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Minority Political Representation: Muslim Councilors in Newham and Hackney

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Abstract: Scholars have long been intrigued by the role of minority elected officials in representing the interests of their communities. There is an on-going debate on whether distinctive minority agendas exist and whether the existence of minority representatives (descriptive representation) is a necessary condition to secure the representation of minority interests (substantive representation). This article analyzes original interview data to examine these issues through a case study of Muslim city councilors and the dynamics of local government in the Newham and Hackney Borough Councils of London. It finds that the exceptionally high ethnic diversity of Newham with no dominant ethnic group, the lack of racial or religious divides among neighborhoods, and low racial tensions shapes the political culture of the Council, as well as the Muslim councilors, and yields high responsiveness for all minorities. It also finds that non-Muslim councilors play a significant role in the substantive representation of minority interests, including Muslim interests. In contrast, the case study of the Hackney Council reveals that beyond high party fragmentation, ethnicity and religiosity of the Muslim councilors vary widely and hinder effective representation. In addition, their political incorporation is low, and the leadership positions they hold seem to have symbolic rather than substantive impact. The political behavior and representative styles of Muslim councilors reveal a balancing perspective, whereby they advocate for group interests with a more moderate tone. These factors account for the low government responsiveness to Muslim interests in Hackney.

Keywords: minority representation; Muslims in the UK; local political representation

1. Introduction

Scholars have long been intrigued by the role of minority elected officials in representing the interests of their communities. There is an on-going debate on whether distinctive minority agendas exist and whether the existence of minority representatives (descriptive representation) is a necessary condition to secure the representation of minority interests (substantive representation). Descriptive representation refers to how much and in what ways the representatives resemble the represented; whereas substantive representation involves actions of the representatives on behalf of the represented, which is assessed through policy outcomes. This article analyzes original interview data based on fifty-one interviews conducted in London between June 2006 and August 2009 to examine these issues through a case study of Muslim city councilors and the dynamics of local government in the Newham Borough Council. It finds that the exceptionally high ethnic diversity of the borough with no dominant ethnic group, the lack of racial or religious divides among neighborhoods, and low racial tensions shapes the political culture of the Council, as well as the Muslim councilors, and yields high responsiveness for all minorities. It also finds that non-Muslim councilors play a significant role in the substantive representation of minority interests, including Muslim interests.

2. The London Borough of Newham

The London Borough of Newham was established in 1965 and is the most ethnically diverse local authority in England and Wales, with no particular ethnic group dominating [1]. Newham has the highest youth population and the second highest percentage of Muslims in Britain (24.3%), after Tower Hamlets. Based on 2006 Office for National Statistics estimates, over 39% of the population is White, 38% is Asian (12.2% Indian, 10% Bengali, and 8.9% Pakistani), 20% is black (6.5% Caribbean and 12.4% African), and 1.6% is Chinese [2]. Newham is also known for its poverty. Although there has been some regeneration and investment, particularly new housing, in the borough over the last two decades, based on the 2006 Index of Multiple Deprivation scores, it is still the eleventh most deprived local authority in England and Wales and the third in London [2]. This high diversity coupled with high levels of deprivation leads to some racial tension. Councilor Abdulkarim Sheikh, one of the longest serving Muslim councilors in Newham, confirmed that there are incidents of hate crime in Newham, like being called Bin Laden because of a long beard or being insulted on the bus for wearing a headscarf. Yet, he also contended that the police and the Muslim community have good relations and argued that the relatively low levels of racial tension can be attributed to the make-up of the population, where no ethnic group dominates. Since whites and all other ethnic minority groups are less than 30% of the overall population of the borough, they are all minorities. Unlike most other London boroughs, Newham's neighborhoods are not segregated along religious or ethnic lines. Additionally, the council has implemented certain policies, which contributed to the social cohesion of the borough. For instance, Newham schools are closed for *Eid*, as well as other religious holidays, and the council flies the flag of every country on its national day.

The number of Islamic schools has increased from one to four in the last decade, and the borough has the second highest number of mosques (37) after Tower Hamlets. Twelve percent of grant money allocated to volunteer groups by the Newham Council is distributed among predominantly Muslim groups, despite the fact that 24.3% of the borough's population is Muslim. Although Muslim immigration started in the late nineteenth century, the numbers were miniscule until the post-World War II period. In the 1911 census, there were only 143 Asians recorded in East Ham and seventeen in West Ham [3], and by the 1921 census, there were 1,000 Indians in Canning Town alone [4]. As the British government and large companies began to recruit workers from Commonwealth countries, Newham began to develop a significant Muslim population in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, the majority of immigration from India and Pakistan comprised of single workingmen, who subsequently brought over their wives and children in the 1970s and 1980s. They worked as seamen; ship builders at the docks; construction workers in the sugar refineries, flourmills and leather factories; and at the Dagenham Ford factory.

Today, 53% of the 60,000 Muslims living in Newham are foreign-born. Eighty percent of Newham's Muslim population is of South Asian origin: with 19,000 Pakistanis, 20,000 Bengalis, and 7,000 Gujarati Indians. The remaining minority includes 6,000 African Muslims (mostly Somalis, Nigerians, and Tanzanians), more than 1,000 white British Muslims, and 2,000 other white Muslims (mainly from Eastern Europe and Turkey). A majority of the mosques are Hanafi Sunnis of *Barelvi* and *Deobandi* schools.¹ In addition, there are a few Wahhabi-influenced mosques, a Shia mosque, and an Ahmadi organization. There are two umbrella organizations active in the Muslim community. Newham Muslim Alliance represents the thirty affiliated mosques in Newham in consultation with the Council, whereas Newham Muslim Citizen's Association is an apolitical association appealing to secular Muslims. Overall, Newham and its Muslim community can be characterized by diversity, deprivation, and strong community involvement.

After the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act, public authorities were required to fulfill steps to identify and address racial discrimination, promote racial equality, and publish yearly Racial Equality Schemes. Newham Council's 2002 Racial Equality Scheme sets out the aims of eliminating racial discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity, and encouraging good racial relations between people of different racial groups. It also requires ethnic monitoring and sponsors research to evaluate the impact of council policies on racial equality and diversity. Furthermore, Newham Community Strategy, published in 2003 by the Local Strategic Partnership, sets the priorities for spending the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund awarded by the central government into these categories: health and wellbeing, crime and antisocial behavior, environment and housing, employment, community, and social regeneration of young people. The second target is to build an active and inclusive community, such that "everyone in the borough should have the same chances in life, whatever their background and Newham should be a place where people live harmoniously and respect each other." It outlines three main strategies to achieve these goals: promoting equalities, the Supporting People me to help

¹ These are the two major Sunni orthodox schools influential to sub-continental India and Muslim immigrants from this region. Deobandi promotes strict following of the Prophet's tradition. They also believe in the role of Saints. However, the Barelvi school is more puritanical and rejects Saints.

vulnerable people in care to live independently, and community involvement through the community forums and other consultative mechanisms and partnerships.

The Newham Community and Police Forum enables local residents to become involved in policing matters and has regular public meetings to discuss community safety and policing. Muslim councilors and associations regularly attend these meetings, and raise issues of antisocial behavior and racial and religious discrimination. The police also have an independent advisory group consisting of eighteen members, four of whom are Muslim. This group attends planning meetings relevant to policing at community events and overseas operations.

As mentioned earlier, community relations in Newham are relatively smooth compared to other cities with substantial Muslim populations (Bradford, Burnley, and Birmingham), which experienced race riots. Community workers attribute Newham's cohesion to its diversity and residential feel. In the 1970s and 1980s, the British National Party (BNP) heavily targeted Newham, and racist murders were commonplace. In the face of organized racism, the black and South Asian communities in Newham also became politically organized, setting up the Newham Defence Committee and the Newham Youth Movement that led to the foundation of the Newham Monitoring Project in 1980. In 1980, the murder of a young Muslim male prompted the founding of Newham Muslim Citizens Association. Right-wing groups continued to be active in Newham during the 1990s, but their strength has waned considerably since 2000. There have not been any race-related uprisings in the borough since 2001 when a young Muslim was killed in disturbances.

The Muslim councilors and community members interviewed stated that although overt racist discrimination is rare, subtle forms of discrimination are persistent. Surveys show that a tenth of working-age men and women in Newham, particularly Pakistanis and black Africans, have experienced discrimination in employment on the grounds of race or ethnicity [5]. Newham does not have excessive antisocial behavior problems compared to neighboring inner-city boroughs. However, as anywhere, some young males loiter on the streets. One recurrent issue pertaining to Muslims is on *Eid* and Pakistan Independence Day, when numerous young Muslim males drive through Green Street with loud music and waving Pakistani flags. Elders hold campaigns in the mosques before *Eid* to try and dissuade young people from doing this, arguing that this behavior does not present a good image of the Muslim community. However, as one Newham councilor explained, police reports suggest that youth violence is not directly related to ethnic or religious differences but to conflict between rival schools or families. There are also concerns about fighting amongst Muslim youth, and Mosque elders hold talks with young men to try to defuse tensions by appealing to the common brotherhood of Islam.

