

**The Representation and Political Incorporation  
of  
Visible Minority Members of Provincial Parliament**

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## **The Representation and Political Incorporation of Visible Minority Members of Provincial Parliament**

### **Abstract**

Using qualitative interviews conducted with MPPs of Ontario's 40<sup>th</sup> provincial parliament as well as one former MPP from the 33<sup>rd</sup> provincial parliament, this paper explores the representation and political incorporation of visible minority Members of Provincial Parliament at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This paper first explores representation using a descriptive representative model whereby it is assessed how closely the Legislative Assembly of Ontario numerically mirrors Ontario's visible minority population. Secondly, this paper explores the culture at Queen's Park and assesses to what extent it is conducive to the fullness of the experiences of visible minority MPPs. This paper investigates the perceived barriers that visible minority MPPs face in their roles as Members at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. By analyzing the collected, this study finds that considerable but not overwhelming barriers currently exist for visible minority MPPs at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

### **Introduction**

Canada has long carried out racial exclusion in immigrant selection, through its policy of preferred countries of origin (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.1217). Until the 1960s, Canadian immigration policy was designed to develop the country as a white settler society, and virtually all immigrants came from Britain, the United States, and Europe (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.1217). However, since the 1960s, particularly with a more open immigration policy under the Trudeau government, fewer than 20% of immigrants have come from these places (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.1217).

Today, Ontario is an increasingly diverse province with a striking 22.82% of Ontarians being identified as visible minorities (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.4). For a more focused understanding of Ontario's demographic shifts, it is important to consider the enormous change in Toronto's demographics, particularly over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Toronto has become one of the world's most immigrant, multiracial, and multicultural cities. Among the city's two and a half million residents, half are immigrants and more than four in 10 are visible minorities (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.1218).

I begin this investigation from my own standpoint, reflecting on my own experiences as a young racialized woman interning at Queen's Park, and taking in the relatively homogenous cultural and socio-political landscape deeply rooted in nineteenth century traditions of British parliamentarianism.

In seeking to understand the experiences of Members who may not share this cultural history, I am specifically exploring the experiences of visible minority Members of Provincial Parliament

at Queen's Park. I propose to engage in a two-part analysis. First of all, I will engage in a descriptive representative study as a comparison of how closely the visible minority make-up of the Ontario Legislature mirrors that of Ontario. Through qualitative interviews, I will also engage in a small-scale exploration of the perceptions, sentiments, and experiences of visible minority MPPs in their respective roles at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in exploring any barriers to effective political integration, representation, and incorporation.

### **The Contentious Nature of Measuring Race: Use of the Term 'Visible Minority'**

The term visible minority is a distinctly Canadian invention and the official terminology in Canadian law to identify non-Caucasians and non-whites (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.2). According to Canada's *Employment Equity Act* (first introduced in 1986 but later amended in 1995), visible minorities refer to "all persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race and non-white in colour," (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.2).

The collection of data by the government to classify individuals by their race has had a long and somewhat controversial history in Canada. Given the contested – often ambiguous and hybrid – nature of the term visible minority, some researchers have disputed the methods or purposes of classifying race on the grounds that race is a social construct and not an essentialistic feature of human beings that can be reliably measured in order to draw meaningful conclusions (2007, Mays, p.202). It is this inherent complexity of measuring race which makes a term like 'visible minority' a problematic one.

Some researchers have argued that a literal reading of the term implies that only those individuals who are not Caucasian are 'visible' and that visible minorities necessarily constitute a reductive minority (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.2). Both of these assumptions are untrue. Moreover, some Canadian municipalities consist of minority white populations. For example, within the Greater Toronto Area, visible minorities constitute the majority of the population in Markham (64%) and Brampton (57%) (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.2). In 2006, almost half – 47 per cent – of Toronto's population was non-white, up more than 10 per cent from 2001, and more than 30 per cent from 1996 (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.2).

