ran for the party, 'voters would explode with fury once they felt comfortable to discuss this issue without censure from the rest of the group', but while she 'fed back their feelings as faithfully as I could, as often as I could…there was never much of an appetite to listen'. Further, various survey-based studies have revealed a gap between voters' views and politicians' perceptions of voters' views (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Dekker and Ester 1989; Holmberg 1999; Norris and Lovenduski 2004; Walgrave et al. 2023). Politicians' aides and advisors have also been shown to be ignorant of political opinion (Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes 2019).

The content analysis conducted for this thesis demonstrates that British politicians *do* appear to have an accurate understanding – whether innate or as a result of research – of public opinion and that they act in a rational way, emphasising popular aspects of their lives and omitting or framing unpopular aspects. That is to say, it does indeed appear that British politicians act in the rational, vote-maximising way that Downs predicted with regard to parties. The highly caveated nature of this statement highlights that further work needs to be conducted to more fully understand the processes and motivations at work. The final chapter considers what work is required.

The work conducted for this study raises a number of important questions. The sociodemographic characteristics of politicians have been shown, in this thesis and in work by others, to be extremely important to Britons. Yet they are not being presented, by politicians at any rate, with the full picture. This highlights the role of media and competing politicians in informing the public – the final chapter considers this in more detail. It also touches upon a number of broader, normative questions. Do voters have

[264] Some, like Geoffrey Cox, Conservative MP for Torridge and West Devon, continue to practise as barristers whilst in Parliament.

[265] Butler (2023) charts how and why three extremely unpopular and costly policy decisions came to pass: Labour's decision to allow migrants from the 'A8' nations (Eastern European countries joining the EU) the right to work in the UK in 2004, the Liberal Democrats' U-turn on tuition fees in 2010, and the Conservatives' healthcare reforms in 2012. With regard to immigration, the evidence suggests that New Labour were *aware* of public opinion but chose to ignore or discount it.

the right to know everything about politicians' lives? Do politicians have any rights to privacy? If they are running for office, have they ceded the rights of a normal citizen to be free from relentless intrusion? These questions and possible answers are considered below.

6. Conclusion

ABSTRACT

This final chapter summarises the work undertaken for this thesis. It explains how and why a variety of research methods, from both the quantitative and qualitative traditions, were employed. It highlights how an innovative approach was adopted, which combined a candidate choice experiment which tested respondents' views towards their own MP and surveys which tested respondents' views towards politicians as a group. It details how this novel approach unearthed original findings, including the fact that middle-class Britons display what is termed 'class NIMBYism' when it comes to selecting their representatives, i.e. they are far more receptive to working-class politicians when asked about Parliament as a whole than when asked about their own MP. It notes how data was collected on the sociodemographic characteristics of contemporary MPs and how this data, combined with the aforementioned candidate choice experiment and surveys, reveals that Britons are not being represented by the kind of politicians that they desire. It details how the third section of the thesis – content analysis of contemporary MPs' websites – shows that politicians appear to be aware of Britons' preferences towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians and are shaping the way that they present themselves in order to more closely align with popular views. It then reflects on the implications of the above for British politics, suggesting that the mismatch between voters' preferences towards politicians and the reality of British politics may help explain the rise of the populist right in Britain. It concludes by considering the further work which should be undertaken as a result of the work conducted in this thesis.

6.1 Introduction

This thesis comprises a substantial contribution to our understanding of Britons' views and preferences towards the politicians who represent them and to the concept of representation itself. It is a very timely piece of work, given the record low levels of electoral turnout and record high levels of disillusionment with politics that Britain is currently experiencing. It focuses on the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians, which have not only changed dramatically in Britain over the previous few decades, but which prior research has shown are linked to both turnout and satisfaction with democracy.

It employed a variety of methods, from both the quantitative and qualitative traditions, in order to answer the three questions driving it, namely (i) what kind of politicians do Britons want to represent them; (ii) what kind of politicians *actually* represent them, and (iii) what do British politicians reveal about themselves. Thus, it conducted a conjoint candidate choice experiment, ran three surveys, trawled secondary sources and conducted investigative research to build a detailed, original dataset on the sociodemographic characteristics of contemporary British politicians (at a much more granular level than

existing work), and undertook content analysis of MPs' websites – the first time, to the best of the author's knowledge, that this has been done.

This chapter summarises the results that were found, explains their importance, considers their implications for British politics, and concludes by outlining the further avenues for research which emerge from the thesis.

6.2 Summary of results

The candidate choice experiment and surveys both (re)tested variables which had been explored by other scholars but via flawed designs and identified and tested previously untested variables. Moreover, they combined to form a novel methodological approach, with the candidate choice experiment testing respondents' views towards their own representative and the surveys testing respondents' views towards politicians as a group.

This innovative approach unearthed original findings. It revealed, for the first time, that Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of politicians vary by proximity of government. Specifically, it found that while Britons have certain preferences with regard to their MP, they desire a Parliament which mirrors the sociodemographic profile of the wider country. Thus, while the candidate choice experiment reveals that Britons do not wish to be represented personally by a privately educated MP, the surveys disclose that they want the privately educated to be in Parliament, in the same proportion as the privately educated exist in Britain.

The application of subgroup analysis revealed further novel results, such as the fact that middle-class Britons, whilst professing a desire for more working-class and fewer middle-class representatives when asked about Parliament as a whole, nevertheless favour middle-class candidates over working-class when asked about their own MP. This pattern of preferences is termed 'class NIMBYism'.

The precise wording of the candidate choice experiment and surveys, combined with subgroup analysis, found, also for the first time, that middle-class Britons' views towards working-class politicians vary depending upon the abstractedness of the context in which their opinions are solicited. Thus, middle-class Britons are found to be much more receptive to the *idea* of working-class politicians than to voting for fully-fleshed out working-class candidates.

The data collection portion of the thesis complements the first and enabled a comparison to be made – between the preferences of Britons towards their politicians (as revealed in the candidate choice experiment and surveys) and the reality. The results are disquieting. Britons are largely not being represented by the kind of representatives they desire. Britons wish to be represented by the state-educated, by the working-class, by those who did not attend Eton, who did attend Oxford, who did not study politics at university, and who are not career politicians. Yet all of these groups are under-represented in Parliament.

The third and final section of the thesis revealed that contemporary British MPs appear to be aware of this disjuncture between the views of Britons towards politicians and the reality and are shaping how they present themselves to more closely match the preferences of the public. It comprised a content analysis of the biographical sections of MPs' websites. It found that two dual processes were at work. First, MPs were found to emphasise aspects of their lives which are popular with voters and downplay or omit aspects which are not, behaviour which the thesis terms the 'strategic release of information'. Second, when MPs *do* reference aspects of their lives which are unpopular, they seek to craft a narrative which casts the aspects in a more positive light, often focusing on the personal benefit which will accrue to voters as a result of said characteristic. This behaviour can be seen as an example of what the literature terms the 'framing' of information.

6.3 Implications for British politics

A number of experimental studies, seeking to explain the paucity of working-class politicians in the House of Commons, have tested Britons' views towards the class of candidates and, finding no apparent opposition to working-class candidates, even among middle-class voters, conclude that their near-total absence must be the result of supply-side factors and/or the role and biases of party gatekeepers. Thus, Vivyan et al. (2020a, 10) assert that 'class affinity is primarily a working-class phenomenon, with little evidence that middle-class respondents favour in-group candidates' and Carnes and Lupu (2016a, 841), having found that '[a]cross all of the outcomes and subgroups we considered, working-class candidates simply seemed unremarkable – and sometimes seemed to do slightly better than white-collar candidates' suggest that 'scholars interested in the shortage of working-class people in public office may benefit from shifting their attention to the earlier stages of the candidate entry process'. This view has seeped into the popular discourse, with a recent think tank publication referencing these studies and echoing their conclusions (Quilter-Pinner et al. 2022).[266] [267]

The innovative approach adopted in this thesis reveals that existing research provides an incomplete account. The combination of a constituency-focused candidate choice experiment which explores respondents' views towards their own representative with surveys which explore respondents' views towards politicians as a group reveals that while middle-class Britons may profess a desire for more working-class politicians in Parliament, they exhibit marked class affinity when asked about their own MP. Further, they are shown to be much more positive towards the *idea* of working-class politicians than when presented with actual, realistic working-class candidates.

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[266] 'Action to close the widening class 'representation gap' is urgent. Our diagnoses suggest the solutions primarily lie in the supply of more working-class candidates' (Quilter-Pinner et al. 2022, 21).
[267] Angela Rayner (2022), the former deputy prime minister, has echoed the idea that the lack of working-class MPs is the result of supply-side factors, arguing that '[w]e don't have enough people putting themselves forward from my kind of background', the reason being that '[i]t's a tough business standing for election and a costly one, in terms of time and money.'

Despite these important nuances, the candidate choice experiment and surveys confirm that Britons as a group do indeed prefer working-class politicians over middle-class politicians. Further, the collection of data on the contemporary denizens of the House of Commons highlights a marked mismatch between the heavily middle-class character of Parliament and the aforementioned desires of the public.

This mismatch extends to many of the sociodemographic characteristics tested. Britons of all classes, for example, want both their own MP to be educated at a state rather than private secondary school and for Parliament as a whole to contain far more state-educated MPs and far fewer privately educated MPs; yet those educated at state schools remain vastly under-represented on the green benches while those educated at private schools remain vastly over-represented. Similarly, neither graduates nor non-graduates want their own MP to be educated at Oxford, and neither believes that Oxonians should be over-represented in Parliament as a whole; and yet they remain so. Career politicians are found to be unpopular at both the constituency and Parliamentary levels and yet their numbers continue to increase exponentially. If the current party system is not providing Britons with the politicians that they desire, it is no surprise that electoral turnout is falling, disillusionment with politics is rising, and that the public are increasingly turning to insurgent parties.

Perhaps sensing this mismatch between Britons' views towards the sociodemographic characteristics of their representatives and the reality, British politicians appear keen to shape the narrative about themselves into a form which more closely aligns with Britons' preferences. Tactics for doing so include emphasising aspects of their lives which are popular, omitting aspects which are not, and – being charitable – stretching the truth.

As mentioned above, this thesis raises normative questions around politicians' right to privacy, specifically whether they sacrifice any such rights when they run for office. Indeed, the level of scrutiny politicians face has almost certainly increased dramatically in recent years, likely linked to the aforementioned personalisation of politics which has been increasing apace in Britain in recent decades. It became unbearable for Chuka Umunna (2015), who dropped out of the race to succeed Ed Miliband as leader of the Labour Party, citing the 'scrutiny and attention' both he and 'those close to' him were experiencing. Umunna, then shadow business secretary and one of the favourites to replace Miliband, is now no longer an MP – he works instead for JPMorgan.

However, such questions are increasingly purely of an academic nature only. As Shakespeare (1967 [1600], 89) observed, 'in the end, truth will out', and politicians appear particularly keen to highlight where their peers possess unpopular sociodemographic characteristics. In 2003, for example, Michael Howard, then leader of the Conservative Party, famously compared his and Tony Blair's schooling, declaring at Prime Minister's Questions that 'this grammar school boy will take no lessons from that public school boy on the importance of children from less privileged backgrounds gaining access to university.' Similarly, during a debate on then Labour leader Keir

Starmer's proposal to establish a committee to explore ending private schools' charitable status, then Education Secretary Gillian Keegan (2023) highlighted the disproportionate number of Labour MPs who attended private school, noting that '14% of Labour MPs elected in 2019 attended private schools – double the UK average.' Keegan contrasted their schooling with her own, describing how '[a]s someone who did not benefit from such a prestigious educational background, I stand here focused not on the fewer than 7% of children who attend independent schools, but much more on the 93% who attend state-funded schools, as I did.' In the same debate, Jonathan Gullis (2023), Conservative MP for Stoke-On-Trent North, highlighted his former career as a teacher and the fact that none of the Labour Opposition frontbench had worked in the teaching profession, stating that he had experience 'working in the classroom, unlike those on the shadow Front Bench'.[268]

Similarly in America, Tim Walz (2024a), in his speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in which he accepted the party's nomination for vice-president, highlighted that unlike his Republican rival J.D. Vance, neither he nor any of his classmates 'went to Yale.' Walz instead emphasised his small-town roots and the sense of community such an upbringing imbues: 'I grew up in Butte, Nebraska, a town of 400 people. I had 24 kids in my high school class, and none of them went to Yale. But I'll tell you what: Growing up in a small town like that, you learn how to take care of each other. That family down the road, they may not think like you do, they may not pray like you do, they may not love like you do – but they're your neighbors, and you look out for them, and they look out for you.' *Fox News* host Martha MacCallum (2024), in an interview with Vance following the speech, suggested that Walz was 'calling you basically Mr fancy pants Ivy League'.[269] [270]

Vance (2024a), in response to Walz's jibes, would depict his journey from poverty to Yale as an exemplar of the American Dream, describing how '[n]obody in my family had ever gone to law school. I grew up in a poor family. The fact that Tim Walz wants to turn it into a bad thing that I actually worked myself through college, through law school and made something of myself, to me that's the American Dream.'

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[268] Gullis (n.d.) would also highlight his background in the classroom on his website ('[p]reviously he worked as a secondary school teacher in Birmingham. Jonathan was a Head of Year and was responsible for the achievement, behaviour and safety of over 250 students') and the education-based work he has engaged in as an MP ('he previously sat on the Education Select Committee, helping them to author the report on disadvantaged white pupils').

[269] Christine O'Donnell (2010b), Republican candidate for the Senate seat of Delaware in 2010, similarly contrasted her own – and voters' – background with that of the Yale-educated Democrat she was facing, in this case Chris Coons, releasing an advert in which she stated 'I didn't go to Yale. I didn't inherit millions of dollars, like my opponent. I'm you.' An earlier, rather more bizarre, advert, in which she again attempted to stress her normality, began with her averring 'I'm not a witch' (O'Donnell 2010a).

[270] Ironically, attending Yale had previously been adduced as evidence of a non-elite, down-to-earth background and moderate opinions. During the 1988 Presidential election, Republican candidate and Yale alumnus George H. W. Bush (1988) derided his Democratic rival Michael Dukakis for holding 'foreign policy views borne in Harvard Yard's boutique'. When pressed as to the difference between the two New England universities, Bush (quoted in Dowd 1988) would suggest that 'Harvard boutique to me at least has the connotation of liberalism and elitism' whereas 'Yale's so diffuse, there isn't a symbol'.

Vance, in turn, would question Walz's military record, whilst also highlighting his own. Walz (2024) had emphasised his service and the insight it gave him with regard to policy in his aforementioned speech to the DNC. He explained '[l]ook, I know guns. I'm a veteran. I'm a hunter…But I'm also a dad. I believe in the Second Amendment, but I also believe our first responsibility is to keep our kids safe.' Vance (2024) described how:

> You know what really bothers me about Tim Walz, as a Marine who served his country in uniform? When the United States Marine Corps, when the United States of America asked me to go to Iraq to serve my country, I did it. I did what they asked me to do, and I did it honourably and I'm very proud of that service. When Tim Walz was asked by his country to go to Iraq, you know what he did, he dropped out of the army and allowed his unit to go without him, a fact that he's been criticised for aggressively by a lot of the people he served with. I think it's shameful to prepare your unit to go to Iraq, to make a promise that you're going to follow through and then to drop out right before you actually have to go. I also think it's dishonest.

Referencing a speech that Walz (2024 [2018]) gave in 2018, in which he stated 'I spent 25 years in the Army…[w]e can make sure that those weapons of war, that I carried in war, is the only place where those weapons are at', Vance (2024) asked 'I wonder Tim Walz, when were you ever in war? What was this weapon that you carried into war given that you abandoned your unit right before they went to Iraq and he has not spent a day in a combat zone? What bothers me about Tim Walz is the stolen valour garbage. Do not pretend to be something you're not…I'd be ashamed if I was him and I lied about my military service like he did.' A spokesperson (quoted in Pellish and Bash 2024) for the Kamala Harris-Tim Walz campaign would clarify that Walz 'misspoke' when he claimed to have carried weapons in war.[271]

The media exhibit a similar joy in revealing inconsistencies between politicians' statements about their backgrounds and the reality. It was noted above how Rebecca Long Bailey touted her work for the NHS on her website, in which she (n.d.) stated that she was 'a solicitor, where, for many years I acted on behalf of NHS Bodies on a range of governance and contractual issues.' Reporters at *The Sunday Times* (Pogrund, Gregory, and Collins 2020) contended in 2020 that she 'made inaccurate statements about her legal career while standing as an MP' in 2015. They describe how 'during the 2015 general election, Long Bailey…distributed leaflets stating: "I studied law and became a solicitor for the NHS to help defend our health service"' but contend that in reality she 'spent almost all of her career as a solicitor at Hill Dickinson, a commercial law firm, and was never employed by the NHS.'

In a notorious interview referenced above, in which she highlighted that she had children while Theresa May, her rival for leadership of the Conservative Party and the

[271] Walz (2024b) confessed that he also 'misspoke' when he claimed to have been in Hong Kong at the time of the Tiananmen Square protests. He explained that 'many times I will talk a lot, I will get caught up in the rhetoric'.

premiership, did not, Andrea Leadsom (quoted in Sylvester 2016) argued that her career in banking provided her with the knowledge required for stewardship of the wider economy, explaining that, as a former banker, she understood 'how the economy works and can really focus on turning it around'. Reporters from *The Times* (Kenber and Wilson 2016) would subsequently accuse her of embellishing her CV and exaggerating the extent of her financial mastery. Highlighting an online post by a former colleague of Leadsom's (Stephens 2016), they stated that 'Andrea Leadsom has no experience as an investment banker…*The Times* can reveal.' Penny Mordaunt (quoted in Weaver 2016), MP for Portsmouth North and a leading Leadsom supporter, would complain during the ensuing furore that Leadsom's critics were 'imply[ing] that she was just making the tea.' Ironically, the results of the experiment conducted for this thesis suggest that making the tea would have played better with the electorate than a career in finance.[272] Rachel Reeves, Labour's Chancellor of the Exchequer, would be similarly accused of exaggerating the extent of her financial experience (Mitchell and Cooke 2025). The motivation for Reeves (allegedly) exaggerating the extent of her financial experience and acumen appears to be the same as for Leadsom (allegedly) exaggerating hers: to highlight her ability to successfully manage the economy. A Labour Party (n.d., 4) document entitled *Financing growth: Labour's plan for financial services* described how Reeves 'spent most of the first decade of her career at the Bank of England; she understands the importance of financial and monetary stability to Britain's economic success.'[273]

However, the unmasking of politicians surely leads only to yet greater cynicism among the public. Moreover, by this point the politicians with unpopular characteristics have already been elected. The aim, as Carnes and Lupu (2016a) suggest above, is surely to explore the earlier stages of the candidate pipeline, not just for class, but for all the popular but poorly represented sociodemographic characteristics discussed herein. It is the shape this research could take, as well as various other ways the work conducted for this thesis can be extended, that form the subject of the following section.