Newham was profoundly affected by the London bombings. There was widespread fear of reprisals against mosques and Muslims, which turned out to be largely unfounded. In the week following the July 7 bombings, one faith crime and one incident of racist graffiti occurred [5]. The Newham Council, police, and Muslim associations showed unity, holding a gathering at the East Ham Town Hall to observe two minutes of silence in memory of the victims, condemning the bombings, and to discuss community safety. Newham Monitoring Project also held a meeting at the Minhaj-ul-Quran Mosque in Forest Gate to discuss the threat of terrorism in Newham. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair, Newham Mayor Sir Robin Wales, and MP Lyn Brown spoke against the bombings calling for no one community to be singled out for the attacks. Furthermore, Newham police organized information-sharing meetings between the borough commander, senior police officers,

councilors and concerned groups, and consulted with mosque leaders on what the police response to the bombings should be. Mosque leadership expressed desire for life to resume normally, and rejected the offer of posting police officers outside the mosques.

Muslim councilors in Newham contend that international events impact community relations as much as local events. For instance, there was widespread local opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2003, an antiwar march on Green Street attracted 10,000 protesters, including people from mosques, trade unions and political parties. Responding to this popular sentiment, the Respect Party made major inroads in local politics in Newham, which has traditionally been a Labour stronghold. In the 2005 general elections, East Ham showed the seventh largest swing from Labour in the country. Newham Respect heavily targeted Muslims and the majority of its supporters in the East End are Muslims [6]. This may have precipitated a greater appreciation of Muslims as a distinct political force in Newham amongst the other political parties. In addition, days before the 2005 general election, a small group of Pakistani males, assumed to be associated with fringe Islamic movements *Al-Muhajiroun* and *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, drove down Green Street carrying posters against all the local candidates calling them “Satan” and shouting through loudhailers “voting is *haram*” in Urdu.

2.1. The Newham Council

The London Borough of Newham consists of twenty wards, each electing three councilors. Until 2002, the leader of the council was elected among the majority party, whereas the ceremonial mayor was elected by the full Council. However, the mayor and cabinet system was approved by the residents in a referendum held in January 2002, making Newham one of the three London boroughs (and one of thirteen in England) that have a directly elected mayor. Under the new system, the Civic Ambassador fulfils the role previously undertaken by the ceremonial mayor. The first mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales, was elected in the May 2002 local elections. Out of the five candidates staged in the first round of elections by Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Respect, and Christian People’s Alliance, three were Muslim. Labour’s Sir Robin Wales (64%) beat Respect’s Abdurrahman Jafar (36%) in the second round. Judge Graham Lane, one of the longest-standing Newham councilors, criticizes the new mayoral system as being “...totally undemocratic. All the power goes to the mayor. In reality it is the election of a king. He/she makes all the decisions” [7]. Likewise, Respect Councilor Abdulkarim Sheikh, who is of Pakistani origin, lived in the borough for fifteen years before becoming active in local politics in the mid-1980s, contends that “The new system of directly elected mayor has blocked everything. Council does not have much to put in” [8]. In addition, the Newham Council has been an overwhelmingly Labour Council since its inception (see Table 1). Moreover, Labour did not lose a significant number of seats in Newham following the Iraq War.

Respect Clr Abdulkarim Sheikh argued that Labour’s continued success in the 2006 local elections was largely because opposition did not act wisely and the Muslim vote was divided among too many Muslim candidates. He blamed the Liberal Democrats with staging the same “dirty game” as before and “playing Muslim against Muslim.” He was the only incumbent who got re-elected after defecting from Labour. Labour Clr Graham Lane also argued that Newham does not have a very healthy democracy since it is hard to win a seat for other parties. Moreover, he contends that the Conservatives won only twice in the last thirty years because blacks vote solid Labour, and the Conservative Party

fought a semi-racist campaign in the past [9]. The Respect Party also had support in Newham. Three Respect councilors were elected in May 2006 (Abdulkarim Sheikh, Asif Karim, and Hanif Abdulmuhit), all from the Green Street West ward. Since then, Councilors Karim and Abdulmuhit became Independents.

The first Muslim councilor was elected to Newham Council in 1990. The number of Muslim councilors has been increasing steadily since then. In the 1990 local elections, four Labour candidates (Shama Ahmad, Abdulkarim Sheikh, Riaz Mirza, and Akbar Chaudhary) were elected to Newham Council.

Table 1. Composition of Newham Council, 1965–2009.

	Overall Control	Conservative	Labour	<u>Liberal</u> <u>Democrat</u>	Others
					3 CPA
2009	Labour	-	54	-	2 Independent 1 Respect
					3 CPA
2006	Labour	-	54	-	3 Respect
					1 CPA
2002	Labour	-	59	-	
1998	Labour	-	60	-	-
1994	Labour	-	59	1	-
1990	Labour	2	57	1	-
1986	Labour	-	60	-	-
1982	Labour	-	54	6	-
1978	Labour	-	57	-	3
1974	Labour	-	51	-	9
1971	Labour	-	53	-	7
1968	Labour	6	30	3	21
1964	Labour	-	50	-	10

2.1.1. Fragmentation

There are two types of fragmentation: party and gender. We measure party fragmentation as the number of parties among Muslim councilors in a given council divided by the number of Muslim councilors, where the greater the number, the greater the fragmentation. Among the thirteen, there are three female Muslim councilors, one of whom (Clr Shama Ahmad) has been a councilor since 1990. Newham Muslim councilors are ethnically more mixed. Among the ten Muslim councilors during the 2002–2006 term, three were Bengalis, four Pakistanis, one Indian, and two Kashmiris. Likewise, all thirteen Muslim councilors during the 2006–2010 term were also South Asians from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Kashmir.

Until 2005, when the first Muslim councilor defected to the Respect Party, all Muslim councilors were from the majority Labour Party. Hence, the party fragmentation was zero for the 1998 and 2002 terms, and 0.2 for the 2006 term. In the 2006–2010 term, only 77% of Muslim councilors were in the majority party (see Table 2). As of January 2010, Newham has thirteen Muslim councilors (see Table 3). Ten are from the Labour Party, one from Respect, and two were elected as Respect candidates in May

2006 and have since become Independents. Clr Sheikh, who unsuccessfully tried to run as an Independent, joined the Labour Party in the late 1980s and was elected as a councilor in May 1990. He has been a Labour councilor since 1990 and defected to Respect in 2005. He served as mayor, deputy leader, leader, and finally as leader of Respect Party. He explained his defection from the Labour Party:

There is a strong control apparatus within the Labour Party as the whip. We need to treat all sections of the society equally, we are not asking for special treatment, but equal status and equal opportunity so there is harmony. There is harmony in neighbourhoods, like between Hindus and Muslims (...) but as far as service delivery is concerned I am not very comfortable. Labour Party has to change within. I blame our [Muslim] brothers and sisters not to come up with a hard approach and say you will be losing more seats. Now they see, they were nearly losing 10 more seats [8].

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Muslim Councilors in Newham.

Newham	1998–2002	2002–2006	2006–2010	Average
Percent Muslim Population	NA	NA	NA	24.31
Number and Percent of Muslim Councilors	9 (15.1%)	10 (16.7%)	13 (21.7%)	10.67 (17.8%)
Number of Parties among Muslim Councilors and Party Fragmentation	1 (0)	1 (0)	3 (0.2)	1.33 (0.08)
Percent Muslim Councilors in Majority Party	100	100	76.9	92.3
Mean Seniority of Muslim Councilors	4.6	6.5	6.2	5.7
Number of Leadership Positions held by Muslim Councilors	6	3	6	5
Number of Prestigious Committee Assignments held by Muslim Councilors	4	13	12	9.7
Percent Majority Party Seats	Labour 100%	Labour 98.3%	Labour 90%	Labour 96.1%
Percent Ethnic Population in Borough	60.6	58	55.6	58.1

Table 3. Party Breakdown of Muslim Councilors in Newham, 1982–2010.