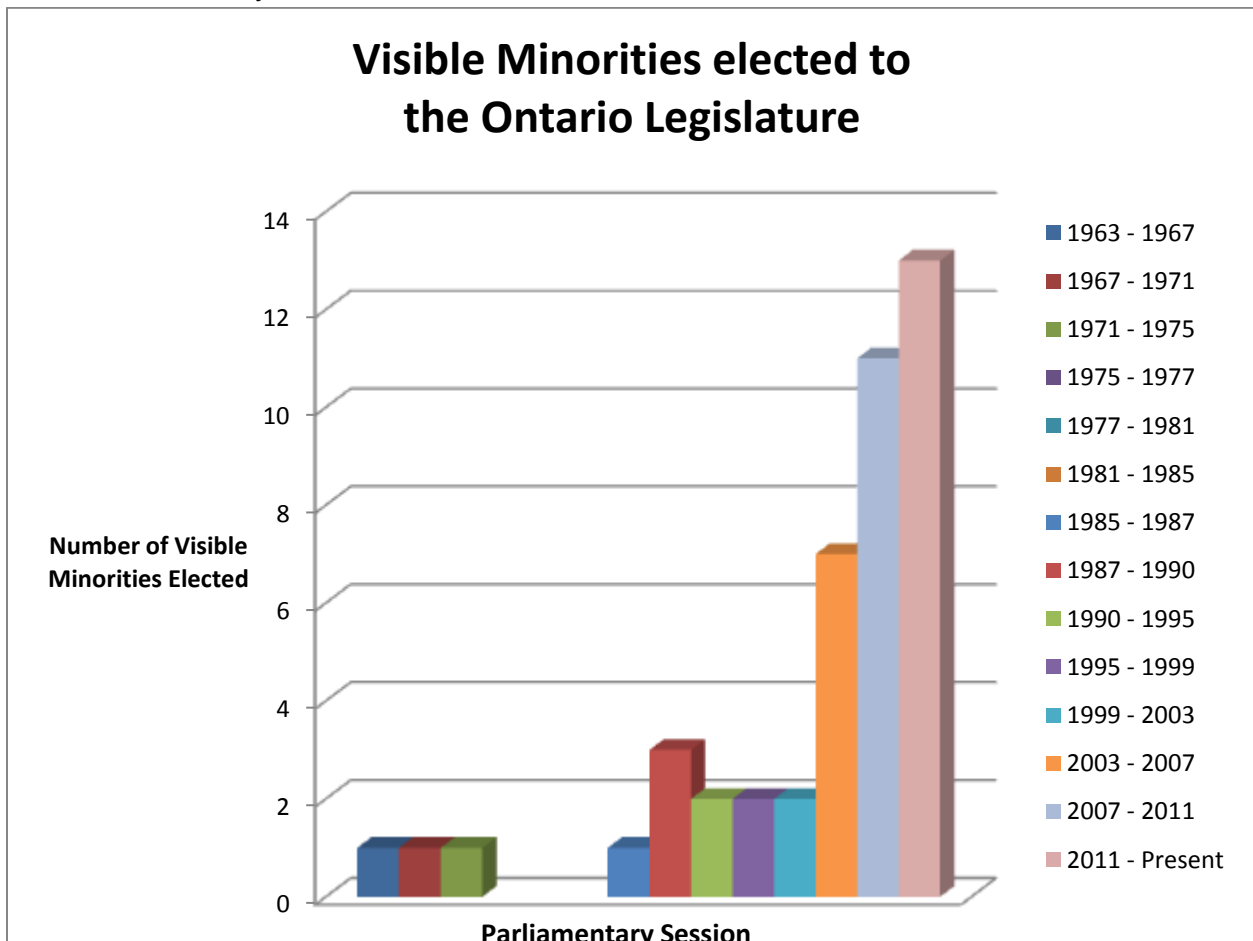
Another drawback of the term is its imposing effect on people of colour, according to the United Nations which has twice criticized Canada for this reason. In 2007, the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination deemed the term potentially discriminatory. In 2011, Canada was ordered to appear before this same committee, which produced a report stating, "It is being used at all levels of the Canadian society, homogenizing experiences of different ethnic groups. Its lack of precision may pose a barrier to effectively addressing the socio-economic gaps of different ethnic groups," (2007, CBC News).

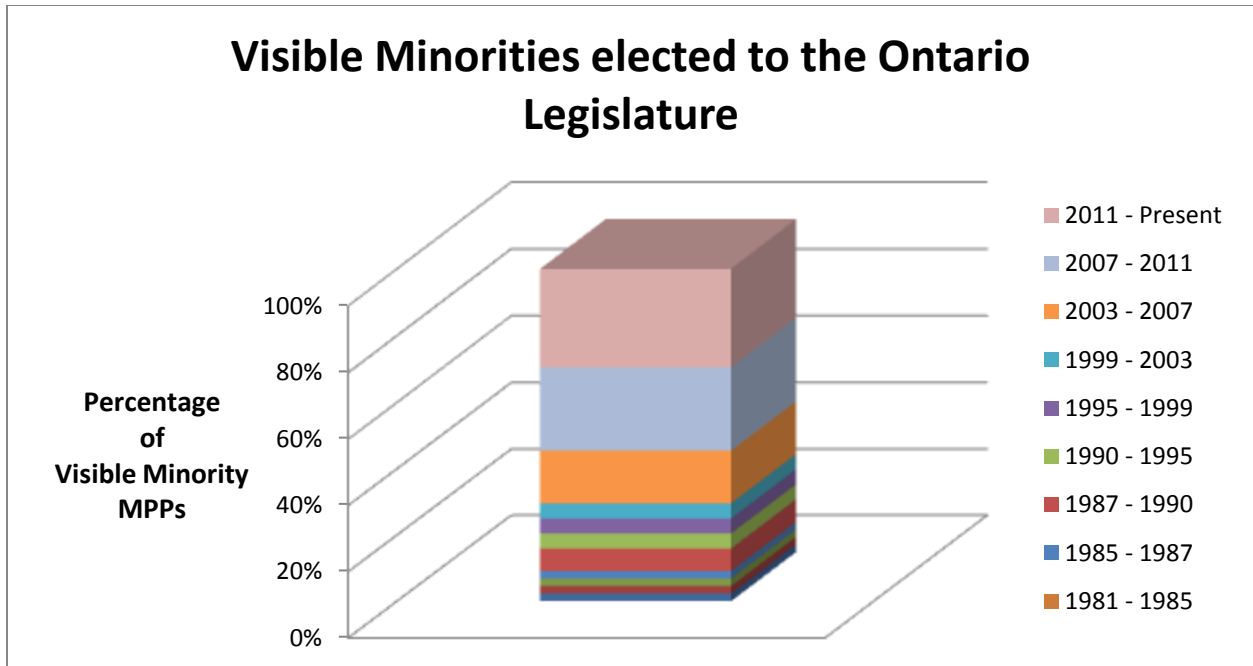
Another problem with the term is that it often lends itself to confusion. There is no singular way in which sub-groups can be drawn from the broader group 'visible minorities' (i.e. by nationality, by ethnicity, by continent, or by sub-continent). Further, certain individuals from sub-groups, such as Hispanics, may or may not fit into the visible minority category depending on their appearance and whether or not they appear to be white (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.3).

