



RACE AND FAIRNESS IN FRACTIOUS TIMES:

Public priorities for racial equity

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The first publication of the *Voices for Equity:
Moving from Evidence to Action* project

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Foreword: Understanding Britain's contested conversation on race

What is the condition of Britain and our multi-ethnic society today? Is racial prejudice diminishing across the generations, so the increasing visibility, voice and presence of ethnic minorities becomes a new normal? Or do polarised identity debates and the resurgence of racism now risk reducing confidence, among minorities and the white majority group, not just about how we can handle change fairly, but even whether a shared multi-ethnic society can succeed at all?

If both of those perspectives appear to be valid at once, how well do we understand the dynamics of these debates – and how institutions and citizens can respond? There have long been contrasting experiences of advances and disparities, and contested narratives about the scope and limits of progress. In increasingly fractious times, it can feel more difficult to find a shared understanding of where we are, how we got here and where we could go next.

We are not short of information on our changing society. The UK has a good claim to have the most detailed data on ethnic minority outcomes, in education and employment, of any OECD democracy. Yet the evidence base on attitudes and experiences regarding social change has been much patchier than the data on socio-economic outcomes. Moreover, there is far less robust evidence available about ethnic minority attitudes than for the public as a whole, especially on policy priorities.

Even as patterns of opportunities and outcomes become more complex over time – within and across minority and majority groups – the public conversation about race often risks becoming more binary. This can reinforce a heated polarisation in political, media and online debates that feed public perceptions of increasing division and pessimism about a shared future.

In such fractious and anxious times, both ethnic minority and white respondents told us they felt past progress on racial equality was going backwards. Our society is more divided than anybody would want – though there are contrasting views about who is driving that division.

Yet, across nations and regions, we mostly heard that people's own lived experience contrasted positively with the cultural climate. Some wondered if they were lucky, if they lived in cities like Cardiff, Glasgow or London, where more familiarity with diversity had increased confidence over time.

Others felt that the political, media and online debates were dangerously skewing the conversation in ways that were having real-world impacts.

Many ethnic minority respondents wanted to hear a more vocal challenge to the resurgence of racist street movements that evoke memories of the 70s and 80s. Polarised debates about asylum and immigration feel too heated to many. Some responded with solidarity for asylum seekers, though other ethnic minority participants took a harsher and less empathetic view of incomers whose presence had reignited tensions. Others again sought the balance that could welcome those who did want to contribute, and extend compassion to new arrivals in ways that feel fair to all.

Arguments about fairness are contested, not so much on the core principle, but more on perceptions of who gets heard or goes unheard. Yet a common-sense recognition that intersectionality matters extends far beyond those who would recognise or use that term. There is an appetite to see a discussion about fairness that recognises how social class, place, race and gender all matter, rather than seeming to offer a zero-sum choice about which inequalities to address.

Voices for Equity is a three-year project that seeks to address that gap, so as to better understand the dynamics of debates about race and identity, and inform effective responses. It aims to deepen understanding of the perspectives of ethnic minorities in Britain towards race equality, experiences of opportunity and barriers to change. And it uncovers new insights into where ethnic minority and white majority perspectives align – and where they differ. This research aims to bring these insights to policymakers, political leaders and civil society advocates. In doing so, we seek to inform effective policy responses that make a tangible difference to people's lives, advance racial equality, and strengthen a shared confidence in our ability to build a successful multi-ethnic society.

Sunder Katwala

Director, British Future

Executive Summary

In a society where one in six people are from ethnic minority backgrounds, efforts to address structural barriers and discrimination in a diverse society will require policymakers to find a clear voice on race and fairness.

Yet successive governments have rarely held a sustained focus on race. Themes of race equity and tackling racism have received reactive, often sporadic attention in the wake of high-profile incidents, from the murder of Stephen Lawrence to the Home Office Windrush scandal and Grenfell Tower tragedy. A process of lengthy commissions followed by largely unfulfilled recommendations has tended to follow, with little in the way of sustained strategy for driving long-term change.

The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in particular saw a significant mobilisation in politics and across institutions from the arts to employers. Yet a backlash in the years that followed, over contested ideas for promoting inclusion, often left policymakers and key sectors more anxious of engaging on race and fairness for fear of getting caught in a culture war cross-fire. The two years since the 2024 General Election have seen a series of heightened events, with riots and violent disorder in the summer of 2024 targeting asylum-seekers and ethnic minorities; and sharply contested arguments about immigration and asylum.

Most recently, the tragic death of Professor Jason Arday this August came after his role at Cambridge University received fierce controversy, not just about how far the scrutiny of academic standards was legitimate or disproportionate, but much broader claims and counter-claims about equality, diversity and inclusion, and institutional responses to structural racism.

It is in this context that the Voices for Equity project seeks to undertake a major research study, mapping the issues and, crucially, the priorities of people from ethnic minority backgrounds across the UK for change, through one of the largest representative surveys of this group to date and an extensive series of focus groups. The research aims to deliver new nationwide insight on how the government and major institutions can pursue a clearer agenda for change, which is able to command popular support.

It explores where there is consensus for policies and practices across minority ethnic groups and where there are more nuances between groups, genders, generations or regions. In a background of heightened polarisation, including on issues of racial fairness and community cohesion, the research also explores where the attitudes of the white majority empathise or where there are signs of zero-sum 'us versus them' competition.

This is the first report of the Voices for Equity project, setting out key areas of discrimination and inequity experienced by people from ethnic minority communities and their broad priorities for policy action. Further research over the following two years will then build on these foundations: exploring the views of young people in more depth over year two, and undertaking a deep-dive on key areas for action in year three.



Key findings: Attitudes on racism and inequality

Shared fears that race equality progress is going into reverse – but differences on the everyday reality and its causes

Our research finds a cross-ethnic consensus on the direction of racial equality in Britain: both white and ethnic minority respondents are more likely to believe it is getting worse than better. White respondents (48%) feel this even more strongly than ethnic minorities (44%). Well over half of ethnic minority Britons (62%) see racial inequality as a serious problem, a view supported by 57% of the white population. But this shared unease does not extend to agreement on the present-day picture: white respondents are consistently less likely than ethnic minorities to see structural barriers in education, work and public services, and are more likely to believe minority communities receive equal or even preferential treatment.

Divides by age and politics are deeper than those by ethnicity

The sharpest divides in British attitudes to race are not, however, primarily between white and ethnic minority Britons. Age is the strongest fault line: younger people of all backgrounds are more alert to everyday discrimination and more comfortable discussing race, yet paradoxically more hopeful that things can improve. Older respondents recognise the progress that has taken place, but combine less awareness of present-day inequality with greater pessimism and fatigue with the subject.

Political affiliation also divides opinion on race at least as much as ethnicity does. Supporters of Reform UK and the Conservatives are far less likely than Labour, Liberal Democrat or Green supporters to see racism as structural or serious – a divide most stark on whether minorities now receive preferential treatment.