6.4 Areas for further research

[272] Rachel Reeves, Labour's Chancellor of the Exchequer, was similarly accused of exaggerating the extent of her financial experience (Mitchell and Cooke 2025). The motivation for Reeves (allegedly) exaggerating the extent of her financial experience and acumen appears to be the same as for Leadsom (allegedly) exaggerating hers: to highlight her ability to successfully manage the economy. A Labour Party (n.d., 4) document entitled *Financing growth: Labour's plan for financial services* described how Reeves 'spent most of the first decade of her career at the Bank of England; she understands the importance of financial and monetary stability to Britain's economic success.'

[273] This phenomenon of politicians padding – or scrubbing – their backgrounds is not restricted to Britain. A highly publicised and much-mocked recent example being that of George Santos, former Congressman for New York. As Rubin (2023) puts it, 'nobody beats Rep. George Santos (R-N.Y.) when it comes to fictitious resumes. He seems to have lied about virtually his entire life experience – from his volleyball career to his college education to his mother's death on 9/11 to his family's flight from the Holocaust.' Hershel Walker, the (losing) Republican candidate in Georgia's 2022 Senate race, has been similarly criticised. Walker is accused of having 'lied about his educational achievements, his participation in law enforcement and the FBI, the size and success of his business ventures, and the number of children he has' (Kruse 2022).

This thesis developed original theories concerning Britons' voting behaviour, employed a novel research design in order to test them, and generated a range of new and important findings. The breadth and depth of the work undertaken has resulted in the emergence of several areas for further research. Before these new paths are considered, this section considers the rerunning of the candidate choice experiment.

As was noted above, YouGov made two errors when conducting the candidate choice experiment. First, they miscoded one of the candidates' potential occupations – 'works for a political party' – into the nonsensical 'works for a political name'. All data relating to this occupation was removed from the analysis as a result. Second, instead of presenting respondents with the requested eight task choices, they presented them with just two, resulting in the large confidence intervals for the attribute with the most levels (candidates' occupations). It is hoped that the candidate choice experiment can be rerun with these two errors corrected. The inclusion of both political occupations – 'political adviser' and 'works for a political party' – will not only provide a robust test of Britons' views towards career politicians, but will function as an additional test of Britons' views towards the class of politicians, with political advisers categorised as higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations in the eight-class version of the NS-SEC schema and those working for political parties as lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations in the eight-class version of the NS-SEC schema.

As well as rectifying these issues, the rerunning of the candidate choice experiment would present the opportunity to further explore the results which were found. As noted above, both graduates and non-graduates displayed a statistically significant aversion towards Oxford graduates. It would be instructive to rerun the candidate choice experiment and test if Britons' antipathy extends to candidates who attended elite universities less associated with privilege, wealth, and contemporary politicians, such as Imperial College London and the LSE.

Politicians would also be included as one of the occupations that could be held by candidates' fathers. As detailed above, of the four occupations which were tested in the candidate choice experiment, only one was unpopular at statistically significant levels: political adviser. If the experiment is rerun, this animus towards the children of those who work in politics will be more fully explored. No British candidate choice experiment has tested the independent effect of a candidate being the child of a politician.[274] A number of studies have been conducted outside of Britain which explore voters' views towards the children of politicians, and this would be an important addition to this burgeoning literature.[275] The focus on Britons' views towards the progeny of politicians is particularly timely given the rise of the so-called red princes and princesses, i.e. scions of prominent Labour politicians. Among those identified as such are Stephen Kinnock, Labour MP for Aberafan Maesteg and son of former leader Neil and former longtime

[274] Vivyan et al. 2020a, in their first experiment, include politician as a potential occupation for a candidate's father, but they combine it the mother's occupation i.e. they do not test the independent effects of a candidates' parent being a politician.
[275] See, for example, Eshima and Smith 2022a; Horiuchi, Smith, and Yamamoto 2020; Miwa, Kasuya, and Ono 2023 with respect to Japan and Liu 2019 with respect to China.

MEP Glenys; Georgia Gould, Labour MP for Queen's Park and Maida Vale and daughter of pollster Philip and peer Gail; Joe Dromey, Labour Councillor for Lewisham and son of former MP Jack and former deputy leader Harriet; Will Straw, unsuccessful Labour candidate for Rossendale and Darwen at the 2015 General Election and son of the former Home Secretary Jack; Emily Benn, unsuccessful Labour candidate for East Worthing and Shoreham at the 2010 General Election and Croydon South at the 2015 General Election and niece of current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Hilary and granddaughter of long-time MP Tony;[276] and David Prescott, unsuccessful Labour candidate for Gainsborough at the 2015 General Election and son of former deputy prime minister John (Hookham 2017; McBain 2014).[277] It is no coincidence that they are all the sons and daughters of leading and long-tenured political figures. A study by Dal Bó, Dal Bó, and Snyder (2009, 116) revealed that holding office for more than one term doubled the probability that a US congressman or congresswoman's relatives would also be elected to Congress. As the authors conclude, 'in politics, power begets power.'[278] The red princes and princesses exhibit other aforementioned traits of the political class. McBain (2014), for example, charts how 'Labour's so-called Red Princes have all worked in politics – in think tanks, for the European Parliament or US Congress, or as campaign strategists. Neil Kinnock is the son of a coal miner and Jack Straw grew up on an Essex council estate but their offspring enjoyed affluent upbringings and effortless transitions from Oxbridge into high-flying jobs', while Georgia Gould and Emily Benn both read politics at Oxford.

Further, a post-treatment question would be included, asking respondents how they would classify the occupations they were presented with in the experiment. A three-class schema would be employed, comprising the upper-middle class, an intermediate class, and the working class. The reason for this question is to ensure that the NS-SEC classification of occupations matches the way Britons *actually* classify these occupations. A self-employed electrician, for example, is classified by the NS-SEC as holding an intermediate occupation. However, it seems possible, even likely, that a (large) number of Britons would classify it as a working-class occupation. If so, extrapolating Britons' views towards the class of candidates using the NS-SEC classification could lead to inaccurate assumptions about Britons' views towards the class of politicians.

An additional survey would be run, testing Britons' views towards Old Etonians in parliament. This new survey would ask, as the old surveys did for many of the other sociodemographic characteristics that were tested in the candidate choice experiment, whether respondents believe the proportion of MPs who attended Eton should be greater than, the same as, or less than the proportion of people in the country who attended Eton. The motivation behind this additional survey question is to test whether

[276] Tying neatly with one of the themes of this thesis, Benn would delete any reference to his attendance at Westminster School from *Who's Who* (Rawnsley 2014).
[277] Mosca (1939 [1896], 61) would note how 'all ruling classes tend to become hereditary in fact if not in law.'
[278] Alongside the red princes and princesses of Labour are a number of Conservative 'bluebloods', among them Ben Gummer and Nick Hurd, sons of John and Douglas, respectively.

there are limits to Britons' desire for a parliament that reflects the wider country. The candidate choice experiment revealed that attending Eton was by far the most unpopular sociodemographic characteristic of all those tested. Thus, if any characteristic is likely to challenge Britons' view that Parliament should mirror the sociodemographic profile of the country, it is this one.[279]

As detailed above, the content analysis of MPs' websites was hand-coded. Conducting a computer-assisted content analysis of the same material and comparing the results would constitute a useful methodological contribution.[280] Such a study would build on similar work conducted by Boukes et al. (2020), de Graaf and van der Vossen (2013), Nelson et al. (2021), Rosenberg, Schnurr, and Oxman (1990), and Grimmer and Stewart (2013) and add to the ongoing debate around the respective strengths and weaknesses of hand-coded and computer-assisted content analyses.[281]

It was noted above that MPs' websites highlight elements of their lives which are popular with the British public and omit or frame elements which are not. A crucial complement to this work would be to conduct an interview-based follow-up study which explores how, why, and by whom decisions about the biographical material contained on these websites are made. While one might imagine politicians and party officials would be hesitant to reveal such information, politicians can prove surprisingly candid. Jacob Rees-Mogg (2023), for example, admitted at the 2023 UK National Conservatism ('NatCon') conference that the Conservative government introduced voter identification legislation in the hope of electoral advantage rather than the stated aim of combating electoral fraud. He would note how '[p]arties that try and gerrymander end up finding that their clever scheme comes back to bite them, as dare I say we found by insisting on voter ID for elections and we found that the people who didn't have ID were elderly – oh and they by and large voted Conservative.' Further, the cloak of anonymity will be offered to those prepared to speak but not 'on the record'.[282] A number of studies utilise this approach, combining content analysis of political communications with interviews with the people involved in creating and disseminating the content – see, for example, Enli and Skogerbø 2013; Karlsen and Enjolras 2016; Magin et al. 2017 – but none (to the best of the author's knowledge) have focused on Britain. The author has already conducted the first of these interviews, with Daniel Bowman, the Conservative candidate for Liverpool Garston at the 2024 General Election.[283]

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[279] The irony, of course, is that even if Britons *did* want Old Etonians to be represented in Parliament in the same proportion as the wider country, there would still be none of them in Parliament, given how few people in the country attend the school.

[280] Neuendorf (2002, 125–126) noted as early as 2002 that computerised content analysis of text 'has become so common that it's rare to find a text content analysis today that does *not* use computer analysis [emphasis in original].'

[281] Of course, the distinction between manual and computer coding is a porous one; as Hase (2023, 24) notes, '[h]uman decisions lie at the core of "automated" content analyses'.

[282] 'Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth' (Wilde 1891).

[283] Aberbach and Rockman (2002), Cowley (2021), Lilleker (2003), Mikecz (2012), Peabody et al. (1990), and Rivera, Kozyreva, and Sarovskii (2002) have written useful guides on how best to interview politicians. For advice on the practice of interviewing elites more broadly, see Berry (2002), Breeze (2023), Goldstein (2002), Harvey (2010), Liu (2018), and Ma, Seidl, and McNulty (2021). Among the

It was posited above that the subject politicians studied at university could represent an additional dimension of the increasingly important concept of the career politician. Preliminary follow-up work does indeed reveal that many of the politicians who spent little or no time outside the political world before being elected to Parliament – for example, the Miliband brothers, David Cameron, and Matt Hancock – studied politics at university,[284] while many of those who built careers outside of politics did not. Thus, the journalists Boris Johnson and Michael Gove studied classics and English respectively, the barristers Keir Starmer and Tony Blair studied law, and the financier Jacob Rees-Mogg studied history. A systematic study, rigorously testing the strength of the association between studying politics at university and embarking on a political career shortly after graduation would prove a valuable extension of this theoretical work.

It was noted above how Angela Rayner highlighted the importance of the way in which MPs speak. She contended that many MPs from working-class backgrounds no longer sound as though they are members of the working class. Conversely, it has been suggested that some British politicians have changed their accent in order to appear *more* like a member of the working class. Among those who have been accused of modulating their voice in such a way are the aforementioned Douglas Hurd and Tony Blair, whose 'voice became estuarial…he deployed his "ya knows" and his glottal stops' (Paxman 2002, 241). The author proposes to conduct an aural experiment, whereby respondents hear hypothetical candidates introduce themselves. This would be the first (to the best of the author's knowledge) aural candidate choice experiment conducted – in Britain or anywhere else. As well as testing the importance of politicians' class to Britons, it also offers the potential for testing the impact of charisma, a much discussed but rarely tested component of political success.

The author also plans to conduct a candidate choice experiment which tests Britons' views towards the outside interests of politicians – indeed, work on this has begun. The motivation to develop this line of research was spurred by the content analysis of MPs' websites. As detailed above, MPs lay great emphasis on, and devote much space to, their outside interests. They do this – presumably – because they believe it benefits them politically to do so. Some highlight the local aspects of their outside interests, such as supporting local sports teams, and it has been proven time and again how important it is to voters for politicians to have local ties. Some may highlight interests in the hope of echoing voters' interests and building affinity bias with them as a result.[285] Some may highlight activities they believe demonstrate their vigour, vitality, energy, and

works which pioneered the use of elite political interviews are Dexter (1969), Huitt and Peabody (1969), and Matthews (1960). Interview-based studies which have attained the rank of classic include Fenno's (1978) *Home style: House members in their districts* – in which he observed what has become known as 'Fenno's paradox', the phenomenon whereby people tend to view Congress as a whole negatively but representatives from own congressional districts positively – and Kingdon's (1973; 1984) *Congressmen's voting decisions* and *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*.

[284] Indeed, all four studied PPE at Oxford.

[285] Perhaps adopting this strategy – and covering as many bases as possible – Renaissance man Martin Vickers (n.d.), Conservative MP for Cleethorpes, lists 'reading (mainly politics, history and religion), railways, travel, the Church/religion, football & cricket, and music' as among his interests.

fearlessness. A prime candidate in this regard would be Steve Baker (n.d.), Conservative MP for Wycombe, who states that he 'enjoys skydiving, motorcycling…advanced driving, fast catamaran sailing, crewing a tall ship, piloting a light aircraft, SCUBA diving, hill walking, driving a rescue RHIB [rigid-hulled inflatable boat], skiing and golf.' Building on the research conducted for this thesis, this subsequent candidate choice experiment would also explore the class-related aspects of politicians' outside interests, employing Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as a guiding framework.[286] This relationship between class and outside interests has been a feature of the political discourse in recent years. Len McCluskey (2023), former General Secretary of the union Unite, for example, argued that poetry 'should be compulsory on the National School Curriculum to make it accessible to every student, so that the stigma in working-class communities about poetry only being for "posh people"…would gradually be eliminated.' Corbyn and McCluskey (2023) would publish a collection of poems, which one of the contributors promised would 'encourage you, the reader, to embrace poetry and shake off any notion that it is not something to be read, written, or appreciated by working-class people' (Murphy 2023).[287]

A number of examples were cited above of politicians highlighting aspects of their opponents' lives which – one assumes – they believed would hurt them politically. Building on this observation, the author intends to conduct a systematic content analysis of electoral leaflets in Britain, with the aim of uncovering which aspects of their opponents' lives politicians highlight and how frequently they do so. Few studies have conducted such analysis of British election leaflets, presumably due to the difficulties involved in collecting the material. Fortunately, a vast trove of British election leaflets has in recent years been digitised and made easily accessible by the OpenElections project,[288] founded and run by Caitlin Milazzo, Siim Trumm, and Alan Duggan at the University of Nottingham. The author plans to utilise this resource and add to the burgeoning literature it has made possible.[289]

Let us conclude by returning to the direction of study proposed by Carnes and Lupu (2016a). After finding that both middle- and working-class Britons held positive views towards working-class representatives in their candidate choice experiment, they

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[286] See Bourdieu 1973; 1979 (for the original French) and 1984 (for the first English translation); 1983 (for the original German) and 1986 (for the first English translation); 1989 (for the original French) and 1996 (for the first English translation); Bourdieu and Passeron 1970 (for the original French) and 1977 (for the first English translation); Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992.

[287] The volume – *Poetry for the Many* – took its title from Shelley's (1832) poem *The masque of anarchy*, the final stanza of which Corbyn would frequently recite, most notably at the Glastonbury music festival in 2017:

> Rise, like lions after slumber
> In unvanquishable number!
> Shake your chains to earth like dew
> Which in sleep had fallen on you:
> Ye are many – they are few!

[288] Located at https://www.openelections.co.uk/.

[289] See, for example, Duggan and Milazzo (2023), Milazzo and Hammond (2018), Milazzo, Trumm, and Townsley (2021), Milazzo and Townsley (2020), and Trumm, Milazzo, and Duggan (2023).

attribute the lack of working-class MPs to supply-side factors and party gatekeepers rather than voter demand and encourage scholars to focus their attention on these areas if they wish to explain the scarcity of working-class politicians. As the more nuanced approach employed for this thesis reveals, there remains a certain hesitancy among middle-class Britons when it comes to voting for working-class candidates. However, it confirms that overall Britons are keen to see more working-class people in politics. Further, it reveals a desire for more MPs from other under-represented groups, for example those who attended state secondary schools and those who did not attend university.

A substantial body of research has explored the non-electoral reasons for the political under-representation of certain groups, much of it focusing on women. Suggestions have ranged from selection panel biases (Bochel and Denver 1983; Greenwood 1988; Rasmussen 1983b; Rush 1969; Vallance 1984), to an aversion to the competitive and confrontational nature of elections (Kanthak and Woon 2015), to a lack of ambition (Fox and Lawless 2004; Fox and Lawless 2014; Lawless and Fox 2005; Lawless and Fox 2010), confidence (Fox and Lawless 2011), and resources (Hills 1983; Mackay 2001; Norris and Lovenduski 1993; Ranney 1965).[290] Important work has highlighted how the role of party gatekeepers interacts with the supply of candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1995) and how belonging to more than one under-represented group – for example being a working-class woman – produces cumulative barriers to participation (Murray 2023).

However, this work requires updating to take account of Britain's rapidly changing economy. Recent years have seen the rise of the so-called 'gig economy' in Britain and the commensurate rise of what has been termed the 'precariat'.[291] The gig economy has been defined as the 'exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment by task basis' (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2018, 9).[292] The resultant precariat who work in it 'consists of people who lack the seven forms of labour-related security…that social democrats, labour parties and trades unions pursued as their "industrial citizenship" agenda after the Second World War', namely labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security, and representation security (Standing 2011, 10–11).

