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ARTICLE

Voted in, standing out: Public response to immigrants' political accession

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Abstract

How do dominant-group natives react to immigrants' political integration? We argue that ethnic minority immigrants winning political office makes natives feel threatened, triggering animosity. We test this dynamic across the 2010–2019 UK general elections, using hate crime police records, public opinion data, and text data from over 500,000 regional and local newspaper articles. While past work has not established a causal relationship between minorities' political power gains and dominant-group animosity, we identify natives' hostile reactions with a regression discontinuity design that leverages close election results between immigrant-origin ethnic minority and dominant-group candidates. We find that minority victories increase hate crimes by 67%, exclusionary attitudes by 66%, and negative media coverage of immigrant groups by 110%. Consistent with power threat and social identity theories, these findings demonstrate a strong and widespread negative reaction—encompassing a violence-prone fringe and the mass public—against ethnic minority immigrants' integration into majority settings.

How do dominant-group natives respond to immigrant-origin ethnic minorities' integration into political institutions?[1] It has long been argued that the economic and political ascendance of a minority group can trigger hostility from members of the majority group concerned by a real (Bobo, 1983) or perceived (Blumer, 1958) threat to the status quo. Hostility to minority groups can occur in response to structural social changes like population shifts (Blau, 1977) and economic restructuring (Sharma, 2015), or if previously disenfranchised groups increase their political power (Van Dyke & Soule, 2002). Such hostility, expressed as violence or exclusionary attitudes, is partly reactionary and can be a means of reasserting social control (King & Brustein, 2006).

Prior studies suggest that when immigrant-origin ethnic minorities integrate into political institutions, dominant-group natives will perceive this as a challenge to their power and social position (Dancygier, 2010). Using UK election results, we explore majority group members' responses to ethnic minority immigrants winning seats in Parliament.

Our study's theoretical expectations and research design are grounded in threat theory, which encompasses two related strands with similar observable implications for hostility to immigrant minorities. First, *power threat theory* explains intergroup conflict as a clash over valued scarce goods, including claims to

[1]We use the term *immigrant* to refer to both first- and later-generation immigrants. We use it interchangeably with the term *ethnic minority*, as many of the numerically sizable minority groups in rich democracies have immigrant origins.

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The Cornell Center for Social Sciences verified that the data and replication code submitted to the AJPS Dataverse replicates the numerical results reported in the main text of this article.

social status and privilege (e.g., Blalock, 1967). Conflict in power threat theory is rooted in social-structural sources of group difference. Elections between ethnic minority and dominant-group candidates, under this theory, are a clash over economic, political, and social resources. Losing to an ethnic minority candidate threatens dominant-group natives' control over those valued resources.

The starting point of the second strand of threat theory, *social identity theory*, is that individuals' sense of self is based on the status of the groups they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because people strive for positive self-worth, when these groups are negatively evaluated, people attempt to make their group more positively distinct. Hostility here, is thus based on threat related to group categorization and social status differentiation. Elections, in this context, inherently entail a social comparison. Dominant-group natives consider an electoral loss as a threat to their social identity, and in turn their self-worth.

Both strands of threat theory imply that minority political victories trigger threats against the dominant group, rooted in concerns either about resources or about social status. Both strands also assume that conflict results from dominant-group desires to suppress such threats. The close correspondence we find between hostility against immigrant minorities and minority electoral victories underscores the political role of threat and of dominant-group efforts to counter it.

Our study addresses two limitations of prior studies, which contend that when marginalized groups gain political power, the dominant group responds with hostility. In a first limitation, past work has struggled to establish a causal relationship between minorities' political power gains and dominant-group hostile responses. Common proxy measures such as the size of the minority group (Quillian, 1995) do not necessarily capture the group's political power, even though they indirectly measure competition for scarce resources. Studies that capture minorities' political power with direct measures—such as the ratio of minority-to-majority votes in recent elections (D'Alessio et al., 2002), the share of legislators that are members of the minority group (Van Dyke & Soule, 2002), and whether a minority holds mayoral office (Jacobs & Wood, 1999)—are vulnerable to identification concerns. Particularly, these studies do not account for unobserved factors determining both minority political power and hostility against minorities. We address these concerns using a regression discontinuity (RD) design of close parliamentary elections, comparing constituencies where a minority candidate narrowly wins to constituencies where a minority candidate narrowly loses.

Second, previous work is ambiguous about which members of the majority group respond negatively to gains in minority political power. Much of the existing literature focuses on violent backlash in the form of hate crimes (Dugan & Chenoweth, 2020), lynchings (Hovland & Sears, 1940), and interracial killings (D'Alessio et al., 2002); it does not evaluate whether such negative behavior is more widely shared among majority group members. Although some studies have established a correlation between minority political power gains and mass public opinion (e.g., Quillian, 1996), it is unclear whether the conditions that trigger a violent backlash also generate less extreme (attitudinal) responses. We address this concern by exploring—within the context of a single (electoral) event—outcomes at two different societal levels: *hate crimes*, a behavior at the tail of the societal distribution, and *attitudes toward migrants*, which captures mass public opinion. The media possibly profits from these electoral events. As such, we corroborate our results on the mass public by gathering data on *newspapers' tone toward migrant groups*, which reflects the response of "fourth estate" elites to the election results, as well as their expectations regarding readers' increased engagement.

Leveraging close results between immigrant-origin ethnic minority and dominant-group candidates in the 2010 to 2019 UK general elections, we find that a minority victory triggered hostility against minority communities. In constituencies where ethnic minority candidates narrowly won a parliamentary seat, compared to where they narrowly lost, the subsequent hate crime rate is significantly higher. Three months after the election, we identify an effect of .88 standard deviations, which corresponds to a 67% increase in hate crimes relative to the average hate crime rate in constituencies where minority candidates narrowly lost. We further provide evidence that this effect likely captures an increase in hate crime incidence, and not merely in reporting. As for the mass public, we find that minority victories also shape mass attitudes toward immigrants, significantly increasing the share of those who state that too many immigrants have been let into the UK. The size of the effect corresponds to a 66% decrease in inclusionary attitudes (or.65 standard deviations). The media response is consistent with that of the mass public. We computed a measure of negative speech about a candidate's ethnic group, by analyzing text with Natural Language Processing (NLP) tasks from over 500,000 newspaper articles that we matched to the ethnic background of the candidates and to their constituencies. Three months after the election, we detect a .67 standard deviations difference between the proportion of negative mentions of the narrow winners' and narrow losers' ethnic groups.

This article contributes to the literature on intergroup conflict that is rooted in Blalock's (1967) original conceptualization of threat theory. While the *correlation* between minority political power gains and majority-group hostility has been established, we provide causal estimates of such animosity. We

also show within a single event that the hostility to minority group's political gains is not limited to a violence-prone fringe; it is also observed among the mass public. Supporting the main mechanism in our argument—threat, we provide empirical evidence consistent with material and status threat-triggering concerns.