The research also finds that “ethnic minority” is far from a single, homogenous viewpoint. Black respondents reported concerns about treatment by institutions, but were often more optimistic for the future than Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents – whose heightened anxiety appears linked to the 2024 riots and their Islamophobic character. Women, particularly ethnic minority women, are also more pessimistic than men throughout.

Nearly half of people from ethnic minority backgrounds have faced prejudice in the past year. One in three note feeling less safe after the 2024 riots.

Nearly half (46%) of ethnic minority respondents had faced prejudice based on their race or nationality in the past year (including 25% reporting instances in public spaces, 20% on social media and 14% at work or education). Experiences were notably higher among young people aged 18-24 (58% faced prejudice) than over-65s (18%). Of those who had experienced prejudice, only a small minority said that they had shared what happened with the police (15%), a charity (10%) or with their employer/education institution (19%).

There is shared concern across ethnicities about everyday discrimination, yet growing zero-sum conflict over who is treated fairly by government.

Most ethnic minority respondents agree that “Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK” (57% agree/13% disagree), as do just over half of white participants (51% agree/17% disagree). In all age groups and across supporters of all major political parties, the public prove substantially more likely to agree than reject this foundational view.

Most of the white British public also hold broadly tolerant racial attitudes. Two thirds (64%) of white British participants would be comfortable with an ethnic minority Prime Minister, although a one-in-six group hold overtly racist views – with 16% reporting they would be uncomfortable with a national leader that is not white. Similar proportions say the same for a child’s partner being from an ethnic minority background (65% comfortable/17% uncomfortable).

However, white respondents were more split (37% agree/33% disagree) over the statement ‘In the UK, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are treated better than people who are white British’, suggesting that perceptions around action on racial inequity risks becoming more polarised without efforts to build mutual understanding.

Asked how the UK government treats people by ethnicity, white respondents are more likely to say there is ‘similar treatment’ (41%) but equal proportions now feel that ethnic minority groups receive ‘better’ treatment (24%) or ‘worse’ treatment (25%). Perceptions that the government treats minorities better than others have increased by nine percentage points since British Future tested the same question in 2020.

High levels of concern about institutional discrimination, particularly in the media and police.

Four in ten (43%) respondents in the ethnic minority survey feel the police treat minorities worse than white people, (while 27% feel they treat both groups similarly and 17% say ethnic minorities are treated better). One in three (35%) say that national government treats ethnic minority groups worse (34% similar treatment; 17% better). A similar proportion (35%) feel that national newspapers treat minorities worse (32% similar; 16% better). We heard particularly strong concerns across the qualitative discussions about police profiling and people feeling stereotyped by national media and political debates over immigration and integration.

White respondents tend to share concerns about discrimination by police (44% say they treat ethnic minorities worse / 32% same / 14% better) and in national newspapers (31% treat worse; 41% the same; 14% better). Asked about each of the largest ethnic and faith minority groups, we also find that a majority of white respondents acknowledge they face ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ prejudice in society.

There is low trust in political parties to treat people of different ethnic backgrounds fairly, with the Greens and Labour sharing a narrow lead and strong concerns about Reform.

Among ethnic minority voters, Labour receives a net trust score of +13 (38% trust / 25% distrust) that the party treats people of different backgrounds fairly. The Greens are net +15 (34% trust/19% distrust). The Lib Dems are net +6 (27% trust/21% distrust) and Conservatives -1 (29% trust/30% distrust). Reform UK prompts markedly stronger distrust with a net score of -31 (16% trust / 47% distrust).

Key findings: priorities for action

The research then sought to understand ideas for how policymakers and institutions could drive progress on racial equality, including the public’s priorities for change.

Ideas that tackle race and class together unlock broad public support and reflect the experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The research highlights that the public do not want to choose between race and class when addressing social disadvantage and that action to address both together can command broad support.

In both the white and ethnic minority surveys, gaps between rich and poor are seen as the most important divide impacting the UK. In focus groups, participants shared how barriers to opportunity were often layered, reflecting a person’s race alongside other factors such as poverty or regional inequalities.

Meanwhile, white survey respondents are more likely (43%) to believe that class and race are equally important to someone’s life chances, while 25% saw class as more important and 15% saw someone’s race as the primary factor. This suggests that action to address inequalities would better reflect the priorities of ethnic minorities, and achieve broader consensus with white British people, where policies address socioeconomic and racial inequality through a joined-up lens.

A shared call across ethnic minority voters for closing racial pay gaps.

Asked to select priorities for change, from a list spanning media representation to housing and health equity, a focus on equal pay emerged top across all reportable minority ethnicities. One in four (25%) selected this as their most important issue and nearly four in ten (37%) in their top three. This was also the issue most selected by white respondents for addressing racial disparities.

Beyond equal pay, wider work is prioritised on progression, fair recruitment and senior representation in leadership.

This is accompanied by a broader set of priorities for fairness in the workplace, seen as essential to promoting equitable opportunities and removing unfair barriers.

Improving representation and progression of ethnic minorities in employment and leadership roles came through as a key issue (ranked 1st by 19%, top-three by 41%). In focus groups, we heard experiences of many feeling they worked twice as hard but faced being overlooked for promotion by management who often failed to reflect and represent the diversity of their area.

Ensuring fair recruitment practices and tackling workplace discrimination also surfaced among the top priorities (ranked first by 15% and top-three by 43%) to avoid bias creating barriers to opportunity. Focus group participants shared a range of challenges they faced in finding jobs, from having to westernise their name or mask their ethnicity in their CV to get a hearing, through to newer arrivals being passed over by employers for requiring additional visa paperwork.

Collecting race data is seen as common sense for effective outcomes.

There is wide consensus permission for policymakers to collect statistics on minority groups in areas such as employment, health and policing to help identify and address disparities. The vast majority of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds (74%) see this as essential or fairly useful, as do six in ten white respondents (61%). Only a fringe of 9% in the white sample consider this unnecessary or irrelevant.

Beyond government, community groups are considered effective champions for change.

Asked about their ideas for change, many people from ethnic minority backgrounds tended to voice scepticism about national progress. This took the form of mistrust in the government to pursue pro-equality policies and anxiety about increasingly fractious political conversations about diversity, inclusion, immigration and education in the UK. However a clear contrast

was drawn with more local initiatives to promote cohesion and togetherness across ethnic lines, and to build trusted relationships for change-making within and between racial groups. These grassroots groups and spaces for neighbourhood local action were seen as vital hubs for hopeful optimism. Spaces that foster cross-ethnic connections were viewed with more confidence and interest, with participants calling for these local efforts to be better supported, to bring meaningful change and moments for connection closer to communities.

Recommendations

The core challenge for the new government is to set out a stronger vision for how we handle our differences and ensure fair chances for all. The report sets out a framework for a stronger vision of how a changing society should treat people from different backgrounds fairly, respect their differences, and bring people together.