	Labour	Independent	Respect	Total	Female
1990–1994	4	-	-	4	1
1994–1998	7	-	-	7	2
1998–2002	9	-	-	9	2
2002–2006	9	-	1	10	2
May 2006	10	-	3	13	3
Jan 2009	10	2	1	13	3

He argued that nobody was listening while the community was suffering and their genuine demands were not being met [8]. Although there were ten Labour Muslim councilors at the time of the interview, Cllr Sheikh contends that they do not have much autonomy, and that their “lips are tied.” He argued that within the Labour Party there is a strong whip system, which demands councilors not to speak for or against Party decisions. On the other hand, being a Respect councilor gives him a “free hand” and lets him speak up his mind [8]. He contends that although a good proportion of the Labour Party is Muslim, they were helpless and unable to change the Party over time because of the whip structure put up in place [8].

Gender fragmentation refers to the ways in which gender impacts the representative roles of councilors. The experience of Newham Cllr Rohima Rahman illustrates gender fragmentation as well as the impact of gender fragmentation on substantive representation of Muslim interests. She is a first-generation immigrant from Bangladesh and was elected in 2006 at the age of 33. In her brief tenure in office, she has been an active advocate of Muslim women’s interests, yet taking a balancing perspective. Together with Cllr Shama Ahmad, she established an English literacy program for Muslim women, which is supported by the Newham Council. She explained the necessity for the program as follows:

They [Muslim women] say, I have been here for 20 years” but they have never been out of Newham or out of their locality of their house! They have never been to city parks... last week we took them by DLR to different places, they said I cannot believe this train goes without driver... majority are thirty plus, not that old. Think how their children are abusing that system, thinking mom doesn’t know where I am going... [10].

Education of Muslim women is also important to remedy the vast gap with their children. It is common for second-generation Muslims not to speak the native tongue of their parents, and for parents, especially mothers, to speak very little English. This causes serious problems in that:

Sometimes we see Muslim children drifting away from mainstream system, their mothers or parents don’t speak English. They don’t know whether the child is going to school or is into bad habits. They might be wearing scarf at home but as soon as they go out, we see with our own eyes, they take it off. Parents don’t know, they cannot communicate with their schools [10].

Cllr Rahman experiences ethnic, religious, and gender stereotyping in her council work. She explained the discomfiture in her interaction with white constituents as follows:

Whites come, they show they feel comfortable but I don’t know how they feel inside. They hear my name and expect a male councilor to be there. When they see a scarf, recently we had a consultation meeting on zoning, the way one or two approached me, the first expression I saw was they didn’t expect me to be at that level, when I started speaking to them, explaining them the issues, explaining them the advantages and disadvantages, they really liked it, I felt their attitudes have changed [10].

In her political and public life, she, like all other Muslim councilors, has to find a level of compromise between her religious beliefs and doctrines, and the British way of life. She told that:

Sometimes I socialize with other colleagues, I talk with them and handshake, I chose that myself to be in this system, if there are certain issues if Islam does not allow me to do, I am married, my husband is okay with this, I know my limits, if I am in a Muslim community I don’t hand shake that’s not in our system, but if it is

a white non-Muslim person I do it, it is their tradition I want to value that. But some white men know Muslim women don't hand shake so when they see my headscarf they don't extend their hands (...) but if they do, I shake it, that's not how we should show the world what Islam is, they are offering friendship and you refuse it, no [10].

As a female Muslim councilor, she faces varying levels of discrimination or different treatment from male Muslim councilors, Muslim constituents, and non-Muslims. When asked how Muslim male councilors responded to her, she replied:

At the beginning, I have seen some male Muslims' attitudes was "why you are here if you are wearing scarf, you should be at home." But I have changed that. I believe Islam is modern... all there is, now Qur'an has it, science is there. Women have a big role in Islam as well. To change community and women's needs, and my Muslim women's needs, set up a role model for other Muslim women to come to politics... [10].

Likewise, she criticized the way Muslim male constituents treat her during surgery or mosque visits:

I have been to a few mosques, and the way they see us, they don't treat a white or non-Muslim councilor that way. Sometimes we find that part quite difficult. For example, if there is a white female councilor and me, they will handshake with her and say "oh madam, madam." But they talk to you as if they know you from long ago, and you are his daughter, no respect. I don't like it, that's why I try to avoid those kinds of people. When they come to me for help, I try my best to show them I am capable, same as that other person actually. They sometimes feel and treat you low. They demand things more from us. It is not requesting it is demanding. I still try to help them [10].

Among the sixty Newham councilors, she is the only one who wears the headscarf. She said she is proud to represent it and would like to see more Muslim women in the council [10]. She has been offended when non-Muslim councilors offered her to join them in the pub to discuss council matters. She also points that non-Muslim councilors are confused because Muslim councilors practice Islam differently; for instance, some drink alcohol and others do not.

One of the challenges to her political career is that she feels excluded from the male-dominated public spaces among the Muslim community, as well as the white English community:

For example, in Muslim community when there is an important issue, to ask for vote, all men go to the mosque... That's our culture, it is the gathering place for men. Pub is the same in British culture, they relax, talk, make decisions, drink. This is their gathering place. But we do miss out, the more I talk and socialize with you, the more I will know about you. Otherwise, if we just say "hi" and "bye" we have a distance, and we don't understand each other we don't have that dialogue. And here in politics it is very important to know each other, without support you cannot do anything, especially being minority, we need to get everybody's support not just Muslim or minority councilors [10].

She said she goes to the women in the literacy program to ask for votes and believes that women are more important in voting time, for they can also convince men. The other two councilors from her ward are Pakistani males. I asked her if female constituents come to see her more. Clr Rahman replied that she has "noticed that more men come to women. More men come to me. Men feel more comfortable with women, when they have a problem they feel uncomfortable to talk to a man and say

‘I am having this problem.’ But with women they don’t feel that” [10]. She strongly feels that minority representation is important to address the needs of minority communities. For example:

...because I am female and I am from Bengali community I speak several different languages. So ethnic minorities feel that if they don’t speak English they can come to me and talk in their language, where they can address the issue and problem they are facing. So they feel I can help them [10].

In conclusion, Cllr Rahman faces different forms of discrimination from her Muslim male colleagues and constituents, as well as white constituents and councilors.

2.1.2. Political Incorporation

Political incorporation of Muslim councilors in Newham (number of leadership positions they hold, their mean seniority/average number of years served as a councilor, and strategic institutional positioning) is notably high. Among the 36 Newham mayors (1965–2002), three were Muslims. The first Muslim mayor of Newham was Shama Ahmad (1996–1997) who was also the first and only Muslim female mayor of Newham. She was followed by Abdulkarim Sheikh (1998–1999), and Riaz Ahmad Mirza (1999–2000). Moreover, the average of the mean seniority of Muslim councilors for the three terms was 5.7 years. In the 1998–2002 term, Newham Muslim councilors had the fifth highest mean seniority; and the seventh highest in the 2002–2006 and 2006–2010 terms. In the 1998–2002 term, Newham Muslim councilors held the highest number of leadership positions. In the 2002–2006 term, they held the fifth highest, and in the 2006–2010 term, the third highest, number of leadership positions. In all three terms, Muslim councilors in Newham held the second highest number of prestigious committee assignments such as those that impact the greatest number of residents. In the current term, thirteen Muslim councilors hold six leadership positions and twelve prestigious committee assignments.

2.1.3. Political Behavior and Representative Styles

The political behavior and the representative styles of Muslim and non-Muslim councilors in Newham are rather similar. Arguably due to the political culture of the borough and the council, non-Muslim councilors are more understanding and responsive to Muslim interests and the interests of other minorities. Likewise, Muslim councilors take a more balancing perspective and they do not unequivocally support all Muslim demands at all costs but balance the interests of Muslims with the other minority groups and the borough. In the case of Newham, both Muslim and non-Muslim councilors are able to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of minority demands and council decisions for minority groups and the borough.

Among the issues of concern for the Newham Muslim community, two are particularly noteworthy for the purposes of this study; namely, the establishment of a Muslim cemetery, and opposition to mosque applications, in particular, the Abbey Mills Mosque in Stratford. The key committee for both the issues is the planning committee. Although the planning committee is independent in its decision-making, councilors do not have a lot of discretion and are advised by council officers as to what the legislation dictates. It is occasional that councilors can exercise some judgment [9]. Newham Muslims, who constituted one fifth of the population, have lobbied the council for a separate Muslim

cemetery for decades, before being granted a separate section in the only council-run burial ground in 1991. West Ham Cemetery at Forest Gate, found in 1857, is the only cemetery owned and managed by the Newham Council. It is divided into three areas, consecrated, unconsecrated, and a section for Muslim burials. Cllr Abdulkarim Sheikh, the longest-serving Muslim councilor in Newham, played a crucial role in establishing the Muslim section in the West Ham Cemetery, which is in use since 1991 [8]. As the only Respect councilor during the 2006–2010 term, his views and political behavior lean towards a group representative. He decided to be a councilor because he “thought that the service delivery was not tailored to the composition of the population. And if you have to say something, if you stand in front of the town hall and make noise, it does not make any difference. So it is better to be involved in the decision-making process” [8]. He acknowledged that although he counts on the votes of the 4,000 Muslims in his ward, he also needs the votes of other communities to get elected [8].