The precariat lack money, stability, and time, all of which are crucial prerequisites for running for political office. Further, '[t]he precariat lives with anxiety – chronic

[290] The emphasis on the resources required to run for office is analogous to the resource-based explanation for electoral turnout among voters. See Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2018; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995 for the foundational works on the resource model of political participation.
[291] The first reference, to the best of the author's knowledge, to the precariat – more strictly to '[l]a précarité' was just before the turn of the millennium by the indefatigable Bourdieu (1998).
[292] For background on the rise and operation of the gig economy, see De Ruyter and Brown 2019; Kalleberg 2009; 2011; Ness 2023.

insecurity associated not only with teetering on the edge…but also with a fear of losing what they possess…[they] are insecure in the mind and stressed, at the same time "underemployed" and "overemployed". They are alienated from their labour and work, and are anomic, uncertain and desperate in their behaviour' (Standing 2011, 20). This hardly seems like the ideal foundation for building a political career, indeed, it is difficult to think of a worse one. The author hopes to conduct a study, utilising a mixture of surveys and in-depth interviews, which explores the precariat's view towards running for office, with the aim of testing whether this 'class-in-the-making' is so constrained and disempowered by its circumstances as to make running for political office a practical impossibility.

6.5 Final word

It is hoped that the research undertaken for this thesis has generated not only interesting results but also *important* results. Contemporary Britain is experiencing a crisis of faith in democracy; among its manifestations are record high levels of disillusionment with politics and record low levels of electoral turnout. This thesis has suggested a possible cause for this present discontent: that democracy, as it is being practised in Britain today, is proving unresponsive to the wishes of the public. This thesis began with a quotation from America's second president, it ends with one from a recent holder of the office and one from a fellow Founding Father. In his Inaugural Address, given just two weeks after the attempted insurrection of 6 January, Joe Biden (2021) stressed that '[d]emocracy is fragile'; Benjamin Franklin (quoted in McHenry 1787), following the Constitutional Convention at which the US Constitution was agreed, was asked 'what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?'; he replied '[a] republic, if you can keep it.'

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Appendix A

Number of candidates per single member seat in the United Kingdom, 1885–2010

	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Total seats
1885	35	538	39	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1886	212	400	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1892	57	527	30	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1895	181	406	29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1900	229	379	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1906	108	462	45	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1910 (January)	69	501	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1910 (December)	153	446	16	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	616
1918	101	311	211	36	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	670
1922	48	293	212	22	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	576
1923	41	280	254	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	576
1924	30	318	223	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	576
1929	5	98	447	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	576
1931	54	409	99	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	576
1935	34	389	146	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	576
1945	3	259	291	42	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	601
1950	2	113	405	100	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	625
1951	4	495	122	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	625
1955	0	489	133	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	630
1959	0	373	238	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	630
1964	0	194	379	53	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	630
1966	0	234	349	44	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	630

1970	0	185	328	103	13	1	0	0	0	0	0	630
1974 (February)	0	38	370	191	32	3	1	0	0	0	0	635
1974 (October)	0	0	346	238	44	7	0	0	0	0	0	635
1979	0	3	173	300	118	28	12	0	1	0	0	635
1983	0	0	251	250	99	31	12	5	1	0	1	650
1987	0	0	351	236	51	11	1	0	0	0	0	650
1992	0	0	103	253	183	81	23	7	0	1	0	651
1997	0	0	18	134	176	165	101	35	23	7	0	659
2001	0	0	45	198	208	134	49	20	5	0	0	659
2005	0	0	21	136	215	128	92	34	17	2	0[1]	646
2010	0	0	1	43	142	203	134	67	35	19	4[2]	650

1 Fifteen candidates stood in Sedgefield.
2 Twelve candidates stood in Hackney South and Shoreditch and in Luton South.

Source: Rallings and Thrasher 2012, 132.

Appendix B

Attributes and levels tested in British conjoint candidate choice experiments

Campbell et al. 2019a; Vivyan and Wagner 2015; Vivyan and Wagner 2016

(The results of the same three experiments are published in Campbell et al. 2019a, Vivyan and Wagner 2015, and Vivyan and Wagner 2016)

Study 1

Attribute	Levels
Frequency of dissent	Never speaks out or votes against his/her party leadership; Rarely speaks out or votes against his/her party leadership; Sometimes speaks out or votes against his/her party leadership; Often speaks out or votes against his/her party leadership
Party	Labour; Conservative
Time allocation between constituency work and national policy work	Spends on average 1 day of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 4 days working on local constituency issues; Spends on average 2 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 3 days working on local constituency issues; Spends on average 3 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 2 days working on local constituency issues; Spends on average 4 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 1 day working on local constituency issues
Tenure in Parliament	3 years; 10 years; 21 years
Gender	Male; Female

Study 2

Attribute	Levels
Motivation for dissent	Their own personal views; Their constituents' views
Type of dissent	Tends not to speak out; Tends to speak out at internal party meetings, but not publicly; Tends to speak out at internal party meetings and also publicly
Party	Labour; Conservative
Time allocation between constituency work and national policy work	Spends on average 1 day of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 4 days working on local constituency issues; Spends on average 2 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 3 days working on local constituency issues; Spends on average 3

	days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 2 days working on local constituency issues; Spends on average 4 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 1 day working on local constituency issues
Gender	Male; Female

Campbell et al. 2019b

Attribute	**Levels**
Extent of local ties	Grew up and lives in your local area (the area within a 15-20 minute walk from your home); Originally lived in another part of the country but twenty years ago moved to live in your local area (the area within a 15-20 minute walk from your home); Originally lived in another part of the country but five years ago moved to live in your local area (the area within a 15-20 minute walk from your home); Lives in another part of the country
Time allocation between constituency work and national policy work	1 day of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 4 days working on local constituency issues; 2 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 3 days working on local constituency issues; 3 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 2 days working on local constituency issues; 4 days of a 5-day week reviewing and working on national policies in Parliament, and the remaining 1 day working on local constituency issues
Role of party, constituents', and personal views when considering policy	Mainly thinks about his/her party's views; Mainly thinks about his/her constituent's views; Mainly thinks about his/her own views
Party	Labour; Conservative
Ideological position within party	Generally considered to be in the centre of the Conservative party; Generally considered to be on the right-wing of the Conservative party; Generally considered to be in the centre of the Labour party; Generally considered to be on the left-wing of the Labour party.
Main policy interests	Political interests include economic policy and taxation; Political interests include education and health policy
Gender	Male; Female

Carnes and Lupu 2016a

Attribute	**Levels**
Name	John; Jane; Nigel; Emma
Gender	He; She

Occupation	Business owner; Factory worker
Level of education	Graduated from university; Completed secondary school
Party	Labour; Conservative

Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018

Attribute	Levels
Conduct	'Last year, the current MP received a commendation for diligent and ethical service from a Westminster watchdog'; 'Last year, the current MP was found to have inappropriately claimed £10,000 in expenses'
Gender	Male; Female
Party	Labour; Conservative [incumbent]; Labour, Conservative, or Liberal Democrat [candidate]
Age	45; 52; 64 [incumbent]; 40; 52; 64 [candidate]
Former occupation	General practitioner; Journalist; Political advisor; Teacher; Business manager

Frederiksen 2022

Attribute	Levels
Age	44–53; 54–57; 58–61
Gender	Female; Male
Profession	Lawyer; Civil servant; Banker; Journalist; Political career
Party	Conservatives; Labour
Position: Redistribution	Increase public welfare spending; Decrease public welfare spending; Increase power of trade unions; Decrease power of trade unions; Increase income tax on 10 percent richest; Decrease income tax on 10 percent richest
Position: Morality policy	Make it easier for women to get an abortion; Make it harder for women to get an abortion; Make it easier for people of the same sex to marry each Other; Make it harder for people of the same sex to marry each other; Allow illegal immigrants to apply for citizenship; Increase efforts to arrest and eventually deport illegal immigrants
Undemocratic/Democratic behavior	Said it is legitimate to fight political opponents in the streets if one feels provoked; Said it is unacceptable to fight political opponents in the streets even though one feels provoked; Supported a proposal to reduce polling stations in areas that support opposing parties; Supported a proposal to preserve existing polling-stations in all areas; Said court rulings by judges appointed by opposing parties should be ignored; Said court rulings by judges appointed by opposing parties should be adhered to; Said it is acceptable to harass journalists that do not reveal sources; Said it is

	unacceptable to harass journalists even though they do not reveal sources
Reputation: Economy	Good at handling economic matters; Bad at handling economic matters; Neither good nor bad reputation on economic matters
Reputation: Corruption	Bad at fighting corruption; Good at fighting corruption; Neither good nor bad reputation on fighting corruption

Greenwood-Hau 2023

Experiment which includes party

Attribute	**Levels**
Gender	Man; Woman
Occupation	Lawyer; Teacher; Electrician; Call-centre worker
Education	A levels; Degree
Income	£25,000; £50,000; £100,000
Friends' occupations	Law and medicine; IT and finance; Plumbing and building; Shop, café and restaurant staff
Pastime	Cinema; Football; Art galleries; Opera
Policy interest	Health; The economy; Immigration and asylum; The environment
Party	Labour; Conservative
Ideology	Moderate [Labour]; Left [Labour]; Moderate [Conservative]; Right [Conservative]

Experiment which excludes party

Attribute	**Levels**
Gender	Man; Woman
Occupation	Lawyer; Teacher; Electrician; Call-centre worker
Education	A levels; Degree
Income	£25,000; £50,000; £100,000
Friends' occupations	Law and medicine; IT and finance; Plumbing and building; Shop, café and restaurant staff
Pastime	Cinema; Football; Art galleries; Opera
Policy interest	Health; The economy; Immigration and asylum; The environment
Ideology	Moderate [Labour]; Left [Labour]; Moderate [Conservative]; Right [Conservative]

Hobolt and Rodon 2020

Attribute	**Levels**
Candidate's ideological position	Extreme Left; Left; Centre; Right; Extreme Right

Candidate's immigration position	Immigration should be reduced a lot; Immigration should be reduced a little; Immigration should remain the same as it is; Immigration should be increased a little; Immigration should be increased a lot
The candidate campaigned for	Leaving the European Union; Remaining in the European Union
Candidate's chances of being elected to Parliament	Very unlikely; Unlikely; Unknown; The race is competitive; Likely; Very likely
Candidate's party is likely to…	Be in the opposition; Form a single-party; Form a coalition majority government with another party
The candidate is likely to become…	A member of the opposition; A junior minister in the government; A senior minister in the government
Gender	Male; Female
Ethnicity	White British; Asian British; Black British

Horne 2022

Attribute	**Levels**
Education	Secondary School; University Degree; Post Graduate Degree
Occupation	Factory Worker; Retail Salesperson; Businessperson; Lawyer; Political Advisor
Gender	Male; Female
Party	Labour; Conservative
Left/Right Position	Helping those less well off by raising taxes on the wealthy to support social programs and working to ensure jobs for those who want them [this is the left position]; Working to ensure economic growth by supporting the needs of business and keeping taxes low [this is the right position]
Open/Closed Position	Seeking to continue strong ties with the European Union and embracing a diverse and multicultural British society [this is the open position]; Pursuing a clean break with the European Union, lowering rates of immigration and promoting traditional British values [this is the closed position]

Kevins 2021

Attribute	**Levels**
Surname	Kavanagh; Kim
Parents' country of origin/Roots	Ireland/Irish; South Korea/Korean
Father's occupation	Factory worker; Orthopaedic surgeon
School attended as a child and teen	State; Private

Magni and Reynolds 2021; Magni and Reynolds 2022

(The results of the same experiment are published in Magni and Reynolds 2021 and Magni and Reynolds 2022)

Attribute	Levels
Sexual orientation	Straight; Gay
Gender identity	Male; Female; Transgender
Health	Healthy; On a wheelchair since birth; Overweight; Has diabetes; HIV positive since birth; HIV positive
Age	35; 44; 56; 71
Education	Less than high school; High school degree; College degree; Master degree
Race	White; Black; Asian
Religion	Christian; Muslim; Not religious
Political experience	No previous experience; Town council member; Member of the House of Commons

Martin and Blinder 2021

The results of two experiments are reported in Martin and Blinder 2021, one with 'neither' as a response option, one without. The attributes and levels in both experiments are the same.

Attribute	Levels
Name [to operationalise ethnicity]	Oliver [White British]; Emily [White British]; Omar [Pakistani]; Fatima [Pakistani]; Joshua [Black Caribbean]; Gabrielle [Black Caribbean]; George [White British]; Sarah [White British]; Mohammad [Pakistani]; Maryam [Pakistani]; Daniel [Black Caribbean]; Kim [Black Caribbean]
Ethnicity	White British; Pakistani; Black Caribbean
Party	Conservative party; Labour party
Gender	Male; Female
Policy position on migration and refugees	Letting skilled migrants enter the country to fill jobs in sectors with skill shortages; Accepting more refugees who are fleeing war or persecution; Strongly limiting migration to the UK
Priorities for law enforcement	Race equality laws should be more strictly enforced, with greater penalties for those found guilty of harassment and discrimination; Laws against anti-social behaviour should be more strictly enforced, with greater penalties for those found guilty of disturbing the public order
Route into politics	Being included on a list of candidates from under-represented backgrounds; Getting involved in the political party

Mckay et al. n.d.

Rural version of experiment

Attribute	Levels
Gender	He/his; She/her
Party	Labour; Conservative; SNP; Plaid

Position	on the left of the Labour party; in the centre of the Labour party; on the right of the Conservative party; in the centre of the Conservative party; on the left of the SNP; in the centre of the SNP; on the left of Plaid Cymru; in the centre of Plaid Cymru
Descriptive	lived only in urban areas; mostly lived in urban areas; lived in rural areas about half the time; mostly lived in rural areas; lived only in rural areas
Affective (ingroup)	'this country only succeeds when its rural areas succeed'; 'rural areas need to face up to how society is changing'; 'rural areas face many challenges, and many opportunities'
Affective (outgroup)	'Britain's urban areas deserve to be successful'; 'some urban areas have had it too good for too long'; 'you can't generalise too much about urban areas'
Surrogacy	fight for this constituency; fight for this constituency and for rural areas across the country; fight for this constituency and for women across the country; fight for this constituency and for ethnic minorities across the country
Interest group	Representatives of the Rural Partnership, an organisation that represents rural areas, expressed their disappointment that [Gender] had not yet met with them in Parliament; Representatives of the Rural Partnership, an organisation that represents rural areas, expressed their satisfaction that [Gender] had taken the time to meet with them in Parliament

Urban version of experiment

Attribute	**Levels**
Gender	He/his; She/her
Party	Labour; Conservative; SNP; Plaid
Position	on the left of the Labour party; in the centre of the Labour party; on the right of the Conservative party; in the centre of the Conservative party; on the left of the SNP; in the centre of the SNP; on the left of Plaid Cymru; in the centre of Plaid Cymru
Descriptive	lived only in urban areas; mostly lived in urban areas; lived in rural areas about half the time; mostly lived in rural areas; lived only in rural areas
Affective (ingroup)	'this country only succeeds when its urban areas succeed'; 'urban areas need to face up to how society is changing'; 'urban areas face many challenges, and many opportunities'
Affective (outgroup)	'Britain's rural areas deserve to be successful'; 'some rural areas have had it too good for too long'; 'you can't generalise too much about rural areas'
Surrogacy	fight for this constituency; fight for this constituency and for urban areas across the country; fight for this constituency and for women across the country; fight for this constituency and for ethnic minorities across the country
Interest group	Representatives of the Urban Partnership, an organisation that

	represents urban areas, expressed their disappointment that [Gender] had not yet met with them in Parliament; Representatives of the Urban Partnership, an organisation that represents urban areas, expressed their satisfaction that [Gender] had taken the time to meet with them in Parliament

Reher 2021

Experiment which includes party

Attribute	**Levels**
Name [to operationalise gender and immigration background]	Paul Smith; Anna Smith; Amita Chowdhury; Rahul Chowdhury; Ian Wright; Jane Wright; Nadia Abadi; Samir Abadi; David Jones; Mary Jones; Meena Jarwar; Dev Jarwar; Tom Williams; Kate Williams; Leila Said; Masoud Said
Age	35–65
Children	No children; One child; Two children; Three children
Occupation	Owns a small business which employs five people; Works as a primary school teacher; Works in a local factory; Works as a lawyer for a large international firm
Disability	NA; Is paralysed below the waist and uses a wheelchair to get around; Is blind and reads using text-to-speech software; Is deaf and communicates mostly in British Sign Language
Experience	4–17
Office	Has previously served as a local councillor; Has not yet held elected office
Party	Conservative Party; Labour Party

Experiment which excludes party

Attribute	**Levels**
Name [to operationalise gender and immigration background]	Paul Smith; Anna Smith; Amita Chowdhury; Rahul Chowdhury; Ian Wright; Jane Wright; Nadia Abadi; Samir Abadi; David Jones; Mary Jones; Meena Jarwar; Dev Jarwar; Tom Williams; Kate Williams; Leila Said; Masoud Said
Age	35–65
Children	No children; One child; Two children; Three children
Occupation	Owns a small business which employs five people; Works as a primary school teacher; Works in a local factory; Works as a lawyer for a large international firm
Disability	NA; Is paralysed below the waist and uses a wheelchair to get around; Is blind and reads using text-to-speech software; Is deaf and communicates mostly in British Sign Language
Experience	4–17

Office	Has previously served as a local councillor; Has not yet held elected office

Saha and Weeks 2022

Attribute	Levels
Gender	Male; Female
Talent	Empathetic; Personalistic; Collaborative; Good communicator Hard-working; Assertive; Tough negotiator; Determined to succeed
Future plans: Has candidate shown interest in running for President?	Yes; No
What kinds of changes to the current political agenda will the candidate bring about?	Very few changes; Moderate changes; Complete overhaul
Children	0; 1; 2; 3