1. Be proactive, not just reactive, about equality and fairness in an increasingly diverse Britain

The government should use National Windrush Day, 22 June, as an annual moment to communicate its vision of fair chances for all, review progress and barriers in priority areas, and explore policy changes needed.

2. Challenge zero-sum thinking – by embedding race equality in a broader agenda for fair chances

As the UK's ethnic minority presence in public life grows, it increases pressure for race equality action but also risks backlash from those who see it in zero-sum terms.

Sustained progress requires political leadership that frames race equality within a broader mission of fair chances for all, backed by practical tools to embed this approach across public policy.

3. Audit fair chances – to make the fairness case when specific interventions are necessary

Some of biggest gains for race equality may come from progress in government action on universal goals, such as the elimination of child poverty. But an effective fairness strategy will also need the tools to address specific barriers.

An audit can help to show how these meet a public 'fairness test' – that there is a specific gap that needs more attention. Where there are such gaps, for example in employment, health or education, targeted interventions should prioritise those from different minority and majority groups who risk falling behind.

4. Increase the local and regional understanding of disparities in opportunities, including race equality, and recommend local/regional responses

As part of its broader devolution agenda, the national government should work with city-regions and others to break down opportunity data within regions – by ethnic group, social class, generation and gender. This would enable a region-specific approach to narrowing key gaps.

5. Make the practical case for progress on key priorities – for example the unfairness of ‘CV name bias’

Despite a polarised debate on race, broader public support can be unlocked, across all groups, when there is a clear fairness case about the need for action, with a practical agenda to address key challenges.

One of the most compelling examples is the evidence that having an ‘ethnic-sounding’ first name or surname significantly affects how many interviews you will get when applying for a job. The government should set a clear priority to eliminate this obvious unfairness – and challenge all sectors to step up.

6. Prioritise fairness at work – and depolarise the debate about equality, diversity and inclusion

Fairness at work emerged in the attitudes research as a key public priority. Employers should not retreat from promoting fairness at work in the face of heated debates about equality, diversity and inclusion.

The government should consult on how mandatory pay gap reporting for large employers of over 250 people can be extended to include medium-sized and smaller employers.

7. Tackle racism of every form – and pay more attention to the causes of racism too

Progress on tackling racial prejudice feels stalled or reversed, driven partly by online racism spilling into offline spaces. The government should push Ofcom harder on platform compliance and use soft power against platforms that protect toxic and unlawful content.

The UK has had no hate crime strategy since 2016-20. Racially motivated hate crimes get far less policy attention than religious hate crimes, though they outnumber them by a factor of ten times. A joined-up strategy should extend consistent definitions and principles across all forms of hatred, distinguishing legitimate protest from prejudice. It should back this with education, robust risk monitoring, and transparent reporting to Parliament and the public. That should include partnering with civil society to test interventions that shift perpetrator behaviour and protect at-risk groups from radicalisation into hatred.

8. Ensure that people from all backgrounds benefit from policing strategies for safer streets

Policing faces cross-pressure amid “two-tier” accusations from multiple directions. The NPCC’s Action Plan was too narrowly focused on the Black community, without setting this in the context of policing across all ethnic groups and the majority population too. It risked undermining important commitments through performative rhetoric about anti-racism.

Instead, fair treatment should be reasserted for everyone and monitored in practice – with police recruitment gaps closed as an operational necessity, not just a diversity target, alongside better training and monitoring of victim experiences across ethnic groups. Local community consultations would help forces understand specific trust drivers and tailor place-based approaches across ethnicity, faith, generation, gender and class.

9. Strengthen the foundations of shared identity in schools

National and local government should ensure there are strong educational resources to help students understand the making of multi-ethnic Britain. Efforts should also promote contact between students from different backgrounds; and critical thinking skills to help identify mis- and disinformation online.

10. Empower Local Communities and rebuild grassroots cohesion

Local initiatives are more trusted than national government to deliver change on inequality. But national government can support local and grassroots activity, including bringing more voice and power to local communities through Community Consultation Committees, and providing targeted micro-funding to support local, resident-led initiatives.



Introduction

Across Britain today our classrooms, workplaces, and public spaces reflect the multi-ethnic society we have become. Greater diversity has brought new questions about how we maintain and expand a sense of shared belonging and mutual respect; and how barriers to fair treatment can be broken down. It can also require us to address rising incidents of racism from those who feel aggrieved by the pace of change and the rising visibility and status of ethnic minority Britons.

Political engagement on race has tended to be reactive and short-lived, in response to flashpoints like the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence or the Black Lives Matter anti-racism protests of 2020. It is further problematised by the way we talk about race: consensus and coalitions for change can be made harder to build when political and public discourse about race has become polarised. And it is hampered, too, by the paucity of evidence on the perspectives and priorities of ethnic minority Britons and where these differ from, or concur with, their white counterparts. Nonetheless, if the fairness agenda – a central focus for the new government led by Andy Burnham – is to reach and uplift outcomes for all Britons, it will need to engage proactively on race. Labour will need to consider, too, how it can strengthen support among ethnic minority voters, with its historic appeal among minority communities having somewhat eroded in recent election performances.

In response this report, and the wider three-year project of which it is part, represents one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of ethnic minority public opinion in Britain. The research builds a dual perspective: mapping the nuanced experiences of ethnic minority Britons while measuring the levels of consensus and division in attitudes to race and equality among ethnic minorities and the wider White British public.

To capture both broad structural trends and the nuances of lived experiences, a mixed-methods approach was used:

- **Quantitative:** Two extensive, representative online surveys conducted by Number Cruncher Politics between 30th March and 29th April 2026. This included representative samples of 2,009 White adults and 3,014 ethnic minority adults.
- **Qualitative:** 12 in-depth qualitative focus groups conducted across various regions of the UK (Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London (Peckham), Preston, Walsall) to capture nuance, generational dynamics and regional narratives.

The research was commissioned by British Future as part of its Voices for Equity: Moving from evidence to action project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation's Race Diversity UK (RDUK) programme.

It finds shared, cross-ethnic concerns that progress on racial equality has stalled or is going into reverse; along with sharply distinct views on the nature of inequality today and its causes. While the research identifies areas of divergence between white and ethnic minority opinion and experience, it highlights age and politics as the deepest divides in attitudes on race in Britain. And it further examines the diversity of attitudes and experiences within Britain's ethnic minority population, including differences by age, gender, education, politics and geography as well as between ethnic groups.

The research also examines where ethnic minority Britons most want to see change. A focus on fairness in the workplace emerges as a priority, with specific regard to recruitment, reward and progression. There is a desire to address systemic disparities in essential services like health, housing, and policing, ensuring institutions serve every citizen equitably. Unequal treatment of ethnic minorities in media reporting – brought into sharp focus in recent months with the intense media scrutiny of Cambridge University Professor Jason Arday – was also highlighted as an area of concern.

