

# Every Vote Does Count



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*Iraqi Association Comment*

A General Election is gripping Britain and with the three mainstream parties vying to win votes across the country the political battle-lines have already been drawn. This election could be one of the closest fought elections in recent memory.

Immigration, education, jobs, the economy, public services and crime are among the top concerns of most voters, but for minority ethnic voters while these issues are of equal concern; the rise of the extremists and the continued alienation these voters feel from mainstream politics indicates that for many, politics is still a predominately white arena. According to an Electoral Commission report in 2005 there is still a huge gap between the voting levels of minority ethnic communities (BME) in comparison to whites. The report found that a significant number of BME communities feel that political parties did not stand for the changes they would like to see. Political parties still have a long way to go in order to convince BME communities that British politics is racially inclusive. The rhetoric of 'equality for all' often replaces visible and tangible results.

However, the ethnic minority votes will be more important than ever in the forthcoming general election, but ethnic minority voters are still massively undervalued and under-represented. The University of Warwick's Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations says that ethnic minorities voter registration is approaching levels of white voters and turnout is now higher than the national average. In the last general election the national average turnout was 61.4% yet for Bangladeshi voters it was 76%, Pakistanis 70% and Indians 67%. Black Africans matched the national average at 61% and only Black Caribbean voters were lower at 54%. Although the ethnic minorities are 10% of the UK population, the total number of ethnic minority origin MPs does not reflect that. Meanwhile, in this election, the minority ethnic vote could determine the outcome in more than 100 seats.

We encourage and promote our community members to register and vote, for example in the greater London area, on average, more than 2500 British Iraqis live in each of the 33 boroughs of the London area. They are floating voters when it comes to local and general election, particularly young voters of Iraqi origin. For example, in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, many of our community members are settled, and with successful businesses. However, in Hammersmith and Fulham borough, not all the local politicians have had an interest in our community's achievements and needs, it is not only a terrible disappointment, but equally losing important undecided voters.

In the London area, the west of the capital is where most Iraqis live. In other parts of the country, our community is growing significantly, particularly in Cardiff, Manchester and Birmingham, and other parts of the country. The history of Iraqi settlement in this country can be traced back to late 1930s. Since then, the wave of arrivals has been dominated by the turbulent and bloody political history of Iraq.

Comments are welcome [info@iraqiassociation.org](mailto:info@iraqiassociation.org)