In the 2006 local elections, he fought his first campaign as a Respect candidate. He said that the campaign was not focused on Muslim issues as such but focused on specific local issues, such as Sir Robin Wales’ proposal to replace an historic market with Walmart and closing down a secondary school. Cllr Sheikh has been involved with the Newham Alliance of Islamic Associations since it was formed in 1981. Dr. Zulfiqar Ali became the chairperson of the same organization in 2007 after being elected as a councilor. Cllr Sheikh claimed that partially due to his involvement in this organization, he is more aware of Muslim issues than the other Muslim and non-Muslim councilors [8]. He has tried to help out the Muslim community in the public sphere because he believes that “To be a good Muslim, you have to be a good citizen” [8]. He told me that he is the only Muslim councilor in Newham who refuses to come to evening meetings in the council during Ramadan.

Cllr Sheikh named mosque applications as one of the “burning issues” in Newham. For instance, the planning application for Green Street Mosque was objected by the neighbors and, according to Cllr Sheikh, council officers were inefficient in helping the Muslim community to prepare a successful application. Mosque applications are often rejected on the basis that (a) there are too many mosques, (b) it is encroaching on others’ privacy, and (c) it causes traffic and parking problems. Cllr Sheikh stated that:

When I was on the planning committee and there was an application for a Hindu temple or synagogue I never objected. I said this is civil liberty. If we have churches established centuries ago, why should we have restrictions on others? Technically they have reasons to refuse, which should be addressed, but indirectly there is discrimination. Because the officers’ job is to advise the client how they can improve their planning so it meets the requirements of the law and could be successful. Both officers and councilors have implicit discrimination. If one says no, it goes out of the window [8].

The development committee, which processes planning applications, had fifteen members since its inception sixteen years ago. However, Labour reduced the number of members to ten by the pretext that there is not as much work to be done by councilors. Although the opposition demanded to have two seats, only one seat was allocated, which makes it hard to impact decisions without a seconder. Furthermore, Cllr Sheikh strongly believes that there is discrimination against Muslims in housing, and he commented that ‘There are 80,000 housing units owned by the Council. No Muslim housing association, my heart bleeds. We don’t have that spirit; people go for individual gains (...) Specific needs like *wudu* facilities, has to be addressed.’ [8]. Bengali households are more likely than the white

British to be living in local authority housing [11]. Whilst less than 40% of the borough's overall population is white, 60% of council tenants are white [11].

Clr Sheikh helped Muslim constituents to get a center for the youth. Although the council designated funds, and the center was established a few years ago, it was never handed back to the Muslim community. Another contentious issue is the lack of an exclusively Muslim cemetery. When Muslim councilors, including Clr Sheikh, and constituents tried to negotiate with the local authority, they were told that it is not the responsibility of the Council, and that there is no money or land. After much opposition and demonstration, Muslims:

...were given 120 spaces for cemetery. We wanted to have a virgin land, certain direction for burials. The nicest cemetery is the City of London Cemetery, but we did not get a chance to get space there. They said come and use it but bury as we do. We cannot do that. This is the local authority's job to negotiate but they have failed to do that [8].

On the other hand, Newham Clr Rohima Rahman's cautious approach to demands from Muslims is more representative of Newham's Muslim councilors. She has been an active community worker for over fifteen years. During her first term in office, she helped an Islamic school get planning application. However, she is cautious about small-scale faith schools established by non-qualified administrators and teachers:

It is not only an issue about planning but about managing it. How you will run it, if we give you permission, that's fine but how will you run it. These young people will come to your school, who will be responsible? What the kids' future will be, we have to consider all of this (...) Small schools ran by small communities is quite difficult (...) [10].

She is equally cautious when it comes to mosque applications. As in localities with high percentage of Muslims, mosque planning applications are an ongoing controversy in Newham. Contrary to common perception, Muslim councilors do not necessarily support all mosque applications. For instance, Clr Rohima Rahman acknowledged that sometimes new mosques create more problems than they solve, and "By building the mosque if it creates problems for others, I personally don't support building it to create more problems" [10]. On the other hand, non-Muslim councilor Alec Kellaway seemed equivocal on the issue and said that mosque applications are:

...mostly a concern because Newham is very crowded, and parking is always a problem. If they want a mosque in a small shop, there is not parking available. There are sizable mosques developed. There are no problems. Sometimes residents complain, but then it is resident associations who deal with noise or night parties.' [12].

His attitude is representative of the non-Muslim councilors in that he approaches the issue from a practical stance, weighing the pros and cons while trying to empathize with the minority group.

Another recent mosque controversy clearly revealed the political attitudes and representative styles of Muslim and non-Muslim councilors in Newham. In 2007, *Tablighi Jamaat*, a movement founded in India in 1927 with 80 million followers worldwide, submitted plans to build Britain's largest place of worship, the Abbey Mills Mosque, next to the 2010 Olympic Park in Newham. More than 48,000 people have petitioned the government to abolish plans for the 100-million-pound mega-mosque with a

capacity for 12,000 worshippers to be built [13]. A Newham councilor from the Christian People's Alliance, Alan Craig, is leading the campaign against the mosque, while Judge Graham Lane, a white Englishman and one of the longest serving councilors in the Newham Council, takes a rational, unbiased stance [14]. In analyzing the dynamics of the debate, he explained that although in theory the planning committee is independent of the Council, it is likely that the mayor will get involved in such a controversial decision:

I got a feeling he is ambivalent, and since many Muslims are involved he doesn't want to annoy the Muslim community. However you have to make a decision based on planning law properly. Muslims are divided, and most Muslims are opposed to it. It is organized by a fundamentalist group with dubious connections. I would say that I would object to Westminster Abbey moving to Newham on the grounds that it is too big... Having a mosque with tens of thousands of people is too big for a densely populated area. It is an inappropriate place to build it; it has to be on the countryside. It has to be taken on planning grounds not religious grounds. Some Muslim councilors think it is something they ought to support, but there are one to two who see the planning arguments. The opposition is from Christian People's Alliance; the least people opposing this should be them. But they oppose due to planning arguments.... Council cannot interfere with planning decisions. But now the mayor will make his view known privately to the chair of the planning committee, but in law they have to make the decision. I don't think it will be a decision that is left entirely to the hands of Newham; Boris Johnson, the current mayor of London, and national government may have a say as well [9].

Although Cllr Lane believes that Newham's strength is its diversity for there is no ruling minority, he alluded to discrimination by the mayor in cabinet appointments:

There are plenty of Asian councilors but they don't hold key positions. That's the interesting thing and it is to some extent the fault of the mayor, he gives them titles but the real jobs go to white names. When we held elections for those positions, we got a slightly better balance... Ayesha Chowdhury is very intelligent and capable but they haven't given her anything to do these last four years. She has been fed up. But she is a very rich business woman, who owns 40–50 properties [9].

He argued that some Muslim constituents purposefully avoid going to surgeries of Muslim councilors but acknowledge the positive effects of having minority councilors:

Minority councilors change the way we operate here for the good because there are certain things we would have done different if it had been all white councilors. Having Asians and other we have become more aware of what the people need, that's been the good side of it. We realize that there are certain traditions in different communities that we ought to respect. And we understand those communities more [9].

Moreover, Cllr Lane accused Muslim councilors, as well as some white councilors, for getting caught up in a patronage role, and thinking that they can do favors for people:

Where we won't tolerate is any sort of local patronage or corruption. It wasn't just Asian councilors in some cases who were doing this. White councilors were doing it as well. There was a custom here, when somebody was housed, they used to come and bring you a bottle of whiskey or a present. Now it is illegal and any gift over 25 pounds has to be reported. But in those days, nobody noticed it... one or two councilors,

whites as well, thought that this was alright. That sort of thing is frowned upon and you would possibly lose your council seat. It could be reported to the standards board because it is kind of bribery [9].