People across all ethnicities report a sense of community at a local level and share a desire for greater unity through community hubs and locally supported initiatives. There was also a desire to see greater efforts to tell a shared national story of Britain and its diversity, in schools and more broadly.

Britain's inequalities cut across race, class, gender, age, geography and education. A fairness agenda should pursue policies that tackles them together, undermining zero-sum resentments and building lasting consensus. While a lack of trust in politics, government and other institutions to make things better came across strongly in the research, our analysis does identify opportunities as well as challenges for pursuing policy responses. These will be taken forward in later stages of the Voices for Equity project.

These findings present both a challenge and an opportunity for building consensus on racial equality. The challenge is that conversations about race need to bridge a widened political and generational divide, with signs that discussion of the topic is becoming harder rather than easier. Fatigue with the subject has grown over the last five years, with some framing their frustration in terms of competing grievances rather than hostility to equality itself.

The opportunity lies in the strength of underlying agreement: most people, across differences by race, age and politics, believe racial inequality is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. It is precisely because these divides cut across ethnic lines, rather than existing simply between white and minority Britons, that there is scope to build coalitions for change that do not depend on race alone.

2. Hopes, fears and present-day anxieties: views on race in the UK

How far do ethnic minorities and the White British see questions of race equality and fairness differently today? People's experiences of a multi-ethnic society can obviously differ between those from ethnic minorities and the majority group – including in whether or not race seems to shape experiences of opportunity and of everyday life. But a 'white majority versus ethnic majorities' understanding of how people understand race would certainly not capture the whole picture. Our research, combining a survey of over 5,000 ethnic minority and white adults, with focus groups conducted across the country, illustrates a more complicated story.

There are aspects of inter-ethnic consensus across minority and majority groups. On the direction Britain is heading, there is agreement that racial equality is going backwards, not forwards. Yet on the present-day reality of discrimination and disadvantage, that consensus is harder to sustain – majorities of both groups agree racism remains a serious, everyday problem, but they disagree sharply on how structural it is and who experiences it.

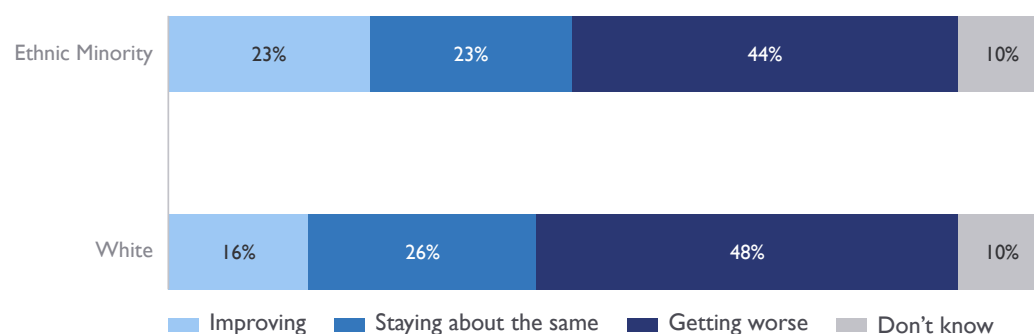
The deepest divides in British attitudes to race run along different lines altogether. They are predominantly by age and politics, with gender and geography as complicating factors too – while the ethnic minority population itself holds far more varied views than a single label like "BME" can capture.

A cross-ethnic consensus that racial equality is getting worse, not better

On an issue that can often seem divisive, our research found an unwelcome consensus among both ethnic minority and white respondents – that racial equality in Britain today is not improving, but is getting worse.

Asked "Do you think racial equality is getting better, worse or staying about the same?", people from a minority background were twice as likely to feel equality was getting worse (44%) than getting better (23%). White respondents felt this more strongly still, with 48% seeing a deterioration and just 16% thinking things were getting better.

Figure 2.1: Shared consensus that racial equality is getting worse
“Do you think racial equality is getting better, worse or staying about the same?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

This sense of decline is striking not just because it cuts across racial lines, but because of how consistently it holds within each group. As we explore in more detail later in this chapter, this pessimism is echoed by women and men, by younger and older respondents, and across political divides – albeit to varying degrees. That consensus does not mean everyone experiences racial inequality in the same way, or agrees on its causes – as the rest of this chapter shows, significant divides remain. But it does suggest that a sense of stalled or reversing progress on racial equality is now a mainstream view in Britain, rather than one confined to any single section of society.

The limits of consensus: the present-day reality of discrimination

Majorities of both ethnic minority (57%) and white respondents (51%) also agree that “Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK”. But it is when asked about the present-day situation that differences emerge in the views and experiences of minority and white majority respondents.

Responses are almost identical when people are asked “are ethnic minorities treated the same as white British people?” Three in ten ethnic minority (31%) and white respondents (30%) agree, and 38% of both groups disagree.

Yet on almost every other measure in our survey – the extent to which discrimination is commonplace, the existence of structural barriers, minorities being treated better than white people — the two groups diverge substantially. White respondents are consistently less likely to see racism as a live, structural problem.

Figure 2.2: The reality of everyday discrimination: divergence between white and ethnic minority views

	Ethnic minority agree/disagree (net)	White agree/disagree (net)
“Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK”	57%/13% (+44)	51%/17% (+34)
“People from ethnic minority backgrounds face structural barriers in areas such as education, work, and public services”	50%/16% (+34)	36%/25% (+11)
“In the UK, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are treated better than people who are white British”	23%/48% (-25)	37%/33% (+4)

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Focus group participants from minority backgrounds discussed their experiences of discrimination and prejudice, with some attributing a worsening picture to the changing political climate:

“My son was back in the country recently, lives in Indonesia, and he actually was crying... three times he was involved in some kind of racial incident in the street, folk shouting stuff at him and one of his friends, I think, it’s just off the recent kind of political climate. It’s starting to become more acceptable again, to have these kind of views.”

–Arab female participant, Edinburgh

“I’ve seen people go for jobs and not got the jobs, and they’ve got the skill, but because they’re ethnic minority, they’ve not got the job, and they’ve given it to somebody else with lesser skills.”

–Asian male participant, Cardiff

Another participant from the Midlands described the isolating effect of being a “first” in a professional field:

“It’s extremely isolating... they can experience a lot of racism, even microaggression... things where they’re not included, they’re not thought about.”

–Black female participant, Walsall

The gap in attitudes between these two groups is not insurmountable. As we examine later in this chapter, divides by generation and politics are far deeper than those between minority and majority groups; and there is divergence in attitudes within the ethnic minority groups, which is not a homogenous bloc. But it remains an obstacle to progress on racial equality if we lack agreement on the current picture of inequality in Britain.

Age is the single strongest fault line on attitudes — and generational difference cuts in two different directions

As discussed above, there are differences – and some agreement – in views and experiences between white and ethnic minority people in Britain today. But if talking about race can be a divisive topic, what our research uncovers is that the deepest of these divides are not by race, but by age and politics. We examine political divides on race later in the ‘Challenges for future change’ section of this chapter.

