British Hindu Voters and the Conservative Party: A Case Study on Leicester East.

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Business and Law in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the award of BA Politics.

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Abstract

Voting behaviour and the factors that affect how groups vote vary. Historically, it was presumed that all BME groups voted for the Labour Party because whilst in Government, they had legislated to protect the interests of the newly migrated BME community in the 1960s and 1970s. Based on being inspired by Binita Mehta-Parmar 2015 opinion piece in The Telegraph titled 'You Don't Have to Be White To Vote Right' Why young Asians are rebelling against their parents and a review of literature of works particularly by Nicole Martin, Anthony Heath and Maria Sobolewska, this dissertation focuses on the British Hindu electorate looking at what makes the electorate vote the way they do in elections, with a focus on the 2019 election campaign. To fulfil this aim, this study used an online quantitative and qualitative questionnaire, sent to Committee members of Mandirs (Hindu places of worship) in Leicester East. The use of an online questionnaire, which mainly had quantitative questions encouraged the Hindu electorate to anonymously discuss their politics. In this context, it shined a light on the political interesting political changes which are happening in Leicester East, through analysing the results by descriptive and inferential statistics and coding.

The results had indicated leadership of political parties does have a major influence on the Hindu electorates opinion of political parties because of the role the revitalisation of Hindu nationalism is having, as a result of the election of the BJP in India and the effect this is having on Indian diaspora. Results from the questionnaire indicates this can have an influence on how the electorate vote. On this basis, it is recommended that there should not be generalizations with how different groups in society vote because each group varies in factors that affect them. Further research is needed to identify if similar factors affect the same religious ethnic group, or if the area in which they live gives the Hindu electorate different political concerns.

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List of abbreviations

BES – British Election Study

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party

BME – Black Minority Ethnic

EMBES – Ethnic Minority British Election Study

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

OFBJP – Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 - Background

The last nine years in British Politics has been the most dramatic, with 3 General Elections in the space of four years with a significant decline in consensus politics as the two main political parties have been pulled away from the centre ground. This adjustment in British Politics has impacted the decisions of the electorate in voting, in particular, Britain's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) because voting is a crucial part of a functioning democracy and engaging all groups in society, no matter how big or small they make up the population, finding out what matters to them is crucial in ensuring no groups political views are ignored.

The topic for this dissertation is British BME voting behaviour focusing on the British Hindu electorate. This research area has been inspired by Binita Mehta-Parmar 2015 opinion piece in The Telegraph '*You Don't Have to Be White to Vote Right*' and Standpoint Theory defined by Salazar (1990) as the researcher has a privileged perspective on social relations. This dissertation uses insight from the Hindu electorate in the English constituency in Leicester East to challenge the view that all BMEs are loyal to the Labour Party by focusing on the 2019 General Election campaign to addresses the change in party realignment of the group, the importance of identity and Indian Diaspora to identify the phenomenon behind Leicester East potentially no longer being a Labour safe seat.

The findings of this dissertation are relevant in the field of BME voting in elections because it is a field that investigates all BME voters together, as shown via the works of David Sanders, Anthony Heath and Maria Sobolewska. This dissertation begins to close the gap in knowledge of the British-Hindu because there is very little focused research on this groups voting behaviour, therefore by focusing on Leicester East, it shows something interesting is happening between the Labour Party and Conservative Party in trying to appeal to the voting bloc or retain their votes. This research aims to benefit academics and researchers by showing them that investigating specific BME groups is complex, and each religious electorate community deserves their academic research into why they vote the way they do.

1.2 - Objectives

The main objective of this dissertation is using Standpoint Theory of being in a privileged position of knowing there is a change happening in how the British-Hindu electorate vote in elections, to investigate how perceptions of party leaders, views on political parties and candidates from the 2019 election through collecting primary data.

A second objective is looking at how well the two main political parties are doing in appealing to the British-Hindu electorate in Leicester East to appeal to new voters or retaining existing voters.

1.3 - Structure

Chapter 2 is a resource review. This reviews a variety of academic sources from the De Montfort University online library, using journals such as Electoral Studies Journals to trace Ethnic Minorities and Britain post World War Two, the integration of Indians in Britain and the political integration of Hindus in British Politics. This resource review also provides background information on the constituency and opinions of political parties from newspaper articles and opinions.

Chapter 3 is the methodology. Here it will explain why a quantitative and qualitative online questionnaire was used to gather primary data, the limitations faced and a judgment of the validity and reliability of results.

Chapter 4 is the analysis and discussion. Using descriptive and inferential statistics along with coding from grounded theory, this section will unpick the responses from the questionnaire and understanding of why there is a change in Hindus attitudes towards political parties, focusing on Leicester East, whilst also addressing the limitations of results.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter, which gives a summary of the choice in method, a brief summary of the most significant results from the questionnaire, how the findings contribute to the field and recommendations of what should be researched in the future surrounding British Hindu voters.

Chapter 2 - Resource Review

2.1 - Introduction

By focusing primarily on literature, a literature review can answer any questions about how previous approaches to key questions have increased our understanding and knowledge of the subject (Hart,1998, p.14). One of the objectives defined by Hart (1998, p.27) in McNabb (2010) is to "trace the historical evolution of the study problem or key issues, themes or construct pertaining to the problem" (p.305). This is relatable to the research topic because the historical evolution is something that the research is looking at through codes, beginning with legislation (Race Relations Acts), integration (of Indians in Britain), identity (Hindus in Britain) and the role of Jeremy Corbyn as the Labour Party leader on the Hindu electorate in Leicester East.

2.2 - Resource Review

2.2.1 - Legislation

According to Weber (1922), ethnic groups are "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or customs or both or because of memories of colonization' (Weber [1922] 1978, p.38)" (Heath et al, 2013, p.2). The significance of this definition of ethnic minorities is relevant to ethnic minorities in Britain who came to the country in the 1960s and 1970s arrived as "economic migrants, refugees, illegal immigrants and families of people here" because of the economic opportunities and freedoms presented (Panayi, 2007, p.250), who were set to change the future of British Politics.

This is significant because migration has affected who the different minority groups vote for, due to their different experiences. The first being the post-war period seeing an influx of people arriving in Britain, and according to Panayi (2007) migrants did not consider the racial discrimination that would be faced in housing, employment, and education. For the Indian diaspora coming to Britain, it is important to recognise the reasons why they came; Cosemans (2015) highlights two reasons, firstly "the Africanisation and the African context that prepared the expulsion (Mamdani 1973; Mazrui 1975; Jorgensen 1981; Cooper 2002; Nugent 2003)" and "President Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972" (p.59). They came to Britain in search a safe place to call home.

Thus, research by Heath et al, 2013 indicates the reason why BMEs have a strong political allegiance with the Labour Party is due to them passing anti-discrimination legislation which protects the interests of ethnic minorities and promotes their interests (p.247) and (Heath, 2015, p.6). The content of the Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1974 gradually made it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of race or ethnicity in the workplace, housing, and education for second-generation migrants and onwards (Cabinet Archives). The 1974 Act, focused on an increased role for local authorities, and the next section will look at Indians, multiculturalism, and diaspora.

