RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN BRITISH POLITICS:
PRESSURE GROUPS OR GROUPS UNDER PRESSURE?

Ekaterina Kolpinskaya

University of Nottingham

ldxeK2@nottingham.ac.uk

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Abstract

The influence of pressure groups in British politics has been on the rise since the 1960s, particularly as membership of political parties has declined. They can be distinguished according to the nature of their membership, aims, strategies and relations with government. Traditionally, they have been thought to primarily represent economic or social group interests. Increasingly, however, religious minorities are attempting to exercise influence in the British political system via various institutions, including interest/pressure groups. This paper illustrates how Jewish and Muslim communities are involved into British pressure politics at the parliamentary level.

It analyses a pressure group phenomenon in British politics – its role and difference from other types of political representation. Grounding on the previous research the paper distinguishes types of pressure groups at the parliamentary level, and gives an overview of Jewish and Muslim-identified interest groups trying to influence decision-making.

Introduction

There is not much research directly related to a study of religious minorities’ pressure groups in British policy-making to date. This could be explained by a number of reasons. First, there is a long-held perception that religious minorities have never been active in British pressure politics (Radcliffe, 2010). Secondly, even established religious pressure groups haven’t had any significant impact on British domestic politics. Third, minorities’ interests are supposed to be properly represented by other sectional or cause interest groups (trade unions, for instance). Forth, both Jewish and Muslim minorities are more successful promoting a joint community position on external rather than internal political issues. Finally, both Jewish and Muslim minorities can hardly be described as consistent entities. Due to religious nonconformity, differences in socio-economic status, origin (even for the second-third generation migrants), and cultural traditions they are fragmented and polarised (Levin, 2001).

However, communities’ engagement into international affairs, increasing politicisation of religion, growing competition between various religious communities (primarily Muslim, Hindu and Jews) and within them have resulted in the establishment of pressure groups aim to represent their concerns and promote interests. Despite their relatively small sizes, and limited impact on British politics involvement of religious minorities into pressure group politics has becomes an important segment of their political representation.
Why study pressure groups?
The mainstream approach places the electoral forms of representation prior to non-electoral ones. Referring to its normative interpretation ‘representation’ in this sense means ‘democratic representation’ as a direct reflection of a will and concerns of the electorate. As defined by Hannah Pitkin non-electoral forms can hardly be considered democratic as they are not a result of free and fair elections. Therefore they are not representation (Pitkin, 1967: 107-109).

However, representation should not be election-based in order to be representation. Considering current political trends and experience of established democracies various modes of non-elective representation can either supplement elective ones or carry their own potential democratic legitimacy in some way ‘completing’ democracy (Renfeld, 2006: 2).

First, current surveys show an increase of dissatisfaction with politics and distrust of elected politicians in Britain and elsewhere. Secondly, since the 1960s membership in the major political parties in the UK has been in decline. Meanwhile, membership in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and interest groups has been increasing. Finally, elective forms of representation do not provide better representation for underrepresented groups (i.e. ethnic/religious minorities, women, etc.). All in all, it means that electoral politics gives a background for political representation generally, but its frames are too tight to embrace representation as a dynamic, multi-level process as it currently is.

In the pluralist model of democracy pressure groups play an essential role. Elective forms of representation are not always able to represent a full range of diverse interests and opinions, as the key function of political parties is to aggregate interests into a coherent political entity capable of governing the country. Consequently, opinions and concerns of minorities (for instance, religious communities) can be often misinterpreted or more often ignored in favour of political efficiency.

To be efficient and responsive to political realities elective politics should be combined with different modes of non-elective representation. Yet the main principles of both are similar: multiple, issue-specific choices during and between elections; identification in terms of non-party and partial citizen identities; giving voice to underrepresented identity and interest groups, often beyond territorially defined constituencies; and various means of public control of politics via media, government and social networks, etc. (Saward, 2011: 93).

Consequently, being involved into both electoral and non-electoral forms of political participation one can possess both a vote (as a member of a territorial constituency) and belong to a group (consisting of people who have shared attitudes or concerns). Whereas a vote can only be used periodically, membership in pressure groups gives an opportunity to influence politics in particular areas constantly. In this sense pressure groups ‘are one of the fundamental components
of the British political process providing a key medium through which civil society can engage in political discourse and engagement’ (Kavanagh, 2006: 418). They complement and supplement electoral democracy first, by providing an important mechanism for citizens to influence government between elections; and second, by enabling opinions to be weighed as well as counted. It improves the quality of the decision-making process making it more responsive and proactive to needs and interests of all parts of the society.