Younger people, regardless of their ethnic background, are more aware of discrimination as an everyday phenomenon and more comfortable discussing it. Older respondents combine lower awareness of day-to-day inequalities and prejudice, together with a more pessimistic view about whether we can address it. They are also more fatigued with the topic and likely to say that we spend too much time talking about race.

Figure 2.3: Generational divides on race

	Younger people (18-34)		Older people (55+)	
	White	Ethnic minority	White	Ethnic minority
“Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK”	Agree 58% Disagree 9%	Agree 59% Disagree 11%	Agree 46% Disagree 22%	Agree 48% Disagree 14%
“Compared to other social issues, racial inequality is a serious problem in the UK”	Agree 64% Disagree 9%	Agree 63% Disagree 10%	Agree 51% Disagree 21%	Agree 57% Disagree 10%
“People from ethnic minority backgrounds face structural barriers in areas such as education, work, and public services”	Agree 44% Disagree 17%	Agree 55% Disagree 14%	Agree 31% Disagree 31%	Agree 41% Disagree 22%
Do we talk about race too much /too little?	Too much 31% Too little 32%	Too much 29% Too little 35%	Too much 45% Too little 23%	Too much 27% Too little 30%
Compared to the time of the Black Lives Matter anti-racism protest of 2020, do you feel more or less comfortable talking openly about race?	More 43% Less 11%	More 50% Less 11%	More 18% Less 15%	More 28% Less 10%

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

n = 1167 Ethnic minority GB Adults aged 18-34 and n=574 aged 55+, 30th Mar to 29th Apr 2026

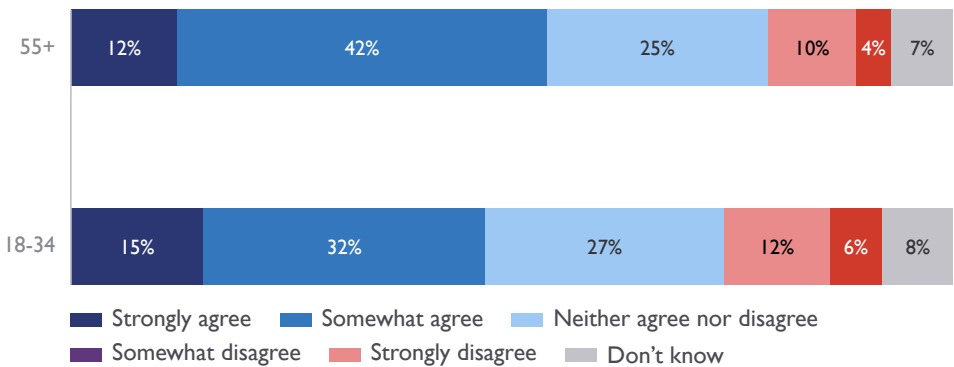
n = 503 White GB Adults aged 18-34 and n=835 aged 55+, conducted 30th Mar to 29th Apr 2026

Responses to a further question, where significant differences were again noted by age, may help us understand some of this divergence in attitudes between younger and older respondents.

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement “The UK has seen progress in addressing racial inequality over my lifetime”. Older ethnic minority respondents (aged 55+) were more likely to agree they have seen progress (54%) than 35-54s (47%) or 18-34s (47%), with a 14-point gap between those aged 65+ (58%) and the youngest cohort aged 18-24 (44%). The same generational pattern applied to white respondents, with a 13-point gap between agreement from the eldest respondents (56% of those aged 65+) and the youngest group of 18-24s (43%).

Figure 2.4: Differing perceptions of progress on racial inequality by age (Ethnic minority responses)

“The UK has seen progress in addressing racial inequality over my lifetime.”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026
 n = 1167 Ethnic minority GB Adults aged 18-34 and n=574 aged 55+, 30th Mar to 29th Apr 2026

In some respects this finding is blindingly obvious – people over 65 have had a much longer lifetime in which to experience progress than those who are only just leaving school and entering the workplace. But those two groups have also experienced very different versions of the UK. In the 1960s and 70s Britain was far less diverse, racism was mainstream on our TV screens and football terraces, and racial equality laws were only just being passed. Seeing Britain evolve from “No Irish, No Blacks, No dogs” to the UK’s first ethnic minority Prime Minister is a very different experience of change than that of younger people brought up around diversity with an expectation of fairness and equal treatment – albeit one that is frequently disappointed.

A further significant difference in responses by age is one of the (somewhat) more hopeful stories from our research. It is that younger people, despite being more conscious of inequality and discrimination in Britain today, are also the most hopeful that the country is moving in the right direction and can tackle inequality over time.

Figure 2.5: Younger people are more hopeful of progress on equality

	White 18-34s	Ethnic minority 18-34s	White over-55s	Ethnic minority over-55s
How do you feel racial equality will change over the next five years? (improve/worsen)	Improve 24% Worsen 26%	Improve 29% Worsen 21%	Improve 13% Worsen 36%	Improve 15% Worsen 28%

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026
 n = 1167 Ethnic minority GB Adults aged 18-34 and n=574 aged 55+, 30th Mar to 29th Apr 2026

This sense of progress, and hope for the future as young people grow up in a more diverse and integrated society, was also discussed in hopeful terms by focus group participants:

“My family have kind of been in Britain for maybe 80 years or so now, and yet I still feel like there’s that contentious thing... However, I think that we’ve come a long way since then, and I think that some of like the best aspects of what people would call British values... at its best, especially when we look at the kind of major cities, it can be like a melting pot for lots of different people to come together. And so that’s a positive thing.”

–Black female participant, Walsall

“Some parts of the community would rather... stick with their own... but now it’s getting a bit better, because there’s lots of different races, ethnic minorities that come to live in Preston now... younger generations... mix more in schools, and like the older generations... kept to themselves.”

–Asian female participant, Preston

“I see the youth, I’ve got nieces and nephews, and they’ve got a mixed bag of friends from different like, races and backgrounds. They look like they’re integrating with one another, which is positive.”

–Mixed-race female participant, Cardiff



Ethnic minority Britons do not all think the same

Quantitative surveys can lump all ethnic minority responses together into one 'BME' category, often due to small sample sizes. But the larger ethnic minority sample for this research, of more than 3,000 people, enabled us to look not only at ethnic groups in more detail to identify similarities and differences in their views but also the nuanced and varied experiences of race and fairness within them.

The research found significant texture and difference within the overall picture of ethnic minority attitudes. Black respondents were frequently more positive than others: more likely than other groups to feel that racial equality is improving; more comfortable talking about race; and more hopeful for the future. Black respondents were the only ethnic sub-group to feel more positive than negative that the UK could make progress on racial equality (33% improve/21% worsen).