2.2.2 - Political Integration of Indians in Leicester

According to Heath et al (2013), the highest level of democratic engagement comes from British Asians (p.133). Existing literature suggests several reasons for this, the first being minorities sharing British democratic values in their home country (Heath et al, 2013, p.3). Anwar (2001) indicates the second argument is supported by Sanders et al (2013), as minorities see Britain as their home, and the 'myth of return' diminishes, ethnic minorities are more willing to participate in politics. The Indian community in Leicester have a strong presence as a result of chain migration which Moffett (2018) highlights is the building of ethnic and cultural communities in their new homeland.

Multiculturalism as a policy has been the most important policy behind the ethnic diversity in Leicester, the integration of the Indian community and the grip the Labour Party has on the city. According to Singh (2000), the implementation of multiculturalism occurred because 'Young Labour' outmanoeuvred 'Old Labour' in the 1970s, which allowed them to set up their civic vision enabling the Labour Party in Leicester to respond to "local needs as well as national development such as the Race Relations Act 1976, which placed a special duty on local authorities to promote racial equalities" (p.43). Since 1979, the Labour Party has dominated the city of Leicester and eroded the presence of the Conservative Party (Singh, 2003, p.49).

This can be seen during local elections as most candidates were ethnic minorities from the Labour Party and these have won seats with a significantly high proportion of votes such as Padmini Chamund who won 5872 votes in Belgrave (Belgrave). This highlight is the Labour Party are strong locally, because of the success of multiculturalism, however, when specifically looking at Indians, Behta (2015) is supported by Sobolewska et al (2013) in highlighting Indians in the 2010 General Election was Labours least loyal group, and data from Martin (2019) indicates the support Indians have for the Labour Party had decreased by 7 points (p.178) The decline in support for the Labour Party raises the question of Indians feeling like their political support has been taken for granted, as they have relied upon past achievements for their continued success.

2.2.3 - Identity

For voters in the UK, identity is important. Ethnicity forms part of identity and especially for recent migrants because their community provides social support with learning how to adapt to a new environment (Heath et al, 2013, p.28). This is important because according to Tambs-Lyche (1980) the Hindu community in Britain has been built on the experiences of 'twice migrants' and through shared

experiences, they have been able to build up strong communities (Ramji, 2006, p.712), for arrivals in Leicester this has been important when it comes to political participation because as noted in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 the Labour Party have been leaders in enshrining multiculturalism in an attack against racial discrimination, and for that reason, it explains partially their voting bloc. However, as racial discrimination has declined, there has been an observation of spatial theory of party choice by Downs (1951) in Heath et al, 2014 which "observes that individuals tend to vote for the party that they locate closets to them in some fundamental issue" (p.234). In the past, the fundamental issue had been tackling racial discrimination which accounts for why Leicester East has traditionally "been a Labour stronghold for more than 30 years" (Sandhu,2019), however this is diminishing.

2.2.4 - Jeremy Corbyn and Indian diaspora

This research is contemporary, which means the role of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party and his relationship with the British-Hindu community and electorate needs to be assessed. According to the Press Trust of India (2019) "fifty-three % of British Indians report holding an unfavourable opinion of Jeremy Corbyn" due to him advocating the Labour party's stance on Kashmir, which British Indians have said the Labour party should not get involved in (Martin, 2019).

With the announcement of a General Election to take place in December 2019, Leicester East became a target seat for Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP). The purpose of the group was to unseat Labour because, under Corbyn's leadership, the Labour Party had become "Anti-Indian" and "Anti-Hindu." The placement of Claudia Webbe as the Labour Party 2019 Parliamentary Candidate reinforced this view as Webbe had chaired the motion on Kashmir, but constituents had told Councillor Joshi in Leicester East say that "the Labour Party should not be meddling" on Indian affairs (Martin, 2019).

One may speculate in recent years, this is due to the increase in the role of the diaspora, this is a Greek word meaning to scatter and according to Ramji (2006) "the study of Indian diaspora has emerged as an important branch of knowledge and understanding (p.704). Due to the revival in Hindu nationalism which has affected Indian diaspora, as a result of the BJP winning the Indian General Election in 2014 and strengthening their result in 2019 (Withnall, 2019). This is important because Leicester has a high percentage of Indian-Hindu migrants, therefore Indian diaspora has an important role in determining who the electorate vote for in British elections, and this research investigates this.

2.3 - Conclusion

The purpose of this background resource review was to identify a gap in the political allegiance of Hindu voters in Britain. Key themes of legislation which looked at the

impact of the Race Relations Acts have shown the Labour Party to have strong levels of BME support. As there have been indications that the ethnic group Indians were less likely to support the Labour Party out of all BME groups, the review streamlined to Leicester and the impact Labour have had and briefly explored the view that Indians had been taken for granted as a political voting bloc. The review has opened the door for a case study to be done on Leicester East because following the 2019 General Election, there has been a significant decline in support for the Labour Party and the circumstances are perfect to investigate the phenomena (Denscombe, 2014, p.63).

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 – Introduction

On undertaking a literature and background resource review into Hindu political preferences, it was noticed there was a gap in the UK of understanding the factors that affect whom Hindu voters vote for, their rationale for those decisions and the political topics that drive their voting behaviour. This chapter discusses the chosen research method, how effective it has been and why adopting the positivist philosophy has benefited the researcher, to identify how people in Leicester East are feeling about politics.

3.1.1 – Problem

The area that has been investigated can be identified as the sub-Indian community identified by their religious beliefs – Hinduism. In examining the religious group of Hindu voters, I will endeavour to determine what factors affect whom they vote for in general elections. There is little research that has gone into finding out what affects how this group votes. Also, the Hindu population in Britain is high, as this group form 1.5% (Religion Media Centre) of the population, with this knowledge, it had been decided that the focus for finding out what effects Hindu voters would be focused on Leicester, and specifically target the constituency of Leicester East 39% (Ghosh, 2014).

In an attempt to close the gap in knowledge, the research questions which will help look into the research topic are as follows

• To examine if there are any pull factors for Hindus to vote for the Conservative?

• Identify if there are any push factors from the Labour Party.

• Investigate the changes that are happening in Leicester East.

3.1.2 – Philosophy

Using a positivist philosophy for the methodology to base my research on; as Blaike and Priest (2017, p.344) note, this ensures the data can describe the social phenomena and allows for an ability to test my hypothesis that 'British Hindus are more politically sympathetic to the Conservative Party'. Also, as Nowak and Vallacher (1998) argue; and as Moussaid et al. (2013) confirm; individual opinions can change as a result of external influences, thus justifying the utilisation of the positivist philosophy and a quantitative research method. By using positivist philosophy, it ensured that I, the researcher, remained independent of the research, despite the research resulting from Standpoint Theory, and therefore did not influence participants through researcher bias (Salazar, 1990).

3.2 – Approach

Verstehen, as postulated by Max Weber, is the understanding of human behaviour (Martin, 2018); and since the research is aiming to understand human voting behaviour, finding verstehen is the goal of my research. It should be noted that due to the nature of my research and its positivist philosophy, a quantitative methodology was used to test the hypothesis. This compatibility of positivism and quantitative methodology, therefore, allows the hypothesis to be thoroughly tested within a reasonable time frame. Whilst a qualitative approach would also be useful in understanding British Indians voting behaviours, the time frame needed to complete the research would not allow for many in-depth interviews to be conducted. However, if this were paid research with a larger time frame to complete, then this would be an avenue open for exploration.