Subgroup analyses show that hostile responses are concentrated on candidates who pose a greater threat to the status quo—for example, Muslim and women candidates, and those who stand with left-leaning parties, which are more likely to support redistributive policies that challenge existing social hierarchies. Consistent with the mass public response, increased negative media reporting is most evident in right-wing newspapers, which arguably target a dominant-group segment that is most threatened by pluralistic values and redistribution.

We also advance the literature on hate crime targeting minority ethnic groups. We enrich work on situational trigger events, which hitherto focused on reactions to unexpected shocks (Dipoppa et al., 2023), and to minorities perpetrating terror attacks (Deloughery et al., 2012) and serious felonies (Jäckle & König, 2018). We demonstrate that minorities can trigger a similar violent response by winning parliamentary elections, arguably because their political ascendance heightens dominant-group members' sense of threat to their dominant position. In doing so, this article also complements existing studies identifying dominant-group electoral responses to the political incorporation of ethnic (Zonszein & Grossman, 2023) and religious (Allie, 2023) minorities.

A small number of studies has assessed variation in media coverage of immigration based on immigrant-related events (mostly terrorist attacks perpetrated by members of minority groups); these focus on national media coverage (e.g., Bleich et al., 2016). We assess instead whether (and how) media coverage of migrants changes in response to ethnic minorities integrating into host country political institutions. Our study contributes to the political communication literature by showing that the electoral success of a migrant group changes the amount and type of national and local media coverage it receives. Media coverage changes possibly to heighten the public's engagement, given the election context and the public's response to the election result.

MINORITY POLITICAL ACCESSION AND INTERGROUP HOSTILITY

We argue that dominant-group natives respond with hostility to ethnic minority electoral victories as they trigger sociostructural threats (discussed in power threat theory) and identity threats (established in social identity theory).

Power threat theory

A central tenet of minority-group threat theories is that real or perceived intergroup competition for scarce resources can provoke hostility. Group conflict involves objective competition between members of different groups as well as the subjective perception that outgroup members threaten the dominant group's valued resources, norms, and traditions.

Power threat theory provided the theoretical foundation for a long-standing body of interdisciplinary research on interethnoracial relations.[2] According to this perspective, minorities who start occupying spaces traditionally dominated by an ethnic majority group are perceived as a threat to the majority's social, political, and economic resources. Empirically, this body of work consistently finds a positive correlation between the relative size of a minority population and hostility toward that group (Green et al., 1998). As the relative size of the minority population increases, the threat increases as well—for example, by heightening interethnic competition for scarce resources like jobs, housing, education, and health care (i.e., an economic and social threat; Jackson, 1989), or by increasing the potential for minority political mobilization (i.e., a political threat; Leighley, 2001). As such threats increase, the willingness of (some) dominant-group members to allow minorities into "their" spaces decreases, and denigration of minorities increases.

Evidence of such a dynamic has been provided by linking the relative size (change in size or rank) of a minority population to hate crimes (e.g., Cikara et al., 2022), and negative attitudes toward ethnoracial minorities (e.g., Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010) and immigrants (e.g., Alba et al., 2005). Prior research has also discussed threat-triggering conditions other than the relative size of a minority group. Blalock's (1967) central link between intergroup conflict and competition for scarce resources has naturally been extended to economic conditions. Worsening economic circumstances among dominant-group members (Sharma, 2015), like job loss (Van Dyke & Soule, 2002) and unemployment (Mayda, 2006), have also been found to trigger hostility against minorities. In addition to minority-group threat theories based on competition for material resources, the hostile response to changing ethnic demographics in rich democracies has also been explained as a reaction to a cultural (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014), and national identity threat (Sniderman et al., 2004), and to the mere exposure to immigrants (Hangartner et al., 2019).

A handful of studies addresses the political threat aspect of minority-group threat theory. D'Alessio et al. (2002), for example, use the ratio of Black-to-White

[2] See Riek et al. (2006) for a useful review.

votes cast in South Carolina to measure the threat to the dominant group's political status. Jacobs and Wood (1999) likewise find a significant relationship between the presence of Black US mayors and White killings of Blacks. In discussing ethnic conflict, Hardin (1995) conceptualizes public office as a positional good that is fundamental in the allocation of distributional goods like welfare benefits. Relatedly, Dancygier (2010) explains that immigrant-native conflict in the UK arises from immigrants' costly material demands, to which political parties are responsive. Natives attack immigrant-origin minorities when their presence allegedly reduces natives' material welfare. As such, Dancygier (2010) finds a positive association between the share of minorities in local councils and anti-immigrant hostility, but only under conditions of economic scarcity.

Social identity theory

According to social identity theory, individuals form their identities and define their interests based on group membership, and evaluate their own group by comparing its attributes to those of other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Importantly for our context, an outgroup becomes a target of comparison when circumstances, such as elections, make it more salient. When a comparison against an outgroup is unsatisfactory, people attempt to make their group more positively distinct. The goal of such a differentiation is to maintain or achieve social superiority—and by extension, a more positive self-worth. As such, the process of group differentiation is essentially competitive. Insofar as social differentiation rests on comparisons related to status, social competition is expected to be linked to intergroup hostility, as individuals seek to change their group's social position.

Minority electoral victory as a threat

Power threat and social identity theories both imply that losing an election to an ethnic minority candidate poses threats to the resources and status of the dominant group; majority-group members, especially those committed to their social group, thus react aggressively to suppress such threats.[3] Building on power threat theory, we argue that electoral competitions between ethnic minority and dominant-group candidates establish an arena for intergroup competition for a diverse set of valuable resources. Elections contested by candidates from different ethnic groups are often seen as a way to accommodate coethnic preferences (Dancygier, 2010). Therefore, losing an election to a minority candidate threatens the dominant group's access to such resources. Building on social identity theory, we argue that elections between ethnic minority and dominant-group candidates trigger intergroup competition for social status. An electoral loss may produce negative feelings and hostile behavior because it has direct implications on a dominant-group member's standing and sense of self (Huddy et al., 2015).

Political entrepreneurs may capitalize on these sociostructural and identity threats, increasing the election results' salience and the hostile response to minority victories. When elections take place along ethnoracial lines, political elites have incentives to stoke communal grievances to mobilize voters (Horrowitz, 1985). Such mobilization heightens ethnic identification and ethnocentrism (Eifert et al., 2010), which is frequently expressed as hostility against outgroups. Even when political elites do not exploit elections along ethnoracial lines, we argue that the result of these elections, on its own, may trigger hostility against minorities. Elections contested by ethnic minority candidates may operate as an external stimulus (or informational cue about the size, growth, and mobilization capacity of ethnic minority groups) that connects the dominant group's changing local demographic, economic, and political context with their behavior and attitudes toward minorities. Such a stimulus (or informational cue) reinforces the hostile response to losing an election to an ethnic minority candidate. Indeed, past work demonstrates that providing information to dominant-group members about changing ethnic demographics triggers concerns about their status, standing, and potential vulnerabilities, which in turn, promote the denigration of ethnic minorities (Craig et al., 2018), and moreover, that dominant-group members react more strongly to a changing local demographic context when primed by external stimuli that reinforce that threat (Hopkins, 2010).