Political parties vs. pressure groups?
There is no controversy or mutual exclusion in being a member of both a party and a pressure group. The growth of group activity referring to an increasing number of various pressure groups started at approximately the same time as British political parties began to decrease primarily in terms of membership. For instance, in the last 50 years the Labour Party membership declined from 1 million to 200,000 or under, and the Conservative Party from 3 million to 300,000 (Jordan and Maloney, 2007: 3).

Reasons for the major party decline are many. Generally, this phenomenon can be a result of either strengthening of the pressure groups, or crisis of the traditional party system due to parties no longer being effective in representing citizens due to citizen’s high expectations, development of new social stratus and erosion of a traditional class structure. Meanwhile, the average number of associational memberships in Britain grew by 44% between 1959 and 1990 (Hall, 2002: 25). However, many scholars do not see this process as a drama. It would be a mistake to consider an outflow from the main political parties to be a sign of weakening of the British democracy in whole. For instance, Ryden (1996) argues that parties and groups mediate between the public and the elected in similar ways expanding perspectives of democracy rather than narrowing them. Pippa Norris (2002: 19) convincingly proves that such activities – choice-based rather than loyalty-centred – form a new style of activist citizen politics expanding opportunities of people to influence politics at different levels.

Defining the pressure group
In the 1950s a pressure group was defined as ‘any group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behaviour that were implied by the shared attitudes’ Truman (1951: 33). This definition stresses that a pressure group was (a) seeking to influence policy on a limited range of issues, (b) not wishing to take the office, and (c) had an individual-based membership. In the following decades this definition so as the typology of pressure groups changed in order to keep up with up-to-date political trends. At the present it is described as an ‘interest’, ‘lobby’ or
‘protest’ or ‘an organisation which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy, representing a set of authoritative decisions taken by the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary, and by local government and the European Union’ (Grant, 2000: 14). This definition on the one hand centres on the policy influencing role of groups. On the other hand it is flexible enough to express structural non-homogeneity of pressure groups and variety of forms their activity might take.

However, there are several features typical for a pressure group (Jordan and Maloney, 2007: 31):

- It is organised to reach a specific attainable collective goal\(^1\).
- The group can be disbanded on realisation of its aims.
- It is a non-governmental body\(^2\).
- It does not seek to form a government.
- It seeks to influence public policy.
- It has a formal, mostly voluntary, membership of private citizens (not business)\(^3\).
- It has elements of internal democracy (rather symbolic in some cases).
- The membership funds are a critical part of the group’s income (while it may receive government or corporate support as well).
- It is organised to express the attitudes and interests of a particular constituency of voters.

Pressure groups are not homogenous even though they have common features, they can be categorised in many ways, based on differences in internal group structures, aims, modes of activity, relations with authorities, etc.

To understand the peculiarities of religious minorities’ pressure groups the following characteristics should be considered:

(1) aims of a religious minority pressure group;
(2) types of membership and recruitment procedures;
(3) strategies applied in pressure politics;
(4) relations established with government and other interest groups.

(1) According to their aims, pressure groups can be divided into sectional or cause/promotional groups.

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\(^1\) In theory a ‘goal’ is supposed to mean a ‘political goal’. However, for some pressure groups political activity may be just a part of the agenda. As goes from the rational choice theorists’ perspective ‘successfully organised political groups probably exist for non-political reasons – that is lobbying is simply the by-product’ (Berry, 1999: 154).

\(^2\) Practically it can represent interest of civil servants, government departments, companies, etc.

\(^3\) Some of pressure groups are ‘umbrella organisations’ (i.e. the Muslim Council of Britain). In this case they might have a group rather than an individual membership.
Sectional pressure groups seek to represent the common (usually professional or economic) interests of a particular section of society (such as, trade union or professional bodies). As a result, members of sectional pressure groups are directly and personally concerned with the outcome of the campaign fought by the group. For the same reason membership of a sectional group is usually restricted by a particular criterion.