3.2.1 – Reproducibility

The study has a high level of reproducibility, mainly due to the main utilisation of quantitative research methods, with only a small part of the study eliciting open-ended responses. However, due to the bulk of the research taking place in the immediate aftermath of the 2019 General Election, my research benefited greatly. This is mainly due to the exposure that the OFBJP were getting during the election.

If I were to repeat this study I would most likely use, or indeed recommend using to those who wish to repeat this study, a mixed-methods approach. Carrying on with the quantitative data collection methods that I mainly used, whilst using the open-ended questions from my survey to form the basis of quality in-depth interviews.

According to McIntyre (2005, p.39) and Burnham (2008, p.39) "a reliable measure is one that gives consistent results." The consistent results for this research are due to the mirroring of results from the questionnaire and the results of the 2019 General Election; reflected what happened in the election, the results are reliable. The questionnaire set out to measure the change in people's political opinions and why they have those opinions. Furthermore, as the questionnaire was online and anonymous the results can be classed as valid because participants were encouraged to answer the questions honestly, meaning it removed the 'social desirability' factor, which according to Denscombe (2014) is when the participant feels "inclined to provide answers which he/she feels are the expected ones, the correct one which put him/her in a better light" (p.10).

3.3 – Strategy and Research Design

3.3.1 – Choice of Method

To be able to fully analyse British Hindu voting behaviour, a mainly quantitative methodology was used and therefore a survey was chosen to be the best format for gathering data. The survey contained four sections of closed answer questions, and one section which was intended to have open-ended responses. However, whilst collating responses this was realised to not be the outcome, with many choosing to answer in closed-ended format. The main influence on the utilisation of an online questionnaire was time constraints. Since the time frame to complete the dissertation was constrained, this led to a mixed-method and qualitative data gathering being deemed an ineffective use of precious time. Although both these methods were considered, it would have meant spending my time in trying to encourage participation in interviews and therefore would have led to less participation in the research than I currently have.

As McNabb (2015, p110) states "questionnaires can be designed to determine what people know… they can measure subjects factual knowledge about a thing or an idea, or they can be used to measure people's opinions [or] attitudes". This quote formed the main reasoning behind choosing a questionnaire for my research. Also considered was the idea that there is less scope for researcher bias influencing the results for a questionnaire as there would be for interviews (Belk, 2006, p. 322), therefore allowing me as the researcher to stay independent of the research and not influence the responses.

3.3.2 – Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this research study was 'British Hindus are more politically sympathetic to the Conservative Party'. This hypothesis has been designed to uncover the extent of party political dealignment and more specifically the dealignment that has seemingly occurred in the Hindu sub-community in the UK.

3.3.3 – Sampling

The sample I was aiming for was between 20 to 25 participants because that would have enabled a good range of opinions, of people from different age groups and experiences.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 limiting my time window for research, I only gathered half the responses I had aimed for. Whilst this is disappointing, if the study were to be conducted again in the future, I would look to build rapport with the group, to build trust to encourage greater participation.

3.3.4 – Questions

The questions asked to participants were separated into five sections.

• Section 1: About You – Asked participants about the demographics, allowing me to identify the demographic I'm looking for

• Section 2: National Identity – Asked participants to score their national identity on a scale. Designed to show whether there has been an increase in nationalism in the Indian diaspora.

• Section 3: Voting in General Elections since 2010 – This section will help to identify where the change in feelings may have occurred.

• Section 4: Views on parties and leaders: This section asked participants for their views, on a scale, on British political parties, their leaders, and their relationship with India.

• Section 5: Influences on voters – This section was more qualitative in its design, with questions designed to be open-ended for participants to answer with in-depth answers. It stems from a Guardian article where Siddique found that Hindus said that they were not influenced by the OFBJP.

3.3.5 – Precedence

Researchers like Heath et al (2014), Sobolewska (2012), Sanders et al (2013) and Martin (2019) use a combination of existing data sets from British Election Study and Ethnic Minority British Election Study, questionnaires, and interviews to inform their research. Therefore, they have given the precedence for this study.

3.4 - Ethics

The consideration of research ethics was to ensure no harm would come to the participants because they were taking part in the questionnaire voluntarily and it would not have been fair on them to be harmed (Gilbert, 2001, p.54). To protect participants, the stage one and two research ethics form had been filled out, in accordance with the De Montfort University guidelines (Stage 2). Harm is defined by Newmann (2000) and Oppenhem (1992) in McNabb (2010) "is broadly defined, for example, it can mean physical, cultural, social or psychological distress" (p.72), and considering they voluntarily consented to it, it would be an injustice for participants to volunteer and be harmed.

The importance of consent was due to ensuring the researcher was compliant with GDPR, introduced in 2018 law which added to the Data Protection Act (1998), broadening the definition of "'personal data' meaning any information relating to an identifiable person who can be directly or indirectly identified in particular by

reference to an identifier" (p.8). GDPR also covers consent, which is defined as "offering individuals real choice and control. Genuine consent should put individuals in charge, build trust and engagement and enhance your reputation" (2018, p.21). This gives individuals more control over their data, and because the research that was being conducted asked participants for 'special category data' which includes race, ethnic origins, politics and religion it was even more important for the ethical consideration because according to GDPR (2018) "this type of data could create more significant risks to a person's fundamental rights and freedoms, for example, by putting them at risk of unlawful discrimination" (p.48).

To prevent discrimination and psychological harm, the researcher had identified Mandirs - Hindu temples, in Leicester East - and then once the ethics form had been approved, emailed them if they would be willing to participate, stressing participants would be anonymous. The second layer of consent was having 'participant information sheet' before the questionnaire beginning. Informed consent is important according to Neef, Iwata and Page (1986) in McNabb (2010) due to the western ideals of "freedom and self-determination spelt out in the body of Common Law" (p.72). The third layer of consent derived from the final page of the questionnaire asking the participant for a second time if they are happy for their results to be sent to the researcher, analysed and used in the dissertation. This was important because despite this not being a high-risk topic that would cause participants harm which can be triggered by the psychological trauma of terrorism or violent crime, for example, looking at; race, ethnicity, politics, and religion is considered 'special category data' (GDPR, 2018, p.47-8).

3.5 Generalisations and limitations

3.5.1 – Limitations to my research

There are limitations to the research I conducted, methodological limitations and two personal limitations. In terms of the methodological limitations, my research could have been made more thorough using these three further methodological approaches:

1. The use of semi-structured interviews would have been ideal if there was more time to conduct the dissertation, as they would have allowed me to gain a deeper, specific insight into how voters feel. However, there were more cons with this method which ranged from; potential bias in picking participants, getting too much data, responses would be extremely specific and because this is a topic that has not been very well researched, I would not be able to make generalisations to give a good overview to what is going on.

2. Standing in Leicester East and approaching people to fill out questionnaires in person would have been the most effective way to get a broad range of responses, however there were several risks involved with that; such as being off-campus and facing resistance from people who may turn violent.

3. Phone call interviews have the same problems as a semi-structured interview which includes bias and too obtaining too much information to make generalisations. Two additional cons of using phone call interviews would have included obtaining the numbers of participants in compliance with GDPR and the potential language barrier.

The limitations faced in conducting this research were heavily focused on the global Coronavirus Pandemic. Following government advice, Mandirs were advised to close – the timing coincided with the questionnaire only having been live for two weeks.