Vivyan et al. 2020a

First experiment

Attribute	Levels
Father and mother's occupations [to operationalise class roots]	Working class: Factory worker; Plumber; Bricklayer [Father]; Shop assistant; Hairdresser [Mother] Lower-middle class: Insurance sales agent; Small businessman; Policeman [Father]; Secretary; Nurse [Mother] Upper-middle class: University professor; Business owner; Politician [Father]; Judge; General practitioner [Mother]
Gender	Male; Female
Former occupation	Lower-grade service class: Teacher; Hotel manager; Local council employee; Accountant Higher-grade service class: GP; Senior manager in the public sector; Journalist; Bank manager Career politician: Press officer for a political party
Party	Labour; Conservative
Local roots	Grew up in the same region as the respondent; Moved to the region before the last election
Local or national focus	Develop national policies; Address local problems
Party loyalty	Never criticises party; Criticises party at internal party meetings but hardly ever votes against party; Criticises party at internal party meetings and then votes against party; Criticises party in parliamentary debates but hardly ever votes against party; Criticises

	party in parliamentary debates and then votes against party; Criticises party in the media but hardly ever votes against party; Criticises party in the media and then votes against party
Ideological position within party	Right-wing [Conservative Party]; moderate [Conservative Party]; Left-wing [Labour Party]; Moderate [Labour Party]

Second experiment

Attribute	Levels
Occupation and parents' occupations [to operationalise class trajectory]	Working-class stayer: currently works as a [factory worker/shop assistant], and [his/her] parents worked as [bricklayer/plumber] and a [shop assistant/hair dresser] Class climber: currently works as a [manager/judge/GP], and [his/her] parents worked as [bricklayer/plumber] and a [shop assistant/hair dresser] Upper-middle stayer: currently works as a [manager/judge/GP], and [his/her] parents worked as a [manager/business owner] and a [judge/GP]
Gender	Male; Female
Ideological position within party	Right-wing [Conservative Party]; moderate [Conservative Party]; Left-wing [Labour Party]; Moderate [Labour Party]
Local roots	Grew up in the same region as the respondent; Moved to the region before the last election
Local or national focus	Develop national policies; Address local problems
Local activity	School governor; Local charity; Local council
Number of children	One; two

Wüest and Pontusson 2019

Attribute	Levels
Sex	Male; Female
Party	Labour; Conservative
Current occupation	Shop assistant; Clerk at a law firm; Solicitor with own practice; Managing partner of a large law firm; Cleaner in a hospital; Paramedic; General practitioner; Cardiologist in a prestigious hospital
What should be the main objective of economic policy?	Reduce income differences between rich and poor households; Increase public investment in education and infrastructure; Reduce the size of government
When should immigrants have full	Immediately; After paying income taxes for at least three years; After they have become citizens

access to social benefits?	
What is the main problem with politics?	Big business has too much power; The political establishment does not represent the will of the British people; There is too much partisan polarization

Appendix C

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)

<table>
<tr><th>Operational categories</th><th colspan="3">Analytic classes</th></tr>
<tr><th></th><th>Eight classes</th><th>Five classes</th><th>Three classes</th></tr>
<tr><td>L1 Employers in large establishments</td><td>1 Higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations</td><td>1 Managerial, administrative, and professional occupations</td><td>1 Managerial, administrative, and professional occupations</td></tr>
<tr><td>L2 Higher managerial and administrative occupations</td><td>1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>L3 Higher professional occupations</td><td>1.2 Higher professional occupations</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>L4 Lower professional and higher technical occupations</td><td rowspan="3">2 Lower managerial, administrative, and professional occupations</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>L5 Lower managerial and administrative occupations</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>L6 Higher supervisory occupations</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>L7 Intermediate occupations</td><td>3 Intermediate occupations</td><td>2 Intermediate occupations</td><td rowspan="3">2 Intermediate occupations</td></tr>
<tr><td>L8 Employers in small establishments</td><td rowspan="2">4 Small employers and own account workers</td><td rowspan="2">3 Small employers and own account workers</td></tr>
<tr><td>L9 Own account workers</td></tr>
<tr><td>L10 Lower supervisory occupations</td><td rowspan="2">5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations</td><td rowspan="2">4 Lower supervisory and technical occupations</td><td rowspan="4">3 Routine and manual occupations</td></tr>
<tr><td>L11 Lower technical occupations</td></tr>
<tr><td>L12 Semi-routine occupations</td><td>6 Semi-routine occupations</td><td rowspan="2">5 Semi-routine and routine occupations</td></tr>
<tr><td>L13 Routine occupations</td><td>7 Routine occupations</td></tr>
</table>

L14 Never worked and long-term unemployed	8 Never worked and long-term unemployed	* Never worked and long-term unemployed	* Never worked and long-term unemployed
L15 Full-time students	For complete coverage, categories L15, L16 & L17 are added as 'Not classified'.		
L16 Occupations not stated or inadequately described	The composition of 'Not classified' will depend on the data source.		
L17 Not classifiable for other reasons			

Source: Office for National Statistics n.d.

Appendix D

Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema

Full version	**Collapsed version**		
	Seven-class	**Five-class**	**Three-class**
I Higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials; managers in large industrial establishments; large proprietors	I+II Service class: professionals, administrators and managers; higher-grade technicians; supervisors of non-manual workers	I-III White-collar workers	Non-manual workers
II Lower-grade professionals, administrators and officials; higher-grade technicians; managers in small industrial establishments; supervisors of non-manual employees			
III*a* Routine non-manual employees, higher grade (administration and commerce)	III Routine non-manual workers: routine non-manual employees in administration and commerce; sales personnel; other rank-and-file service workers		
III*b* Routine non-manual employees, lower grade (sales and services)			
IV*a* Small proprietors, artisans, etc., with employees	IV*a* + *b* Petty bourgeoisie: small proprietors and artisans, etc., with and without employees	IV*a* + *b* Petty bourgeoisie	
IV*b* Small proprietors, artisans, etc., without employees			
IV*c* Farmers and smallholders; other self-employed workers in primary production	IV*c* Farmers: farmers and smallholders and other self-employed workers in primary production	IV*c* + VII*b* Farm workers	Farm workers
V Lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers	V + VI Skilled workers: lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers; skilled manual workers	V + VI Skilled workers	Manual workers
VI Skilled manual workers			

VII*a* Semi- and unskilled manual workers (not in agriculture, etc.)	VII*a* Non-skilled workers: semi- and unskilled manual workers (not in agriculture, etc.)	VII*a* Non-skilled workers	
VII*b* Agricultural and other workers in primary production	VII*b* Agricultural labourers: agricultural and other workers in primary		

Source: Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, 38–39.

Appendix E

Oesch class schema

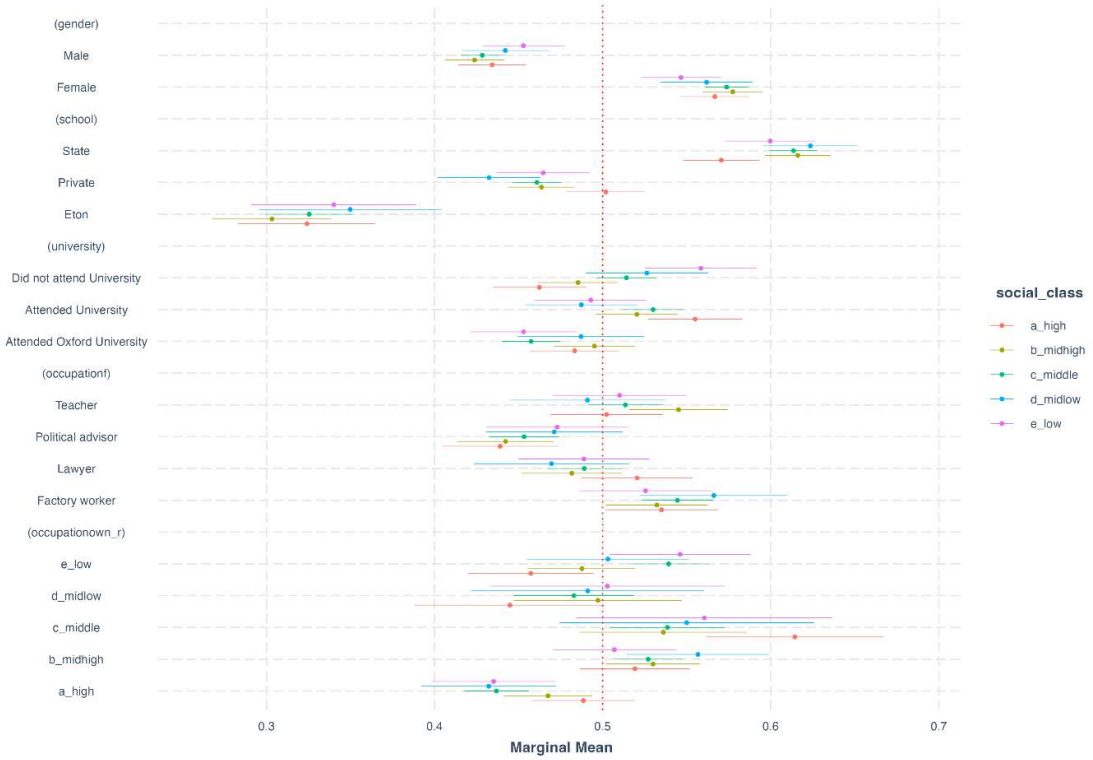
<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Self-employed</td><td colspan="3">Employees</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Independent Work Logic</td><td colspan="2">Technical Work Logic</td><td>Organizational Work Logic</td><td>Interpersonal Service Work Logic</td><td>Marketable Skills:</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. Large employers (>9)
Firm owners
Hotel owners
Salesman</td><td>2. Self-employed professionals
Lawyers
Accountants
Medical doctors</td><td colspan="2">5. Technical experts
Mechanical engineers
Computing professionals
Architects</td><td>10. Higher-grade managers
Business administrators
Financial managers
Public administrators</td><td>14. Socio-cultural professionals
University teachers
Medial doctors
Journalists</td><td>Professional/managerial</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Small proprietors, artisans, with employees (<9)
Restaurant owners
Farmers
Garage owners</td><td colspan="2">6. Technicians
Electrical technicians
Computer equipment operators
Safety inspectors</td><td>11. Associate managers
Managers in small firms
Tax officials
Bookkeepers</td><td>15. Socio-cultural semi-professionals
Primary school teachers
Physiotherapists
Social workers</td><td>Associate professional/ Managerial</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">4. Small proprietors, artisans, without employees
Shopkeepers
Hairdressers
Lorry drivers</td><td colspan="2">7. Skilled crafts
Machinery mechanics
Carpenters
Electricians</td><td>12. Skilled office
Secretaries
Bank tellers
Stock clerks</td><td>16. Skilled service
Children’s nurses
Cooks
Beauticians</td><td>Generally/vocationally skilled</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>8. Routine operatives
Assemblers
Machinists</td><td>9. Routine agriculture
Farm hands
Loggers</td><td>13. Routine office
Mail sorting clerks
Call centre employees
Messengers</td><td>17. Routine service
Shop assistants
Home helpers
Waiters</td><td>Low/un-skilled</td></tr>
</table>

Freight handlers	Gardeners			

Source: Oesch 2006, 68.

Appendix F

Which candidate would you rather have as your representative? (by respondents' social class) (5-class schema)



Note: The five NS-SEC occupational categories which were utilised for this experiment (see Table 3.1) relate to the categories in Figure 4.1 as follows: higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations correspond to 'a_high'; lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations correspond to 'b_midhigh'; small employers and own account workers correspond to 'c_middle'; semi-routine occupations correspond to 'd_midlow'; and routine and manual occupations correspond to 'e_low'.

Appendix G

Survey results (July 2021)

Sample Size: 1693 adults in GB
Fieldwork: 23–25 July 2021

		Vote in 2019			2016 EU Ref		Gender		Age				Social Grade		Region				
	Total	**Con**	**Lab**	**Lib Dem**	**Remain**	**Leave**	**Male**	**Female**	**18-24**	**25-49**	**50-64**	**65 +**	**ABC1**	**C2DE**	**London**	**Rest of South**	**Midlands / Wales**	**North**	**Scotland**
Weighted Sample	**1693**	574	420	152	628	670	823	870	185	706	408	394	965	728	203	569	367	408	146
Unweighted Sample	**1693**	599	419	160	689	680	737	956	99	679	436	479	1013	680	203	571	374	404	141
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Do you think the proportion of MPs with a university degree should be...																			
...greater than the proportion of people in the country with a university degree	**19**	16	21	22	23	13	22	16	25	22	14	16	23	14	19	21	17	16	25
...the same as the proportion of people in the country with a university degree	**46**	50	53	51	53	46	43	50	40	42	49	54	50	42	40	47	48	49	42
...less than the proportion of people in the country with a university degree	**6**	7	5	4	3	9	6	5	4	4	8	7	5	7	5	5	7	5	8
Don't know	**29**	27	21	22	21	32	29	29	31	32	29	22	23	37	36	27	28	31	25
Do you think the proportion of MPs who went to private school should be...																			
...greater than the proportion of people in the country who went to private school	**6**	8	5	3	4	5	7	5	14	6	4	3	7	4	5	6	7	5	6
...the same as the proportion of people in the country who went to private school	**49**	53	51	60	57	47	47	52	48	48	49	53	54	43	44	49	52	49	51

...less than the proportion of people in the country who went to private school	**22**	18	30	22	24	23	21	23	15	18	25	28	22	21	22	22	19	22	24
Don't know	**23**	22	15	15	15	25	25	21	23	28	21	16	17	32	29	22	22	24	18

Appendix H

Survey results (June 2022)

Sample Size: 1678
Fieldwork: 13–14 June 2022

		Vote in 2019 GE			2016 EU Ref		Gender		Age				Social Grade		Region				
	Total	**Con**	**Lab**	**Lib Dem**	**Remain**	**Leave**	**Male**	**Female**	**18-24**	**25-49**	**50-64**	**65+**	**ABC1**	**C2DE**	**London**	**Rest of South**	**Midlands / Wales**	**North**	**Scotland**
Weighted Sample	**1678**	569	416	151	623	664	816	862	183	700	404	391	956	722	201	564	364	404	144
Unweighted Sample	**1678**	562	403	146	656	680	713	965	127	652	445	454	1005	673	160	595	359	413	151
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Do you think there are...																			
[Only shown to half of the sample; N=848]																			
...too many working-class MPs	**3**	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	0	4	2	3	3	3	6	3	1	3	2
...the right number of working-class MPs	**10**	19	2	8	5	12	11	9	21	5	9	16	13	7	5	13	12	9	3
...too few working-class MPs	**59**	47	76	60	69	56	61	56	50	61	62	54	58	59	56	55	54	66	68
Don't know	**29**	31	21	30	24	29	25	32	29	30	28	26	26	32	33	30	32	22	27
Do you think there are...																			
[Only shown to half of the sample; N=830]																			
...too many middle-class MPs	**44**	35	58	47	51	42	43	44	37	47	44	42	44	43	40	42	40	54	39
...the right number of middle-class MPs	**12**	21	5	14	11	17	13	11	5	9	12	21	13	10	14	13	14	10	8
...too few middle-class MPs	**10**	11	7	6	10	10	11	9	20	8	10	9	10	10	3	10	13	10	10
Don't know	**34**	33	29	33	29	31	33	35	38	36	35	28	32	36	43	35	33	26	43
How do you feel about MPs who are political careerists (i.e. people who have spent most of their working lives in politics)?																			

[Only shown to half of the sample; N=820]																			
There should be more of them	**5**	4	6	4	7	2	4	5	5	6	5	3	5	5	10	3	5	4	4
There is about the right amount of them	**20**	27	16	20	16	24	21	19	32	18	20	20	17	24	19	23	20	20	14
There should be fewer of them	**46**	48	46	55	51	50	51	41	19	43	53	56	53	37	43	45	44	50	51
Don't know	**29**	21	33	21	27	24	23	35	44	34	22	21	25	34	28	29	31	27	30
How do you feel about MPs who are professional politicians (i.e. people who have spent most of their working lives in politics)?																			
[Only shown to half of the sample; N=858]																			
There should be more of them	**8**	7	10	1	8	7	8	8	14	8	5	9	9	7	13	5	10	8	5
There is about the right amount of them	**19**	28	12	13	14	22	18	19	20	20	16	17	17	20	23	19	21	16	12
There should be fewer of them	**44**	44	46	57	52	46	50	39	33	41	53	48	49	37	34	43	44	47	58
Don't know	**29**	21	32	28	27	25	24	34	33	32	26	26	25	35	29	33	25	29	25

Appendix I

Survey results (March 2023)

Sample Size: 2214
Fieldwork: 23–27 March 2023

		Vote in 2019 GE			2016 EU Ref		Gender		Age				Social Grade		Country			Region			
	Total	**Con**	**Lab**	**LibDem**	**Remain**	**Leave**	**Male**	**Female**	**18-24**	**25-49**	**50-64**	**65+**	**ABC1**	**C2DE**	**England**	**Wales**	**Scotland**	**North**	**Midlands**	**London**	**South**
Weighted Sample	**2214**	724	536	188	780	824	1072	1142	232	914	547	520	1262	952	1911	111	193	534	368	268	742
Unweighted Sample	**2214**	760	556	201	887	840	1008	1206	193	911	560	550	1343	871	1905	122	187	527	360	247	771
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Do you think there should be more or fewer MPs who studied the following subjects at university, or are there about the right number of them now?																					
Politics																					
More	**29**	33	28	32	29	32	24	33	25	29	30	28	27	31	28	26	33	28	28	21	31
Same	**21**	20	23	22	25	19	19	23	25	21	20	21	22	20	22	19	18	20	25	25	20
Fewer	**24**	24	25	27	25	24	34	16	25	23	23	27	27	20	24	25	28	22	25	27	24
Don't know	**26**	23	23	19	22	25	23	29	26	27	27	24	24	29	26	29	21	30	22	27	25
Engineering																					
More	**39**	40	44	50	45	37	45	34	35	40	37	43	44	34	40	40	36	37	39	39	42
Same	**22**	23	22	22	23	22	21	22	22	20	22	24	20	24	22	20	20	21	25	20	22
Fewer	**6**	6	4	2	3	7	6	6	10	6	6	4	5	7	5	7	9	7	7	6	4
Don't know	**33**	31	30	26	29	34	28	38	33	34	36	29	31	36	33	34	34	35	29	34	33
Chemistry																					
More	**28**	26	34	35	34	25	32	24	28	29	24	30	31	24	29	23	26	26	25	33	31
Same	**26**	28	27	29	28	25	25	26	24	24	28	29	25	27	26	27	25	25	31	22	25
Fewer	**9**	12	5	6	6	12	11	8	15	9	8	9	9	10	9	9	10	9	12	8	8
Don't know	**37**	35	34	30	33	38	32	42	33	38	40	33	35	40	36	42	39	40	32	37	36
Medicine																					
More	**44**	39	52	49	50	39	45	43	47	46	40	43	48	39	44	43	49	43	38	45	46
Same	**19**	25	17	21	18	23	21	18	15	16	22	24	18	21	19	17	19	17	26	19	18

Fewer	**6**	7	5	4	4	8	8	4	10	7	5	5	6	7	6	9	6	5	9	5	6
Don't know	**30**	29	26	26	27	31	26	35	28	31	33	28	29	33	31	32	27	34	27	32	30
Law																					
More	**37**	39	39	41	39	38	33	41	34	40	36	35	37	38	37	39	38	37	37	30	39
Same	**24**	26	24	28	26	23	26	22	25	22	24	27	26	22	24	21	24	21	29	25	24
Fewer	**12**	12	13	9	11	13	17	7	15	10	12	13	13	11	12	12	12	11	12	15	11
Don't know	**27**	24	23	22	23	26	24	30	26	28	28	24	25	30	27	28	26	31	22	30	25
Do you think the proportion of MPs who went to private school should be...																					
...greater than the proportion of the country who went to private school	**5**	6	2	7	5	6	6	4	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	4	2	6	5	6	5
...the same as the proportion of the country who went to private school	**45**	44	51	61	54	41	45	44	44	47	44	41	50	38	45	35	45	43	45	46	46
...less than the proportion of the country who went to private school	**26**	24	32	18	26	29	26	27	21	24	29	29	25	28	25	34	29	25	27	24	26
Don't know	**24**	25	15	14	15	24	23	25	30	24	21	25	20	30	24	27	24	25	23	24	23
Do you think the proportion of MPs who went to university should be...																					
[Shown to a random half of the sample; 1061]																					
...greater than the proportion of the country who went to university	**20**	16	28	31	28	14	21	20	19	26	19	12	26	12	21	10	19	22	16	29	19
...the same as the proportion of the country who went to university	**48**	53	50	49	51	50	47	48	42	44	52	52	48	47	48	43	50	46	55	40	47
...less than the proportion of the country who went to university	**9**	8	7	3	6	11	10	7	10	7	11	9	7	11	8	17	5	7	9	5	10
Don't know	**24**	22	16	18	15	26	22	25	29	24	18	27	19	30	23	30	27	25	19	26	23
Do you think the proportion of MPs who went to Oxford University should be...																					