Promotional (or ‘cause”) pressure groups endeavour to promote an issue or a problem not necessarily connected with direct benefits to the members of the group. As these groups aim to promote a cause (such as, protection of environment, nuclear weapon non-proliferation, etc.) they might potentially be supported by everybody. Therefore, membership is not usually restricted.

In 1991 Dunleavy developed an exogenous/endogenous typology similar to sectional/promotional (cause) distinction. The dichotomy is based on whether or not members of a pressure group share ‘an identity set’ – a number of objective characteristics such as professional ones (‘exogenous group’). On the other hand, members of ‘endogenous groups’ do not necessarily share the same features but have the same way of thinking being ‘like-minded people’ (Dunleavy, 1991: 54-55). This distinction places greater emphasis on the development of group identities as the subjective perception of interests shared with others (Grant: 1995: 15).

Wyn Grant (1989) established a classification of pressure groups based on their status and methods rather than their aims. He called them insider and outsider groups.

Insider pressure groups are considered to be legitimate by the government and, therefore, they are given access to decision-makers. Being a part of the consultation process enables them to use methods of direct influence on decision-making promoting their position. As for insider pressure groups usually play by the ‘rules of the game’ and effectively act in the mainstream politics.

Outsider pressure groups have none of the advantages of insider groups. They do not have a direct access to the decision-making process. Therefore, they have fewer opportunities to determine the direction of policy. However, this makes them more flexible in terms of lobbying methods and strategies. Besides, they are often involved into political consultation as independent experts.

Marsh and Rhodes (1992) also contributed to the debate by treating policy networks and, therefore, types of relationships between pressure groups and government as a generic criterion to distinguish groups from each other. There are four types of networks/communities: policy, professional, producer and issue.

Policy communities are characterised by stability of relationships, a restrictive membership, and vertical interdependence based on shared service delivery responsibilities and insulation from
both other networks and the public more generally. These networks are constantly involved in policy-making abiding the ‘rules of the game’.

Professional networks represent interests of one particular policy-making actor – the professions. Their characteristics include restricted membership, extensive connections with local authorities, limited vertical interdependence, along with an ability to penetrate many other networks.

Producer networks are distinguished by a prominent role of economic interests in policy-making. These networks are not usually stable and have a restricted by economic characteristics membership with only limited interdependence among the economic interests.

Issue networks have a large number of participants with a limited consensus between them though. Stability and continuity are rare and the structure tends to be atomistic as based on consultation rather than negotiation or bargaining.

However, it is hard to make a clear distinction between pressure (especially religious minorities-identified) groups according the types of policy networks they use. That is because these groups so as (1) minorities are highly diverse, and (2) due to the limited experience have a lack of long-term strategies, and therefore, implement any type of networking efficient at a particular time period and/or situation.

**Religious minorities’ lobby within the British Parliament**

Pressure groups promote the interests of various segments of society at different levels and within different political institutions. However, it is commonly believed that the national (particularly, parliamentary) level is worth studying in terms of elective and non-elective representation for a number of reasons. First, new political trends are faster incorporated into its routine than at the local and international levels as it is more compact and manageable. Secondly, a range of modes of political representation are wider and include various groups and individuals from all over Britain whereas at the local level they can be limited due to ethic/religious, class, age composition of population in each constituency. And last but not least the majority of pressure groups (even those present at the local and international level) aim to be involved in decision-making process.

The British policy-making process is dynamic, fragmented, and subject to a great many influences from a diverse range of organisations hoping to shape policy decisions. This direct and indirect lobbying of policy-makers and other stakeholders is deeply ingrained in the political system (Parvin, 2007). As stated in the First Report of Members Interests Committee, 1984-85: ‘It is the right of any citizen to lobby his Member of Parliament, and if he considers that his case can be better advanced with professional assistance he has every right to avail himself of that assistance’ (House of Commons, 2009).
That is why pressure groups are an essential part of the parliamentary life. And so do the debates on whether they are a force for good. There is a genuine issue of concern that pressure politics gives some actors a privileged access and disproportionate influence within the parliament – the practice that is considered to be discriminative for actors less involved into these activities (House of Commons, 2009). However, insider and outsider pressure groups when included in political consultation provide a forum outside formal institutions of the parliament in which the elected can meet interested individuals or from outside the parliament, with a view to gaining knowledge and to identifying ways of advancing action on the subjects of particular concern to them (House of Commons, 2006).