He defined patronage as doing something that you benefit from, such as a councilor accepting money or a free ticket for helping a constituent. He also cited manipulating the rules and bullying council officers, like insisting to move a constituent up on the list for housing [9]. What a councilor can do to help his or her constituent is to get the details of their case, and take it up with the officer, “If you disagree with how it has been handled, you can challenge that. What you cannot do is ask for a favor to be done for that constituent” [9]. Hence, Clr Lane identifies the positive and negative impacts of the presence of minority councilors in a rather unbiased manner. Likewise, according to Clr Peck, the problem with patronage politics is that “...many Muslim representatives on institutional bodies operate within a more familiar patron-client mode in relation to their own communities” [15]. Similar to Clr Peck, Michael equally blames party strategies for sustaining this mode of local politics:

... there was a great willingness to talk to community leaders, who were perceived to be influential, in order to recruit into the Labour Party. From that period onwards, MPs looked to groups to whom they could offer patronage, via a “community leader,” who would present the MP with (usually) the deportation or housing queries of his constituents. “Vote-brokering” became commonplace across the black communities, and it is a common slur upon modern community leaders that such forms of instrumental politics are still practiced. But that it did occur for so long is testament to the effectiveness of patronage in achieving for black communities at least some solutions to the immediate problems, although damaging to political participation and education in the long term.... Political empowerment of black and Asian communities was simply not on the agenda. ([15], p. 19–20).

The representative style of Alec Kellaway, another white Labour councilor since 1981, is also particularly telling for he is an active pastor among the Christian community in Newham. As most councilors, he also represents an ethnically mixed ward. He contends that “Ethnic communities vote along party lines, and the ethnic vote goes to Labour. There are very practicing Sikhs, Christians and Muslims in the Council. And they do reflect this in their campaigning and work, Labour Party is okay with this” [12]. He does not feel that Muslim councilors overemphasize their religious or ethnic background. He feels that it is normal for Muslim constituents to prefer Muslim elected officials over non-Muslims. African Christians prefer coming to see him in surgery, because people “tend to come to people they have met at events. We had a choral concert at Christmas, being seen at events like that encourages people to come and see us” [12].

3. The London Borough of Hackney

The case study of the Hackney Council reveals that beyond high party fragmentation, ethnicity and religiosity of the Muslim councilors vary widely and hinder effective representation. In addition, their political incorporation is low, and the leadership positions they hold seem to have symbolic rather than substantive impact. The political behavior and representative styles of Muslim councilors reveal a balancing perspective, referring to how they advocate group interests with moderation. However, both Muslim and non-Muslim councilors are also reserved to extend particular group rights to avoid the escalation of similar demands from the other minority groups in the borough. Finally, the Hackney

Council had been through a period of political turmoil and instability since the late 1990s, which impacted the ability and willingness of minority councilors and the council as a whole to represent constituent interests effectively. Arguably, all these factors account for the low government responsiveness to Muslim interests in Hackney.

The London Borough of Hackney was established in 1965, uniting the metropolitan boroughs of Hackney, Shoreditch, and Stoke Newington. Similar to Newham, Hackney has been a hub of low-skilled immigration since the late nineteenth century, becoming an ethnically diverse borough. The proportion of ethnic minorities remained stable at 40.6% from 1998 to 2006, and dropped to 38.9% in the current term (see Table 4).

Table 4. Hackney Data.

Hackney	1998–2002	2002–2006	2006–2010	Average
Percent Muslim Population				13.76
Number and Percent of Muslim Councilors	5 (8.8%)	10 (17.5%)	9 (15.8%)	8 (14%)
Number of Parties and Fragmentation	3 (0.6)	3 (0.3)	3 (0.3)	3 (0.4)
Percent in Majority Party	40	80	77.8	65.9
Mean Seniority	6.4	4	6.7	5.7
Number of Leadership Positions	2	4	4	3.3
Number of Prestigious Committee Assignments	0	9	7	5.3
Percent Majority Party Seats	LAB 50.9%	LAB 77.2%	LAB 77.2%	LAB 68.4%
Electoral Competitiveness	68.3	93	91.8	84.4
Percent Ethnic Population	40.6	40.6	38.9	40
Cemetery	0/1	0/1	0/1	0
Islamic School	3/93	4/94	4/94	0.04
Mosque	7	9	10	8.7
Percent Grant	8	9	10	9
IMD Scores	57.3	45.1	46.1	49.5

According to mid-2005 estimates, 47.3% of Hackney residents describe themselves as white British, 10.6% black African, 9.2% black Caribbean, 4.1% Indian, 2.9% Bengali, and 1.4% Pakistani [2]. There is also a large Turkish population in Hackney, many of whom are Turkish Cypriot. According to the 2001 Census, 66% of the resident population was born in the UK, while 29% was born outside of the UK and Europe. The 2001 Census also shows that Christianity (44%) is the largest religion in Hackney, followed by Islam (18%) and Judaism (4%) [2]. A significant concentration of Hasidic Jews exists in the northern wards, which are represented by Orthodox Jewish councilors. There are many commonalities among the issues of concern for Orthodox Jews and Muslims in Hackney, like kosher or *halal* food provision, dress code regulations in schools, gender-separate education, and emphasis on religious education.

Comparable to Newham, Hackney is one of the most deprived boroughs in London as well as England. All Hackney wards are among the 10% most deprived in England, and 47% of children in

Hackney live in low-income households [1]. In 1998 and 2002, Hackney was the second most deprived borough in London and became the most deprived borough in 2006 [1]. Furthermore, Hackney has one of the highest crime rates among London boroughs, but cooperation between local police and the council led to 28% reduction in crime rates between 2003 and 2007. Table 4 summarizes the data on Hackney Council and the borough relevant to this study. Hackney has the fourth largest Muslim population (13.8%) among the 32 London boroughs.

Moreover, Hackney was the thirty-fifth least competitive borough in 1998. Due to the increase in the number of Labour seats from twenty-nine to forty-five, Hackney became the thirteenth least competitive borough in 2002 and the sixteenth in 2006. The percent of council grant money allocated to organizations with predominantly Muslim clients increased steadily from 8% in the 1998–2002 term, to 9% in the 2002–2006 term, and 10% in the 2006–2010 term. Although it is less than the percentage of Muslims in the Borough (13.8%), it gradually approaches parity.

3.1. The Hackney Council

Since its establishment in 1965, Hackney had been a Labour run authority, except a period of Conservative administration from 1968 to 1972 (see Table 4). The borough is divided into nineteen electoral wards, each returning three councilors in a first three past the post election system. Currently, the fifty-seven seats representing the nineteen wards of the borough are divided up between the Labour Party with forty-five, the Conservative Party with nine, Liberal Democrats two, and the Green Party with a seat (see Table 4). During the 1998–2002 term, Labour held the majority holding only 51% of the seats and increased its majority to 77% in the following two terms (see Table 4).

Following the Mark Trotter affair, a child abuse scandal involving a council social worker, a period of changing coalitions occurred in the late 1990s. Hackney Labour Party split between councilors who were following Clr. Nick Tallentire and following Clr. John McCafferty, who succeeded getting the backing of the national Labour Party. By the 1998 elections, all but two of the Hackney New Labour councilors defected to the Liberal Democrats or the Conservatives, and a coalition was launched between the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives, and two Green Party councilors. Later, there was a coalition between Labour led by Jules Pipe and the Conservatives led by Eric Ollerenshaw. After the 2002 local elections, Labour returned as the majority party, and unpredictably, it was one of the few boroughs where Labour did not lose any seats in the 2006 local elections (see Table 5).

Largely due to the period of instability following the Mark Trotter affair, the Audit Commission for Local Authorities expressed serious concerns about the performance of Hackney Council in its 2000 report, for most council services were failing. This led to considerable negative press coverage for the borough and the council. However, only four years later MORI reported that residents were significantly more satisfied than they had been in 2002. In addition, the Audit Commission reported that the council achieved three stars in 2007. All these developments have impacted the ability and willingness of the councilors to represent minority interests effectively.

Hackney is one of the three London boroughs governed by a directly-elected mayor and run by a mayor and cabinet system. Labour's Jules Pipe was the first directly elected mayor of Hackney in 2002 and got reelected in 2006. Under the new system, the Speaker fulfils the civic and ceremonial duties previously undertaken by the ceremonial mayor. The mayor of Hackney selects approximately nine

councilors to make up the Cabinet. Cabinet members are responsible for the governance of the borough's civil service and represent the mayor and council on strategic bodies. The regulatory functions of the council are carried out by back-bench councilors. The planning and licensing committees make independent decisions that oversee both the private and public sector and decide upon a wide range of petitions for permission to build, demolish or transform the built environment. Additionally, the borough consists of two parliamentary constituencies, Hackney North and Stoke Newington, represented by Labour's Diane Abbott, and Hackney South and Shoreditch, represented by Labour's Meg Hillier. MP Diane Abbott was the first black woman elected to the British Parliament in 1987 and is a renowned civil rights activist.

Table 5. Composition of Hackney Council, 1964–2009.