Despite its complexities and contradictions, because the term remains deeply embedded in Canadian law, literature, and history, I will use the term visible minority to refer to non-Caucasians or non-whites, other than Aboriginals.

### Looking at the Numbers: Then and Now

This study begins with a descriptive representative approach to examining visible minority representation at the Ontario Legislature. We begin by examining the composition of visible minority MPPs over each of the last fourteen parliamentary sessions, since the election of the first visible minority MPP in 1963 (Current MPPs, 2013):





From this quantitative analysis, we see a substantive increase in visible minority representation in the House over the last 30 years. However, the presence of visible minority MPPs in the Legislature has always been drastically lower than that in broader Ontario (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.7).

Currently, there are 107 seats in the Ontario Legislature and thirteen are held by visible minority members (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.8). This 12.15% of MPPs hardly compares to the 22.82% of Ontarians that are visible minorities (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.8). Focusing more specifically on the Greater Toronto Area where 40% of the population is visible minority, only 11% of GTA seats belong to visible minority MPPs (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.9). Ontario must double its visible minority elected officials in order for provincial MPPs to mirror the province's racial profile (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.8). This is especially concerning when considering that, out of the three levels of government, provincial government has been found to be the most conducive to facilitating visible minority access to elected office (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.8).

Looking more closely at the racial makeup of legislators at Queen's Park, South Asians are overrepresented at Queen's Park. South Asians hold six seats which accounts for roughly 17.83% of Members while they do not meet this proportion in broader Ontario. (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.9). Meanwhile, other major ethnic groups (Arabs, Filipinos, non-white Latin Americans, and Southeast Asians) have no representation whatsoever (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.9).

### **Moving beyond Descriptive Representation to Political Incorporation**

This paper focuses on provincial electoral representation of visible minorities as a significant marker of civic inclusion and exclusion. An initial, *prima facie*, numbers-based examination of visible minority representation at Queen's Park lays out a descriptive representative study.

This descriptive representative approach to understanding diversity in politics is concerned with looking at to what extent elected bodies accurately mirror the composition of the electorate. According to Hannah Pitkin (1967), "In a representative assembly, as in art, the perfection of the portrait consists in its likeness." This suggests that by sharing or resembling the same identity markers (i.e. ethnicity, race, or cultural background), the MPP is able to represent a group's interests.

I suggest that, although it offers an important baseline for understanding the political engagement of racialized players in formal political institutions, mere descriptive representation is not sufficient for consideration of the influence of minority MPPs on policy- and political decision-making.

In exploring the incorporation of visible minority MPPs into the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, no single theoretical model can encompass all cases, variables, and circumstances. Nevertheless, I am assuming enough to lay out one theoretical framework to ground my assessment of the experiences and insight of minority MPPs interviewed.

Recent discussions of political incorporation have developed a number of ideas. Martin Shefter defines "full [political] incorporation" very broadly as "gain[ing] a position in the regime that is secure" (Hoschild & Mollenkopf, 2009, p.15). This idea is further developed by Rufus Browning, Dale Marshall, and David Tabb who describe incorporation as "the responsiveness of the [political] system to the interest of inclusion and substantial authority and influence" or more simply as "the extent to which group interests are effectively represented in policy making" (Hoschild & Mollenkopf, 2009, p.15). In other words, this model holds that for a minority community to witness effective response to its needs, minority leaders must come to occupy positions of governmental authority (Browning et. al., 1986, p.578).