Groups are not a part of the official structure of the parliament, and are not, therefore, staffed and resourced by it. Yet, if they are included in the ‘Approved List’ (practically having an insider status) they have an opportunity to use House meeting rooms as well as stationery, and get the assistance provided by a public relations or public affairs consultancy (House of Commons, 2006: 10).

A number of pressure groups within the parliament multiplied more than three times in last 20 years (from 148 in 1986 to 442 in 2006), mostly due to the growth of subject groups (from 80 in 1986 to 321 in 2006) (House of Commons, 2006). On the one hand it means a range of issues pressure groups are involved in has increased. On the other hand –development of nonelective representation (including pressure groups) shows that means of politics has become diverse and multi-level. The latter potentially gives more opportunities to underrepresented groups like religious minorities in promoting their interests. This can be implemented either via religious minorities’ elected representatives – MPs – or pressure groups.

It is important to highlight differences between ways of political engagement of the two. Muslim and Jewish MPs are involved in political discussions far beyond religious communities concerns expressing interests of the general population as well. Being elected from particular constituencies with diverse population they cannot and do not want to be seen as ‘single-issue’ politicians (Saalfeld, 2011; Saggar, 2000). Therefore, their religious identity and ties with religious communities are obscure and slightly influence their parliamentary activities. Moreover, they often try to avoid a number of sensitive topics connected with faith, ethnicity, race relations, etc. Practically it means that they are involved in committees and All-Party Groups on various topics providing the interests of the general population and symbolic representation of Jewish and Muslim minorities.

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4 For example, Muslim MPs are not involved into the ‘Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’ All-Party Group. Neither Jewish nor Muslim MPs are members of the ‘Iraq and the Region’ All-Party Group. They do not take part in the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee either.
Religious minorities’ pressure groups have more narrow concerns. That is because they usually have well-established connections with faith-based NGOs, religious and community institutions across the country. Unlike elected politicians pressure groups are connected directly with minorities representing them as a political constituency. As a result they aim to promote specific interests of religious minorities or their parts influencing Members of Parliament directly or being involved in consultations. For the most part they are interested in issues connected with religious and faith communities, ethnic groups and foreign affairs (particularly, the Middle East and Israeli policies) (Radcliffe, 2010; Oborne, 2009).

Jewish-identified pressure groups
Traditionally, the term ‘Jewish lobby’ in the United Kingdom has been used to describe a coalition of groups and individuals (not necessarily Jewish) which try to influence British foreign policy in favour of Israel and its policies. That is because since the early 19th century the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine became the main political issue united various Jewish communities in Britain and elsewhere. Promoted by influential bodies such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Anglo-Jewish Association in Britain it resulted in the Balfour Declaration and ‘the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people’ (Schneer, 2010). This event was the first serious success of the Jewish lobby and a benchmark for a study of Jewish-identified pressure groups for several reasons. First, it practically established Jewish presence in British pressure politics despite the Board of Deputies of British Jews and several other organisations had been founded more than a century earlier. Till the beginning of the 20th century they were rather closed and self-centred. Promoting religious rights and civil liberties of British Jewry on a day-to-day basis they acted mainly at the local level via synagogues and cultural centres. Therefore, political interests of Jewish minority at the national level were usually sponsored by activities of its single members rather than well-organised interest groups. That is why recognising the Jewishness of those who figured in the British history (i.e. Benjamin Disraeli) and their possible favour for the Jewish minority development it was rarely tied to their own sense of belonging to a community (Endelman, 2002). In the beginning of the 20th century Jewish migration from the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe dramatically changed the structure of the community and enhanced political participation of British Jewry. Yet the newcomers did not have established connections with the host society and disregard ‘rules of the political game’ (Sacks, 2008). Trying to adapt and secure their place in the society they became more politically active than settled Jewish communities. Therefore, the Balfour Declaration was a result of joint efforts of ‘old’ and ‘new’ members of the
Jewish community which combined their political and financial power with initiative and demand for better presence within British political institutions.

Secondly, this success made a case for further involvement of Jewish minority into British pressure politics. Despite being mostly concerned about Israel and corresponded problems they are interested in other issues, such as asylum and migration legislation, antidiscrimination law, human rights, inter-faith dialogue, etc. More or less all these activities are connected with foreign affairs which is still one of the main features of the Jewish lobby.