[Shown to a random half of the sample; 1153]																					
...greater than the proportion of the country who went to Oxford University	**6**	8	4	7	5	7	7	4	7	6	4	6	6	5	6	3	4	5	4	9	6
...the same as the proportion of the country who went to Oxford University	**43**	40	50	61	52	39	43	44	43	46	47	35	48	37	43	46	40	42	40	49	44
...less than the proportion of the country who went to Oxford University	**22**	21	26	21	23	25	22	22	16	19	23	29	22	22	22	18	29	19	23	19	24
Don't know	**29**	31	19	11	20	30	28	30	34	29	25	30	24	36	29	33	28	34	32	23	26
How do you feel about MPs who are political careerists (i.e. people who have spent most of their working lives in politics)?																					
[Shown to a random half of the sample; 1099]																					
There should be more of them	**8**	9	8	2	5	11	8	8	6	9	7	7	8	7	8	3	6	10	5	11	8
There is about the right amount of them	**17**	20	13	20	13	20	15	19	19	17	13	19	15	19	17	23	12	17	19	16	16
There should be fewer of them	**52**	52	60	56	62	51	58	45	37	46	61	58	55	47	51	61	57	52	50	45	52
Don't know	**24**	19	19	22	19	18	19	29	39	28	19	17	21	27	24	12	25	22	26	27	24
How do you feel about MPs who are professional politicians (i.e. people who have spent most of their working lives in politics)?																					
[Shown to a random half of the sample; 1117]																					
There should be more of them	**9**	10	8	14	10	8	8	9	11	9	8	7	9	8	8	7	14	8	8	9	8
There is about the right amount of them	**21**	23	14	19	21	19	18	23	27	21	18	19	21	21	22	17	13	23	25	17	21
There should be fewer of them	**47**	51	52	44	46	55	53	41	32	43	48	59	48	44	46	52	50	43	49	47	46

Don't know	**24**	16	25	23	23	18	20	28	30	27	25	15	22	27	24	25	23	26	19	27	25

Appendix J

MPs elected at the 2019 General Election but no longer in Parliament when the content analysis of websites was conducted

Nigel Adams (Conservative, Selby and Ainsty)
Imran Ahmad Khan (Conservative, Wakefield)
David Amess (Conservative, Southend West)
Tracy Brabin (Labour, Batley and Spen)
James Brokenshire (Conservative, Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Rosie Cooper (Labour, West Lancashire)
Jack Dromey (Labour, Birmingham Erdington)
Margaret Ferrier (SNP, Rutherglen and Hamilton West)
Cheryl Gillan (Conservative, Chesham and Amersham)
Neil Gray (SNP, Airdrie and Shotts)
Kate Green (Labour, Stretford and Urmston)
Mike Hill (Labour, Hartlepool)
Boris Johnson (Conservative, Uxbridge and South Ruislip)
Chris Matheson (Labour, City of Chester)
Neil Parish (Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton)
Owen Paterson (Conservative, North Shropshire)
David Warburton (Conservative, Somerton and Frome).

Appendix K

MPs elected at the 2019 General Election who did not have a functioning website when the content analysis was conducted

Peter Bone (Conservative, Wellingborough)
Jonathan Edwards (Elected as Plaid Cymru, Independent as of May 2020, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr)
Florence Eshalomi (Labour, Vauxhall)
John Hayes (Conservative, South Holland and The Deepings)
Robert Jenrick (Conservative, Newark)
Taiwo Owatemi (Labour, Coventry North West)

Appendix L

MPs elected at the 2019 General Election who had a functioning website but no biographical section when the content analysis was conducted

Margaret Beckett (Labour, Derby South)
Apsana Begum (Labour, Poplar and Limehouse)
Mhairi Black (Scottish National Party, Paisley and Renfrewshire South)
Olivia Blake (Labour, Sheffield Hallam)
Deidre Brock (Scottish National Party, Edinburgh North and Leith)
Chris Bryant (Labour, Rhondda)
Amy Callaghan (Scottish National Party, East Dunbartonshire)
Alan Campbell (Labour, Tynemouth)
Chris Clarkson (Conservative, Heywood and Middleton)
Yvette Cooper (Labour, Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford)
Stephen Crabb (Conservative, Preseli Pembrokeshire)
Jon Cruddas (Labour, Dagenham and Rainham)
Stephen Doughty (Labour, Cardiff South and Penarth)
John Finucane (Sinn Féin, Belfast North)
Stephen Flynn (Scottish National Party, Aberdeen South)
Yvonne Fovargue (Labour, Makerfield)
Luke Hall (Conservative, Thornbury and Yate)
Rupa Huq (Labour, Ealing Central and Acton)
Kim Johnson (Labour, Liverpool Riverside)
Andrew Jones (Conservative, Harrogate and Knaresborough)
Ben Lake (Plaid Cymru, Ceredigion)
Alison McGovern (Labour, Wirral South)
Robbie Moore (Conservative, Keighley)
Lisa Nandy (Labour, Wigan)
Sarah Olney (Liberal Democrats, Richmond Park)
Jess Phillips (Labour, Birmingham Yardley)
Christina Rees (Elected as Labour MP for Neath, Independent as of October 2022)
Nick Smith (Labour, Blaenau Gwent)
Graham Stringer (Labour, Blackley and Broughton)
Owen Thompson (Scottish National Party, Midlothian)
Jamie Wallis (Conservative, Bridgend)
Mike Wood (Conservative, Dudley South)
Mohammad Yasin (Labour, Bedford)

Appendix M

Power analysis simulation (two choice tasks)

Attribute	Level	True effect size	Power	Type S error rate	Type M error	Simulation seed
Gender	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.18 (0.12)	202,028
Secondary education	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.16 (0.15)	202,028
Secondary education	2	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.16 (0.14)	202,028
Higher education	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.17 (0.14)	202,028
Higher education	2	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.17 (0.14)	202,028
Father's occupation	1	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.16 (0.18)	202,028
Father's occupation	2	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.16 (0.16)	202,028
Father's occupation	3	0.05	1.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	1.15 (0.16)	202,028
Occupation	1	0.05	0.92 (0.27)	0.00 (0.00)	1.22 (0.31)	202,028
Occupation	2	0.05	0.90 (0.29)	0.00 (0.00)	1.20 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	3	0.05	0.90 (0.29)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	4	0.05	0.90 (0.30)	0.00 (0.00)	1.19 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	5	0.05	0.89 (0.31)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.31)	202,028
Occupation	6	0.05	0.91 (0.29)	0.00 (0.00)	1.20 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	7	0.05	0.88 (0.33)	0.00 (0.00)	1.20 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	8	0.05	0.92 (0.27)	0.00 (0.00)	1.18 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	9	0.05	0.92 (0.27)	0.00 (0.00)	1.20 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	10	0.05	0.94 (0.24)	0.00 (0.00)	1.20 (0.31)	202,028
Occupation	11	0.05	0.90 (0.31)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	12	0.05	0.93 (0.26)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	13	0.05	0.90 (0.29)	0.00 (0.00)	1.20 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	14	0.05	0.93 (0.26)	0.00 (0.00)	1.19 (0.29)	202,028

Occupation	15	0.05	0.89 (0.31)	0.00 (0.00)	1.19 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	16	0.05	0.89 (0.31)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.30)	202,028
Occupation	17	0.05	0.94 (0.25)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.29)	202,028
Occupation	18	0.05	0.90 (0.31)	0.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.30)	202,028

Notes: Power analysis conducted with a sample of 7600 respondents, each performing 2 tasks. Simulation is repeated 200 times to ensure the precision of the estimates.

Appendix N

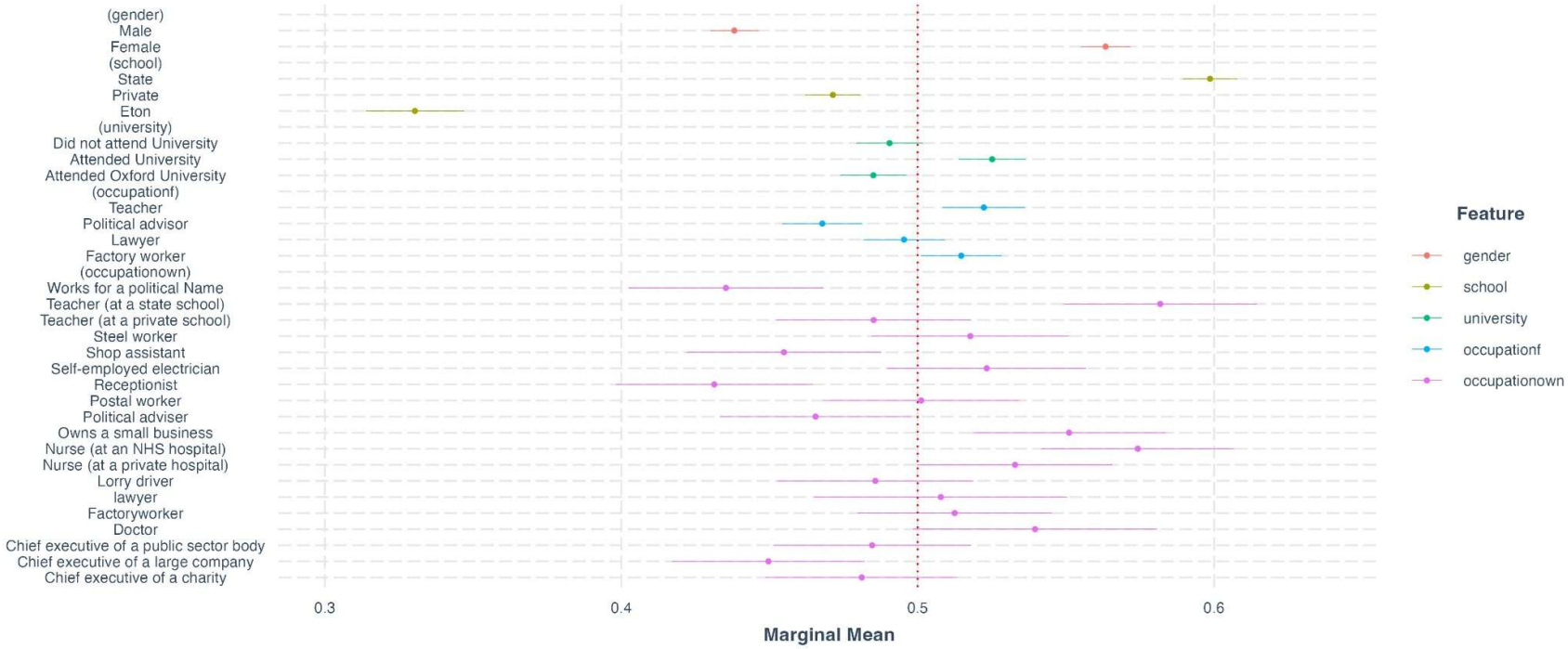
Difference-in-marginal-means analysis (z-test for independent estimates) comparing evaluations of MPs and local councillors

Occupation	Marginal mean (MP)	Marginal mean (Local councillor)	Difference in marginal means	Standard error of difference in marginal means	Z-statistic	Significance
Chief executive of a charity	0.47	0.48	-0.01	0.023	-0.42	
Chief executive of a large company	0.40	0.39	0.01	0.023	0.42	
Chief executive of a public sector body	0.45	0.42	0.03	0.024	1.26	
Doctor	0.54	0.49	0.05	0.030	1.68	
Factory worker	0.52	0.53	-0.01	0.024	-0.42	
Lawyer	0.46	0.44	0.02	0.031	0.65	
Lorry driver	0.51	0.54	-0.03	0.024	-1.26	
Nurse (private hospital)	0.54	0.53	0.01	0.024	0.42	
Nurse (NHS hospital)	0.61	0.60	0.01	0.023	0.43	
Owns a small business	0.56	0.56	0.00	0.023	0.00	
Political adviser	0.43	0.41	0.02	0.023	0.86	
Postal worker	0.51	0.54	-0.03	0.024	-1.26	
Receptionist	0.45	0.47	-0.02	0.024	-0.83	
Self-employed electrician	0.55	0.56	-0.01	0.024	-0.41	
Shop assistant	0.48	0.54	-0.06	0.024	-2.53	*

Steel worker	0.54	0.54	0.00	0.024	0.00	
Teacher (private school)	0.48	0.46	0.02	0.024	0.84	
Teacher (state school)	0.58	0.58	0.00	0.024	0.00	

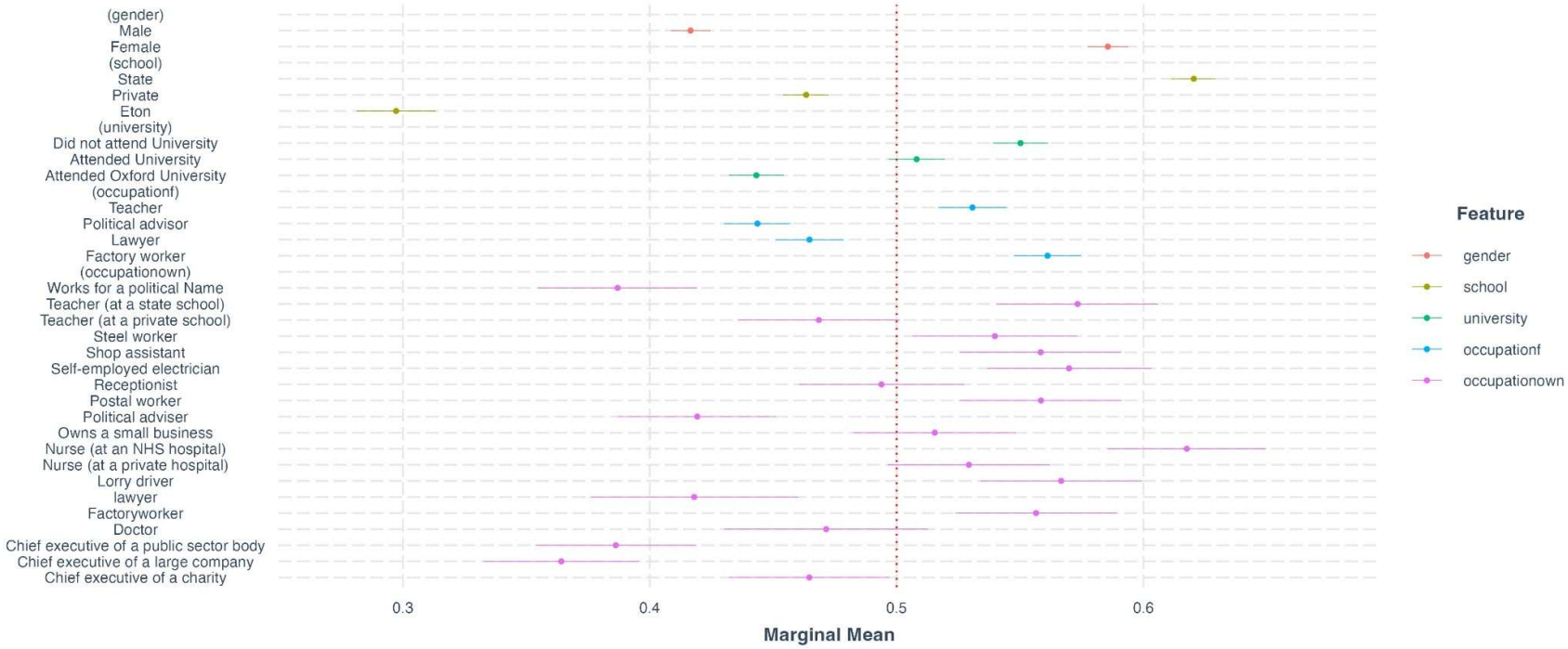
Appendix O

Which candidate do you think would be more competent?