ETHNIC MINORITY CANDIDATES AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPs) IN THE UK

We test the above argument using the case of minority candidates in close parliamentary elections in the UK. The number of ethnic minority candidates has been increasing over time, in part due to a 2010 agreement between the three largest parties to set internal targets to increase minorities' representation. In the last four general elections (2010–2019), ethnic minority candidates have run in 58% of England and Wales's parliamentary constituencies and have won in 28% of the elections they contested. The number of ethnic

[3] Appendix L (Supplementary Information [SI], p. 37) discusses theoretical predictions for members with high and low commitment to their social group.

minority MPs has thus increased during this period from 26 to 65 (10% of members of the House of Commons).[4]

MPs in the United Kingdom are constituency oriented, and the personal relationships they cultivate with their constituents make them highly visible. About 66% of British constituents can spontaneously recall the name of their MP, twice the recall level of US Members of Congress (McKay, 2020). The turn toward a focus on constituency services was set in motion by the postwar welfare state, which increased citizens' interactions with the state as they navigated a complex set of rules and eligibility criteria. Recent reforms in Parliament—such as the foundation of the Backbench Business Committee—have further reinforced the centrality of constituency concerns (McKay, 2020). Although parliamentary institutions restrict individual MPs' ability to engage in redistribution, MPs often trade off their time to participate in government–opposition debate (one of their most fundamental resources) for constituency representation, and are frequently involved in local casework, even when matters are legally the responsibility of local government, like housing (Crewe, 2015).

Existing evidence suggests that ethnic minority politicians are more eager than their White counterparts to represent minorities. For example, Minority MPs (especially those who do not belong to the Conservative Party) are more likely to believe that racism has held back British minorities, and that it is their duty to address inequalities by prioritizing minority concerns (Sobolewska et al., 2018). On the demand side, immigrants believe that coethnic politicians better understand and act on their communities' interests (Bloemraad, 2006).

In this context, control over political office by a member of an ethnic minority group can be viewed as a threat to the privileged position of the dominant group. Such a threat may be more salient when the increased political presence of ethnic minorities is backed by institutional efforts to increase their representation (King & Brustein, 2006), such as the 2010 multiparty agreement mentioned above. The threat may be based on objective conditions of competition: ethnic minority MPs are more likely to advocate redistributive policies that benefit their fellow group members and may use constituency services to redirect attention to marginalized groups. However, such threats can also be based on the perception that ethnic minority MPs threaten the hierarchical social order: The presence of ethnic minority politicians in Parliament may signal the demise of a "White political elite" (Clark, 1994). Moreover, minority politicians have been shown to increase minorities' sense of political efficacy and boost their political participation—and thus the prospect of electing more minority-group representatives (Maxwell, 2012). We study a context in which ethnic minority political victories could be thought as jeopardizing the resources and status of dominant-group members and may thus lead to hostility toward minorities.

DATA AND OUTCOME MEASURES

We measure violent animosity with the number of police-recorded hate crimes. Hate crime offenders are not representative of the broader public: In the UK, most are White, male, and under 25 years old (Roberts et al., 2013). Thus, hate crimes cannot approximate the mass public's response. We instead measure the mass response with public opinion data on attitudes toward immigrants. Finally, to substantiate the mass response, we assess the media response using the valence of newspaper articles about candidates' ethnic groups. We collect these data for the longest period available covering the general elections from 2010 to 2019.

Hate crimes

Data

We use monthly counts of police-recorded hate crimes in England and Wales desegregated by Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Local Authority District (LAD) from April 2014 to September 2020. We obtained these data from the Home Office via a Freedom of Information request by offense subcode for racially or religiously aggravated offenses (e.g., "racially or religiously aggravated assault with injury") and equivalent nonaggravated offenses (e.g., "assault with injury").[5] The data contain 327,840 hate crimes, 61% of which occurred in postelection months and constituencies in which minority candidates ran for Parliament.

Outcomes

We measure violence against ethnic minorities as the number of hate crimes per 1,000 residents reported each month in a given constituency. We treat the month of the general election as the first month and focus on crimes committed up to 9 months later, which corresponds to the maximum period of crime data available after the 2019 election as provided

[4] This total is still below the number (93 MPs) that would reflect the ethnic make-up of the UK population (Uberoi & Tunnicliffe, 2021).

[5] We do not have information from 30 CSPs that do not use offense subcodes to report hate crimes, or information about perpetrators' and victims' ethnicity. We cannot assess whether victims share a candidate's ethnicity.

by the Home Office. As a placebo outcome, we use the monthly constituency crime rate of equivalent offenses that are not motivated by race or religion. Appendix B (SI p. 1) describes the process we used to assign hate crimes from LADs to parliamentary constituencies, including a validation exercise.

Mass public opinion

Data

Public opinion data are from the 2010, 2015, 2017, and 2019 waves of the British Election Study, which are face-to-face postelection surveys fielded immediately after a general election and are representative of UK eligible voters. We focus on White respondents; for comparability, we subset the data to England and Wales, for which we have hate crime data.[6] Pooling all survey rounds generates a sample of 2,200 respondents in constituency-elections where minority candidates ran for a seat in Parliament and have at least one respondent in 45% of these constituency-elections. We analyze the data at the individual level since they are not representative of constituencies.

Outcomes

Following the migration literature (e.g., Scheve & Slaughter, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2021), we approximate inclusionary attitudes toward immigrants with attitudes toward migrant entry policy. In particular, we rely on a question included in the 2015, 2017, and 2019 postelection surveys that asks whether too many immigrants have been let into the UK. To assess the robustness of our results, we compute two additional outcomes that use all other available survey items on attitudes toward immigration and ethnic minorities. These items were either included in all survey years, but the wording of questions and answers (and their range) changed, or were not included for all four elections. We use an index of left–right views on topics unrelated to immigration as a placebo outcome. Appendix C (SI p. 3) describes the survey items and how the outcome variables were computed.

Media tone toward migrant groups

Data

We use data from over 500,000 articles from 350 national, regional, and local UK newspapers, from 2010 to 2019. These data are from Common Crawl, which is an open repository of web crawl data. We assume that an article refers to a candidate's ethnic group when three conditions are met: (1) The publication date is within 10 months after each general election (the maximum between the 2019 election and the most recent article), (2) the article mentions terms referring to the candidate's country or nationality of origin (extracted with CoreNLP named entity annotator), and (3) such mentions co-occur in the article with a reference to the candidate's constituency (extracted by tokenizing the article and finding tokens that match place names in the Index of Place Names in Great Britain, and mapping to the corresponding constituency). These data include almost 150,000 mentions from 156 newspapers that meet these three conditions.

Outcomes

Using CoreNLP's five-category sentiment annotator, we compute a measure of media tone about the candidate's ethnic group. From the relevant articles, we extract the sentiment of the sentences that mention the candidate's country and nationality. Our main outcome is the ratio between negative valence mentions and total mentions about the candidate's ethnic group each month. We focus on such a ratio rather than on the number of negative mentions, because the result of the election may increase the salience of the winning candidate's ethnic group. We also compute the proportion of positive- and neutral-valence mentions, which we use to assess the general increase in salience.