However, till the mid-1950s none of Jewish-identified pressure groups was directly involved into decision-making at the parliamentary level. Foundation of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel, the Labour Friends of Israel in 1957, and the Conservative Friends of Israel in 1974 have changed the situation. Affiliated with different political parties these groups have a common aim – promotion of a strong cooperation between Britain and Israel and peaceful co-existence in the Middle East (LDFI, 2010; LFI, 2003; CFI, 2010). Therefore, they practically influence all the major political parties promoting the general interests of Jewish minority whatever party is in power.

Comparing to other party and insider parliamentary groups the Friends of Israel are ‘the best connected, and probably the best funded, of all Westminster lobbying groups’ so as ‘the largest organization in Western Europe dedicated to the cause of the people of Israel’ (Oborne, 2009).

Comparing the Labour and the Conservative Friends of Israel, the latter are believed to be more powerful for a number of reasons. First, historical connections between Tories and Jewish minority have been rather tight, and the contemporary party history confirms it. Since the Conservative prime-minister, Margaret Thatcher, had become chairman of the CFI branch at her local Finchley constituency the number of Conservative MPs, members of the CFI, was gradually growing. Another practically less significant but morally substantial fact is that all leaders of the Conservative Party appear at the CFI events and confirm solidarity with the organisation and its aims. For instance, in his speech to the Conservative Friends of Israel on December 10, 2010 David Cameron stated that ‘the ties between this party and Israel are unbreakable. And in me, you have a Prime Minister whose belief in Israel is indestructible’ (Cameron, 2010).

Secondly, unlike the Labour party, Tories have not supported Palestinians and confronted the Soviet Union anti-Israel policies. That is why the Labour Friends of Israel face a considerably tougher job dealing with a Labour tradition of supporting Palestinian causes since the 1967 war and anti-American concerns of many Labour MPs. However, since Tony Blair the Labour Party officials have not questioned the LFI privileged position especially in the support to Israel and its

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5 By the 2010 election 80 per cent of Conservative MPs were CFI members (Oborne, 2009).
policies (Blair, 2006; Brown, 2007). As stated by Ivan Lewis in 2009 ‘Israel is a close ally of the UK and we have regular warm and productive exchanges at all levels… We shall continue to foster a close relationship with Israel’ (Lewis, 2009).

Still, the Conservative Friends of Israel are supposed to be richer than the Labour ones which is evident when studying their donation policy. Since the mid-1990s the LFI improved their financial position attracting several sponsors and fundraisers like Victor Blank, Trevor Chinn and Michael Levy. Yet, the latter’s fundraising activities ended in 2006 with the ‘cash for peerages’ affair that also shaped debates on the impact of the Jewish minority donations on party politics and parliamentary activities. According to Peter Oborne’s research before the 2005 election a method of donation is merely the same for all constituencies. Medium-sized sums are donated to constituency offices through companies rather than personal names which conceals possible connections to the CFI or other pro-Israel group (Oborne, 2009).

The level of political impact of Jewish communities is unprecedented comparing to other religious minorities (Alibhai-Brown, 2007). This is often a matter of disappointment and criticism (Hirsh, 2006; Karmi, 2007). For the most part it is connected with methods applied by Jewish-identified interest groups. As pointed by many the Jewish lobby political influence is based on its financial strength and personal ties of MPs with Jewish-identified organisations (Oborne, 2009; Alibhai-Brown, 2007).

Unlike other religious minorities present in British politics, Jewish lobby groups have relatively low level of internal competition which is beneficial for the community. The lobby groups both work closely with the Israeli embassy and even share supporters, such as businessmen (i.e. Victor Blank and Trevor Chinn (Oborne, 2009)), but they work independently within their respective parties. Yet it is an exceptional case when Jewish candidates (even standing for the name of different parties) compete with each other in the same constituency.