Bangladeshi- and Pakistani-heritage respondents, by contrast, were consistently more pessimistic. They were less likely to say they had seen progress in their lifetime; more likely to expect things to worsen on equality; and least comfortable discussing race today. Indian-heritage respondents responded similarly to other British South Asians on some questions, such as their hopes for the future on race equality. On other questions their answers were quite distinct, however: Indians, along with Chinese-heritage respondents, were much less likely to agree that racial discrimination is common in everyday life, for example.

It is worth noting that ethnicity may not be the only factor shaping these attitudinal differences. As discussed previously, age is one of the biggest indicators of attitudes on these topics, and some populations (notably British Asians) are younger than other groups. Social class, education and geography may also play a part.

Figure 2.6: Differences in attitudes among ethnic minority groups

	Black	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Indian	Chinese
Feel that racial equality in UK is improving	31%	22%	16%	21%	21%
Feel more comfortable talking about race since BLM protests of 2020	52%	40%	39%	37%	27%
Agree racial inequality is a serious problem in UK compared to other social issues	66%	66%	59%	62%	47%
Agree racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK	62%	61%	58%	47%	48%
Feel racial equality will improve over the next five years	33%	19%	22%	23%	15%
Feel racial equality will get worse over the next five years	21%	31%	29%	28%	23%
Agree UK has seen progress in addressing racial inequality over their lifetime	52%	48%	37%	50%	51%

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026 (Black n=852, Pakistani n=399, Bangladeshi n=143, Indian n=594, Chinese n=188)

Experience varied between groups as well as attitudes. Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents were also more likely to report having experienced prejudice based on their religion. Focus groups suggested that the heightened anxiety among British South Asians, particularly Muslims, is partly connected to the far-right riots that erupted across the UK in 2024, when disinformation targeting minority groups rapidly escalated into racist and anti-Muslim violence on British streets. This unrest had a significant impact on many people's everyday sense of security: previous research by British Future found that 61% of Muslims felt significantly more worried about their personal safety in the aftermath of the protests, rising to 69% of Muslim women.¹ Importantly, this concern is not confined to a single ethnic community. Issues surrounding safety, anxiety, and their deeper impact on local community cohesion, are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

One of the most concerning findings within the Voices for Equity research is the frequency with which South Asian participants openly expressed feeling unsafe and uncomfortable in everyday spaces.

“The police were waiting in the corner, they watched several cars go past, seen we were Asians, stopped our car, and we had one white girl in the car. She wasn’t asked any questions... where were you born? I’m like, I’m Scottish. No, where were you born? ...I don’t understand why that’s a question. Where were you born, specifically?... If I said Afghanistan, I’m going to be arrested.”

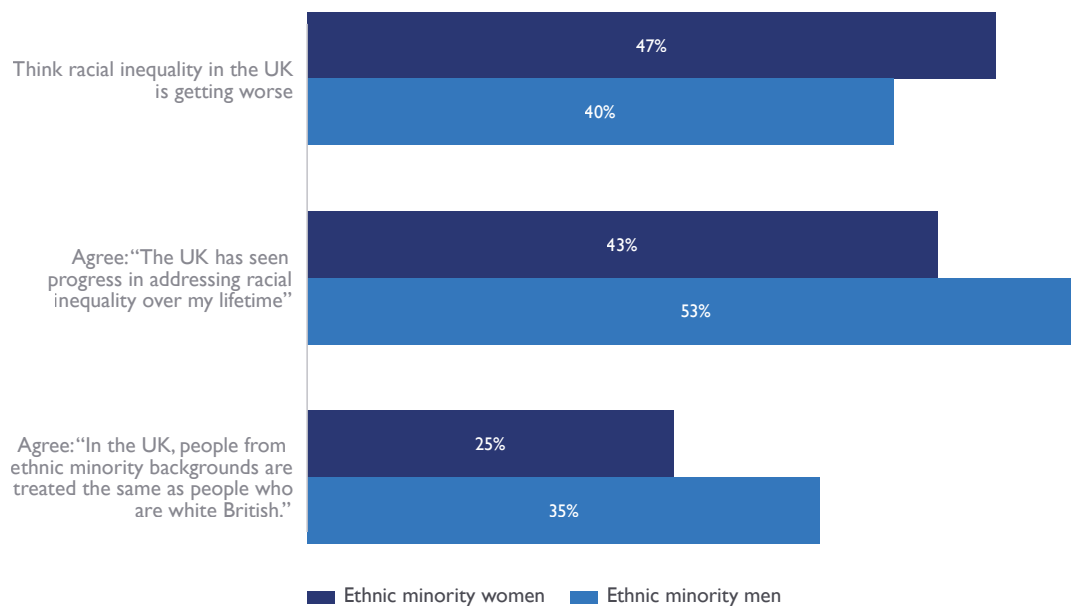
–Asian female participant, Edinburgh

There is a consistent and under-discussed gender gap in minority attitudes

Our research found marked differences in responses by gender, across a range of questions. Women, particularly those from an ethnic minority background, were notably more pessimistic than men. Minority women were seven points more likely than men to feel equality was getting worse (47% to 40%) and less likely to feel it was getting better. On this question there was a similar difference by gender among white respondents.

Ethnic minority women were also ten points less likely to agree that *“The UK has seen progress in addressing racial inequality over my lifetime”* (by 43% to 53%); and less likely to agree that *“In the UK, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are treated the same as people who are white British”* (women 25%, men 35%).

Figure 2.7: How ethnic minority women feel differently to men



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026.
n = 1,195 ethnic minority men and n=1819 ethnic minority women.

Some of the comments shared by women (of all backgrounds) in our focus groups evidenced why they feel this way, citing examples from the workplace and in healthcare settings:

“I have been in boardroom meetings... and I have heard the words that they have found a black woman to speak, to tick two boxes at once. So they put their woman and their black person to speak, and it was so unjust, because the woman who actually came to speak was so overqualified... to hear her talked about like that, it was just unbelievable what they feel comfortable saying when they think... we’re all allies in the room.”

– White female participant, Walsall

“We see statistics within the NHS that people of colour, particularly women who give birth, are at higher risk of losing a child or dying in childbirth, because the training is not there”.

– Black female participant, Walsall

Ethnic minority women are also more pessimistic about the future. Asked whether they felt racial equality would get better or worse over the next five years, they were more likely to say it would get worse (28%) than get better (20%). Ethnic minority men were slightly more hopeful, with 27% feeling it would improve and 23% saying it would get worse.