Chapter 4 - Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results from the questionnaire will be analysed and the findings will be discussed in terms of what had been analysed in Section 2 - Literature Review.

To test the hypothesis of 'British Hindus are more politically sympathetic to the Conservative Party' with the results from the questionnaire, the following research questions will be addressed:

• To examine if there are any pull factors for Hindus to the Conservative Party?

• Identify if there are any push factors from the Labour Party.

• Investigate the changes that are happening in Leicester East.

The questionnaire was sent to the Mandirs that agreed to participate on 25th February 2020 and the link deactivated on the 18th of March 2020. As the 2019 election had happened, the majority of the questionnaire asked participants about their feelings towards political parties; nationally and locally, policies and party candidates during the winter campaign, also, there was a focus on leaders because, during the collection of data, both Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn are seen as divisive people.

From this, there are four key findings from the results, and they are.

1. Conservatives are the more favourable political party

2. Despite speculation that OFBJP influenced the 2019 GE, they did not appear to in Leicester East - at least from those who participated in the questionnaire

3. Smaller political parties are not as popular as the two main parties

4. A strong dislike of the Labour Party

What this shows is the complexity of voting behaviour, it is more than an "examination of voting records, a compilation of statistics and computation of electoral shifts" (Eldersveld, 1951, p.71). Due to this, these findings are not without their limitations which vary from not building up a strong rapport with the community and electorate to being able to ask the 'difficult' questions to the group of participants not being completely varied.

The variables for this research were age and gender. As the choice in participants had been left to the Mandirs to fill in the questionnaire, it meant there was the possibility of getting a range of opinions, due to the variety of ages and gender, based on different political knowledge and civic experience.

4.2 Method of Analysis

Given the mixed methods approach used to collect data, to analyse quantitative data both descriptive and inferential statistics have been used along with coding in grounded theory to analyse qualitative data. The use of a quantitative social survey enabled the researcher to find out the "matters of meaning" (Bryman, 2015, p.624) throughout the discussion of results.

The choice of using descriptive statistics is because according to McNabb (2010) it enables the researcher "to summarize or describe or data sets" and inferential statistics are "used to refer to the tests that are used in inferring qualities of a population from data about a sample drawn randomly from that population" (Bryman, 2015, p.176). The advantage of using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics that there is no misinterpretation of what the participant is answering (McNabb, 2010, p.85-86).

As the responses to Question 5 are qualitative, a different method of analysis has been used as participants were asked to describe their feelings through the use of words and because of this, the responses according to Glaser (1999, p.842) in McNabb (2010) are 'rich in meaning' and 'rewarding to analyse' (p.251).

4.3 General Findings

The purpose of the research question for this dissertation was to fill the gap that existed on Hindu voters in Britain. Journal articles by authors such as Shamit Saggar (2003), Anthony Heath (2011) and Maria Sobolewska (2013) examine BME voting behaviour in general pay little attention to noting that the British Indian demographic; especially Hindus are less likely to support the Labour party, however, there is no further investigation.

From a first glance of the results from the questionnaire, the first thing that comes to light is the results are reflective of the results of the 2019 General Election; the -16.2 in support for Labour is no longer as prominent, and the +14.4 swing to the Conservatives (Woodfield, 2019) was evident through the results of the Question 2 which asked participants whom they have voted for in each general election between 2010 and 2019, the results from the 2019 General Election show 72.2% of participants voting Conservative and 27.3% who voted Labour.

To follow on from the reflection on the 2019 GE results, the Conservative Party did come out on top; in terms of opinions on political parties, the leaders' relationship with India and the candidates that stood in the election.

The third general finding is the little thought for minor parties; the Liberal Democrats, Green Party, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Brexit Party. Perhaps a reason for this is they are not as well known in Leicester East and because the

constituency has been a Labour Party stronghold for 32 years, it is essentially a battleground between the Labour Party and Conservative Party.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Winning Votes

Voter turnout in Leicester East tends to be quite high as indicated by Graph 1. Fieldhouse and Cutts (2008) highlight a reason for areas which are home to a high level of minorities tend to have higher turnouts compared to areas which have fewer minorities (Sobolewski, 2013, p.333). Graph 1 shows the turnout in the 2019 election was 63, a -4.4 change since 2017. This is interesting to see because according to the results of the questionnaire, 2017 was the first election in which all participants voted. One can infer this due to the UK's referendum the year before and 2017 was the election to decide which party voters wanted to carry out the result.

Figure 1 A Bar Chart To Show Voter Turnout in Leicester East, from 1974 to 2019.
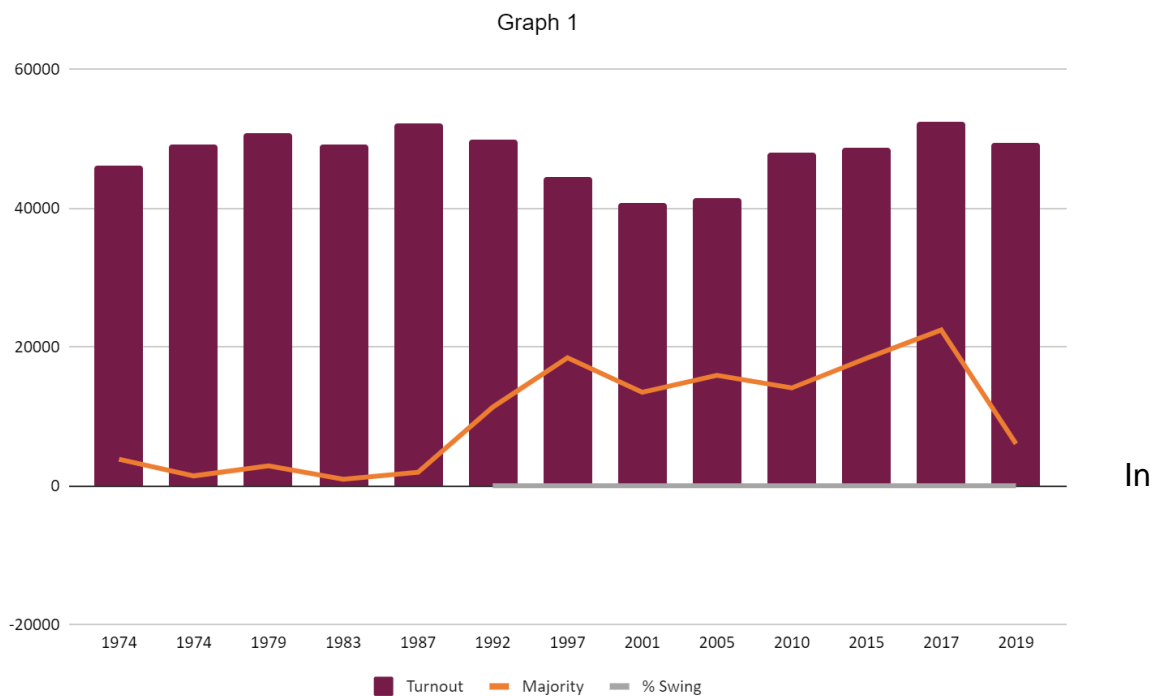
Addressing the high turnout of voters in the 2019 election, a key component that was highlighted in the background resource review in section 2.2.4 had been the role of the Indian diaspora, the rise in Hindu nationalism and the role of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party and the relationship he was seen to have with the British-Hindu community. News articles from Leicestershire Live during the 2019 election suggested Corbyn was turning the Labour Party to be "Anti-Indian" and "Anti-Hindu" (Martin 2019). Question 2 on Pride, question 4.1 addressed the perception that the Hindu electorate in Leicester East has on political parties and question 5.1 asked participants for their opinion on the candidates who stood in the constituency.