To increase confidence in our main measure of tone, we compute a placebo measure—mentions of countries and nationalities in North America, Western Europe, and Oceania in the candidate's constituency, which should not be affected by the identity of the winning candidate. Appendix D (SI pp. 4–7) describes the process we used to gather newspaper data and to compute the outcome measures. It also discusses the validity of the named entity and sentiment annotators, and their advantages compared to other methods measuring the tone of the text.

Election results and candidates' ethnic backgrounds

General election results data for the 2010, 2015, and 2017 elections are from the Electoral Commission and for the 2019 election from the UK Parliament House of Commons Library. We construct a binary variable of a parliamentary candidate's ethnicity as either White or Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME). We identify the ethnic origin of candidates based on their

[6] Appendix I.8 (SI pp. 29–30) shows that results are robust to including Scotland.

country of birth, and their parents and grandparents' countries of birth. Appendix E (SI pp. 7–9) provides details.

In these four general elections, 923 ethnic minority candidates from 334 constituencies stood for Parliament in England and Wales, with increasing numbers over time (Appendix Figure E.1a, SI p. 9). Because our estimation strategy is based on the strongest minority candidate in each constituency, our sample is of 662 candidates with 28% winners. These candidates are fairly split between the two main parties and across geographical areas (Appendix Figures E.1b and **E.1c**, SI p. 9).

Constituency characteristics

We use data from the 2001 and 2011 Census to compute characteristics of a constituency that may determine both an ethnic minority win and an outcome of interest: the constituency population share that is foreign born, ethnic or religious minority, and unemployed; the share of households with high levels of deprivation; population density and vote share for the right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP) or British National Party (BNP) in the previous election. Appendix Table A.1 (SI p. 2) presents the summary statistics for our main outcome, treatment, and control variables.

ESTIMATION METHOD

We test whether the accession of members of immigrant-origin ethnic minority groups to political office triggers hostility to immigrant communities using a sharp RD design. Thus, we compare our outcome measures between constituencies in which minority candidates narrowly win versus narrowly lose (or equivalently, where dominant-group candidates narrowly win). This design allows us to causally identify hostility effects because constituencies where a minority candidate narrowly wins or loses to a dominant-group candidate are, on average, otherwise identical.

In our RD design, the score is the constituency's ethnic minority margin of victory defined as the difference between the vote share of the strongest ethnic minority candidate and the vote share of his or her strongest dominant-group opponent. Therefore, an ethnic minority candidate must be on the ballot to include a constituency in our estimation sample. This is the case for 58% of the constituencies in England and Wales across the 2010–2019 elections. The RD strategy estimates a local average treatment effect that is representative of these constituencies (Appendix Table F.1, SI p.10, characterizes them).

For our estimation, we use local polynomial methods to fit two separate regression functions above and below the victory cutoff. The estimated RD effect is thus computed as the difference between the two estimated intercepts. Formally, we estimate the following weighted linear regression:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{itm} = \alpha &+ \beta_1 \mathit{VictoryMargin}_{it} \\ &+ \tau \mathit{EthnicMinorityVictory}_{it} \\ &+ \beta_2 \left(\mathit{EthnicMinorityVictory}_{it} \cdot \mathit{VictoryMargin}_{it}\right) \\ &+ X_i'\lambda + \epsilon_{itm}, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{itm} is one of our outcome variables measured for constituency i in election year t, and month m after the election.[7] $\mathit{VictoryMargin}_{it}$ is the score, which controls for the minority's vote-share winning margin, and $\mathit{EthnicMinorityVictory}_{it}$ is a dummy variable indicating that a minority candidate won the election ($\mathrm{I}(\mathit{VictoryMargin}_{it} > 0) = 1$). The weights are computed with a triangular kernel of the distance between each observation's score and the cutoff. These kernel-based estimators require a bandwidth for implementation (observations outside the bandwidth receive zero weight). Following common practice, we select an optimal bandwidth that minimizes the mean squared error (MSE) of the RD estimate (Calonico et al., 2014). For implementation, we use the `rdrobust` software.

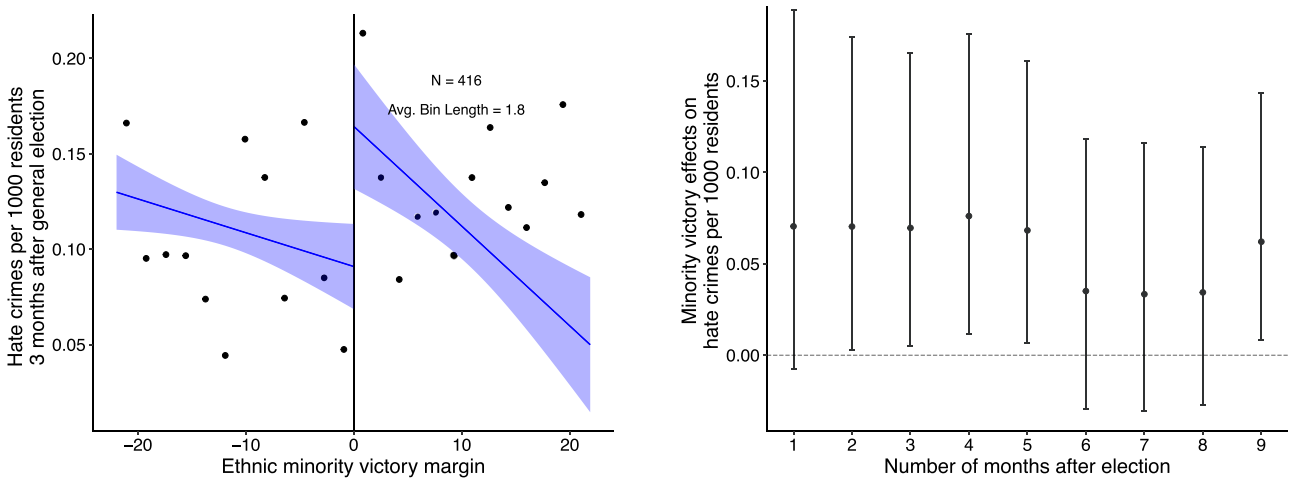
The quantity of interest is τ which, under the assumption of continuity of the expected potential outcomes at the cutoff, captures the local average treatment effect *at the cutoff* of an ethnic minority victory on our outcomes.[8] Because we are pooling observations across elections, τ does not necessarily recover the average of all the single-election minority victory effects, as the number of close elections changes over time. Instead, τ reflects the pooled effect (Sekhon & Titiunik, 2012). For efficiency gains, we control for predetermined characteristics of candidates (e.g., incumbency), constituencies (listed in the section "Constituency characteristics"), and survey respondents (for public opinion outcomes). X_i captures a vector of such characteristics.[9]

We cluster the standard errors ϵ_{itm} by constituency-election to account for the dependence of hate crimes and media tone within a constituency over time after an election, and for the dependence of respondents'

[7] Media tone is measured for ethnic group e, constituency i, election year t, and month m, and the public opinion outcomes are measured for individual j, in constituency i in election year t; therefore, the outcome and error term are indexed as $eitm$, jit, respectively.