As a result a number of Jewish-identified Members of the House of Commons has been 24-25 in 2005-2010 which is often seen as ‘over-representation’ of a Jewish minority comparing to its size (Littlewood, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Liberal Democrats</th>
<th>Number of Jewish MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: British Religion in Numbers, 2010

However, there is no direct evidence that religious identity of MPs significantly influence their parliamentary activities. As stated by Stuart Pollack, director of the CFI, ‘It is important to remember these MPs are elected by their constituents, not because of their Jewish status’.
(Gloger, 2008). Therefore, Jewish parliamentarians deny that they should be seen as single-issue MPs whose main concerns relate to Israel and Jewish matters. They are involved into work of various parliamentary committees and Party Groups. At the same time Jewish MPs support Jewish-identified pressure groups activities in the parliament. Generally speaking, they have two main community-specific spheres of interest: (1) fighting with antisemitism; (2) development of Israeli-British relations.

As at 29th July 2011 Jewish-identified interest groups have initiated the foundation and are currently sponsors of All-Party Britain-Israel Parliamentary Group and All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism. Being cross-party, they are provide an effective discussion forum. First, aims to create a better understanding of Israel and to foster and promote links between Britain and Israel and is supported by the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM). BICOM is an influential lobby group dedicated to creating a more supportive environment for Israel in Britain (BICOM, 2011). However, the Jewish minority is not consentient about the support of Israeli policies. One of influential outsider Jewish interest groups, Independent Jewish Voices, was founded in 2007 as a protest against uncritical support of Israel by major Jewish institutions in the UK (IJV, 2007). Yet confronting the position of other Jewish organisations on Israel, Independent Jewish Voices come along with other interest groups on such issues as combating antisemitism and racist activities, liaising with government, and co-operating with other religious and ethnic communities.

For instance, they are involved into the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism aimed to fight with antisemitism. Making antisemitism a societal issue it intends to create a more tolerant and unprejudiced society (PCAAF, 2009). On the other hand, it effectively unites different parts of the community strengthening its impact on British politics.

All in all, register of All-Party Groups with the UK Parliament is important for Jewish-identified pressure groups in several instances. First, it shows that they seek for an insider status within traditional political institutions and are ready to abide the ‘rules of the game’.

Besides, All-Party Groups, as a form of political participation, establishes relatively stable issue and policy networks between Jewish pressure groups and mainstream political institutions (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992) and confirmed non-restrictive to religious identity membership in Jewish pressure groups.

Finally, despite Jewish pressure groups activities at the parliamentary level embraces a wide range of problems only two of them, both connected with external issues – combating antisemitism and British-Israeli relations – have enough centripetal power to unite a polarised minority at the national level.
Muslim-identified pressure groups
Diversity within Muslim minority determined the variety of Muslim organisations. In the mid-1990s there were approximately 950 Muslim organizations in Britain (Vertovec, 1997: 175). Similar to Jewish minority external issues played a crucial role in unification of Muslim communities. Yet a shared migrant background and religious identity were not enough for establishment of an effective pressure group. The experience of the Union of Muslim Organizations of UK and Ireland’s (UMO’s) gives a clue to explain this trend.

First, international activities of this organisation were, no doubt, vital for Muslims all over the world, but controversial as much. Unlike the situation with Israel, affairs the UMO tried to regulate were between Muslim countries. Therefore, Muslim migrants in Britain could not elaborate a common position being affiliated with opposite sides of the conflict.

Secondly, directions of support were unproductive for lobbying within the British political process. Many groups received financial support from abroad, particularly from the major Middle Eastern states (Radcliffe, 2010). Yet this funding was invested into external activities rather than strengthening of Muslim organisations and promotion of communities’ interests within British political institutions. In this respect for years Muslim organisations in Britain did not accumulate but just transfer financial and other support from abroad.

Finally, religious nonconformity is evident across Muslim communities. Mosque-based organisations which domineered as a form of community organisation in the 1960/1980s left no chance to harmonise positions of Iranian Shi’ites, Turkish Sunnites, Iraqi Kurds, etc. reflecting current ethnic, religious and political clashes (Dittrich, 2005: 27).

One the other hand, there was no substantive demand for Muslim participation in the pressure politics till the end of the 1980s. Muslims were considered to be ‘guest workers’ rather than a political constituency (Baxter, 2005).

In the 1970/1990s Muslim minority in Britain and especially the second and third generation migrants whose legal, educational and social status allowed them to participate fully in British politics had been constantly growing. Increasing politicisation of a Muslim minority after the 1980s riots and the Rushdie affair led to the foundation of the first pressure groups aimed to promote Muslim interests at the national level (Kotin, 2003).