The most common response for feelings of pride for Britain and India were 'Very Strong' this suggests because of the integration of the Hindus in the British Community, there was a sense of commonality with their white neighbours. The Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership had little national pride and could have influenced Hindu participants as being 45.5% less favourable compared to the Conservative Party who came up as 'more favourable' with 72.7%. Globally, a more nationalistic feeling has taken over; in Britain following the 2016 EU Referendum and 2014 in India with the BJP winning the elections. An anti-Muslim feeling derives from the BJP is an Anti-Muslim feeling, and there is speculation that this is a reason why Hindus in Britain vote for the Conservative party which is discussed further in section 4.4.4. One of the limitations of the research was due to not having built up a strong rapport with participants, so not being able to ask difficult questions around islamophobia.
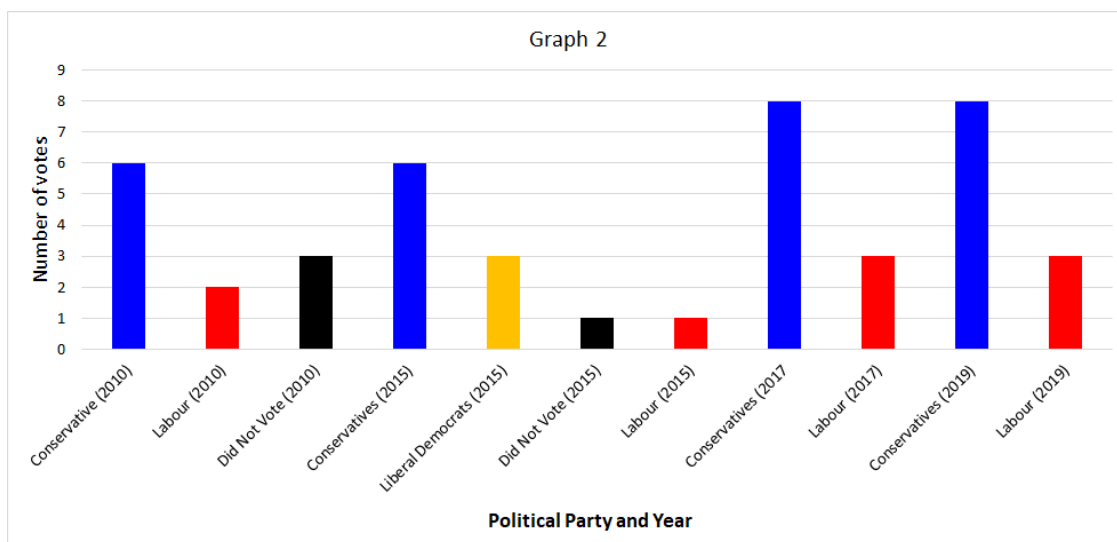
Figure 2 A Bar Chart To Show How Participants Voted in General Elections from 2010 to 2019.

Furthermore, according to the results from the questionnaire, 2017 was the year the Conservative Party began consolidating a high number of votes. Graph 2 shows there was an increase of six votes in 2015 to eight in 2017. The Labour Party continue to receive votes, speculation for this is Hindu voters, like other ethnic minority groups in Britain recognise it was "Labour governments that have historically legislated to protect their interests" (Sanders et al, 2013, p.247) which refers to the Race Relations Acts highlighted in section 2.2.1 Legislation.

The influences of pride and the revival of Hindu nationalism because of the BJP in India, there have been signs of negativity towards parties in Leicester East, especially during and following the 2019 election and the party-political candidates.

Regarding the candidates who stood in Leicester East during the 2019 election, there was a mix of responses which predominantly focused on Bhupen Dave, the Conservative Party Parliamentary Candidate and Claudia Webbe, the Labour Party Parliamentary Candidate. To find themes and codes to the responses from question 5.1, the way to get the most out of the responses according to the Jones model in McNabb (2010, p.923) is by three rounds of coding to find themes.

The first theme that had been discovered was opinion because the question had asked participants for their opinion on the candidates who stood in the election, and each of the eleven participants gave their opinion on them. From this, the second code was 'positive', 'neutral' and 'negative' because responses negatively discussed Webbe, Dave, positively and two responses were neutral on the candidates.

Following the second round of coding, the codes used were 'balance', 'suitable', 'racism' and 'unsuitable' were used in the final round of coding. Graph 3 shows how common these responses were. Webbe had been described as 'unsuitable' because participants felt like she had been "parachuted in". To an extent, this can be seen as the Labour Party taking the votes of British-Hindu for granted and this is an area explored by Sobolewska (2013) who highlights minorities in heavily ethnic minority populated areas are 'powerless' (p.329) over who gets to represent them – as seen in the lead up to the 2019 General Election, as the former Chairman of Labour Leicester East described the choice of Claudia Webbe as the Labour Leicester East candidate a "fix" (BBC News, 2019). By removing this choice, it strongly indicates the Labour Party are heavily reliant upon the strong relationship that was formed by passing the Race Relations Act, for example.

The code 'racism' has also been used because of Webbe chairing the motion of disagreeing with India's policy over Kashmir at the Labour Party Conference in September 2019 (Martin, 2019). Due to this, one can infer participant two strongly disliked Webbe as she had "demonstrated Anti-Indian sentiments and views" and the controversy around Kashmir in British politics is discussed in 4.4.3.

The code 'suitable' has been used to describe how participants felt towards Bhupen Dave. There was no expansion on what the participants meant by this, so by using news articles from the 2019 election campaign, one can infer this means the participants felt Dave was better suited to represent Leicester East because he was

local (Martin, 2019) in comparison to Claudia Webbe – who participants from the questionnaire felt was incredibly unsuitable.
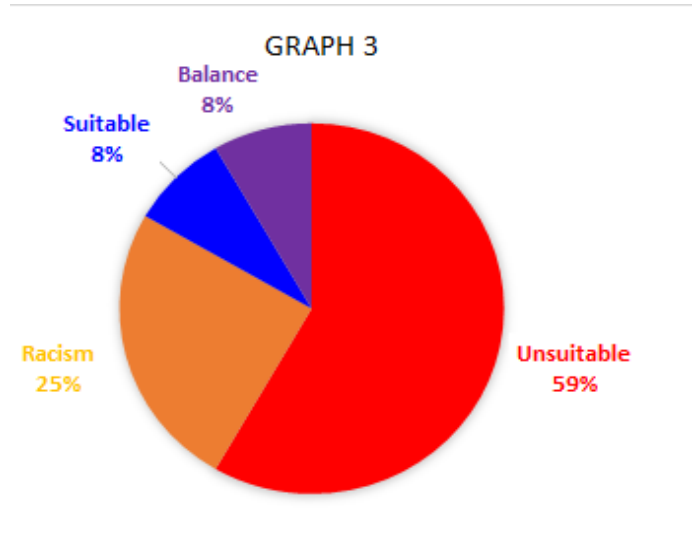

Figure 3A Pie Chart To Show Participants Views on the Candidates from the 2019 General Election.