	Overall control	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Others
2009	Labour	9	45	2	1
2006	Labour	9	44	3	1
2002	Labour	9	45	3	-
1998	Labour	12	29	17	2
1994	Labour	6	44	10	-
1990	Labour	4	48	8	-
1986	Labour	2	53	5	-
1982	Labour	3	50	7	-
1978	Labour	1	59	-	-
1974	Labour	-	60	-	-
1971	Labour	-	60	-	-
1968	Conservative	31	27	2	-
1964	Labour	-	60	-	-

The first Muslim elected to the Hackney Council was the Labour candidate Shuja Shaikh in 1974. He has been the only Muslim in the council for three terms, until the election of Syed Bangle in 1986. The first Muslim female elected to the Hackney Council was Meral Hussein Ece in 1994. Cllr. Ece, who is of Turkish and Bengali background, is one of the few mixed-race Muslim councilors in London.

The number of Muslim councilors remained miniscule until the 1998 local elections when five Muslims were elected (see Table 6). The number of Muslim councilors doubled to ten in the 2002 local elections and dropped to nine in the 2006 elections. It is the only council among the two case study boroughs to see a drop, though minute, in the number of Muslim councilors during the three terms.

Table 6. Party Breakdown of Muslim Councilors in Hackney, 1974–2010.

	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat	Total	Female
1974–1978	1	-	-	1	-
1978–1982	1	-	-	1	-
1982–1986	1	-	-	1	-
1986–1990	2	-	-	2	-
1990–1994	3	-	-	3	-
1994–1998	2	-	1	3	1
1998–2002	2	1	2	5	1
2002–2006	8	1	1	10	2

3.1.1. Fragmentation

Muslim councilors in Hackney are exceptionally diverse with regards to party affiliation, ethnic background, gender, age, and religiosity. The interview data shows that each of these sources of fragmentation hinders the cooperation among the Muslim councilors, in turn deterring government responsiveness to Muslim interests. However, unlike Newham, the strongest sources of fragmentation among the Muslim councilors in Hackney are ethnicity and religiosity. Even though the gender and party fragmentation ratios are high, their impact on the political behavior of Muslim councilors as a group is not as strong.

On average, 14% of Hackney Council was composed of Muslim councilors between 1998 and 2010, yet they were divided among Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats during each term. Less than half (40%) were in the ruling Labour Party in the 1998–2002 term. This figure increased to 80% in the following term and remained at 78% in the 2006–2010 term. Cllr. Shuja Shaikh, the longest serving Muslim councilor in Hackney, was a Labour councilor from 1974 to 1996 and a Conservative since then. Currently, there are seven Muslim Labour councilors, one Conservative, and one Liberal Democrat. Hence, two of the nine Muslim councilors are in opposition, and seven are in the ruling Labour Party. The party fragmentation index was 0.3 for the first two terms and 0.4 for the current term. However, this high party fragmentation index does not impact the cooperation between Muslim councilors based on party lines. For instance, Cllr. Demirci confirmed “Muslim councilors vote together on Muslim issues across party lines.” [16]. Moreover, when it comes to ethnic minority issues or Muslim interests, Demirci “would ask for the support of the ethnic minority councilors. For example, we got a group of Muslim councilors that if we are facing an issue they would vote with me... There is that ethnic vote, I will have their support. But in terms of asking for advice, it depends on the subject, I would go to anyone.” [16].

Hackney councilors are divided among four ethnicities. Out of the nine Muslim councilors, four have Indian ethnicity, three are Alevi Kurds, one is a Sunni Turk, and one is of Pakistani background. Moreover, what makes the ethnic fragmentation particularly influential is the presence of three Alevi Kurds (Gülşay İçöz, Feryal Demirci, and Deniz Oğuzkanlı), who self-identify as either non-practicing cultural Muslims or atheists. Some Sunni Muslims, like Cllr. Siddiqui, do not consider Alevis to be Muslims on theological grounds, which increases in-group tensions.

The three Alevi Kurds, who are in their thirties and were born in Turkey, and are in their thirties, were elected in 2006. Cllr. İçöz and Demirci are two of the three Muslim female councilors in Hackney. Cllr. Oğuzkanlı is a lawyer, who previously worked in Citizens’ Advice Bureau — tackling residents’ problems with benefits, housing, and immigration. He is a committed human rights activist and a member of Amnesty International and Lawyers for Liberty. Cllr. Oğuzkanlı has been an active member of the Kurdish community in Hackney and is a founding member and trustee of the Kurdish Education and Training Centre. His commitments are increasing the number of police officers on the streets, improving schools, and getting young people involved in the community by setting up youth centers. Likewise, Cllr. Demirci was elected the Chair of Scrutiny Committee for Youth in 2009, primarily due to her work with Turkish and Kurdish youth. Although she has no religion, Demirci commented, “I do come from a Muslim family, so regardless of me not having a religion, I am approached by Muslims and have close links with the Turkish Mosques.” [16].

Moreover, the ratio of female Muslim councilors in Hackney is 0.33. However, gender fragmentation remains weak compared to religiosity and ethnic divide. For instance, UK-born Clr. Nargis Khan is one of the female Muslim councilors and one of the younger and more secular ones. Although she has been engaged in minority issues, she does not particularly focus on Muslim interests and appeal to the broader concerns of the local community. She first got elected in 2002 from the Dalston Ward and has been the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure since 2004, holding a portfolio which includes health, adult social care, the voluntary and community sector, leisure, libraries and culture. Her political priorities include improving opportunities for children and getting more people actively involved in the community. She is the vice-chair of the Local Government Association's Community Wellbeing Board. In 2002, Clr. Nargis Khan contributed to the Cattle Review of Community Cohesion, suggesting practical solutions for the role of political and community leadership. She has also advised the Home Office task force *Preventing Extremism Together*, with a focus on engaging women in politics and public life. In 2006, Clr. Nargis Khan was appointed to the Commission for Integration and Cohesion, contributing to the commissions 2007 report *Our Shared Future* on how local areas can play a role in forging cohesive and resilient communities. In a TV interview, she expressed that faith is a personal matter for her and she does not feel it is necessary to express it through dress. She expressed that although she might not look at it on the face, she holds traditional values, and that she does not want to be elected based on her religious background but based on merit [17].

There is a stark divide between these young generation of councilors who self-identify either as cultural Muslims or as having no religion at all, and the four older Muslim councilors (Clr. Shuja Shaikh, Saleem Siddiqui, Faizullah Khan, and Muttalip Ünlüer) who are in their sixties or older and whose political views and behavior is informed by theological convictions. For instance, Saleem Siddiqui, a seventy year old Labor councilor of Indian origin, has been a councilor in Hackney since 1990. Despite being highly outspoken on moral issues like abortion, teen pregnancy, and alcohol related crimes, he has held prominent leadership positions in the Council. Clr. Siddiqui stated that his forthright stance has not caused any problems with the Labour Party. For example, he was the only councilor in Hackney who served as the mayor twice (1995–1996 and 2001–2002). In addition, he was the Chief Whip in 1993–1994, the Deputy Leader in 1994–1995, and is the current Chair of Hackney Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE). His attitude towards the non-observant Muslim councilors is the strictest among the four religious Muslim councilors, in that he does not “mix with them” at all. Moreover, he explained his stance towards the Alevi Kurdish councilors as follows:

Hackney Council cannot respond adequately to our needs. Problems are more than resources we have. Muslims have not made their case as the Muslim community. It is not the fault of the council or racism... They are not withholding. Jews get it because they made their case and fought for it, 2.5% have seventeen Jewish councilors, for 15–19% Muslim there are not more than four Muslims, for I don't consider the Alevis Muslim. There is competition for resources. I believe in equitable rather than equal distribution. If my needs are more, I should get a bigger piece of the cake. [18].

Similar to Clr. Siddiqui, Islamic ideology of serving humanity led Clr. Shuja Shaikh to be a councilor. He runs his political campaigns on the Conservative Party platform, including single-sex schools. Since the beginning of his political career, Clr. Shaikh sought to establish a Muslim identity,

leading other non-Muslim Asians to accuse him of wanting to separate the Asian group. Moreover, secular Muslims from all backgrounds are not supportive of the Muslim label as well. When asked whether the level of religiosity of the Muslim councilor would make a difference, he replied, “I think if the councilor is a secular Muslim, it would make a difference... a practicing Muslim councilor would carry more weight than a secular Muslim... It depends if the secular Muslim councilor is anti-Muslim or against observance. But if the secular Muslim works to help Muslims, he would carry as much weight as anybody else.” [19]. Although he works with the other Muslim councilors, he also acknowledges the effects of party fragmentation in that:

Outside you put on a united front, you cannot disagree with your party in the council or outside. Otherwise you will be gotten rid of or politically punished. But within the party you can talk, discuss, disagree or persuade other people to accept your point of view. But once within the council chamber you have to stick together. Muttalip [Clr. Ünlüer] is doing a good job within the party and trying to accept the point of view, as I do the same in my part. But I am in a better position because I am in opposition. That is why I can get up and say whatever I want to say. But they are in power, the party decides the policies and they have to stick together. My job is to attack them [19].