The Muslim Parliament founded in 1992 was considered to be the first Muslim organisation with restricted to religious identity membership pursuing nothing else but political goals. As stated in

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6 According to the report on its 25th anniversary UMO urged a peaceful resolution to the 1990/1991 Gulf Crisis and relief for Iraqis’ suffering during the sanctions; advocated military intervention on behalf of Bosnian Muslims; and sent delegations to Baghdad to participate in the International Peace Conference after the Iran–Iraq War, to Tunis to meet with Palestinian leaders, to Western Thrace to ‘monitor the situation of Muslims’ in 1991 and to Turkish Cyprus to establish trade links with the British Muslim community (UMO, 1995: 43–52).
the Muslim Manifesto ‘Islam created a political platform from which Muslims were to launch themselves on a global role as founders of great states, empires and a world civilization and culture’ (Siddiqui, 1990). Targeted to transform Muslim community into a political association it failed to unite British Muslims and create stable ties with other public bodies due to a lack of political flexibility. However, as an outsider group the Muslim Parliament is engaged into debates, campaigns and lobby on issues concerning the Muslim community in Britain along with other interest groups.

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) established in 1997 has become the most prominent Muslim-identified group recognised by government. The Council presented itself as an organization that would work with government pursuing an insider role, and therefore play by the rules of the British political process (Radcliffe, 2010). Apart from the MCB there is a wide range of Muslim interest groups such as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK, the Islamic Society of Britain, the Union of Muslim Organisations of UK and Ireland, the United Kingdom Islamic Mission, the Sufi Muslim Council, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee of the United Kingdom (MPACUK), the Quilliam foundation, etc. Generally, they pursue similar aims. Some of the groups have explicit insider strategies (the Muslim Council of Britain, Union of Muslim, the Quilliam Foundation), whilst others apply outsider strategies (the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain). Structurally the majority of them are ‘umbrella organisations’ including various ethnic, linguistic, gender and generational bodies. Nevertheless, the Muslim lobby has been regularly accused of being unrepresentative, comprised of ‘primarily Pakistani and Indian males’, with little representation from women, youth and Shia Muslims (Radcliffe, 2010: 372). At the same time the Islamic dimension of the Muslim lobby is likely to be a social construct aimed to promote interests of communities rather than specific religious concerns (Kepel, 2006). Therefore, as in the case of Jewish pressure groups membership in organisations is not restricted to religious identity as they try to appeal to the wider audience.

At the parliamentary level presence of Muslim interest groups mean getting (1) political, at least, symbolic Muslim representation; (2) an open forum to discuss Muslim needs and concerns; and (3) a means of influence on Muslim minority.

For the most part Muslim pressure groups are involved into British policy-making in several instances.

First, it gives external consultations to government on specific Muslim communities issue such as organisation of the hajj, Sharia courts, economic and welfare issues, etc. For instance, one of the main achievements of the Muslim lobby is establishment of five Sharia courts with the full power of the judicial system, through the county courts or High Court in Birmingham, Bradford,
London and Manchester (Kern, 2011). Besides, the Associate Parliamentary Group on Islamic Finance and Diversity in Financial Markets vice-chaired by Lord Sheikh gives the Islamic finance industry a voice in the House in order to address issues of concern, such as inclusivity, diversity, Islamic LIBOR, regulation and taxation.

Second, Muslim lobby groups have also pressed the British government to develop antidiscrimination legislation (for example, the Racial and Religious Hatred Act). Combating prejudice and discrimination against Muslims in the UK today is a crucial issue for the Muslim lobby. That is because the All-Party Subject Group on Islamophobia sponsored by ENGAGE and supported several other Muslim groups (including the MCB and the Quilliam foundation) aims to fostering mutual respect and tolerance between Muslims and other faith communities.

Third, the MCB along with other Muslim interest groups encourages participation of British Muslims in election (voting not for a particular party but strategically to elect Members of Parliament who were responsive to Muslim concerns (Haque, 2010)). On the other hand, they try to enhance Muslim participation in party politics as well. Traditionally, they supported Labour who seemed to be more concerned about migrant minorities’ interests comparing to the Conservative party, and had better chances to win the election than the Liberal Democrats (Saggar, 2000). However, there is strong evidence showing rising dissatisfaction with the Labour party among the highly-mobilised groups such as whites and Indians, followed by fairly well mobilised Pakistani and Bangladeshi-origin Asians who are the core of Muslim-identified pressure groups (Saggar, 2001; Sobolewska 2011). In the 2010 election both Conservative and Labour parties introduced a more centralised measures to improve representativeness of their candidates. Along with efforts of Muslim-identified pressure groups such as the Muslim Friends of Labour it has doubled Muslim MPs in the House of Commons – from four to eight MPs (Versi, 2010).