By laying out these primary definitions of political incorporation, we are covering important analytical ground. This framework characterizes incorporation as a process (rather than a moment or a threshold) in which individuals or groups move from less to greater or from early to later stages (Hoschild & Mollenkopf, 2009, p.16). Defining incorporation this way allows us to describe visible minority MPPs as more or less incorporated or as incorporated in some ways but not in others or as moving away from or towards further incorporation at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

This is a much more flexible and useful framework than a simple dichotomy between incorporation and a lack thereof, or exclusion. Moreover, we can classify stages of incorporation

– moving from entry to Queen's Park to influence over its policy and institutions. The process of bringing outsiders in is more or less linear rather than random or cyclical (Hoschild & Mollenkopf, 2009, p.16).

Jones-Correa's understanding of incorporation ranges most widely, from simply an individual's law-abiding residence in a polity or naturalization, to full engagement with "the process of democracy (Hoschild & Mollenkopf, 2009, p.17). Given our ambitions for the model, it is this engagement with the democratic institutions at Queen's Park by visible minority MPPs that I am interested in exploring.

Despite Canada's stature as one of the world's leading immigrant-receiving countries, Stasiulis (1997) has accurately noted that "there has been a dearth of research in Canada focused specifically on the experiences of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in electoral politics and the political process at various levels" (Siemiatycki, 2011, p.1220).

In studying the political incorporation of visible minority MPPs, I will be looking specifically at their experiences in their roles as Members at Queen's Park.

### **Scope and Methodology of Study**

This paper uses primary research to gain greater insight into the experiences of visible minority MPPs in their respective roles within their parties as well as at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and to assess to what extent the environment at Queen's Park is conducive to the fullness of their experiences as Members of Provincial Parliament. This study also looks at how deeply being from a nontraditional background impacts one's role and experience as an MPP. Primary research involves the collection of qualitative data, obtained by the researcher.

The interviews were qualitative, in-depth, open-ended, and explore a wide range of topics regarding the personal experiences, sentiments, and perceptions of MPPs regarding their respective roles, with ongoing reference to their ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds. Interviews were conducted over a one-month period from April 22, 2013 to May 22, 2013 and no time limit was enforced.

Questions to individual MPPs address professional background and motivation for entering provincial politics, how welcoming of an environment QP was found to be, comfort level, treatment, added pressures to represent groups (other than members' respective constituencies), forging understanding and overcoming barriers with colleagues, personal perceptions on power to be heard and have a substantive voice as well as access to resources and information, and sentiments on how members' respective parties handles diversity. Because the purpose is to learn as much as possible regarding the unique experiences and perceptions of visible minority MPPs and yet their number is relatively low in the House, participants comprise a small but diverse sample of MPPs.

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Current Members (backbenchers and Ministers) as well as a former Member (Dr. Alvin Curlin) were interviewed.

Seven visible minority MPPs were interviewed (one former Member, four backbench Members, and two Ministers) regarding their personal experiences at Queen's Park.

As part of my primary study, the following MPPs were interviewed:

Honourable Dr. Alvin Curling

Dipika Damerla

Bas Balkissoon

Amrit Mangat

Harinder Takhar

Michael Chan

Jagmeet Singh

I have chosen to include a former Member of Provincial Parliament as part of my study to engage in a comparative study over time and examine how the experiences of MPPs have changed over time.

### **Interview Responses: Visible Minority MPP Experiences at Queen's Park**

#### ***Entrance into Provincial Politics***

When asking Members regarding their background and motivation to enter politics, I noted where Members stated that coming from a nontraditional background had a role in a Member's decision or presented any barriers in running for office. Of the seven visible minority MPPs interviewed, five members described their background as having some sort of influence in entering politics.

Dr. Alvin Curling stated that he ran for office in 1985 as a response to what those around him were saying:

[W]hen I started people were saying there is no chance for you to win because you are black and furthermore, an immigrant, and a Liberal (at the time of a Conservative government), and your riding is very large. Therefore all those things that people made negative, I thought it was positive. It was a great challenge. Wonderful (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Dipika Damerla made it clear that her motivation for running largely had to do with her perceived importance for an average Canadian to have universal access to run for office. Identifying as an average, middle class person, Damerla claims that it is important for people



from all walks of life (“not just the wealthy, not just the established, not just people with a certain last name”) to be able to enter the nomination phase (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

While Harinder Takhar did not speak of being from a minority background as a specific motivating factor, he discussed his involvement in the Sikh Punjabi community as a catalyst to entering provincial politics, having started the first International Punjabi Chamber of Commerce.

Although Minister Michael Chan stated that it was not “a very major factor, being from a minority background”, he made clear that, to him, there was little difference between being a “mainstream government” official and a “minority” one. “I just happen to perhaps know a little bit more about the culture of the Chinese, the minds of the Chinese.” He made it clear that as Minister he is serving and working for all Ontarians and that this approach was more important to him than a focus on minority representation.

Jagmeet Singh spoke of his decision to run for MPP as a response to an elected official that was not supporting his community, particularly on a local human rights issue. Singh was encouraged to run by a number of peers.