Unlike Clr. Siddiqui, Clr. Muttalip Ünlüer cooperates with Muslim councilors from all backgrounds, even “with atheist Kurdish councilors for our community’s needs.” [20]. For instance, after July 7 bombings, Muslim councilors initiated a bridging effort and brought together leaders of different faiths, the mayor and the police:

Muslims or others, it does not make a difference. People come to us with their problems, with housing, services...*etc.* seeking their rights. The only difference is if a Muslim constituent comes we say *salamun alaykum*... But we serve their rightful cases and behave them all the same... Muslims do not come with special demands. They are not aware that they can in fact. The Jewish people openly make special demands, but Muslims are not aware they can make those demands. [20].

3.1.2. Political Incorporation

The political incorporation of Muslim councilors in Hackney is relatively better than most other councils and does not seem to play a significant role in the low government responsiveness. Muslim councilors are relatively experienced with the lowest average seniority being four years, and they hold a notable number of leadership positions and committee assignments. In the 1998–2002 term, among the five Muslim councilors, the mean seniority was 6.4 years, making Hackney the third highest London borough with regards to the mean seniority of Muslim councilors. In the 2002–2006 term, five new Muslim councilors were elected; hence, the mean seniority of the ten Muslim councilors dropped to four years, the fourteenth highest among the 32 boroughs. However, in the 2006–2010 term, the mean seniority increased to 6.7 years (the sixth highest).

In the 1998–2002 term, five Muslim councilors held two leadership positions (the third highest); in the 2002–2006 term, ten Muslim councilors held only four positions (the second highest); and in the 2006–2010 term, nine Muslim councilors held four leadership positions (the fifth highest). Although Hackney has had fewer Muslim councilors compared to Newham, it has had a considerably higher number of Muslim mayors. Former Muslim mayors of Hackney include Clr. Syed Bangle (1987–1988),

Clr. Sham (90–91), Clr. Saleem Siddiqui (1995–1996, 2001–2002), Clr. Mulla (2003–2004), Clr. Faizulla Khan (2007–2008). Notably, Clr. Siddiqui is the only councilor in the history of Hackney to serve as mayor twice. Moreover, in the 1998–2002 term, none of the five Muslim councilors held a prestigious committee assignment. However, in the 2002–2006 term, ten councilors held nine assignments (the third highest); and in the 2006–2010 term, nine held seven prestigious committee assignments (the seventh highest).

3.1.3. Political Behavior and Representative Styles

The political behavior and representative styles of the younger and older generation of Muslim councilors vary. Although, ethnic and religious fragmentation puts them asunder and hinders their cooperation on Muslim issues, both groups advocate on behalf of Muslim interests with a balancing perspective. They advocate for group interests with a more moderate tone compared to Muslim councilors, such as in Tower Hamlets. However, both Muslim and non-Muslim councilors are also reserved to extend particular group rights to avoid the escalation of similar demands from the other minority groups in the borough. This seemingly paradoxical stance, advocating for Muslim interests yet refraining from extending specific group rights due to budgetary pressures, contributes to the low government responsiveness to Muslim interests in Hackney.

In the case of the non-practicing Muslim councilors, ethnic and religious ties overlap. For instance, in explaining her advocacy work, Clr. Feryal Demirci uses the terms ethnic interests and Muslim interests interchangeably. She explains the reasons for running in local elections as follows:

I have always been active in my community since a young age because of the issues of Kurds in Turkey. So being involved in the community center here, I built close relationship with the local party here, and began being interested in local politics and thought I could do this not just for my community but for all. I was a member of Labour Party for two or so years before I was approached by the Party to run for council. The idea came from them, and they felt that although they work with the community center, it would serve the community better if there was someone from the community who actually understood the issues. [16].

She also emphasized the fact that “People assume that you have a huge ethnic voter base, but not necessarily. A lot of our community is not even registered!” [16]. Despite self-identifying as not having a religion, she still advocates for Muslim interests, “There was an issue with getting permission for a school for Muslim kids from constituencies represented by Tory councilors. Muslim Labour councilors supported it as well. As an ethnic minority and as a woman I understand the issues with those communities better than my other colleagues, so when there is an issue, I am the first one to be asked for advice and I do advocate for those communities” [16].

Similarly, Clr. Siddiqui liaises with the police on issues of concern for the Muslim community. Moreover, “There was an issue when a police officer harassed a minority and arrested him, I took it up with the police chief and made the officer apologize. The point is to make officers realize they cannot break the line” [18]. Although he is very passionate about Muslim issues, he does not support all Muslim demands blindly. For instance, for a rejected mosque application he commented “Discrimination is there, I am not saying there is none, but the officers know the lines. The planning application came after it was established, and it was residential, not appropriate for a mosque, so they didn’t get the

permission” [18]. He cited another example when the Muslim community did not follow the appropriate procedures. Tawhid Boys School, an Islamic school established in 2000, applied to convert another building as an addition, “Yet they didn’t even have permission for the first building. Officer didn’t take it further since there was no complaint” [18].

The observant and non-observant Muslim councilors agree that minority representation is crucial for the substantive representation of minority interests. For instance, Clr. Demirci believes that minority representation “definitely matters” because:

Although there are consultations, they sometimes overlook ethnic minorities when making policies because they do not understand. So it is very effective to have councilors from ethnic minorities because we raise the issues and policies are made to ensure that communities are considered. But also, sometimes there are certain allocated budgets and they cannot cater to the needs of every community but have to be universal. [16].

Likewise, Clr. Ünlüer contends that having Muslim councilors has positive effects for the community:

A non-Muslim cannot know a Muslim’s needs more than a Muslim. We brought it up for instance to have a worship place in the council for Muslim employees. A Christian cannot think of this need ever, because he does not need it. For women, how to behave to them, not to shake hands, when I did not shake at the beginning they thought it was weird now they learned it. [20].

Likewise, Clr. Ünlüer told that “Me being a Muslim councilor must have been an inspiration for others” and “I wish to motivate young Muslims and find someone to take over my job when I leave.” [20]. Although he encourages young people saying it would be helpful for the development of the community, few of them get involved [20]. Clr. Chris Kennedy, a forty-year-old white Labour councilor elected in 2002 to Hackney Council, also shares these opinions. He favors the idea of positive discrimination and having ethnic minority-only short-lists for parliament, which is an ongoing debate in Labour National Committee [20]. Clr. Kennedy believes that “Unless you deliberately start the process, it will not happen automatically because rules and general processes, even in Labour Party, favor white older males” [21]. He said that Hackney Mayor Jules Pipe “was told by the Labour Party that the cabinet should not be too white” [21]. He also contends “Cultural difference around the table helps to make a balanced decision. We try to vary gender and culture of the Speaker. When there is a Turkish constituent, the Turkish councilor can tell us better where they are tweaking the truth...” [21]. Likewise, Clr. Shuja Shaikh outlined the positive impacts of the presence of Muslim councilors as follows:

The very presence of a Muslim either as a councilor or any other representative makes a difference in the sense that the non-Muslims become conscious of the Muslim representative’s presence and also of the Muslim community. It has two effects: one is that the non-Muslims come to know about the requirements, needs, and demands of Muslims. Also, it deters them from being racist or anti-Muslim... They would not express their prejudice openly, so it deters them. And the other element is gradual contact with the Muslim representative helps them to maintain continuous contact with the Muslim community and know more and more about it. It is a venue, an opportunity to learn more about Muslims [19].

Yet he also acknowledges that the representation styles of Muslim councilors would make a difference and lead to positive or negative consequences:

But it depends on the Muslim representative. If the Muslim elected representative is positive, then he or she will receive positive response from councilors and others. But if the person is negative and aggressive, then people do not like aggression. Also the representative needs to know how the system works, know the rules, regulations, laws, the way of behavior, and language, because words are important. If you use the wrong word in the wrong place, then people can misunderstand or do not know what you are saying. I think it is also important to speak loudly and distinctly...there is a learning process on both sides. We, the ethnic minorities, have to learn of and about the majority community... also we have a job to teach others about our culture and history. It is how you behave, kind, polite, but firm. In other words, you do not take insults [19].