To end this section on suitability of the candidate, the following section addresses the impact of minor parties.

4.4.2 Minor Parties

It is easy to focus specifically on the two main parties because they have dominated politics in the UK for the most part. There has been a change as new topics come onto the political agenda, such as the UK's membership of the European Union and the environment.

The question which asked how participants voted in General Elections between 2010 to 2019 indicated only one participant had voted for a minor party, and that was in 2015 for the Liberal Democrats. What this suggests is Hindu voters are more concerned about supporting political parties which have a broad range of policies, rather than single-issue parties because of the issue of community which feeds into social identity. A reason perhaps why Hindu voters tend not to vote for minor parties is due to valence theory, whereby the focus is on policy delivery (Sanders et al, 2011) in (Sanders et al, 2013, p.125).

In light of why the participants from this research did not vote for any of the minor parties in the 2019 election could be due to the levels of favourability Hindu voters had on the parties. Each of the minor parties who stood candidates in the 2019 election appeared to have been 'less favourable' as shown in graph 4. One reason for this could be due to the UK's membership in the European Union was not as much of an important one and therefore the Hindu voters in Leicester East did not feel that they would benefit from UKIP or the Brexit Party.

The one anomaly in Graph 4 is the Brexit Party who had one participant say they are more favourable than the other minor parties. Given that the question did not enable participants to expand further, the understanding on why the participant had found the Brexit Party 'more favourable' one can infer it is due to the perception some Hindus have of the European Union, as it has de-strengthened the 'special relationship' between India and Britain (Leidig, 2019). The relationship between British Hindu voters and the relationship with India is one that will be explored in the following section because of the perceived external influence of the OFBJP.
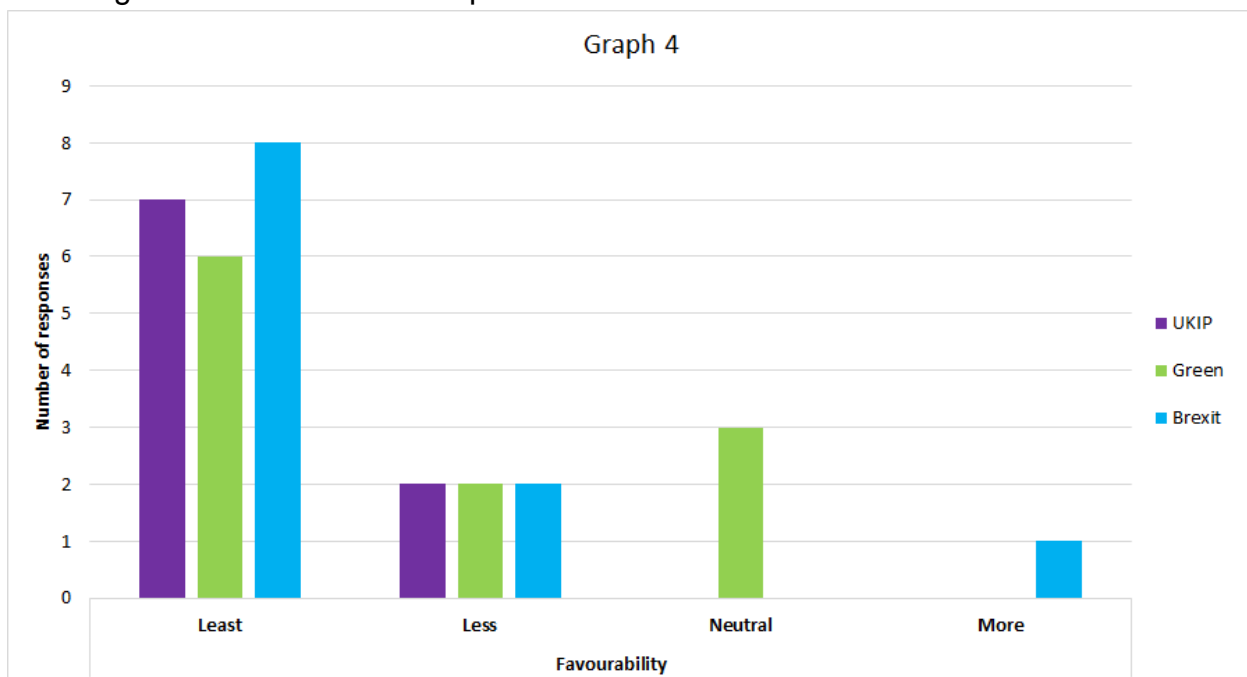

Figure 4 A Bar Chart To Show How Favourable the Minor Party Candidates were in the 2019 General Election.

4.4.3 Role of Overseas Friends of Bharatiya Janata Party

The questionnaire was a reflection upon the 2019 election which meant the researcher was able to ask questions about the role and influence of the OFBJP. They were a group who had explicitly told the Times of India they were going to be actively campaigning in 48 Labour-Conservative marginal seats, supporting the Conservative candidate, the 2019 election was the first year they had actively and openly said they were going to be supporting a political party (Canton, 2019). The aim of the group, according to their website, is to get the Indian diaspora to recognise the role of the Indian government is becoming a global superpower and economic powerhouse (OFBJP UK website). The reason behind them actively supporting the Conservative Party, according to their President in an interview with Canton (2019) was due to the lack of support the Labour Party and especially Labour Indian MPs were showing towards their 'homeland' by speaking against India in the House of Commons on Kashmir and the "Labour motion on Kashmir passed at their party conference. Kashmir is an internal matter of India. Why is the Labour Party discussing the Indian state?" (FP Staff, 2019).

WhatsApp messages were sent out by the OFBJP and have been seen to be 'divisive.' According to Chakrabarti and Siddique, both writers for The Guardian highlighted messages sent ranging from calling Indian Labour supporters "traitors of their ancestral land, to their family and friends in India and their cultural heritage" to the exploitation of tensions between British Pakistanis and Indians (2019). Using this information, question 5.2 asked participants about how much literature they received, eight of the eleven said they had received none and the remainder said they had received some but the amount they received varied. Upon reflection, this question should have included all forms of communication, rather than leaflets because leaflets are not as memorable as messages. In a report by Siddique on The Guardian (2019) his report on the activities of the OFBJP highlighted that the people that spoke to him - from both Harrow and Leicester - all rejected BJP interference and were not going to base their vote on UK policy towards India, which highlights Indian diaspora is not as prominent as some people make out to be.

To follow this, it was interesting to find out if participants had been influenced by the OFBJP because there had been reports by newspapers indicating that whilst the group were around, they had not managed to influence Hindu voters. Question 5.3 asked participants in Leicester East if they had been influenced by the group. The responses ranged from eight of the eleven participants answering no influence, one participant was influenced by them, one participant did not understand the question and one participant responded, 'no comment'. In terms of the research question, it

shows Hindu nationalism and Indian diaspora does not play a big role for Hindus when deciding whom to vote for in UK General Elections.

One may argue the OFBJP have contributed to a push factor from the Labour Party for the Hindu electorate and pull factor towards the Conservative Party, which is looked at in the following section.

4.4.4 Islamophobia

A significant factor which played a role in the OFBJP during the 2019 election was due to heightening tensions between the Hindu and Muslim community, fuelled by Islamophobia, which is defined in the Merriam-Webster as the "irrational fear, of, aversion or discrimination against Islam or people who practise Islam."