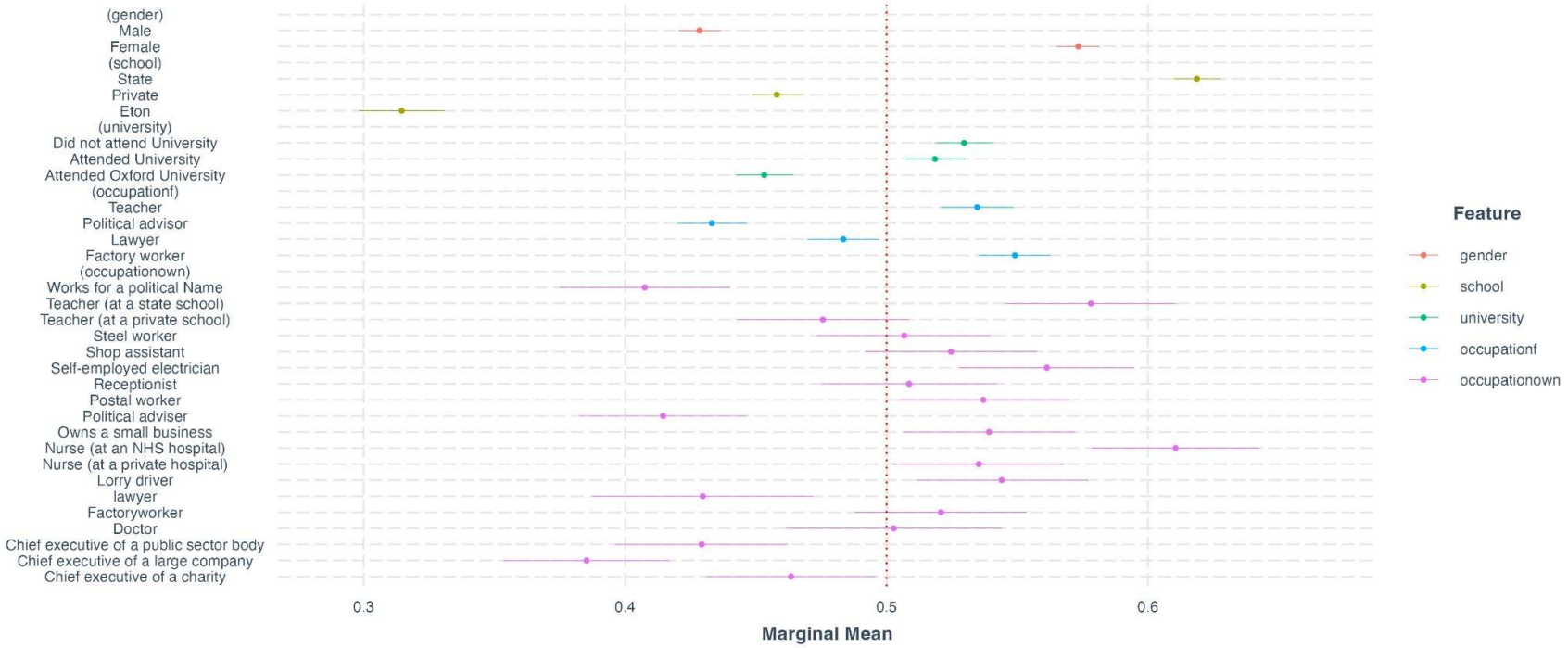
Appendix P

Which candidate do you think would be more approachable?



Appendix Q

Which candidate do you think holds views most similar to your own?



Appendix R

Regression table 1

	Vote choice	
	Marginal Mean	**.5 within CI**
Gender: Female	0.57 (0.0042)	
Gender: Male	0.43 (0.0041)	
School: Eton	0.33 (0.0084)	
School: Private	0.47 (0.0048)	
School: State	0.61 (0.0047)	
University: Attended Oxford University	0.47 (0.0057)	
University: Attended University	0.52 (0.0058)	
University: Did not attend University	0.51 (0.0057)	Yes
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.54 (0.007)	
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.49 (0.0071)	Yes
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.45 (0.0069)	
Father occupation: Teacher	0.52 (0.0071)	
Own occupation: Chief executive of a charity	0.47 (0.0166)	
Own occupation: Chief executive of a large company	0.4 (0.0163)	
Own occupation: Chief executive of a public sector body	0.45 (0.0169)	
Own occupation: Doctor	0.54 (0.021)	Yes
Own occupation: Factoryworker	0.52 (0.0167)	Yes
Own occupation: lawyer	0.46 (0.0217)	Yes
Own occupation: Lorry driver	0.51 (0.0169)	Yes
Own occupation: Nurse (at a private hospital)	0.54 (0.0168)	
Own occupation: Nurse (at an NHS hospital)	0.61 (0.0164)	
Own occupation: Owns a small business	0.56 (0.0166)	
Own occupation: Political adviser	0.43 (0.0164)	
Own occupation: Postal worker	0.51 (0.0169)	Yes

Own occupation: Receptionist	0.45 (0.017)	
Own occupation: Self-employed electrician	0.55 (0.0171)	
Own occupation: Shop assistant	0.48 (0.0168)	Yes
Own occupation: Steel worker	0.54 (0.017)	
Own occupation: Teacher (at a private school)	0.48 (0.0168)	Yes
Own occupation: Teacher (at a state school)	0.58 (0.0167)	
Own occupation: Works for a political Name	0.42 (0.0166)	

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for MP estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 2

	Vote choice	
	Marginal Mean	**.5 within CI**
Gender: Female	0.57 (0.0042)	
Gender: Male	0.43 (0.0041)	
School: Eton	0.3 (0.0082)	
School: Private	0.46 (0.0048)	
School: State	0.62 (0.0046)	
University: Attended Oxford University	0.45 (0.0056)	
University: Attended University	0.52 (0.0058)	
University: Did not attend University	0.53 (0.0057)	
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.55 (0.0069)	
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.47 (0.0071)	
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.44 (0.0068)	
Father occupation: Teacher	0.53 (0.0071)	
Own occupation: Chief executive of a charity	0.48 (0.0166)	Yes
Own occupation: Chief executive of a large company	0.39 (0.0163)	
Own occupation: Chief executive of a public sector body	0.42 (0.0168)	
Own occupation: Doctor	0.49 (0.0211)	Yes
Own occupation: Factoryworker	0.53 (0.0167)	Yes
Own occupation: lawyer	0.44 (0.0216)	
Own occupation: Lorry driver	0.54 (0.0168)	
Own occupation: Nurse (at a private hospital)	0.53 (0.0168)	Yes
Own occupation: Nurse (at an NHS hospital)	0.6 (0.0164)	
Own occupation: Owns a small business	0.56 (0.0166)	
Own occupation: Political adviser	0.41 (0.0163)	
Own occupation: Postal worker	0.54 (0.0168)	
Own occupation: Receptionist	0.47 (0.0171)	Yes

Own occupation: Self-employed electrician	0.56 (0.017)	
Own occupation: Shop assistant	0.54 (0.0168)	
Own occupation: Steel worker	0.54 (0.017)	
Own occupation: Teacher (at a private school)	0.46 (0.0167)	
Own occupation: Teacher (at a state school)	0.58 (0.0167)	
Own occupation: Works for a political Name	0.4 (0.0165)	

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for local councillor estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 3

Feature	Did not attend university	Attended university
Gender: Female	0.55 (0.0051)	0.6 (0.0075)
Gender: Male	0.45 (0.005)	0.4 (0.0073)
School: Eton	0.34 (0.0104)	0.3 (0.0143)
School: Private	0.47 (0.0057)	0.47 (0.0085)
School: State	0.6 (0.0056)	0.62 (0.0082)
University: Attended Oxford University	0.46 (0.0068)	0.5 (0.0103)
University: Attended University	0.52 (0.0069)	0.54 (0.0106)
University: Did not attend University	0.53 (0.007)	0.46 (0.01)
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.54 (0.0084)	0.54 (0.0125)
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.49 (0.0085)	0.48 (0.0126)
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.46 (0.0084)	0.44 (0.0119)
Father occupation: Teacher	0.51 (0.0087)	0.54 (0.0123)
Own occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.44 (0.0077)	0.47 (0.0111)
Own occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.53 (0.008)	0.52 (0.0119)
Own occupation: Small employers and own account workers	0.56 (0.0138)	0.55 (0.0208)
Own occupation: Semi-routine	0.47 (0.0139)	0.52 (0.0216)
Own occupation: Routine and manual occupations	0.53 (0.0094)	0.48 (0.0133)

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for MP estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 4

Feature	Did not attend university	Attended university
Gender: Female	0.56 (0.0051)	0.61 (0.0075)
Gender: Male	0.44 (0.005)	0.39 (0.0073)
School: Eton	0.31 (0.0102)	0.26 (0.0138)
School: Private	0.46 (0.0057)	0.46 (0.0085)
School: State	0.62 (0.0056)	0.63 (0.0082)
University: Attended Oxford University	0.44 (0.0067)	0.48 (0.0103)
University: Attended University	0.52 (0.0069)	0.53 (0.0106)
University: Did not attend University	0.55 (0.0069)	0.49 (0.01)
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.55 (0.0084)	0.55 (0.0124)
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.48 (0.0085)	0.46 (0.0126)
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.45 (0.0084)	0.44 (0.0119)
Father occupation: Teacher	0.52 (0.0087)	0.55 (0.0123)
Own occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.43 (0.0076)	0.45 (0.0111)
Own occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.51 (0.008)	0.53 (0.0119)
Own occupation: Small employers and own account workers	0.56 (0.0138)	0.55 (0.0208)
Own occupation: Semi-routine	0.51 (0.0139)	0.5 (0.0216)
Own occupation: Routine and manual occupations	0.55 (0.0093)	0.5 (0.0133)

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for local councillor estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 5

Feature	Respondents' occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Respondents' occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Respondents' occupation: Small employers and own account workers	Respondents' occupation: Semi-routine	Respondents' occupation: Routine and manual occupations
Gender: Female	0.57 (0.0104)	0.58 (0.0091)	0.57 (0.0066)	0.56 (0.014)	0.55 (0.0122)
Gender: Male	0.43 (0.0102)	0.42 (0.009)	0.43 (0.0065)	0.44 (0.0131)	0.45 (0.0124)
School: Eton	0.32 (0.0208)	0.3 (0.018)	0.33 (0.0131)	0.35 (0.0277)	0.34 (0.025)
School: Private	0.5 (0.0119)	0.46 (0.01)	0.46 (0.0075)	0.43 (0.0156)	0.46 (0.0142)
School: State	0.57 (0.0116)	0.62 (0.0099)	0.61 (0.0074)	0.62 (0.0145)	0.6 (0.0137)
University: Attended Oxford University	0.48 (0.0136)	0.5 (0.0123)	0.46 (0.0089)	0.49 (0.0191)	0.45 (0.016)
University: Attended University	0.56 (0.0144)	0.52 (0.0125)	0.53 (0.0093)	0.49 (0.017)	0.49 (0.017)
University: Did not attend University	0.46 (0.0142)	0.49 (0.0121)	0.51 (0.009)	0.53 (0.0186)	0.56 (0.017)
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.54 (0.0171)	0.53 (0.0155)	0.54 (0.0109)	0.57 (0.0223)	0.53 (0.02)
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.52 (0.0169)	0.48 (0.0153)	0.49 (0.0112)	0.47 (0.0236)	0.49 (0.0198)
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.44 (0.0176)	0.44 (0.0147)	0.45 (0.0106)	0.47 (0.0208)	0.47 (0.0215)
Father occupation: Teacher	0.5 (0.0171)	0.55 (0.015)	0.51 (0.0113)	0.49 (0.0237)	0.51 (0.0204)

Own occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.49 (0.0156)	0.47 (0.0135)	0.44 (0.0099)	0.43 (0.0205)	0.44 (0.0188)
Own occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.52 (0.0166)	0.53 (0.0142)	0.53 (0.0104)	0.56 (0.0217)	0.51 (0.0187)
Own occupation: Small employers and own account workers	0.61 (0.027)	0.54 (0.0255)	0.54 (0.0174)	0.55 (0.0386)	0.56 (0.0389)
Own occupation: Semi-routine	0.44 (0.0289)	0.5 (0.0255)	0.48 (0.0184)	0.49 (0.0354)	0.5 (0.0357)
Own occupation: Routine and manual occupations	0.46 (0.019)	0.49 (0.0164)	0.54 (0.0122)	0.5 (0.0245)	0.55 (0.0215)

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for MP estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 6

Feature	Respondents' occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Respondents' occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Respondents' occupation: Small employers and own account workers	Respondents' occupation: Semi-routine	Respondents' occupation: Routine and manual occupations
Gender: Female	0.57 (0.0104)	0.59 (0.0091)	0.58 (0.0066)	0.55 (0.014)	0.55 (0.0122)
Gender: Male	0.43 (0.0102)	0.41 (0.009)	0.42 (0.0064)	0.45 (0.0131)	0.45 (0.0123)
School: Eton	0.31 (0.0205)	0.27 (0.0175)	0.3 (0.0127)	0.36 (0.0279)	0.29 (0.0238)
School: Private	0.48 (0.0119)	0.45 (0.0099)	0.46 (0.0075)	0.43 (0.0156)	0.46 (0.0141)
School: State	0.6 (0.0114)	0.64 (0.0098)	0.62 (0.0073)	0.62 (0.0145)	0.63 (0.0135)
University: Attended Oxford University	0.47 (0.0136)	0.45 (0.0123)	0.43 (0.0089)	0.48 (0.0191)	0.46 (0.0161)
University: Attended University	0.53 (0.0144)	0.54 (0.0125)	0.53 (0.0093)	0.48 (0.017)	0.48 (0.017)
University: Did not attend University	0.51 (0.0142)	0.5 (0.0121)	0.54 (0.009)	0.54 (0.0186)	0.56 (0.017)
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.52 (0.0171)	0.55 (0.0154)	0.55 (0.0108)	0.58 (0.0222)	0.57 (0.0199)
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.47 (0.0169)	0.48 (0.0153)	0.48 (0.0112)	0.44 (0.0234)	0.47 (0.0198)
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.44 (0.0176)	0.43 (0.0146)	0.45 (0.0106)	0.47 (0.0208)	0.44 (0.0214)
Father occupation: Teacher	0.57 (0.0169)	0.55 (0.015)	0.52 (0.0113)	0.5 (0.0237)	0.51 (0.0204)

Own occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.47 (0.0156)	0.45 (0.0134)	0.43 (0.0099)	0.43 (0.0205)	0.41 (0.0186)
Own occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	0.52 (0.0166)	0.52 (0.0142)	0.51 (0.0105)	0.52 (0.0218)	0.51 (0.0187)
Own occupation: Small employers and own account workers	0.58 (0.0273)	0.57 (0.0253)	0.54 (0.0174)	0.58 (0.0383)	0.55 (0.039)
Own occupation: Semi-routine	0.46 (0.029)	0.54 (0.0254)	0.5 (0.0184)	0.53 (0.0354)	0.51 (0.0357)
Own occupation: Routine and manual occupations	0.49 (0.0191)	0.49 (0.0164)	0.57 (0.0121)	0.52 (0.0245)	0.58 (0.0213)

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for local councillor estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 7

Feature	Conservative	Green Party	Labour	Liberal Democrat	No PID	Plaid Cymru	Reform UK	Scottish National Party (SNP)
Gender: Female	0.52 (0.0078)	0.63 (0.0184)	0.6 (0.0081)	0.61 (0.0142)	0.57 (0.0087)	0.59 (0.0558)	0.49 (0.0258)	0.59 (0.0261)
Gender: Male	0.48 (0.0079)	0.39 (0.0157)	0.4 (0.0079)	0.4 (0.0134)	0.43 (0.0086)	0.4 (0.065)	0.51 (0.0241)	0.41 (0.0266)
School: Eton	0.41 (0.0167)	0.29 (0.0314)	0.26 (0.0153)	0.29 (0.0265)	0.33 (0.0174)	0.43 (0.1602)	0.36 (0.0522)	0.16 (0.0423)
School: Private	0.49 (0.0088)	0.45 (0.0201)	0.44 (0.0089)	0.48 (0.0171)	0.46 (0.0101)	0.41 (0.0485)	0.49 (0.027)	0.49 (0.0299)
School: State	0.55 (0.0086)	0.65 (0.0191)	0.66 (0.0087)	0.61 (0.0158)	0.62 (0.0098)	0.62 (0.0574)	0.56 (0.0256)	0.65 (0.0312)
University: Attended Oxford University	0.48 (0.0103)	0.47 (0.0232)	0.46 (0.0111)	0.45 (0.0195)	0.48 (0.0117)	0.6 (0.0716)	0.44 (0.0319)	0.44 (0.0353)
University: Attended University	0.54 (0.0108)	0.53 (0.0245)	0.51 (0.011)	0.55 (0.0198)	0.51 (0.0123)	0.5 (0.0724)	0.53 (0.0308)	0.53 (0.0368)
University: Did not attend University	0.48 (0.0105)	0.51 (0.0239)	0.53 (0.0107)	0.49 (0.0205)	0.51 (0.012)	0.39 (0.0713)	0.53 (0.0368)	0.53 (0.0353)
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.52 (0.0127)	0.56 (0.0284)	0.56 (0.0135)	0.51 (0.0246)	0.55 (0.0144)	0.6 (0.1193)	0.61 (0.0373)	0.51 (0.045)
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.52 (0.0128)	0.49 (0.0297)	0.48 (0.0134)	0.51 (0.0248)	0.47 (0.0147)	0.35 (0.0915)	0.43 (0.0413)	0.48 (0.0509)
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.45 (0.0133)	0.44 (0.0294)	0.45 (0.0129)	0.44 (0.0221)	0.46 (0.0139)	0.39 (0.1098)	0.46 (0.0416)	0.47 (0.0406)
Father occupation: Teacher	0.51 (0.0128)	0.51 (0.0323)	0.51 (0.0135)	0.53 (0.0239)	0.51 (0.015)	0.7 (0.0929)	0.49 (0.0415)	0.55 (0.0461)