[8] Below we report empirical tests supporting this assumption.

[9] For public opinion outcomes, we have X_{jit}. Our covariate-adjusted estimator estimates the same quantity as the unadjusted estimator when covariates are continuous at the cutoff, and are included linearly, additive-separably, and without interacting them with the treatment (Cattaneo et al., 2019). Our estimation complies with these conditions.



(a) 3 months after general election (b) 1–9 months after general election

FIGURE 1 Ethnic minority victory effects on hate crime. *Note*: In (a) lines are average monthly hate crime rates (with 95% confidence intervals) from local linear regression with covariate adjustment fitted to the sample of units within the MSE-optimal bandwidth of ±22 percentage points around the victory cutoff. Points are average monthly hate crime rates for equally spaced mimicking-variance bins. In (b) points are conventional RD estimates of minority victory effects and lines depict 95% robust bias-corrected confidence intervals. These confidence intervals are centered around the robust bias-corrected estimate rather than the conventional RD estimate.

attitudes within a constituency and election year. Below we report conventional point estimates and robust bias-corrected inferences.[10]

RESULTS

Hate crimes

Figure 1a presents the effect of minority candidates' victory on the incidence of hate crimes 3 months after the election. To the right of the victory cutoff, the line (with 95% confidence intervals) depicts the average monthly hate crime rate in constituencies where minority candidates win, for different values of the victory margin. To the left of the cutoff, the line shows the average monthly hate crime rate in constituencies where minority candidates lose. These lines show that there is a jump at the victory cutoff: when a minority candidate goes from narrowly losing to narrowly winning a seat in Parliament, hate crimes in the candidate's constituency increase by 7 per 100,000 residents. This means that a minority win results in an additional 4.9 hate crimes in the average constituency (which contains about 70,000 eligible voters) in the 3 months after an election. Such an effect is equivalent to .88 standard deviations and corresponds to a 67% increase in hate crimes relative to the average hate crime rate in constituencies where minority candidates barely lose. Table 1 reports the point estimate from Figure 1a with robust bias-corrected inference, as well as point estimates using half the MSE-optimal bandwidth, and a fixed bandwidth of 10 percentage points.

Figure 1b displays estimates of the victory effects on hate crime by the number of months since the general election. While it provides suggestive evidence that these effects decay over time, the effects are not statistically distinguishable from each other across months. Appendix Table G.1 (SI p. 16) presents these effect estimates, estimates of their inference, the size of the MSE-optimal bandwidth, and the effective sample size (i.e., the number of observations within the bandwidth). It also reports estimates from a specification that does not include predetermined covariates. Across specifications, the effects are in the same direction and of a similar magnitude and are statistically significant when we control for predetermined covariates.

Validity tests and robustness checks

The RD estimates would be invalid if candidates sort around the winning threshold, in which case observations on either side of the cutoff might not be comparable. Following common practice to validate our design, we conduct density tests, which show that the approximate number of observations just above

[10] Marshall (2024) argues that RD effect estimates of elected politician characteristics suffer from potential bias from *compensating differentials*. This concern is most relevant to studies assessing politicians' actions. We assess instead constituents' actions. If candidate characteristics affect hostility, our estimates are then a compound treatment effect of candidates' ethnicity and other factors like competence.

TABLE 1 Ethnic minority victory effects on hate crime.

	Hate crimes per 1,000 residents		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
I(VictoryMargin > 0) = 1	.070	.102	.105
	(.041)	(.038)	(.038)
Average hate crime rate in minority lost constituencies	.103	.065	.062
R^2	.317	.536	.553
Number of effective observations	416	200	184
Number of observations	2,080	2,080	2,080
Number of clusters	520	520	520
Bandwidth size	22.285	11.143	10.000
MSE-optimal bandwidth	22.285	22.285	22.285

Note: The dependent variable is monthly hate crimes per 1,000 residents in a constituency 3 months after election. The average treatment effect at the cutoff is estimated with local linear regression with a triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth in (1), half MSE-optimal in (2) and fixed at 10 percentage points in (3). In parenthesis standard errors robust bias-corrected and clustered by constituency-election. Models control for predetermined covariates.

the cutoff is not significantly different from the number of observations just below it, and covariate tests that seek to show null RD effects on relevant predetermined variables. To ensure that there are no other threats to the validity of our results, we conduct a series of tests, which demonstrate that our results are not sensitive to the bandwidth choice or to the order of the fitted polynomials, and a series of robustness checks, including testing placebo outcomes, ruling out possible hate crime reporting biases (by assessing effects on violent hate crimes), and estimating effects with a difference-in-differences approach. Appendix G (SI pp. 11–20) presents these tests, which support the validity of our results.

Theoretically driven subgroup analysis

Grounded on theories of threat, we assess whether ethnic minorities' accession to political office interacts with five conditions that arguably make minority victories more threatening: (1) local conditions, such as migrant influx and economic downturn, are presumed to affect perceptions of relative deprivation, which would heighten the zero-sum nature of electoral competition and therefore the likelihood of a hostile response; (2) whether a candidate is Muslim, as this may raise concerns about "threats to British life" for dominant-group members susceptible to ethnocentric movements, and possibly also for cosmopolitans whose socially liberal inclinations do not square with Islamic values (Dancygier, 2017); (3) candidates' gender, as hate crime perpetrators (mostly White men) may be concerned about women entering historically men-dominated institutions, and furthering women's interests (e.g., Catalano, 2009); (4) candidates' political affiliation, as Labour-affiliated minorities have a more liberal ideology on racial and social spending issues, and are more likely to address long-standing inequalities by prioritizing minority concerns (Sobolewska et al., 2018), which may trigger stronger concerns among dominant-group members who favor the status quo; and (5) whether a constituency elects an ethnic minority candidate for the first time, activating new threat perceptions. In Appendix H (SI pp. 23–24), we consider whether, rather than threat, the hostile response to a minority victory is driven by the participation of UKIP and the party's mobilization around Brexit. We show that UKIP is not likely to be a central explanation.

Appendix Figure G.10a (SI p. 21) illustrates that the effect of a minority win on hate crimes in constituencies with a high influx of migrants over the decade before the election is larger and statistically distinguishable from the estimate of the effect in constituencies with a low influx of migrants (the test statistic of the difference in coefficients is $t = 2.14$). However, in contrast to Dancygier's (2010) finding that immigrants' political power provokes immigrant–native conflict only in poorer areas, we find that, while larger, the effect of a minority win in constituencies with a high increase in unemployment over the decade before the election is indistinguishable from that in constituencies with a low unemployment increase (test statistic is $t = .69$).