There have been rising ethnic tensions between Hindus and Muslims since the partition of India (Tausch et al, 2009, p.3). Tensions between the religious ethnic groups have risen significantly since 2014, when the BJP was elected to govern India, with an ideology based on revitalising Hindu nationalism both at home and to the Indian diaspora abroad. Tensions have significantly heightened following the re-election of the BJP in 2019 along with the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (BBC, 2020). According to Guatam Bhatia, a lawyer, in an interview with the BBC, he indicated that the bill divided migrants into Muslims and non-Muslims and "explicitly and blatantly seeks to enshrine religious discrimination into law."

Within Britain and British politics, the Muslim community are perceived as the 'other' due to a lack of integration into British society, according to Shah on The Guardian (2020) and is supported by Allen (2020) in which "82% [of the public] believed Muslims were too isolationist" (p.84) and fundamentally there is a 'Muslim problem' within the Conservative Party, which began with the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 when "new racism was seen to exaggerate differences and identification of differences in much less explicit ways" (Allen, 2020, p.10).

Within the Conservative Party, there have been reports that Islamophobia is a problem that "goes right to the top" (Bienkov, 2018) and according to Manzoor-Khan for The Guardian, islamophobia is going to get worse under Boris Johnson being Prime Minister (2020). One of the reasons why the Hindu electorate are attracted to the Conservative Party is due to islamophobia; and the OFBJP used this in Leicester East to try and get the electorate to vote for the Conservative Parliamentary

candidate, Bhupen Dave instead of the Labour Party Parliamentary candidate, Claudia Webbe.

Due to this revelation, the final section looks into the role of the two main parties, because the lack of influence minor parties have on the Hindu community tied with the role of the OFBJP and islamophobia can inform the argument that these factors have acted as push factors towards the Conservative Party.

4.4.5 Battle of the two main parties

It is precise because of the lack of impact minor parties have on the Hindu electorate that this section can use valence theory and look at the two main political parties and the pull factors to the Conservative Party and push factors from the Labour Party, focusing on the views on the party leaders; Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn.

Graph 5 shows how favourable the two-party leaders were amongst the participants from the online questionnaire. It is an unsurprising result that Johnson's appeal to the Hindu electorate had been significantly better than the appeal of Corbyn. Reasons such as the Conservative Party putting in the effort to appeal to Hindu voters and the integration of the Hindu community play a role in this, and these reasons are discussed later.

Secondly, the view of how strongly participants agreed or disagreed that the leaders of the two main parties had been good for the British-Indian relationship. Results from the questionnaire are shown in Graph 6 and immediately show participants are highly sceptical of Corbyn. One of the reasons for this can be linked to the perception of him turning the Labour Party to being "anti-Indian" and "anti-Hindu" due to the motion that had been passed on Kashmir at the Labour Party Conference, and Corbyn taking a "critical stance towards Modi" (Ehsan, 2019).

Figure 5 A Line Graph To Compare How Favourable the Conservative Party are under the leadership of Boris Johnson and how favourable the Labour Party are under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.
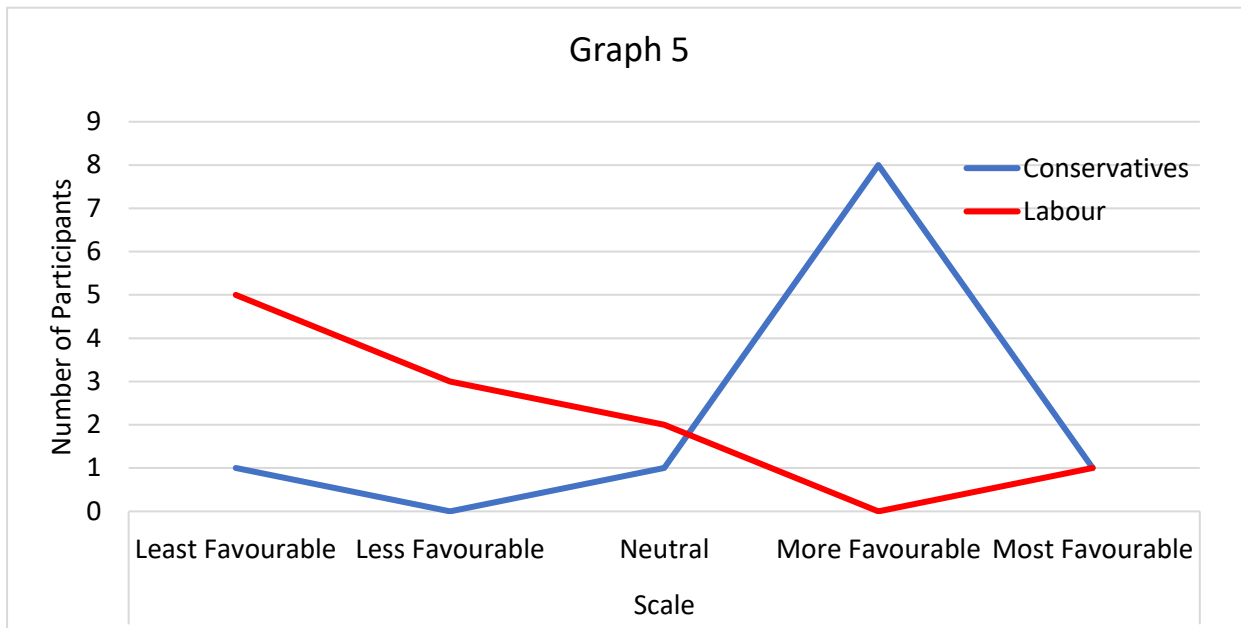
There are multiple reasons for Johnson being perceived as better than Corbyn. The first is according to Rich (1998) in Saggar (2001), the Conservative Party have been working to build a relationship with the Asian community, as the generalisation is the Asian community have similar values to the Conservative Party (p). This is also partly due to high levels of integration and has been recognised by the thinktank Runnymede Trust, and to answer the research question about pull factors towards the Conservative Party one could assume it was due to the response for both Boris Johnson's leadership and more likeability of Bhupen Dave, who received significantly less criticism than Claudia Webbe. The Conservative Party put the effort in to be liked. This can be cross-referenced with Martin and Khans 2017 Election Briefing (2019) which indicates before the 2015 General Election, the Conservative Party put lots of effort in to appeal to minority voters. Some of the actions they took were the announcement of policies that would matter to ethnic minorities, ministerial visits to places of worship along with the promotion of minority MPs to cabinet positions (p.3).
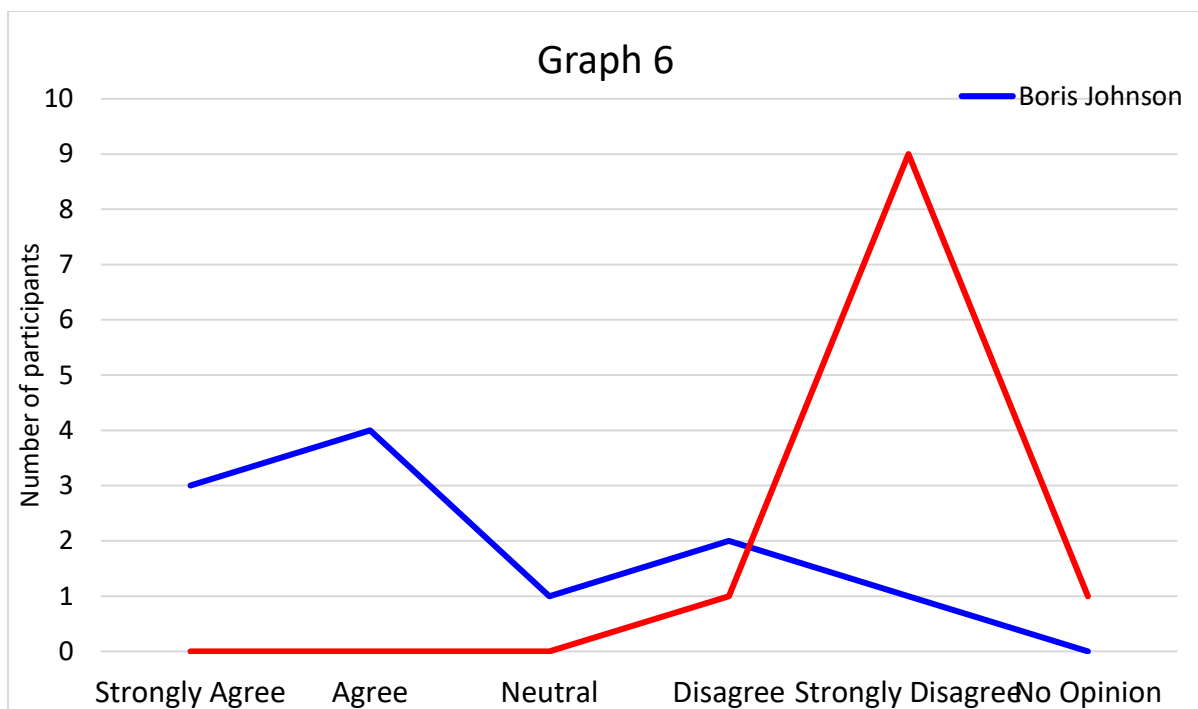
Figure 6 A Line Graph That Compared How Far Participants Agreed Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn are for the British-Indian Relationship