Own occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupation	0.47 (0.012)	0.43 (0.0264)	0.44 (0.0116)	0.46 (0.0225)	0.45 (0.0131)	0.44 (0.1176)	0.38 (0.04)	0.44 (0.0367)
Own occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupation	0.53 (0.0122)	0.51 (0.0283)	0.54 (0.0131)	0.52 (0.0219)	0.51 (0.0136)	0.55 (0.0943)	0.54 (0.0352)	0.53 (0.0423)
Own occupation: Small employers and own account workers	0.59 (0.0202)	0.56 (0.052)	0.5 (0.0222)	0.54 (0.0396)	0.56 (0.0251)	0.75 (0.1344)	0.62 (0.0597)	0.54 (0.0752)
Own occupation: Semi-routine	0.44 (0.0215)	0.5 (0.0494)	0.5 (0.0223)	0.55 (0.0416)	0.5 (0.0242)	0.43 (0.1896)	0.4 (0.067)	0.52 (0.0676)
Own occupation: Routine and manual occupations	0.48 (0.0138)	0.55 (0.0307)	0.54 (0.0152)	0.48 (0.0263)	0.53 (0.0157)	0.44 (0.0779)	0.57 (0.0513)	0.52 (0.0467)

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for MP estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Regression table 8

Feature	Conservative	Green Party	Labour	Liberal Democrat	No PID	Plaid Cymru	Reform UK	Scottish National Party (SNP)
Gender: Female	0.53 (0.0078)	0.63 (0.0184)	0.6 (0.0081)	0.61 (0.0142)	0.58 (0.0087)	0.59 (0.0558)	0.52 (0.0258)	0.6 (0.026)
Gender: Male	0.47 (0.0079)	0.39 (0.0157)	0.4 (0.0079)	0.39 (0.0134)	0.43 (0.0086)	0.4 (0.065)	0.48 (0.024)	0.4 (0.0265)
School: Eton	0.36 (0.0162)	0.2 (0.0281)	0.26 (0.0152)	0.28 (0.0264)	0.3 (0.017)	0.14 (0.1133)	0.38 (0.0525)	0.16 (0.0423)
School: Private	0.48 (0.0088)	0.46 (0.0202)	0.44 (0.0088)	0.46 (0.0171)	0.45 (0.0101)	0.41 (0.0485)	0.46 (0.0269)	0.49 (0.0299)
School: State	0.57 (0.0085)	0.68 (0.0187)	0.66 (0.0086)	0.63 (0.0156)	0.63 (0.0097)	0.69 (0.0549)	0.59 (0.0255)	0.65 (0.0312)
University: Attended Oxford University	0.46 (0.0103)	0.44 (0.023)	0.44 (0.0111)	0.44 (0.0195)	0.46 (0.0117)	0.44 (0.0726)	0.43 (0.0318)	0.5 (0.0356)
University: Attended University	0.52 (0.0108)	0.52 (0.0245)	0.52 (0.011)	0.56 (0.0197)	0.52 (0.0123)	0.61 (0.0707)	0.55 (0.0308)	0.5 (0.0368)
University: Did not attend University	0.53 (0.0105)	0.54 (0.0238)	0.54 (0.0107)	0.49 (0.0205)	0.53 (0.012)	0.43 (0.0724)	0.53 (0.0368)	0.49 (0.0353)
Father occupation: Factory worker	0.55 (0.0127)	0.54 (0.0286)	0.56 (0.0135)	0.52 (0.0246)	0.57 (0.0143)	0.4 (0.1193)	0.57 (0.0379)	0.53 (0.0449)
Father occupation: Lawyer	0.49 (0.0128)	0.49 (0.0297)	0.47 (0.0134)	0.48 (0.0248)	0.46 (0.0147)	0.3 (0.0884)	0.49 (0.0417)	0.45 (0.0507)
Father occupation: Political advisor	0.43 (0.0133)	0.46 (0.0296)	0.44 (0.0129)	0.44 (0.0221)	0.46 (0.0138)	0.61 (0.1098)	0.42 (0.0411)	0.44 (0.0404)
Father occupation: Teacher	0.53 (0.0128)	0.5 (0.0324)	0.53 (0.0135)	0.55 (0.0239)	0.52 (0.015)	0.7 (0.0929)	0.52 (0.0415)	0.58 (0.0457)

Own occupation: Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupation	0.44 (0.0119)	0.44 (0.0265)	0.43 (0.0116)	0.46 (0.0225)	0.45 (0.0131)	0.25 (0.1026)	0.35 (0.0392)	0.42 (0.0365)
Own occupation: Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupation	0.52 (0.0122)	0.5 (0.0283)	0.53 (0.0131)	0.51 (0.0219)	0.5 (0.0136)	0.6 (0.0929)	0.51 (0.0353)	0.52 (0.0424)
Own occupation: Small employers and own account workers	0.59 (0.0202)	0.56 (0.052)	0.53 (0.0221)	0.54 (0.0396)	0.52 (0.0253)	0.62 (0.1502)	0.72 (0.0553)	0.54 (0.0752)
Own occupation: Semi-routine	0.5 (0.0216)	0.5 (0.0494)	0.49 (0.0223)	0.54 (0.0416)	0.52 (0.0242)	0.43 (0.1896)	0.38 (0.0664)	0.6 (0.0662)
Own occupation: Routine and manual occupations	0.51 (0.0139)	0.54 (0.0307)	0.55 (0.0152)	0.5 (0.0263)	0.56 (0.0157)	0.56 (0.0779)	0.62 (0.0503)	0.51 (0.0467)

Total N=15238
Respondents=7619
Notes: Marginal means for local councillor estimated using only Task 1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis.

Appendix S

MPs who describe themselves as working class or coming from a working-class background

Mike Amesbury (n.d.), Labour MP for Weaver Vale: 'My Labour politics are shaped by my working class [sic] background'

Steve Baker (n.d.), Conservative MP for Wycombe: 'I was born to working class [sic] parents in Cornwall'

Maria Caulfield (n.d.), Conservative MP for Lewes: 'I would like to thank the Conservative Party for choosing a working class [sic] nurse like myself for this seat'

Virginia Crosbie (n.d.), Conservative MP for Ynys Môn: 'I have a working class [sic] background'

Sarah Dines (n.d.), Conservative MP for Derbyshire Dales: 'I am a working-class, council house-reared, comprehensive school-educated Conservative'

Mark Fletcher (n.d.), Conservative MP for Bolsover: 'I believe in a compassionate politics driven by my working-class British values'

Darren Henry (n.d.), Conservative MP for Broxtowe: 'Dad was a toolmaker and Mum worked shifts in a factory and we were a traditional British working class [sic] family'

Sarah Owen (n.d.), Labour MP for Luton North: 'As a mixed race [sic] daughter of an immigrant with working class [sic] roots'

Steve Reed (n.d.), Labour MP for Croydon North: 'Steve grew up in a working-class family on the outskirts of London'

Jonathan Reynolds (n.d.), Labour MP for Stalybridge and Hyde: 'I come from a loving working-class family'

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (n.d.), Labour MP for Streatham: 'I am a black working-class woman, Christian, and a lifelong socialist who grew up in a Labour family'

Laurence Robertson (n.d.), Conservative MP for Tewkesbury: 'I was born in 1958 to a working class [sic] family in Bolton'

Dean Russell, (n.d.), Conservative MP for Watford: 'Dean is originally from the West Midlands, from a working class [sic] family'

Wes Streeting (n.d.), Labour MP for Ilford North: 'I come from a working class [sic] family in Tower Hamlets'; 'Wes comes from a working class [sic] family'

Appendix T

MPs who changed parties or had the whip removed between holding of the General Election in December 2019 and the conducting of the content analysis

Neale Hanvey, elected as the SNP MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, had the whip withdraw in December 2019, had it restored in June 2020, before switching to Alba in March 2021.

Jonathan Edwards, elected as the Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, had the whip withdrawn in May 2020.

Julian Lewis, elected as the Conservative MP for New Forest East, had the whip withdrawn in July 2020 and restored in December 2020

Claudia Webbe, elected as the Labour MP for Leicester East, had the whip withdrawn in September 2020.

Margaret Ferrier, elected as the SNP MP for 1 October 2020, had the whip withdrawn in October 2020.

Jeremy Corbyn, elected as the Labour MP for Islington North, had the whip withdrawn in October 2020.

Kenny MacAskill, elected as the SNP MP for East Lothian, defected to Alba in March 2021.

Rob Roberts, elected as the Conservative MP for Delyn, had the whip withdrawn in May 2021.

Imran Ahmad Khan, elected as the Conservative MP for Wakefield, had the whip withdrawn in June 2021.

Anne Marie Morris, elected as the Conservative MP for Newton Abbot, had the whip withdrawn in January 2022 and restored in May 2022.

Christian Wakeford, elected as the Conservative MP for Bury South, defected to Labour in January 2022.

Neil Coyle, elected as the Labour MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark, had the whip removed in February 2022 and restored in May 2023.

David Warburton, elected as the Conservative MP for Somerton and Frome, had the whip withdrawn in April 2022.

Neil Parish, elected as the Conservative MP for Tiverton and Honiton, had the whip withdrawn in April 2022.

Patrick Grady, elected as the SNP MP for Glasgow North, had the whip withdrawn in June 2022 and restored in December 2022.

Christopher Pincher, elected as the Conservative MP for Tamworth, had the whip withdraw in July 2022.

Tobias Ellwood, elected as the Conservative MP for Tamworth, had the whip withdraw in July 2022 and restored in October 2022.

Nick Brown, elected as the Labour MP for Newcastle upon Tyne East, had the whip withdrawn in September 2022.

Rupa Huq, elected as the Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton, had the whip withdrawn in September 2022 and restored in March 2023.

Conor Burns, elected as the Conservative MP for Bournemouth West, had the whip withdrawn in October 2022 and restored in December 2022.

Christina Rees, elected as the Labour MP for Neath, had the whip withdrawn in October 2022.

Chris Matheson, elected as the Labour MP for City of Chester, had the whip withdrawn in October 2022.

Matt Hancock, elected as the Conservative MP for West Suffolk, had the whip withdrawn in November 2022.

Julian Knight, elected as the Conservative MP for Solihull, had the whip withdrawn in December 2022.

Conor McGinn, elected as the Labour MP for St Helens North, had the whip withdrawn in December 2022.

Andrew Bridgen, elected as the Conservative MP for North West Leicestershire, had the whip withdrawn in January 2023 and joined the Reclaim Party in May 2023.

Scott Benton, elected as the Conservative MP for Blackpool South, had the whip withdrawn in April 2023.

Diane Abbott, elected as the Labour MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, had the whip withdraw in April 2023.

Geraint Davies, elected as the Labour MP for Swansea West, had the whip withdraw in June 2023.

Bambos Charalambous, elected as the Labour MP for Enfield Southgate, had the whip withdrawn in June 2023.

Angus MacNeil, elected as the SNP MP for Na h-Eileanan An Iar, had the whip withdrawn in July 2023.

Appendix U

Screenshots of the biographical sections from various MPs' websites

John Baron (Conservative MP for Basildon and Billericay)

Jake Berry (Conservative MP for Rossendale and Darwen)

01706 215 547 | 01254 701 258 | jake.berry.mp@parliament.uk

JAKE BERRY MP
MP for Rossendale & Darwen

Home About Jake Contact Jake

About Jake

Jake was educated at Liverpool College, followed by the University of Sheffield, and trained as a solicitor in the City of London.

Before becoming a Member of Parliament for Rossendale & Darwen in 2010, Jake specialised in Housing and Development Law. This valuable experience has enabled him to effectively champion affordable housing and the Construction Sector within the House of Commons.

Jake was appointed as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Rt Hon. Grant Shapps MP, Minister for Housing and Local Government in 2010. In September 2012 Grant was appointed Conservative Party Chairman with Jake remaining as his PPS.

In April 2013, Jake was asked by the Prime Minister to join his influential Policy Board and advise him on housing, local government and regional growth in Downing Street.

In May 2015 Jake was appointed as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

In June 2017 Jake was appointed as the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse & Local Growth at the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

Stephen Brine (Conservative MP for Winchester)

Conservatives

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About Steve Brine

X Post

Born in 1974, Steve and his wife Susie, a trained Speech and Language Therapist now working in early years, live just outside the city of Winchester.

They have a daughter Emily (born in November 2007), a son William (born in November 2010) Emily & William were both born at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester. Steve has a sister (Tracey) and two nephews (Oliver and Sam).

Steve is pictured with the family on a family holiday to Devon where they go each year during Parliament's Summer recess.

From 2003 until 2017 Steve had 'Popcorn' the Labrador who was well known to local people as a constant companion to the MP while out and about in the constituency.

Navendu Mishra (Labour MP for Stockport)

Navendu Mishra MP
Standing up for Stockport

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Member of Parliament for Stockport

I was elected as the Member of Parliament for Stockport at the 2019 General Election. I am deeply honoured to represent Stockport where I and my family live.

Before entering politics, I worked as a shop-floor trade unionist in Stockport, before becoming an organiser for Unison trade union, where I organised care workers in precarious employment.

I was a member of the Labour Party's National Executive Committee between 2018 and my election to the House of Commons in December 2019, serving as one of the nine Constituency Labour Party representatives.

Since being elected, I have joined several All Party Parliamentary Groups, including Rail, Fairtrade, Woods & Trees, Cricket and Beer.

In addition, I am a member of Unite and USDAW trade unions.

Matthew Pennycook (Labour MP for Greenwich and Woolwich)

ABOUT ME

I was born in October 1982 and raised, along with my younger brother, in South London by my mum.

I went to the local primary, then the local state secondary, before becoming the first person in my family to go to university. My secondary school was not one that typically sent many of its pupils, if any, to university each year, let alone one that pushed them to consider applying to any of our country's elite universities.

I will never forget one senior teacher's advice to me upon expressing an interest in applying: "go for it by all means, but don't put down anywhere stupid like the London School of Economics as one of your preferences."

So that's exactly what I did.

With the support of several outstanding teachers, I secured my place at the LSE to study History and International Relations. Like many people who head to university from an ordinary background, I always had a feeling that I didn't really belong. But I worked hard, did well and was lucky enough to secure funding for an MPhil at Balliol College, Oxford, in the same subject.

Darren Jones (Labour MP for Bristol North West)

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Your Voice in Parliament. Your Champion in Bristol.

Bristol North West is my home - it's where I was born and grew up and where I now live with my family. That makes being the local MP extra special. In 2019, I was proudly re-elected to serve my constituents as the local Labour MP.

As your Voice in Parliament, it's my job to raise your concerns with Ministers and to campaign for change. As your Champion in Bristol, it's my job to support you, your family and our community to make Bristol the best place to live and work.

Kirsty Blackman (Scottish National Party MP for Aberdeen North)

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Kirsty Blackman
Aberdeen North

Kirsty was first elected to Aberdeen City Council in 2007 when she was 21. She served 8 years there and has been the SNP MP for Aberdeen North since May 2015.

Kirsty is the Depute Leader of the SNP at Westminster and leads for her group on the Economy.

She has two children aged 4 and 6.

Claire Hanna (Social Democratic and Labour Party MP for Belfast South)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

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Claire Hanna
South Belfast MP

Born in Connemara, Galway, Claire has lived in South Belfast since the age of three and attended St. Bride's Primary School followed by Rathmore. She has an Honours Degree in International Relations and a Masters in Law.

Prior to elected politics, Claire worked in international development, in a range policy and education roles, taking her to parts of the world such as Haiti, Zambia and Bangladesh. Her passion for international development and humanitarian affairs has endured and is a major inspiration to her political interests and activities.

Claire was first elected as a Councillor for Belfast City Council in 2011 for the Balmoral DEA, having been subsequently re-elected in 2014. In 2015, she was co-opted into the Northern Ireland Assembly as an MLA, and re-elected in 2016 and 2018 until her election to Parliament in 2019.

Neale Hanvey (Alba MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath)

Neale Hanvey MP

01592 210088 neale.hanvey.mp@parliament.uk

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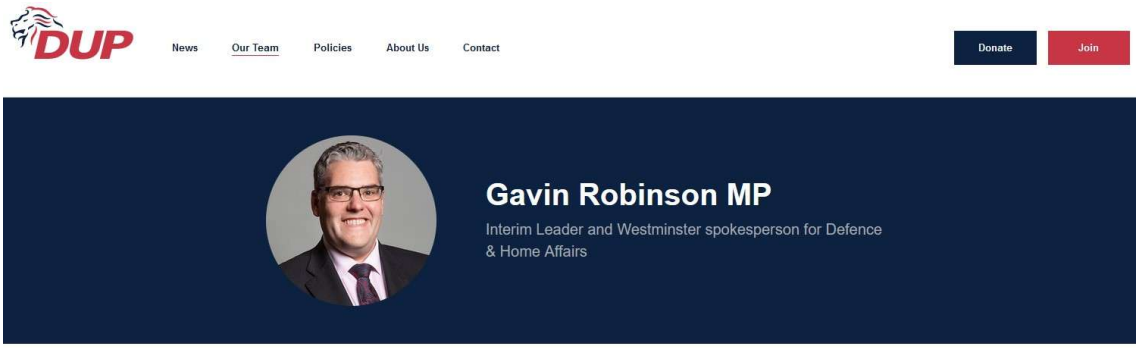
In December 2019, Neale was elected as member of parliament for the Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath Constituency. Neale was previously the SNP Westminster Group spokesperson for vaccine deployment and the SNP representative on the Health and Social Care Select Committee. As of 28 March 2021, Neale took the decision to leave the SNP and join the newly-established Alba Party, a political party set up to deliver a super-majority for Scottish independence at Holyrood.

Neale was born in Belfast and lived in the north of Ireland through his early years. At the age of seven his family moved to Glenrothes New Town in Scotland.

Neale attended Glenrothes High School before starting his career in nursing. He completed a mental health nursing qualification (RMN) in Fife. Following this, Neale completed his general nurse training (RGN) at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh.