Moreover, we find suggestive evidence that minority victories have a stronger effect on hate crime if the candidate has a Muslim background (Appendix Figure G.11a, SI p. 22), and if the candidate is a woman (Appendix Figure G.11b, SI p. 22). We also find that the hate crime response is concentrated in constituencies where minorities stand as candidates with left-leaning parties (Appendix Figure G.12a, SI p. 22). Conservative minority candidates and MPs not only do not prioritize minority concerns as their Labour counterparts do, but their political ideology is also appealing to the voters who are more likely to negatively respond to minorities winning office

(Karpowitz et al., 2021). A Conservative minority win therefore does not pose a threat to the status quo in the same way that a Labour minority win does, thus muting the hostile response.[11] This finding suggests an interaction effect between candidates' ethnic minority background and political affiliation. Tellingly, when we focus on constituencies where only White candidates stand for Parliament, we do not find that, relative to constituencies closely won by a White Conservative candidate, a White Labour close victory increases hate crimes after the election; the coefficients are close to zero and statistically insignificant (Appendix Figure G.12b, SI p. 22). Together, the results in Appendix Figure G.12 (SI p. 22) suggest that the documented hostile response is not a generalized backlash to a shift into left-wing politics. Instead, a candidate's political affiliation plays a role in hostility only insofar as the candidate has an ethnic minority background, supporting our theoretical expectations stemming from threat theory.

Finally, if a minority win serves as an information cue that changes threat perceptions, then a violent response should be more likely in constituencies that elect a minority for the first time. While our model specification isolates incumbency effects,[12] we assess this expectation by controlling for an indicator of whether a constituency has had an ethnic minority MP at least once prior to any of the elections in our sample. We find that the RD estimate shrinks and is not statistically significant when we control for this variable (Appendix Figure G.10b, SI p. 21), suggesting that the hate crime response to minority wins is concentrated mainly in constituencies that elect minorities for the first time.

Mass public opinion

Figure 2 presents the main effect of minority candidates' victory on mass attitudes toward immigrants. To the right of the victory cutoff, the line (with 95% confidence intervals) shows the average proportion of White respondents who *do not* think that "too many immigrants have been let into the country" in constituencies where minority candidates win. To the left of the threshold, the line depicts the proportion of White respondents with such an opinion in constituencies where minority candidates lose. These lines indicate a drop at the victory threshold: when a minority candidate goes from barely losing to barely winning a seat in Parliament, the proportion of White

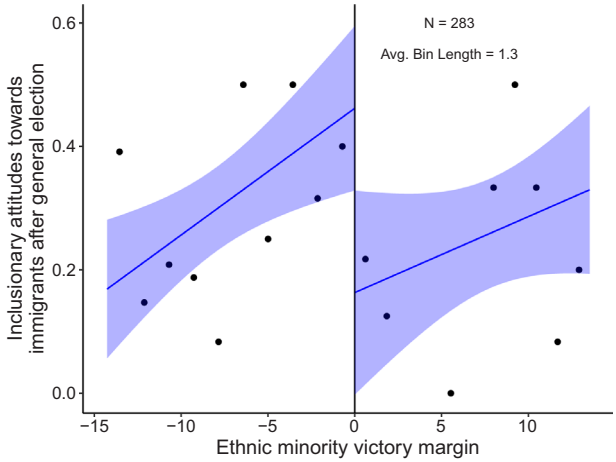


FIGURE 2 Ethnic minority victory effects on attitudes toward immigrants. *Note*: Lines indicate the average proportion of respondents who do not think that "too many immigrants have been let into the country" (with 95% confidence intervals) from local linear regression with covariate adjustment fitted to the sample of units within the MSE-optimal bandwidth of ±14 percentage points around the victory cutoff. Points denote the average proportion of respondents who do not think that "too many immigrants have been let into the country" for equally spaced mimicking-variance bins.

respondents who hold inclusionary attitudes toward immigrants decreases by 30 percentage points. This effect is equivalent to .65 standard deviations and corresponds to a 66% decrease in inclusionary attitudes relative to the average attitude in constituencies where minority candidates narrowly lose. Table 2 shows the point estimate from Figure 2 with robust bias-corrected inference, as well as point estimates using half the MSE-optimal bandwidth, and a fixed bandwidth of 10 percentage points. Because public opinion data are sparse, we refrain from assessing subgroup effects in this section, given power constraints.

Validity tests and robustness checks

Appendix Table I.2 (rows 4–6, SI p. 30) presents the effect estimates and all other relevant statistics for model specifications with and without covariates. The RD estimates are consistent and statistically significant across specifications. Appendix I (SI pp. 24–30) reports an extensive series of further tests (including RD validity, falsification, and placebo checks) that ensure the validity of our public opinion results.

Media tone toward migrant groups

In this section, we test whether minority victories affect media reporting. There are two reasons to explore the media response. First, unlike hate crimes for which we do not know the victim's ethnic and racial

[11] A complementary explanation is that Conservative minority candidates compete in more White and homogeneous constituencies with fewer intergroup interactions (Byrne et al., 2020).
[12] Twenty-one percent of the constituency-elections in our sample are represented by incumbents, and 44% of the winning candidates in the optimal bandwidth are incumbents.

TABLE 2 Ethnic minority victory effects on attitudes toward immigrants.

	Inclusionary attitudes toward immigrants		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
I(VictoryMargin > 0) = 1	−.295	−.238	−.242
	(.056)	(.066)	(.083)
Average proportion of respondents with inclusionary attitudes in minority lost constituencies	.445	.338	.408
R^2	.117	.229	.150
Number of effective observations	283	104	174
Number of observations	1,876	1,876	1,876
Number of clusters	275	275	275
Bandwidth size	14.331	7.166	10.000
MSE-optimal bandwidth	14.331	14.331	14.331

Note: The dependent variable indicates whether survey respondents *do not* thinks that "too many immigrants have been let into the country". The average treatment effect at the cutoff is estimated with local linear regression with a triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth in (1), half MSE-optimal in (2) and fixed at 10 percentage points in (3). In parenthesis standard errors robust bias-corrected and clustered by constituency-election. Models control for predetermined covariates.

background, and public opinion data where questions are broadly about immigrants and minorities, the newspaper data allow us to measure responses targeting a candidate's ethnic group. Second, the media possibly profits from the public's engagement with elections contested and won by ethnic minority candidates. A growing body of work has demonstrated that social identity cues, especially cues espousing outgroup animosity (Rathje et al., 2021) and a negative tone (Robertson et al., 2023), are increasingly driving heightened engagement with media content. Moreover, media elites are acutely aware of this trend (Klein, 2020). Therefore, given increasing pressure to intensify consumer engagement (Munger, 2020), editors and media executives are likely to pander to consumers by covering stories related to core social identities (Hopkins et al., 2023) with a negative valence. Thus, without ruling out the possibility that media may also shape public opinion (Grossman et al., 2022), media content analysis can help corroborate changes in mass attitudes toward minority migrant groups.