Only Bas Balkissoon and Amrit Mangat stated that cultural or racial background difference was not a motivating factor, nor did it present challenges in entering provincial politics.

Balkissoon, however, stated, “I am different (from other minority MPPs),” (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013) as he had already built a reputation in municipal politics as a city councillor. He was already well-respected because of his background in auditing and finance prior to entering Queen's Park. Therefore, “people knew and recognized me,” (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013) Bas says. One may suggest that there is an implicit assumption that he felt that he may have had a poor reception if it was not for the reputation that preceded his entrance to Queen's Park (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Although she made no mention of cultural, ethnic, or racial background, Mangat stated that her motivation for entering provincial politics was driven by wanting to make a difference for girls and women, and wanting to ensure that women all occupy all fields, including politics (A. Mangat, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

### ***Environment at Queen's Park: Reception, Comfort, and Treatment***

The minority Members were asked regarding the nature of their experiences at Queen's Park, including reception and interaction by colleagues and experiences forging understanding in an effort to overcome ethnic, cultural, or racial differences.

Dr. Alvin Curling gave a very candid and thorough discussion about the challenges he faced after appointment to Cabinet in 1985. He spoke about the seemingly extreme discomfort exhibited by those around him when he first came to Queen's Park in 1985:

I think they were uncomfortable (with) this new person. How do we act towards him? They didn't say that. They were friendly. Very polite. Over-polite sometimes (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Curling went on to explain that this discomfort by those around him inhibited him from expressing himself. He was taking in the novelty of Queen's Park, learning for the first time the processes and procedures at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (like other newly elected members) while at the same time dealing with how "the newness of the image of (himself) was being received," (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013). His fellow newly elected members were also "walking on new grounds" while also "walking with people who have never walked with them before". As the first Black cabinet minister, he speaks of breaking the ice for other minority members and about being a "trailblazer" (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Dr. Curling also elaborated on how his reception at Queen's Park was shaped by his interaction with the media – which, he stated, was preoccupied with his race rather than his policy portfolio:

I found that the media itself was actually in a kind of strategic way, not as receptive. In other words they would ask questions like, 'How do you feel as the first black cabinet minister?' Those to me are racist comments. I responded by telling them that I was never white so I wouldn't know what a white cabinet minister feels like. So I tell them I am a cabinet minister who is black. I am not a black cabinet minister (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Contrastingly, Dipika Damerla, has not noted any particular or unusual discomfort or challenges as a newer MPP when entering Queen's Park. "It was hard but I don't know whether it was hard because it's just hard for everybody," (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013). Rather than her discomfort stemming from a difference of race or culture, Damerla elaborated that it had more to do with being a woman:

I am not sure that there are a lot of men you can have relationships with – a platonic relationship where you're working till one on lists. With women, I can talk shopping and you just bond, but with men, I'm trying to find something beyond that. It's not anything peculiar to me, but any woman in a world where there's so few women (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

However, she stated this as a much bigger challenge in the nomination stage:

(It is) not as much a challenge here within the 107 of us, not so much. Generally, I think with stakeholders, it's still a man's world and you find a way to negotiate it. It's not that you don't. It's just going to be a little different. I mean, I'm not going golfing with anyone. I'm not going golfing with any CEO's. I just don't have those networks.

Despite this sense of social isolation from many male networks, Damerla speaks about receiving respect and encouragement from people but often being underestimated. However, this is a phenomenon she says she has faced wherever she has been, not just at Queen's Park. She warns of the danger of letting other people's low expectations lower your own expectations for yourself. She also reflects on being dismissed or of being perceived as 'submissive' and the possibility that it may come from the stereotype of a South Asian woman however, again, she stresses that this is the exception as opposed to the rule and that attitude can overturn these perceptions.

Bas Balkissoon, on the other hand, has "had a very good reception coming here to Queen's Park." He attributes this to the reputation he had already built prior to entering Queen's Park. Balkissoon also stated that he is and has been very comfortable and feels at home. He states that his colleagues have shown respect. There was no situation in which he was offended and he has never felt the need to downplay his differences (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Amrit Mangat has described the environment at Queen's Park to be "very welcoming" in her experience (A. Mangat, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Harinder Takhar says he "looks at things differently" and emphasizes the need for a positive attitude. "I guess you can always feel that way if that's the attitude you want to take. On the other hand, if you just go about doing your job I think you can get over it."

Regarding comfort level, he states that discomfort level in politics sometimes comes from being criticized for things you had no control in or that you didn't do and the media sometimes blows it out of proportion. He states that this happened to him a few times and that discomfort has more to do with media than with the internal workings of the party or other causes.

In terms of interaction with colleagues, he described treatment by colleagues as "fine". "Everybody has their ups and downs in life so the colleagues are fine." In terms of his identity, he stated "I am who I am. No need to downplay it."

Michael Chan said he found the environment at Queen's Park not very different from other environments elsewhere. There were some odd times where he felt looked down upon but all in all, he says, there has been a lot of change from when he began his career in the 80's. Overall, he described the interaction with his colleagues as very normal and comfort level being very high.