Gavin Robinson (Democratic Unionist Party MP for Belfast East)



Profile

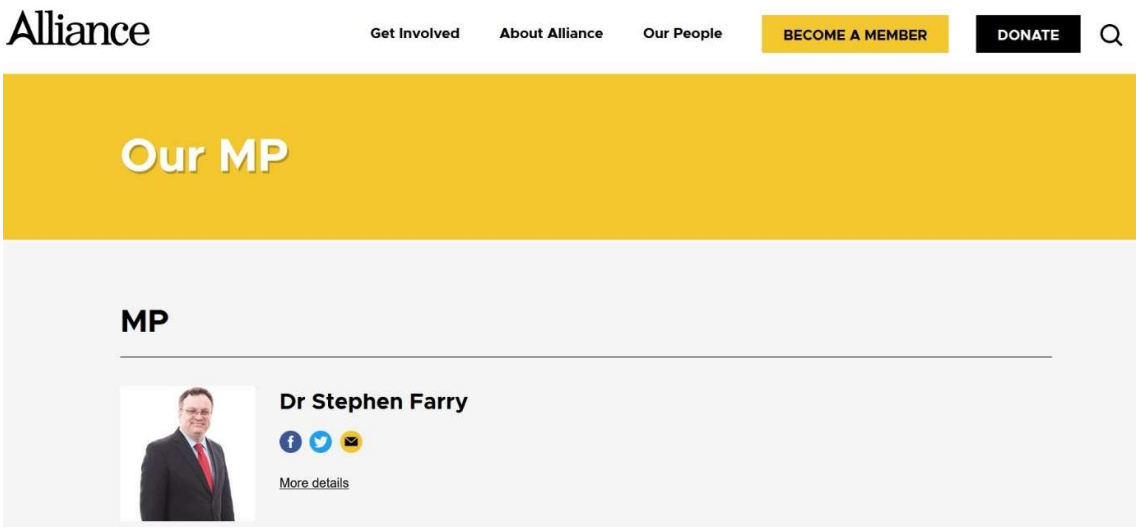
Gavin is a lifelong East Belfast resident. He attended Grosvenor Grammar School in East Belfast. While he was further educated at Queen's University Belfast, he read Law and attained a Masters in Irish Politics before commencing practice as a barrister.

Gavin was a member of Belfast City Council from 2010 until 2015, first for the Pottinger District Electoral Area and then for the newly created Titanic DEA.

He served as the Lord Mayor of Belfast from June 2012 until June 2013 when his leadership was recognised during a difficult period for the city.

Contact Details

Stephen Farry (Alliance MP for North Down) (1)



Stephen Farry (Alliance MP for North Down) (2)

Órfhlaith Begley (Sinn Féin MP for West Tyrone)

Órfhlaith Begley

Profile | Statements (52)

Email: orfhlaith.begley@sinnfein.ie
Phone: 028 82 253040

Órfhlaith Begley is the Sinn Féin MP for West Tyrone and has lived in Carrickmore, County Tyrone all of her life.

A Republican activist from a young age, she has been an active member of the Frank Ward/ Joe McGarrity Sinn Féin Cumann based in the Carrickmore and Creggan area.

Órfhlaith has always had an interest in politics, graduating with a degree in Law with Politics from Queen's University, Belfast.

Following this, she continued her education at Queen's and studied at the Institute of Professional and Legal Studies graduating as a solicitor.

A passionate Human Rights advocate she worked in a general solicitor practice before being elected as the first female Member of Parliament for West Tyrone.

Tim Farron (Liberal Democrat MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale)

About Tim

Tim Farron has been the MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale since 2005.

Tim lives in Milnthorpe, south Cumbria, with his wife Rosie, his daughters Isabella and Gracie and his sons Jude and Laurie. In his limited spare time, Tim enjoys following the (mis)fortunes of Blackburn Rovers, playing football, fell running, walking in the Lake District, listening to various kinds of music and spending time with family and friends.

Tim became an MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale in 2005 ending a 95 year rule by the Tories, winning by 267 votes.

In March 2006 Tim became Parliamentary Private Secretary to the then party leader Ming Campbell. He was then promoted, in December 2007, to the Lib Dem Shadow Cabinet and served as the Shadow Minister for the Countryside and Rural Affairs.

Tim served as President of the Liberal Democrats from 2011 to 2015.

In July 2015 Tim was elected leader of the Lib Dems. He stood down in June 2017 following the General Election and now is the party's spokesperson for the Envrionment.

Since becoming an MP in 2005 Tim has dealt with over 150,000 constituents cases in his office and held well over 600 advice surgeries in South Lakeland.

Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru MP for Dwyfor Meirionnydd)

Plaid Cymru Party of Wales

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Constituency: Dwyfor Meirionnydd

Liz Saville Roberts

liz.saville.roberts@plaid.cymru

Liz Saville Roberts was first elected in 2015, the first woman to represent Dwyfor Meirionnydd and Plaid Cymru's first female MP. She retained the seat at both the 2017 and 2019 snap elections with a significantly increased share of the vote.

Originally from Eltham in south London, Liz learnt Welsh whilst at university in Aberystwyth. She previously worked as a journalist in London and north Wales, and then as a further education lecturer with Coleg Meirion Dwyfor where she led on Welsh language education. Prior to her election to Parliament, Liz was a Gwynedd County Councillor between 2004 and 2015, representing Morfa Nefyn, Pen Llŷn.

Andrew Bridgen (Reclaim MP for North West Leicestershire)

Andrew Bridgen was elected in 2010 after spending 25 years running his successful family business, AB Produce, based in the constituency at Measham. Prior to this Andrew attended local state schools and Nottingham University. He has also trained as an officer in the Royal Marines. During his time in Parliament, Andrew has been a prolific speaker and has campaigned on a variety of local and national issues in Parliament. Locally Andrew campaigned for grant funding to bring all of NW Leics District Council housing up to the Decent Homes Standards.

Caroline Lucas (Green MP for Brighton Pavilion)

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BIOGRAPHY

The first Green MP

Caroline was first elected as Member of Parliament for Brighton Pavilion in 2010. She served as leader of the Green Party of England and Wales from 2008 to 2012, and Co-leader from 2016 to 2018. From 1999-2010 she served as one of the Party's first MEPs and represented the South East region until becoming the UK's first Green MP.

As an MP, Caroline has served as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Climate Change and Limits to Growth.

She has been a Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency and Democratic Participation, and Deputy Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Renewable and Sustainable Energy.

She has also been Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Better Brexit for Young People, Choice at the End of Life, Drug Policy Reform, EU Relations, European Citizenship Rights, Food Waste, Land Value Capture, Proportional Representation, Pubs, Refugees, Sixth Form Colleges, State Pension Inequality for Women, Students, Visitors' Economy and West Papua.

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent MP for Islington North)

Jeremy Corbyn MP

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About me

Jeremy Corbyn MP

First elected to parliament in 1983, I continue to enjoy representing Islington North, and served as Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition from September 2015 to April 2020.

I get huge satisfaction from the work that I do locally, with the wonderful people of Islington North, in taking their needs to parliament in order to bring about solutions for a safer, fairer, and more equal world for all.

Julian Knight (Independent MP for Solihull)

Julian Knight MP
Member of Parliament for Solihull

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About Julian Knight

X Post

Julian Knight is the Member of Parliament for Solihull. Prior to his political career, he worked for the BBC as personal finance and consumer affairs reporter and In 2007 he became the Money and Property Editor of The Independent on Sunday. In 2020, Julian was elected as Chairman of the powerful Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Appendix V

Screenshot of the dual lingual biographical section of Virginia Crosbie's website (Conservative MP for Ynys Môn)

Member of Parliament for Ynys Môn

I am dedicated to social mobility and empowering others – and securing more jobs for Anglesey is where I'll start.

My father was born in Wales but had to leave Wales to find work. I am determined that our young people have a future right here on Ynys Môn and that means good quality jobs. As a maths teacher I am committed to ensuring young people have the same opportunities I enjoyed. I have a working class background and grammar school education. I was the first person in my family to stay at school beyond the age of 16. My grandfather was a miner for 47 years and my mother worked in a jam factory. Following a distinguished career at GlaxoWellcome where I worked on the production of Interferon, UBS where I was one of the youngest Directors in UBS history and HSBC where I won awards as a leading pharmaceutical analyst – I retrained as a teacher.

I live with my husband, our three children and our cocker spaniel Violet. We enjoy exploring and dog walks as a family. The outdoor life is important to us and we enjoy being part of a community – which is why we love living here on Anglesey.

I want everyone on Ynys Môn to have the same opportunities as I had to succeed in life. That's why I'll be your local champion for jobs, skilled employment and investment. I want our young people to aspire to a future here on the island. The next generation is key to keeping our communities together and the Welsh language alive. My goal is to be a voice for those that have no voice and to make tomorrow a better day for as many people as possible.

Aelod Seneddol dros Ynys Môn

Rwy'n ymroddedig i symudedd cymdeithasol a grymuso eraill – a sicrhau mwy o swyddi i Ynys Môn yw lle byddaf yn cychwyn.

Fel athro mathemateg rwyf wedi ymrwymo i sicrhau bod pobl ifanc yn cael yr un cyfleoedd ag y gwnes i eu mwynhau. Mae gen i gefndir dosbarth gweithiol ac addysg ysgol ramadeg. Fi oedd y person cyntaf yn fy nheulu i aros yn yr ysgol ar ôl 16 oed. Roedd fy nhaid yn löwr am 47 mlynedd ac roedd fy mam yn gweithio mewn ffatri jam. Yn dilyn gyrfa ddisglair yn GlaxoWellcome lle bûm yn gweithio ar gynhyrchu Interferon, UBS lle roeddwn yn un o'r Cyfarwyddwyr ieuengaf yn hanes UBS a HSBC lle enillais wobrau fel dadansoddwr fferyllol blaenllaw – ailhyfforddais fel athro.

Rwy'n byw gyda fy ngŵr, ein tri phlentyn a'n cocker spaniel Violet. Fel teulu rydyn ni'n mwynhau archwilio a cherdded y ci. Mae'r bywyd awyr agored yn bwysig i ni ac rydyn ni'n mwynhau bod yn rhan o gymuned – a dyna pam rydyn ni'n caru byw yma ar Ynys Môn.

Rwyf eisio i bawb yn Ynys Môn gael yr un cyfleoedd ag y cefais i lwyddo mewn bywyd.. Dyna pam mai fi fydd eich hyrwyddwr lleol am swyddi, cyflogaeth fedrus a buddsoddiad. Rwyf am i'n pobl ifanc anelu at ddyfodol yma ar yr ynys. Mae'r genhedlaeth nesaf yn allweddol i gadw ein cymunedau gyda'i gilydd a'r Gymraeg yn fyw. Fy nod yw bod yn llais i'r rhai nad oes ganddynt lais a gwneud yfory yn ddiwrnod gwell i gynifer o bobl â phosibl.

Appendix W

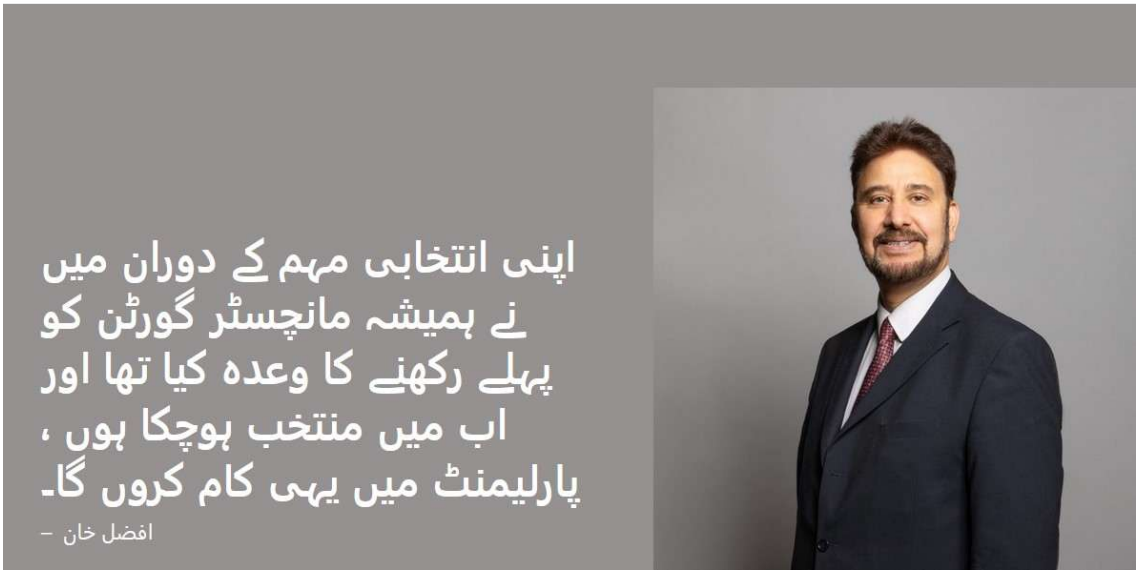
Screenshots of the five languages in which the biographical section of Afzal Khan's website is presented

English version

Urdu version

افضل کے بارے میں

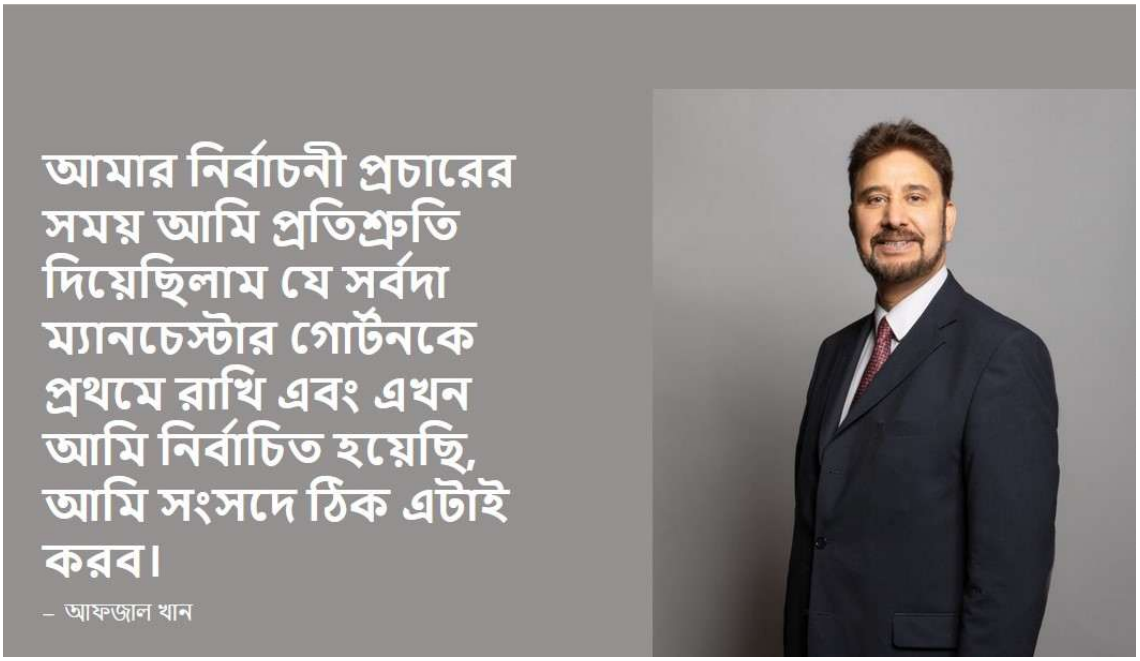
English | اردو | বাংলা | عربی | Polskie



Bengali version

আফজাল সম্পর্কে

English | اردو | বাংলা | عربى | Polskie



Arabic version

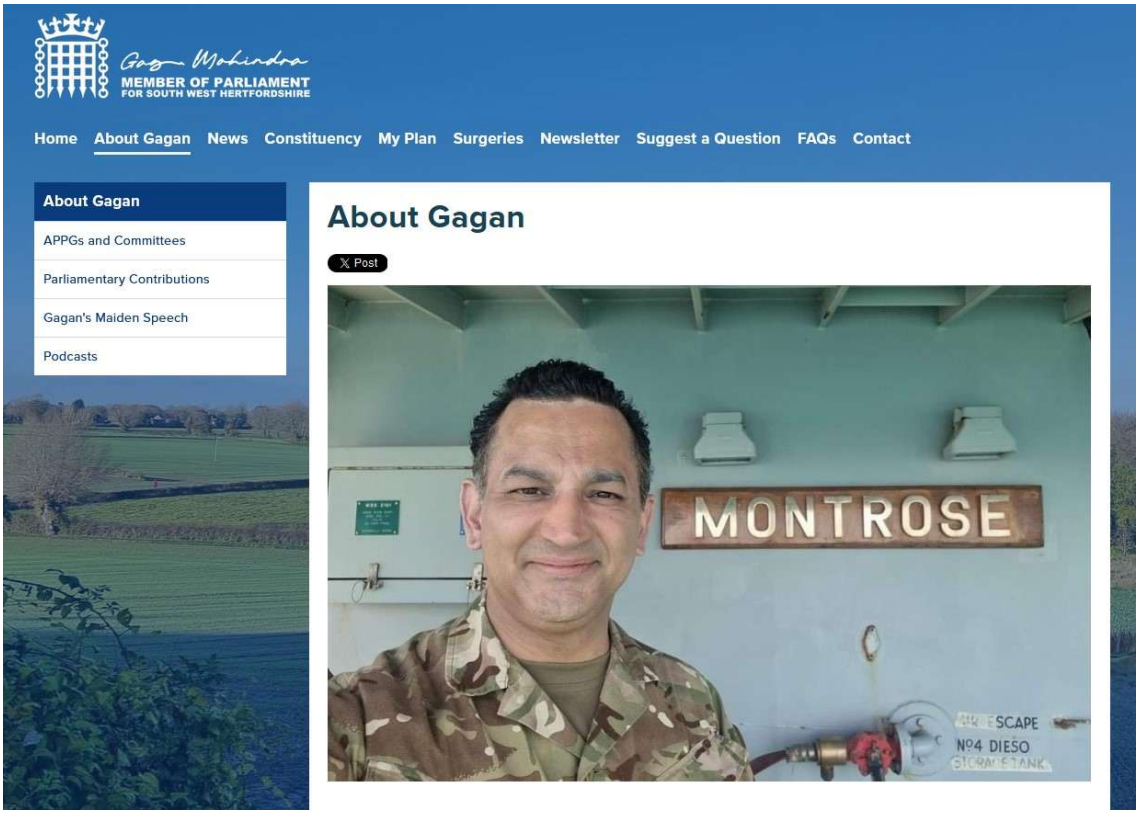
حول افضال

English | اردو | বাংলা | عربى | Polskie

Polish version

O Afzal

English | اردو | বাংলা | عربى | Polskie

Appendix X

Screenshot of the biographical section of Gagan Mohindra's website (Conservative MP for South West Hertfordshire)