Muslim constituents raise issues in his surgeries on personal and local level issues including housing, social security benefits, immigration problems, planning application for mosques, Islamic schools, hate crimes (especially women with headscarves), health, education...etc. No more burials take place in Hackney cemeteries, and the Muslim community bought a land in Edmonton Cemetery in Enfield. Slaughterhouses have to be licensed and inspected by the Department of Health and Safety. In Hackney, there is one privately owned business, which allows Muslims to use its facilities to slaughter their animals. Secular social and cultural activities are funded by the council, but not religious activities. He believes that lack of English proficiency and communication skills of Muslims is the greatest barrier to accomplishing their requests.

The majority of Muslims who participate in public life are older, first-generation immigrants who lack a good command of English and do not understand the psychological and cultural connotations of words [19]. He points out the fact that the generation of 35–50-year-olds is lost from political life. They were born abroad but raised in the UK by first-generation immigrant parents planning to return to their country of origin; hence, they did not pay much attention to their children's development or integration. Whereas the new generation born and raised in the UK is already settled, and according to Clr. Shaikh, socio-politically they will do much better than the first-generation immigrants [19].

Another first-generation immigrant Muslim councilor, Muttalip Ünlüer, became a Labour Party member in 2000 upon the advice of another Muslim councilor and by "taking another Muslim councilor as a role model." He is one of the four councilors born in Turkey, but is the only Sunni and ethnic Turk. When he first joined the Party, Hackney Council, and especially the Labour Party, was in disarray with services coming close to a stop. He believes that since that time, there have been vast improvements in the borough and the council—where all services are restored, and it became a functioning council again. Clr. Ünlüer contends that although the Labour Party lost votes in many local authorities in the 2006 elections, this was not the case in Hackney, largely due to the hard work of local Labour councilors. He sought to be a councilor, because minorities do not know their rights and the services that are available to them. He pointed that councilors do not get high salaries or have prestige or power, and "the only reward is to help someone in need." [20]. Similar to the experiences of Muslim councilors of different ethnic backgrounds, Turkish constituents, even from other wards, prefer attending his surgery particularly because he speaks Turkish.

He has been an active leader in the Turkish community, centered on the Aziziye Mosque in Stoke Newington, run and attended by the Turkish community. Aziziye Mosque's planning application had been accepted 12 years ago, when there were only two Muslim councilors in the Hackney Council. However, community leaders chose not to approach the Muslim councilors, and it took the Council

almost three years to grant the permission. Cllr. Ünlüer had become a councilor by the time Aziziye Mosque applied to open a supplementary school. He emphasized the fact that the application went through the normal legal procedure, and no special provisions were made. The school, which is situated in the Mosque, receives funds from the Local Education Fund, but not the council. It has English classes for women, most of whom are Turkish, and after-school program for kids.

Muslim and non-Muslim councilors point to several barriers to the achievement of Muslim demands. Some barriers have to do with the Muslim community (lack of English proficiency, unfamiliarity with the system, laziness, and an unwillingness to integrate), while others are due to direct and indirect forms of discrimination and budgetary pressures. For instance, Cllr. Kennedy acknowledged that there are forms of subtle discrimination against ethnic minority councilors. For example, what he calls “accentism” refers to prejudice caused by poor English skills of a councilor or constituent. It is hard to avoid it, for Kennedy even catches himself stereotyping because of accentism [21]. Cllr. Siddiqui also addressed the problem and said that when there is discrimination “it is most subtle than apparent” [18]. For instance, he told the story of a former Muslim councilor in Hackney, who lost his seat because of a smear campaign. Apparently, there were 17 council workers with his last name, and an Orthodox Jew, who wanted his ward, gave an interview to a racist newspaper—accusing the Muslim councilor of nepotism and corruption [18]. Cllr. Ünlüer also acknowledged that there are written and unwritten stereotypes of white English people as well as ethnic minorities [20]. According to Cllr. Demirci, another systematic factor that hinders the substantive representation of Muslim interests, is the budget:

Hackney is a very multicultural borough. If you provide something catered for one community, you have to do it for others and that puts a huge pressure on the budget. So they will try to be sensitive but they will not cater to one community and that’s where we come in. If it’s a huge issue for my community but not so much for another community, then we need to put pressure and say “no, actually you need to design this service for our community and take these specificities into consideration” [16].

In regards to the Muslim community’s failure to achieve a substantial amount of council grants, Cllr. Siddiqui said “There is a system in place to get all these things, and there are things they lack: the knowledge of how the system works, and they have to establish that they have been a service provider” [18]. In all three cases—mosque, school and grant applications—he criticized the Muslim community, for “Muslims have not learnt there is a way to go about it. It’s our fault, they keep it as personal not professional organizations” and “Hackney is in unfortunate situation. Muslim community is not well organized, and they are individualistic.” [18]. According to Cllr. Siddiqui, the best-working cohort of councilors is the Orthodox Jews, and the Muslim community does not:

...realize we have to work in the system. Orthodox Jews, I am praising them, there are seven recognized nurseries in this borough although only 2% Jews, two single-sex boy and two girl ones, they had three million of their own and the government gave them 10 million to run the system. They got this because they work with the system and they got the right. I am not saying they got it badly. It is not that they got 10 million so Muslims and Christians should get 10 million too. The Jews have two buildings for their old people, council gives them lunch, transportation, *etc.* for socialization. Muslims are 13.5% officially they have only three schools, but run on a family basis. They have been offered government grant, but they don’t want it because they want to keep their hold on it. We live in the UK, so I don’t drive on the right like I am

in the US! If I do the other way, I will be in collision. Therefore, we have to follow these and live like this. We live here, we have to compromise a bit. [18].

Another impediment working against the Muslim community is prevalent lack of English proficiency and the unwillingness to get over this. For instance:

Certain people think their language isn't good enough to see their councilor so they contact me. I try to encourage them because it is not good for me to solve their case for them. They should come and have contact with you. His contact with his local representative gives two things to that person: the councilor needs to realize he needs their vote; second, our people should realize that they live in the UK, there is a system to work, and they will never learn it if I help them. I joke with my Turkish friends to turn off their Turkish TV. They must learn the language, go to the library, read children's books, and listen to radio. [18].

Clr. Ünlüer contend that, except the last three years (2003–2006), England had been rated the best among all European countries for foreigners not being discriminated against, and allowing their socioeconomical success. The one exception, he argued, is the Turks who are lazy themselves [20]. As for the barriers to the accomplishment of minority demands, he said that:

The problem is with the attitude of Muslim communities. All those I know, they see themselves as guests here. They don't want to get involved in the politics here, but earn enough and leave. But they cannot leave either, their children are born and raised here. So this is a mistake in our thinking, and the first reason why particularly Turks are not involved in local politics. I do not think it has anything to do with the system here. I do believe there is unwritten discrimination but I find ourselves more responsible for this lack. [20].

Finally, Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK) CEO Zulfi Bukhari and Newham Councilor Abdulkarim Sheikh pointed about another barrier to the accomplishment of Muslim demands, and blamed mosque structure for lack of civic engagement [8]. Clr. Sheikh has been involved in Muslim organizations for 32 years, and believes that some people are very orthodox and primitive in their approach; in particular, the public engagement of women is curtailed [8].

4. Conclusions

The data sheds light on the link between descriptive and substantive representation. Although the findings do not undermine the role of minority representatives in advocating minority interests, it reveals other causal factors. The data finds that the high ethnic diversity of the Newham Borough with no dominant ethnic group, the lack of racial or religious divides among neighborhoods, and low racial tensions shapes the political culture of the council as well as the Muslim councilors and yields effective minority representation. Newham's unique demographic characteristics and local sociopolitical culture render non-Muslim councilors a significant role in the substantive representation of minority interests, including Muslim interests.

On the other hand, the case study of Hackney Council reveals that beyond high party fragmentation, ethnicity and religiosity of the Muslim councilors vary widely, thus hindering effective representation. In addition, their political incorporation is low, and the leadership positions they hold seem to have symbolic rather than substantive impact. The political behavior and representative styles of Muslim councilors reveal a moderate level of advocacy for Muslim group interests. However, both Muslim and

non-Muslim councilors are also reserved to extend particular group rights to avoid the escalation of similar demands from the other minority groups in the borough. Finally, the Hackney Council had been through a period of political turmoil and instability since the late 1990s, which impacted the ability and willingness of minority councilors and the Council as a whole to represent constituent interests effectively. All these factors account for the low government responsiveness to Muslim interests in Hackney.

The implication of Newham's case for broader discussions on representation is as follows: descriptive representation can serve substantive representation in local politics if the ethnic and religious composition of the local population is diverse enough without the dominance of a group. The voting power of a diverse local population encourages all politicians to collaborate with political representatives of the minority. The Hackney case supports this, as well as providing an example of how fragmentation on political, ethnic, religious, and gender lines prevents descriptive representation from transforming into substantive representation. In this case, the representatives from the minority groups remain mostly symbolic rather than serving group interests.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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