Jagmeet Singh, however, spoke about being the “only racialized person on the opposition side, feeling a little out of place”. There tends to be a camaraderie between people that are racialized with similar life experiences, similar challenges, relatability, and background, he says.

He speaks about relating to the rest of his caucus on coming from different language backgrounds, growing up in immigrant families but it is still not the same thing. He sometimes feels inclined to not belong or be singled out sometimes. As a result of his very extroverted personality, he says, he has not personally felt isolated or alienated but the fact still remains that he is the only racialized person.

Albeit less so in socializing with his colleagues was described, Jagmeet mentioned more so his discomfort in the Judeo-Christian morning prayers in the Legislature as well the oath on the Holy Bible or allegiance to the Queen as alienating to the people who are not a part of following these traditions. He believes in a separation of church and state and finds the standardized practice of one faith to be a problem. The rotation that is done every other day should be done everyday. Or there should be a nondenominational prayer.

He notes that the impact of these things is measured by individual characteristics like personality but the existence is there.

In terms of assumptions faced by colleagues at Queen's Park, he speaks about people assuming that he was born elsewhere outside of Canada. Although his colleagues don't assume this, he definitely faces that in broader Queen's Park. Also, people are sometimes surprised that his English is very good while it is his first language.

He has never felt the need to downplay his differences. “I'm cool that way”. He boldly declares his differences. The reception depends on audience but he generally receives good reception. He focuses on personality as opposed to environment. “I am a bit bold like that”.

### *Engaging in Dialogue and Bridging Understanding*

On the whole, six out of seven members have expressed the need to engage in some sort of dialogue in order to bridge cultural understanding with their colleagues.

Only Dipika Damerla has stated that people in her party have been so sensitized to a diversity of cultures and backgrounds. She also attributes this ready understanding as a reflection of the Liberal Party which attracts broadminded people open to the idea of newcomers. She doesn't feel the same way about broader Queen's Park (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Alvin Curling speaks about the expectation to be the expert on all minorities: Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Guyanese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Jamaicans, West Indians, Africans, and on and on and on. When any issue or question arose about a particular community or group, he was expected to know even though these communities were usually outside his

constituency. He spoke of being expected to speak even when he had nothing to say. Likewise, he speaks of being overwhelmed and expected to attend every single event for various cultural and religious communities – from events at the Hindu temple to Chinese community events – who expected him to attend. He describes this as delightful yet extremely tolling and heavily demanding on his time and energy (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Bas Balkissoon spoke in depth regarding the need for him to bring a special understanding and relay the historical suffering of immigrant groups in his riding to Queen's Park. As an example, he referred to the children of domestic workers from the Caribbean in his riding, who have faced problems of being unable to integrate into the Canadian school system and job market, and who are part of a cycle of neglect and dysfunction. He speaks of the continued need to bridge important understanding as he currently sits on the Poverty Reduction Cabinet Committee and notes similar problems with Filipino domestic workers in Canada and their children that later immigrate as well (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Amrit Mangat, very matter of factly, stated of course there is a need to engage in dialogue (A. Mangat, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Harinder Takhar describes this dialogue as his responsibility. He discusses the need to teach those at Queen's Park about his cultural community, such as their specific cultural and religious practices, such as why Sikhs wear turbans.

He also speaks about the need to create awareness around various issues in a positive manner rather than just defending them. He describes times when he has had to intervene and speak to the Premier about legislation or policy that would not be well received within his communities.

Michael Chan matter of factly stated the need to engage in dialogue as natural, often informing his colleagues about the happenings in China and Hong Kong.

Jagmeet Singh has also expressed the need to engage in dialogue, but speaks of it in a different sense, addressing questions of fairness and systemic barriers to inequality. To him, dialogue is much more crucial than bridging a mere cultural understanding but also a necessary understanding to help disadvantaged communities. They sometimes lack understanding, he states, but because his NDP colleagues adhere to similar principles there is an openness towards the concepts.

### *Having a Voice at Queen's Park*

Members were also asked regarding their perceptions on being heard and having the power to advocate. Responses were mixed. Most members that did express challenges in being heard spoke about approaches to overcoming such challenges.

Dr. Alvin Curling spoke to challenges in being heard “many, many times” (A. Curling,

personal communication, May 16, 2013). He spoke of raising a point at times and it being ignored, and then when a colleague raised the same point it was recognized by everyone. This affected his sense of certainty:

Sometimes you feel you are being kind of stupid because maybe they didn't understand it, or am I being stupid? You start judging yourself (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

He also made it clear that some issues were not heard or wanted to be heard by his colleagues, referencing his protest of a television show 'Showboat' which he felt has racist overtones in its portrayal of southern US Blacks:

I don't shy away from the fact that Black issues need to be spoken about. I am Black and we will raise the issue and if you try to suppress it, I will take my demonstration/expression somewhere else (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Dipika Damerla's answer was mixed reporting a stronger power to advocate in very official forums as the parliamentary assistant to a particular ministry. She also stressed her responsibility 'to do her homework' and show credibility in order to overturn negative perceptions. She said it may have to do with background but has found this point self-defeating and warns of the trap of falling into victimhood (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Bas Balkissoon states that sometimes he has been heard, and sometimes not but stresses the need to offer solutions when addressing problems. He also states that crime issues were bigger problems when he started as MPP (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Amrit Mangat has said that she feels she has a substantive voice and has never been unable to feel heard (A. Mangat, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Harinder Takhar, in addition to stressing the need to voice the concerns of his specific cultural community, did not say whether he has had a time when he was not heard. Instead, he doesn't let such things bother him believing that everyone has a contribution to be made. He feels it is his responsibility to be heard.

Michael Chan denied ever feeling a time when he was not heard. He says it is not based on background but on merit.

Jagmeet Singh stated that he makes sure that he is always heard –attributing this to his individual personality.

### ***Members' Access to Resources and Information***

In terms of access to resources and information for effective decisionmaking, all but one member cited no real barrier or challenge in ever attaining what was needed.

Dipika Damerla states that she has faced barriers but did not know what this was a result of – not attributing this to a difference in background (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

*Added Pressures and Expectations as Visible Minority MPPs*

Members cited a variety of added pressures as Members of nontraditional backgrounds at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Answers were mixed and varied from no pressure at all to exceptional burdens to act a certain way and to over-perform.

Dr. Curling spoke of multiple pressures from both his colleagues and all minority individuals in Ontario. He spoke at length about the difficulty of adjusting to his new role as a newly elected MPP while being expected to be a positive role model for all minorities in Ontario. He spoke about being conscientious of having all eyes on him and pressure to perform exceedingly well (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

As discussed above, he speaks about the expectation to be the expert on all minorities: Indians , Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Guyanese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Jamaicans, West Indians, Africans, and on and on and on. When any issue or question arose about a particular community or group, he was expected to know even though these communities were usually outside his constituency. He spoke of being expected to speak even when he had nothing to say. Likewise, he speaks of being overwhelmed and expected to attend every single event for various cultural and religious communities – from events at the Hindu temple to Chinese community events – who expected him to attend. He describes this as delightful yet extremely tolling on his time and energy (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

He spoke in particular about Question Period and the multiple pressures to represent his largely white constituency while also act as a positive role model for the thousands and thousands of minorities in Ontario. He also spoke of having to be mindful of his Caribbean accent and slowing down his speech to allow those around him to understand him (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Dipika Damerla did not feel the need to fit into any archetype. She also cites representing certain communities over others as unfair –unless there was a vulnerable group that requires attention (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

In terms of added pressures to exceed expectations, she attributes this to personality, not those around her. She speaks of her ambition to not let past efforts go to waste and members' tendencies to be driven by fear or guilt or ambition (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Bas Balkissoon said he feels no need to represent certain groups over others unless there is strong justification for this – citing his refusal of a day to celebrate everyone's heritage because it would have bad business implications. At an individual level, he stresses the need to succeed for oneself (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Amrit Mangat discussed no specific added pressures (A. Mangat, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Harinder Takhar stated that there is always an added pressure when you are a little different from the others. There is a pressure to work a little harder to get the same results as others but stressed the need to never let that get one down. He stated that everybody comes from their own experiences.

He also 'absolutely' feels the need to represent his cultural community. He stated that they have different expectations from him because they feel they can relate better to him than other mpps of a different background. He also cited that sometimes his community members do not properly understand the system and feel he has more power than he does.

Michael Chan cites no added pressure but his own personal desire and motivation to perform exceptionally.

Jagmeet Singh spoke of the burden to be exceptional, standing out and because of his language background, his looks, his religious background, in order to receive respect. He cites unfair criticism and added scrutiny and the need to overperform to compensate for this.

### *Perceptions on Respective Party's Handling of Diversity*

On the whole, Dr. Curling spoke about the party handling diversity very well as that would increase the popularity and profile of the party. He described it as a plus for the party. In comparison, he feels that the NDP are also doing a good job (citing Akande) but says that the Conservatives have never been so fortunate with minorities in the House. He traces the liberal Party's success back to Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's open-door immigration policy (A. Curling, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

Dipika Damerla feels the Liberal Party handles diversity badly because it is reduced to the colour of your skin, the language you speak, or your faith but she feels diversity is much broader than that. She talks about diversity of views, experiences, and ideas. She also feels that, for instance, the English and french are assumed not to have a culture, under the current definition of diversity (D. Damerla, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Bas Balkissoon says that the party has a long way to go in terms of its handling of diversity. He encourages more outreach and direct involvement with nontraditional communities. He feels they are catered to but not embraced and integrated to understand the way government functions. He hopes for less talk and real engagement. He also hopes for education and trust to be built with newer immigrants (B. Balkissoon, personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Amrit Mangat claims the Liberal party handles diversity "very well", especially compared to the other parties citing her party's number of minority individuals.