Figure 3a illustrates our main finding on the media tone toward migrant groups. The line (with 95% confidence intervals) to the right of the victory cutoff indicates the average monthly proportion of negative mentions of the winning candidate's ethnic group 3 months after the general election, and to the left the average monthly proportion of negative mentions of the losing candidate's ethnic group. These lines depict a jump in the proportion of negative mentions at the winning threshold. The estimated magnitude of this increase in negative media coverage is 20 percentage points (or.67 standard deviations), which is equivalent to a 110% increase relative to the average proportion of negative mentions of the ethnic groups of narrowly losing candidates. Table 3 presents the point estimate from Figure 3a with robust bias-corrected inference, as well as estimates using half the MSE-optimal bandwidth, and a fixed bandwidth of 10 percentage points. Importantly, such media animosity targets a candidate's ethnic group, rather than targeting the candidate. Fewer than 1% of the articles used in this analysis include mentions of the minority candidates (see Appendix D, SI p. 5).

Figure 3b displays the estimates of minority victory effects on media tone by the number of months since the election. We find suggestive evidence that the effects decay over time. The RD estimates of the effects of a minority win decrease in size around the seventh month after the election, but the monthly effects are not statistically distinguishable from each other.

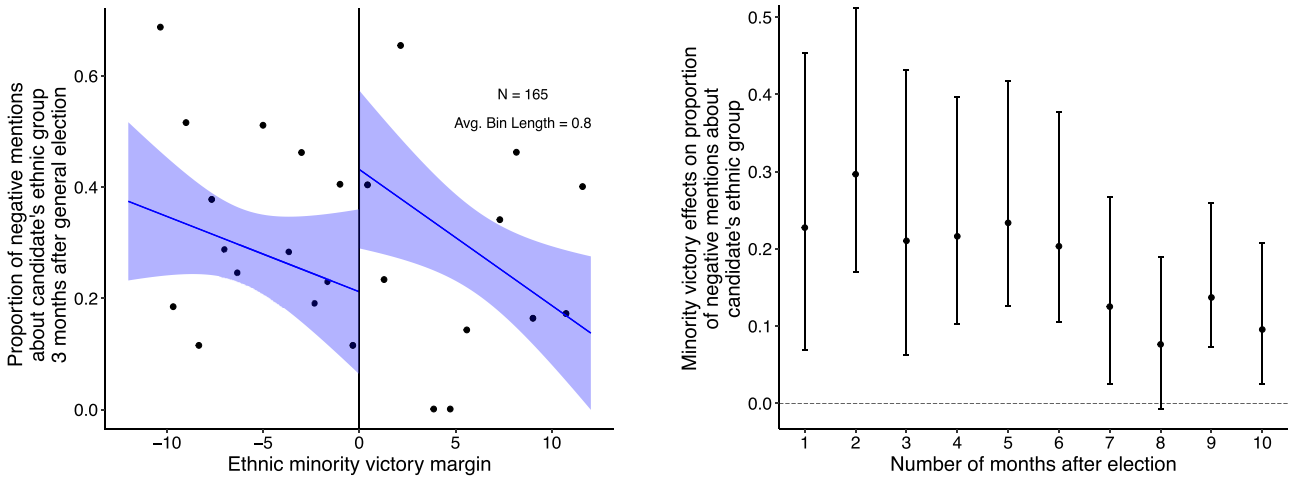
Validity tests and robustness checks

Appendix Table J.1 (SI p. 35) presents the effect estimates and other relevant quantities for different model specifications. Across specifications, the effects are in the same direction and have a similar magnitude, and are statistically significant when we control for covariates. Appendix J (SI pp. 31–35) reports the findings of an extensive series of tests (e.g., RD validity, falsification, and placebo checks[13]) that further confirm the validity of our media results.

Additional analysis of media tone and salience

We showed above that media coverage of a winning minority candidate's ethnic group is increasingly

[13] We do not compute difference-in-differences estimates as in the hate crime analysis because our media tone measure (specific to the minority candidates' ethnicity) is unspecified for constituencies without minority candidates.



(a) 3 months after general election

(b) 1–10 months after general election

FIGURE 3 Ethnic minority victory effects on media tone. *Note*: In (a) lines indicate the average monthly proportion of negative mentions of a candidate's ethnic group (with 95% confidence intervals) from local linear regression with covariate adjustment fitted to the sample of units within the MSE-optimal bandwidth of ±12 percentage points around the victory threshold. Points denote the average monthly proportion of negative mentions of a candidate's ethnic group for equally spaced mimicking-variance bins. In (b) points are conventional RD estimates of the effect of an ethnic minority victory and lines 95% robust bias-corrected confidence intervals.

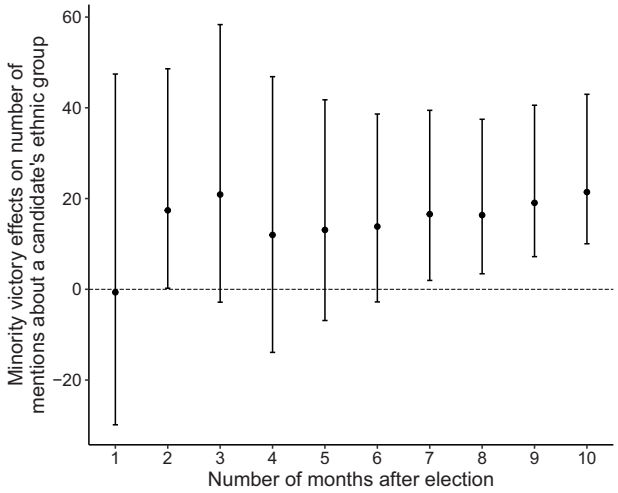
TABLE 3 Ethnic minority victory effects on media tone about migrant groups.

	News articles' negative mentions (proportion)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
I(VictoryMargin > 0) = 1	.210	.706	.296
	(.094)	(.218)	(.167)
Average proportion of negative mentions in minority lost constituencies	.193	.025	.129
R^2	.229	.401	.266
Number of effective observations	165	90	138
Number of observations	1,314	1,314	1,314
Number of clusters	438	438	438
Bandwidth size	12.134	6.067	10
MSE-optimal bandwidth	12.134	12.134	12.134

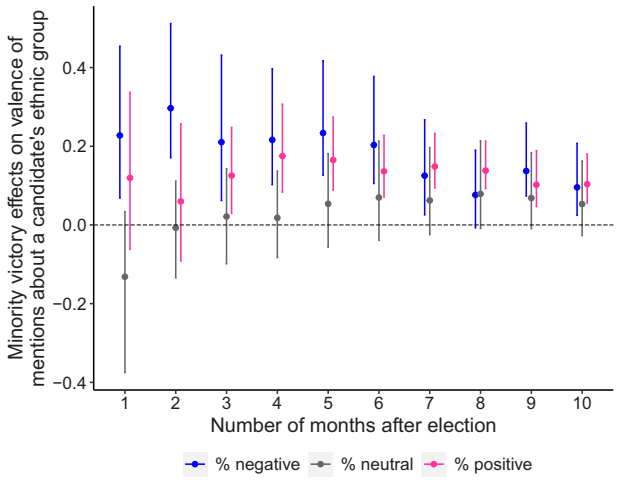
Note: The dependent variable is monthly share of negative mentions in news articles about a candidate's ethnic group 3 months after election. The average treatment effect at the cutoff is estimated with local linear regression with a triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth in (1), half MSE-optimal in (2) and fixed at 10 percentage points in (3). In parenthesis standard errors robust bias-corrected and clustered by constituency-election. Models control for predetermined covariates.