According to Anwar (2001) leaders of the Conservative Party have said Asians typically have values that are similar to the Conservative Party (p541). In terms of community, the Indian Hindu community in Britain is very strong - which is one of the reasons why people who go to Mandirs were asked to fill out the online questionnaire because people of all ages go to them. The community spirit, looking after one another and desire to achieve educational and economic success through merit (Runnymede Trust, p.7) and hard work is a very strong reason why Hindus in Britain are increasingly voting for the Conservative Party. Binita's 2015 article that is a result of policies for minorities based on merit and talent and not simply ticking a box. At the time the election was called, Boris Johnson had and continues to have, a very diverse Government with Indian Conservative MPs in top positions.

A final explanation for this could be the level of integration of Hindus in British society but also the diaspora of the group. Hindus in Leicester have made the city their home by having a successful Asian business community and hosting celebrations for events such as Diwali (Singh, 2003, p.42) the integration of Hindus in Leicester

accounts for why Indian diaspora is so evident. According to Ramji (2006), the verb 'diaspora' derives from the Greek language, and it means "'scatter' and in contemporary parlance is applied to a migratory group which is so scattered or dispersed" (p.204). Diaspora and integration are reasons why future studies in Hindu voting could include looking at two Hindu densely populated areas such as Leicester East and Solihull to compare what makes communities with similar characteristics vote the way they do.

4.5 Conclusion

To conclude in this section results from the questionnaire indicate something interesting is happening in Leicester East; voters are not dissatisfied with politics, rather - and with a cross-reference to the 2019 General Election results - it looks as though party realignment is happening within the Hindu community. As highlighted by Sobolewska (2013) minorities acknowledge it has been Labour Governments that have legislated to protect the interests of Britain's ethnic minorities, and this has secured the Labour Party votes but now, due to the damage of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, there is no longer the same level of trust and view that the Labour Party are interested with the concerns of Hindus.

More research does need to be done in this field, especially considering the change in leadership of the Labour Party since this research was conducted, Keir Starmer may work on improving the relationship between the Hindu community and Labour Party. In Leicester East specifically, research needs to be conducted over the next few years because Claudia Webbe has a chance to show the Hindu community, she is supportive of the community's concerns and could result in a change of attitudes.

Due to the work the Conservative Party have put in to attract Hindu voters to vote for them over the years, the hard work is beginning to pay off; both on a local level in Leicester East and nationally. Using evidence from the responses to the questionnaire, it can be inferred that a reason for this is due to the British-Indian relationship; with the reignition of Hindu nationalism and the acceptance of Prime Minister Modi's leadership of India. It is also worth noting the impact of minor parties because they tend to be single-issue their target core voters tend not to be ethnic minorities. After all, ethnic minorities are concerned with the impact of their vote and how it will affect their wider community in comparison to white voters, ethnic minorities do not have a significant impact on votes cast during elections.

Chapter 5 - Concluding Chapter

5.1 Main Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated British Hindu voters and the Conservative Party, focusing on Leicester East. Using descriptive and inferential statistics and coding from grounded theory, it is evident from the participants from the online questionnaire that Hindu voters are increasingly becoming sympathetic to the Conservative Party. This conclusion has been reached through finding out the push factors from the Labour party and pull factors towards the Conservative Party and a general trend in the results has found the leadership of the political party and the relationship with India is highly important. The investigation to the changes that are happening in Leicester East comes from the dissatisfaction with the former leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn and the current Member of Parliament, Claudia Webbe. What this shows is valence theory is becoming irrelevant, the Hindu community do not feel the need to be loyal to the Labour Party because they have historically legislated to protect the interests of BMEs. Rather, having a strong Indian identity, which is strengthened through the BJP, one can assume means the Hindu community feel confident in voting for a party candidate, that other BME groups will not be voting for – because the Hindu community think that candidate is better suited to representing their local needs on a national scale.

5.2 Further Study

Strategies to enhance a study similar to this in the future – provided there are longer than six months to complete it – could include using a mix methods approach of 5 interviewees for a semi-structured interview and 50 participants for a questionnaire. This would enable the researcher to investigated change in-depth. One way to ensure an in-depth study would be focusing on one BME religious group, like this research, because by conducting a large-scale study on all BME groups; there is the risk of a lot of valuable information that does not get gathered.

Future studies that investigate the Hindu voting group could include a comparison between two constituencies which have a high Hindu population, and a focus on their view on policies of political parties, particularly economic and housing policy. An additional further study could explore the effect age and gender have on the views of political parties. Unfortunately, due to the lack of participants, this research was not able to analyse that, however, the contributions it provides for existing work on Hindu voters is significant.

5.3 Contributions

The contributions this research provides is quite big. Whilst it is only the beginning of uncovering in detail what makes Hindu voters vote the way they do, the focus on one group meant there were no other distraction or prioritising a different religious group over them. It also provides a significant contribution to existing academic work because it had been conducted following the 2019 election; the final election of the decade which had multiple complexities that surrounded voting behaviour.

5.4 Concluding thoughts

Although this is just the beginning of looking in-depth into Hindu voters, it provides a strong recognition that this is something that should be researched further in the future.

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