Hibah Sidat

Harinder Takhar claims that his party doesn't handle diversity well as immigrants are often taken for granted and all assumed Liberal. He also feels that their interests aren't always engaged and they are only sought during election time. He recommends involving and engaging them all the time.

Michael Chan feels the party has been "fantastic" in handling diversity. Although he has concern with the PC party, he says the NDP are doing quite well also.

Jagmeet Singh feels the NDP handles diversity quite well.

### **Interview Analysis: Findings and Conclusion**

On the whole, there seem to be considerable challenges for visible minority Members of Provincial Parliament.

The most striking determinant in the quality of a member's experiences is perhaps time. It is dramatically clear that Dr. Alvin Curling faced the greatest challenges and barriers to incorporation and influence at the Ontario Legislature, upon election in 1985 – over 20 years ago. Extreme discomfort, challenges in being heard, expectation and pressure to be an expert of all non-caucasian cultural customs and issues were present for Curling when they are absent for current members.

However, perceived barriers still persist for the members interviewed. First of all, it is clear that, in some ways, ground is still being broken at Queen's Park. In the high need to bridge understanding, create comfort levels through attitudes, meet additional expectations as a member from a nontraditional background, and the generally poor perception of party handling of diversity, we may infer that full political incorporation is not yet the case.

Another important consideration is membership to a particular party. The Liberal party holds the largest number of visible minority members, partly because of their holdings in urban, more diverse, more racially occupied ridings.

This phenomenon is also consistent with the theories of political incorporation of Browning, Marshall, and Tabb that state that the key to higher levels of responsiveness is not representation but coalition. As the government in power, the Liberals see the highest visible minority representation rate out of all three parties. According to Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, minority inclusion in a coalition that dominates the government (albeit a minority government, the Liberal party still holds the greatest number of seats) produces a much more positive response than the election of minority members not part of the dominant coalition. Mere numbers indicates that perhaps minority members have chosen to run for the government party where there may be a higher perceived chance of election rather than the opposition where, fewer safe seats may exist in the first place.

In noting no visible minority Member presence in the Progressive Conservative caucus, I spoke to MPP Christine Elliott has stated that the PCs recognize that the representation of many different communities results in good policymaking, with an emphasis on merit and goodstanding within their community (C. Elliott, personal communication, May 17, 2013).

Party affiliation of members interviewed also shaped their outlook and approaches to challenges discussed. Liberal members tend to display greater emphasis on maintaining positive attitudes and seeking opportunities to overcome barriers faced, predicated on the ifdea that merit determines outcome. Meanwhile, the NDP member interviewed displayed greater sensitivity towards the systemic barriers and inequalities that some groups inevitably face - although an emphasis on a bold personality was also displayed.

In discussing a member's personality, it is important to note a series of factors that could not be controlled for in my study.

Religion, for example, is one of these neglected factors. Jagmeet Singh speaks of being the lone racialized MPP on the opposition side. He presented additional challenges that other members did not speak of, particularly with regards to being required to participate in the daily morning Christian prayers in the House as well as the required Oath of Allegiance on either the Bible or as an oath to the Queen. These traditions mark Queen's Park as a Christian Legislature with deep roots in British parliamentarianism which minority members may not share. This was only expressed by Singh. He also spoke of often being assumed to be a foreigner or from outside Canada. A visible difference in religion, perhaps, is why only he faces these assumptions.

Similarly, this study lacks any account of gender differences and whether there are any challenges to gender parity. Dipika Damerla, in particular, emphasized notable challenges as a result of being a woman. Mangat also described her desire to empower women as a motivating factor in entering provincial politics.

Tenure and standing of the member has also been disregarded as a result of the small sample size that could be attained in the limited time span for interviews. We see notable differences in the quality of experience between, for example, Minister Michael Chan and newly elected MPP Dipika Damerla.

Respondents' answers may also be constrained by party discipline and the requirement of a member to reflect one's party well. This may also account for the candid and thorough account of Dr. Curling's negative experiences with his colleagues. As a former member, he enjoys the latitude to avoid having to adhere to strict party discipline.

One commonality that most members share is their discussion of shifting to a positive attitude, the need to be bold in expression, the need to work harder or some way to face and overcome the challenges as a visible minority MPP. The seeming ability of members to change the

outcomes of their experiences suggests that barriers for visible minority MPPs are considerable but not overwhelming.

In revisiting our model of political incorporation, I conclude that visible minority MPPs enjoy a relatively high level of incorporation.

### **Future Considerations**

Despite these relatively promising findings, the fact remains. Visible minorities continue to be grossly underrepresented at all levels of government. This study, then, begs further examination in understanding where exactly representation gaps and effectively, gaps in equity, lie.

If our visible minority elected representatives face challenges, it is worth exploring the experiences of the more vulnerable and impoverished who lie completely outside of electoral politics and influence and are not privy to the powers of a Member of Provincial Parliament.

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