negative. Negative valence is recognized to increase the public's news engagement (e.g., Robertson et al., 2023), but also, regardless of valence, coverage of stories about social identities attracts the public's interest (e.g., Hopkins et al., 2023). If editors and media executives are leveraging the public's response to the election context, then we would expect increased coverage of a winning candidate's ethnic group. Here, we assess such a possibility. Based on threat concerns that arise from a minority win (related to material considerations and social status), we then assess whether the resulting negative rhetoric is stronger among segments of society that are predisposed to react to such concerns. We focus on right-wing media, since it is more responsive to those threatened by minorities' electoral victory.

Figure 4a illustrates that there are more media mentions about the ethnic communities of narrow winners than narrow losers: 3 months after the election, there are 20 more mentions of narrow winners (significant at the 10% level). This increase in media attention is concentrated on speech with a specific valence. We find statistically significant increases in the proportion of negative and positive mentions (equivalent to .66



(a) Effects on media attention



(b) Effects on media tone

FIGURE 4 Ethnic minority victory effects on media attention and tone. *Note*: Points are conventional RD estimates of the effect of an ethnic minority victory. Lines denote 95% robust bias-corrected confidence intervals.

and .47 standard deviations, respectively, 3 months postelection), but not on neutral mentions (an effect of .09 standard deviations, Figure 4b). Furthermore, at least during the first 4 months after the election, the increase in attention is predominantly negative, when we compare the share of negative to neutral mentions (Appendix Table K.1, SI p. 36).

Overall, we find that minority wins increase hostility from the news media. This is mostly driven by right-wing newspapers and papers with circulation under 25,000 (Appendix K, SI pp. 34–37), suggesting that the negative response comes from media whose readership favors less redistribution, compensatory policies, and pluralistic values.

DISCUSSION

We argue that dominant-group natives respond with hostility to threats triggered by ethnic minority electoral victories, and that this response is stronger when (predetermined) local conditions or candidate characteristics reinforce such threats. It is only observed in constituencies with a large migrant arrival (right side of Appendix Figure G.10a, SI p. 21) and left-affiliated candidates (Appendix Figure G.12a, SI p. 22), both of which threaten access to material resources and (national or cultural) identity. The response is also stronger when candidates' Muslim background (Appendix Figure G.11a, SI p. 22) or gender (Appendix Figure G.11b, SI p. 22) threatens voters' identity, and among right-wing media (Appendix Figure K.1b, SI p. 37), whose readership likely has more concerns about material and identity threats.

Our study sharpens the debate about *why* electoral victories by ethnic minorities trigger a hostile response. We find support for the argument that minority victories produce an information shock that reminds members of the dominant group of their changing ethnic demographic landscape (Craig et al., 2018), but that other sources of information exacerbate the hostility of the reaction. The reaction is stronger where the information confirms changes that people observe in their environment (e.g., a large migrant arrival, right side of Appendix Figure G.10a, SI p. 21), when the information is novel (e.g., when a minority wins a constituency for the first time, Appendix Figure G.10b, SI p. 21), and if the information is recent (soon after the election, Figure 1b and Figure 3b). Moreover, the effect of a minority victory on threat concerns changes as more information becomes available. We find that the effects weakly decay over time (Figure 1b and Figure 3b) and are concentrated in constituencies with no prior experience of a minority victory (Appendix Figure G.10b, SI p. 21). Perhaps the hostility subsides once members of the dominant group realize that minority office holding does not involve high levels of ingroup favoritism, as documented in previous work (e.g., Bhalotra et al., 2014), or perhaps after having fulfilled their sense of self through outgroup degradation.

These results—together with the finding that local economic conditions do not moderate the victory effects (left side of Appendix Figure G.10a, SI p. 21)—suggest that hostile responses are caused by threats based on group categorization and differentiation (i.e., *status threats*) as well as possible social-structural sources of group difference (i.e., *objective material threats*), even though these are notoriously hard to separate (Manekin et al., 2019). Future work should help clarify which dimension of group threat—threat

to group status or material threat—has the greatest impact in this and other settings.

Consistent with theories which suggest that elite mobilization fuels communal grievances for their political benefit, our results point to a hostile response from both media elites and the mass public. The news media can shape the public's political attitudes and electoral behavior (Grossman et al., 2022), but market pressures also incentivize media outlets to cover issues that resonate with their audiences' priorities (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010), and public sentiment is often reflected by newsworthy political events in themselves, like election results. While our study is not designed to determine the direction of influence, there are good reasons to expect media elites to respond to consumers' growing interest—in the context of a minority victory—in social identity and intergroup relations content.[14]

CONCLUSION

Using an RD design of close parliamentary elections in the UK, we identify the effects of immigrant-origin ethnic minority candidates winning political office on the attitudes and behavior of dominant-group members. We find that such victories result in an increase in hate crimes, in exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants as captured by mass public opinion, and in negative tone in the coverage of a winning candidate's ethnic group in local and national newspapers.

An ethnic minority candidate winning a seat in Parliament triggers a hostile reaction because it threatens the position of dominant-group members. The animosity we identify in response to election outcomes is especially troubling because it is so widespread, encompassing not only a violence-prone fringe, but also the mass public. This finding contributes to the intergroup conflict literature, which has not yet specified which members of the majority group are most likely to respond with hostility to a heightened outgroup threat. Our study's findings also raise important questions regarding the role of elections in intergroup conflict and the nature of the threat that causes a hostile response. While the structure of our data prevents us from addressing all of these questions conclusively, they suggest important avenues for future work.

From a normative perspective, it is somewhat reassuring that the hostility to minority communities we identify is *temporary*. Thus, perhaps on balance, the positive outcomes associated with the election of immigrant-origin minorities outweigh the negative effects of such animosity. Future research should address this question and identify policies that can counteract the hostile response to immigrants' integration.

The RD effects we estimate are representative of constituencies where ethnic minority candidates stand for Parliament, which are distinct from the average constituency in dimensions related to immigrant demographics and their settlement choices (Appendix Table F.1, SI p. 10). Moreover, the RD effects are identified at the victory threshold, where elections between dominant-group and ethnic minority candidates are the most competitive. Future work should use a different research design to investigate the magnitude of effects in noncompetitive elections. Finally, it is reasonable to predict that the hostile dynamics we document may generalize to other multicultural rich democracies with first-past-the-post electoral systems, and where the majority ethnic group is also the dominant group. We hope our single-country study motivates future research in other contexts.

[14] Appendix J.8 (SI pp. 34–36) discusses and establishes independence between our measures of hate crime and media tone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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