



Omar Hammoud-Gallego

Katharina Lawall

Alex Bulat

Isabelle McRae

March 19th, 2025

## Why representation in local politics in London matters

*When political representatives don't reflect the demographics of the population that's not just bad optics – it can lead to discrepancies between what politicians pursue and what people seek. Omar Hammoud-Gallego, Katharina Lawall, Alex Bulat and Isabelle McRae analyse the demographics of London Councillors and find that women, young people and minorities are underrepresented in local councils. The same was true of renters vs homeowners.*

---

Enjoying this post? Then sign up to our [newsletter](#) and receive a weekly roundup of all our articles.

---

In a world in flux [dominated by oligarchs and autocrats](#), talk of representation in politics might seem naïve and oddly timed. Yet, in such a challenging context for democracies across the globe, the need for better representation in democratic institutions is more urgent than ever, including in the United Kingdom.

According to the 2024 [British Social Attitudes report](#), 58 per cent of respondents say that they “almost never trust politicians of any party in Britain to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner”, a record high. This mistrust stems from various sources, including failures in public policy delivery, as well as with the fact that [politicians often do not descriptively](#) or substantively [represent their communities](#). Meaning that the British public feels neither represented in terms of who is elected to democratic institutions nor sees their policy preferences reflected in the policy making process.



*According to the 2024 [British Social Attitudes report](#), 58 per cent of respondents say that they “almost never trust politicians of*

*any party in Britain to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner”, a record high.*



To address this issue, **in a recent report**, a joint initiative between the Migrant Democracy Project and the School of Public Policy at the LSE, we researched the issue of representation and diversity in local politics, focusing on the case of London. We sought to answer questions such as: Are women and young people underrepresented in local politics? What about individuals with migratory background, or renters?

Local councils make decisions about our everyday lives, from housing and green spaces, to roads, transport, and community support. Moreover, understanding councillors matters as many use their positions as **a stepping stone towards national politics**.

But how representative are local decision makers of London's diverse population? Surprisingly, we found out that little to no information had ever been collected on this topic. So we tasked ourselves with finding out, by reaching out and seeking to survey a sample of the 1800 elected local councillors in London. With over 520 respondents, a representative sample in terms of gender, ethnicity and area, this is what we found.

## Communities across London are Underrepresented in Local Councils

Compared with London's population, we found significant representation gaps across many of the characteristics we measured. Women, young people and minorities are underrepresented in local councils. Additionally, highly educated Londoners are overrepresented, while renters are heavily underrepresented. These are just some of our findings.



*In a period of high dissatisfaction with democracy, young people should be central to the democratic process. Instead,*

*young people in London are less likely to be represented, registered to vote or turn out on election day.*



In this article, we focus on two key factors: age and housing. As the figure below illustrates, there is a significant age gap in local representation. While 22 per cent of adult Londoners are under 30, only 8 per cent of councillors fall into this age group, almost three times fewer. In a period of high dissatisfaction with democracy, young people should be central to the democratic process. Instead, young people in London are less likely to be represented, registered to vote or turn out on election day. The limited engagement of young voices in politics is related to disenfranchisement amongst youth. However, there is a silver lining: in a subsequent report, we found that elected councillors engaged with the political process from a young age, suggesting that interest in politics exists among young people. The challenge lies in promoting more inclusive environments that encourage the involvement of younger people in politics.



*Underrepresentation is not merely symbolic; it can lead to discrepancies between what politicians pursue and what residents seek.*



The underrepresentation of younger residents matters also because many might need some of the services councils provide, such as local authority schools and housing. Underrepresentation is not merely symbolic; it can lead to **discrepancies** between what politicians pursue and what residents seek. Moreover, there is likely a link between underrepresentation and **low turnout in local elections**, which was only 33 per cent countrywide in the 2022 local elections.



*With housing security being a huge concern for London renters, the substantial overrepresentation of homeowners in Councils may impact housing decisions.*



## Renters are Underrepresented in London Councils

As the figure below shows, we also found a significant gap in representation based on housing tenure. While over half of all Londoners live in rented property, either privately or subsidised, less than one in every five councillors can speak in council meetings with the lived experience of being a current renter.

In case study interviews with councillors in our **follow up report**, housing insecurity emerged as a major factor affecting the ability of younger and more socioeconomically disadvantaged councillors to continue living and working in a certain council. With housing security being a huge concern for

London renters, the substantial overrepresentation of homeowners in Councils may impact housing decisions.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

Our research answered our initial questions about councillors in London, and identified representation gaps, providing new data on migration backgrounds, education, and homeownership in addition to census-based demographic data. Our survey model could be applied to other parts of the UK to gain a clearer picture of representation across the country or even farther afield. In future projects, we aim to find ways to increase the underrepresentation of several groups in the political process, including women and minorities, thus helping to understand how to strengthen engagement with – and trust in – democracy in the United Kingdom and beyond.

---

*Our report “Mind the (Representation) Gap” on representation and diversity in London’s Councils is available [online](#). A second report, titled “The Challenge of Being a Politician”, which focuses on how the representation gaps identified interact with the challenges of getting in and staying in local politics, including case studies, is also available [online](#). Both can be accessed on the [Migrant Democracy Project](#) website [here](#).*

*All articles posted on this blog give the views of the author(s), and not the position of LSE British Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science.*

*Image credit: [I Wei Huang](#) in Shutterstock*

---

Enjoyed this post? Then sign up to our [newsletter](#) and receive a weekly roundup of all our articles.

### About the author

#### Omar Hammoud-Gallego

Omar Hammoud-Gallego is Assistant Professor in Public Policy at Durham University and a Visiting Fellow at the LSE Department of Government. He is a former Fellow in Political Science and Public Policy at the LSE School of Public Policy. For more on his research go to [www.omarhgallego.com](http://www.omarhgallego.com)

**Katharina Lawall** is a Lecturer/Assistant Professor in Comparative Politics at the University of Reading. Katharina works on political behaviour, polarisation and diversity in politics, and is an expert in quantitative methods, including surveys, experiments and field randomised control trials (RCTs). She has led several large-scale research projects involving academic-civil society collaborations. For more information about Katharina's work, visit: [katharinalawall.com](http://katharinalawall.com)

#### **Alex Bulat**

Alex Bulat is a migration researcher and project consultant. Alex co-founded Migrant Democracy Project and worked on various projects on the representation of minoritised communities. She brings lived experience as a local councillor from a migrant background, working for 7 years in the migration and democratic reform sector in the UK.

#### **Isabelle McRae**

Isabelle McRae is an independent research consultant who has implemented numerous mixed-methods projects on the political participation of migrant and diaspora groups. She is Director of Restart Initiative, an organisation which supports post-conflict economic connectivity, and is the Development Consultant at the Centre for Geopolitics at the University of Cambridge.

**Posted In:** Housing | Local government | LSE Comment



© LSE 2025