Forth, Muslim interest groups at the parliamentary level often acts as an opposition to Jewish and Hindu pressure groups competing for political influence especially when it comes to debates on foreign affairs. As Versi states ‘the Jewish lobby and the Hindu lobby are very strong…The Hindu lobby is richer than the Muslims and they have contributed to the Labour and Conservative parties, which is very important. The Jewish community is also richer, but it is also older – it’s been here for more than 100 years – and it is more assimilated, more integrated into government’ (Radcliffe, 2010: 381). This kind of rivalry between religious minorities often turns to intra-community competition as well which decreases the effectiveness of British Muslim lobbying as a whole.

However, external political issues a still a strong consolidating factor for British Muslims. So as the Jewish lobby Muslim interest groups actively promote community interest via a number of
All-Party Subject and Country Groups, such as All-Party Groups on Arab League, Palestine, Terrorism, Third World Solidarity, etc. Being divided by topics or geography they are usually supported by the same insider pressure groups (Register of All-Party Groups, 2011). The Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu) is the oldest and largest cross-party organisation of its type in Europe. In the UK it sponsors the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group to foster good relations between Britain and Palestine. Besides, it monitors the British press for misrepresentations of Arab culture, issues relating to the Arab world and Arab British communities and calls attention to such misrepresentation for the purpose of objective reporting (Caabu, 2011).

Comparing to Jewish pressure groups Muslim-identified are still weaker for a number of reasons. Diversity within the Muslim lobby reflects diversity within minority. Yet this internal political competition diminishes an impact Muslims might have on British politics. Besides, Muslim-identified pressure groups have been hampered by institutional weakness (such as a lack of strategic planning and long-term initiative; deficit of resources – particularly of full-time staff, lobbying expertise and funding required to support its lobbying activity and community representation) (Radcliffe, 2010). That is because the Muslim lobby often promotes its interests via think-tanks and professional lobbying agencies (for instance, the Gardant Communications is a consultant to the government of the Kingdom of Bahrain) and through embassies and consulates different states (such as the United Arab Emirates, Kurdistan Regional Government) (House of Commons (Register of All-Party Groups, 2011).

**Conclusion**

Political representation of religious minorities through non-elective forms of representation is a relatively new, under-explored trend. Despite Jewish and Muslim minorities have limited experience involved into British pressure politics their impact on political decision-making has been constantly increasing.

Structurally Jewish and Muslim-identified pressure groups are evolving. Currently they can be characterised by the following features.

Both minorities create cause (or promotional) rather than sectional interest groups as they are determined by concrete political aims. However, addressing insider Jewish groups (such as the Friends of Israel) there is a shift towards sectional pressure groups with a restricted membership. Generally a membership in religious minorities’ interest groups is not restricted by religious identity. It has been a long-lasting tradition within the Jewish lobby that Muslim organisations try to implement as well.
Both Jewish and Muslim-identified pressure groups are ‘endogenous’. They share similar attitudes to the problems they aim to solve so as have some identity homogeneity. On the other hand, religious minority pressure groups can be rather vague as religious identity is not the strongest consolidating factor referring to centripetal tendencies caused by race/ethnicity, gender, and class diversity.

Jewish and Muslim pressure groups can apply insider and outsider strategies, but the difference between two minorities is crucial. Since the beginning of the 19th century British Jewry has established well-organised pressure groups. In terms of internal stability, integrity and political experience an insider status of the Jewish lobby and aspiration to get it for a few existing outsider groups is not surprising.

Being more fragmented and polarised Muslim communities do not have agreed political agenda. Even though there exist ‘umbrella organisations’ aim to represent the general concerns of the minority they cannot unite numerous Muslim interest groups on the everyday basis. As a result quantity of representative groups weakens the potential power of the community’s numerical strength, since each group’s credibility is lowered by representing fewer people.

References