Some women from an Asian background, particularly those who choose to wear a head covering, highlighted the specific prejudices they can encounter:

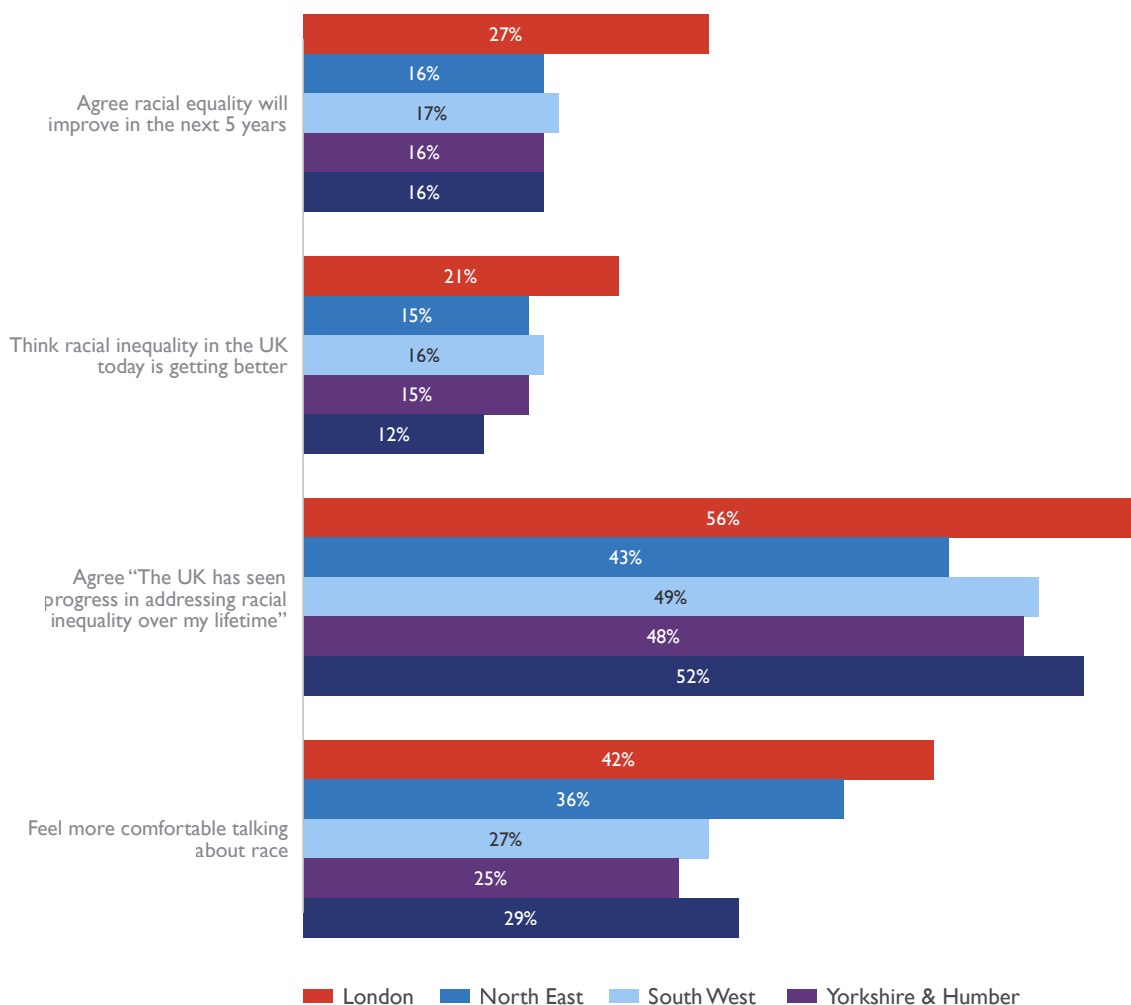
I think especially in certain areas of Preston, I think you do feel it more than in other areas, like in the town centre, I feel like you do feel it more... I think that racism is probably on the rise in Preston... especially in certain areas of Preston.”

– Asian female participant, Preston

London is an outlier, with less diverse regions feeling more pessimistic

Analysis of our survey data by geography reinforces a common finding among social attitudes research – that London looks a bit different. The capital stands out repeatedly – among white Londoners as much as ethnic minorities – as the most likely to see progress, most comfortable discussing race, and (uniquely among white regional groups) more optimistic than pessimistic about the next five years. By contrast, less diverse regions – including the North East, South West, Scotland and Yorkshire & Humber – skew most pessimistic among white respondents.

Figure 2.8: Attitudes are different in diverse London



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

This aligns with a host of previous studies that have found that anxiety about race and migration is often most prevalent in the least diverse places, while greater exposure to diversity correlates with more positive, less anxious views.²

There are some caveats to this conclusion. We were not able to analyse in this study whether the more diverse cities of some regions, such as Bristol in the South West or Leeds and Bradford in Yorkshire, are attitudinally distinct to the rest of the region. The polling also does not explicitly tell us why Londoners feel different: whether living in London shifts people's attitudes, or whether people with more relaxed views on race are more likely to move to, or remain in, Britain's most diverse city.

Challenges for future change

This report, and British Future's wider Voices for Equity project, aims not only to examine the attitudes and experiences of ethnic minority and white people in Britain, but also to carry that forward into a strategy for action and change on race equity. This last section looks at two key challenges that the evidence presents for shaping meaningful change.

Divides by politics are deeper than those by ethnicity

Government and politics cannot do all of the work to improve racial equality in the UK – it will take an all-society approach encompassing business, culture, faith and community, as well as individuals standing together against racism. But political change is nevertheless one of the main levers for shifting the dial, as it has previously with the race relations acts of the 60s and 70s, and the Equality Act of 2010.

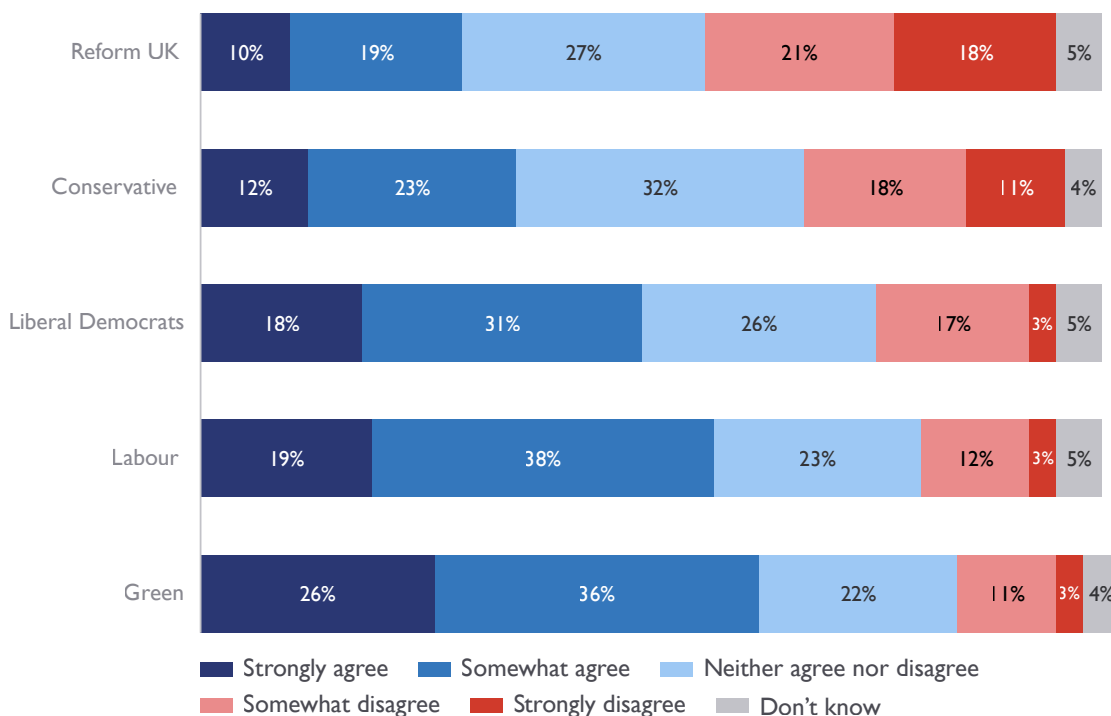
The politics of race in the UK has become increasingly polarised, taking cues from the United States and elsewhere in Europe, and exacerbated by the tone of debate on social media – particularly the platform X, formerly Twitter, since its takeover by Elon Musk. The research finds that across nearly every question, the gap in attitudes between those considering voting Labour, Green or Liberal Democrat at the next election, and those considering the Conservatives or Reform UK, is as large or larger than the gap between ethnic minority and white respondents.

The biggest political divide is over the causes of inequality. Some 57% of those considering Labour at the next election, along with 49% of prospective Lib Dems and 62% of Greens, agree that “People from ethnic minority backgrounds face structural barriers in areas such as education, work, and public services.” In contrast, only 35% of Conservative considerers and 29% of those considering Nigel Farage's party agree – with Reform supporters 10 points more likely to disagree (39%).

Asked whether ‘Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK’, there is a 14-point gap between those considering Labour at the next election (63%) and those considering the Conservatives (49%). The divide between Green considerers (70%) and Reform UK considerers (51%) is greater still.

Similarly, while 70% of Labour considerers and three-quarters (75%) of those considering voting Green agree that ‘Compared to other social issues, racial inequality is a serious problem in the UK’, as do 69% of potential Lib Dem voters, there is a 15-20-point difference in responses from people considering the Conservatives or Reform UK (both at 54%). This does, however, represent a cross-party coalition of support, with majorities across all major parties in agreement that Britain has a serious issue to be tackled. One in five Conservative (19%) and Reform considerers (22%) disagree.

Figure 2.9: Political differences on whether ‘structural barriers’ are behind inequality
“People from ethnic minority backgrounds face structural barriers in areas such as education, work, and public services.” (Results by political support, based on who is either ‘likely to’ or ‘will’ vote each party at the next General Election)



Combined n=5023 GB Adults, survey conducted 30th Mar to 29th Apr 2026.

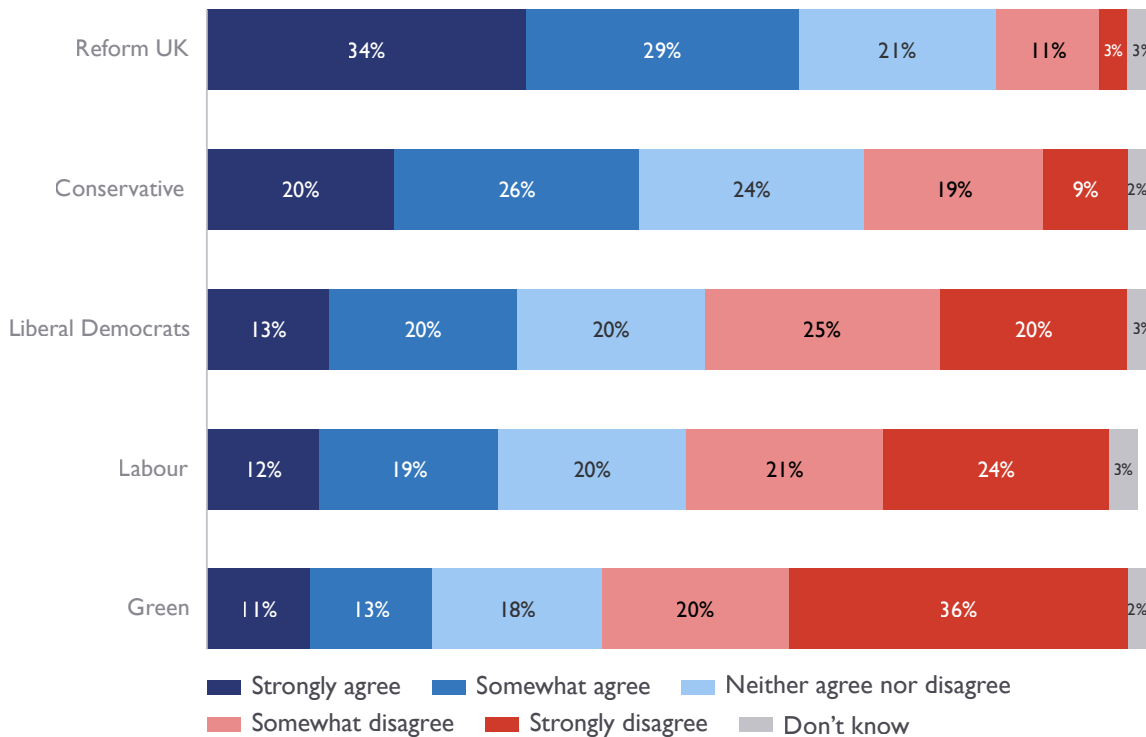
One further political divide may undermine this evidence of soft consensus, however, and that is the question of equal treatment. Asked if they agree “In the UK, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are treated the same as people who are white British,” there are differences by politics, but they are not vast (Labour considerers 39%, Lib Dems 38%, Greens 30%, Conservatives 42% and Reform UK considerers 43%).

Something changes, however, when people are asked if they agree that people from minority backgrounds are treated *better*. Only minorities of Labour (31%), Lib Dem (33%) or Green considerers (24%) agree; support from Conservative supporters is higher at 46%. But those considering Reform UK at the next election are

outliers, with nearly two-thirds (63%) agreeing, while only 14% disagree. This raises some uncertainty about whether some Reform UK supporters may be referring to this perceived pro-minority bias when answering other questions – about the prevalence of racial inequality and the seriousness of the issue, for instance.

Figure 2.10: Political divides over perceptions of equal treatment

“In the UK, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are treated better than people who are white British.”
(Results by political support, based on who is either ‘likely to’ or ‘will’ vote each party at the next General Election)



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

This sense of grievance is echoed in a range of narratives on the hard right of politics: including two-tier policing favouring minorities, EDI initiatives hiring people based on their minority background, and white people being the victims of racism. Some of these themes also emerged in our focus groups:

“About 30 years ago, I was toying with the idea of going to university or college or something, and there was lots of courses that I could do via the job centre that was available. When I applied for them, I couldn't get them because I was white and deemed not to be in an ethnic minority... I felt left out... it was like inverted fairness – being disallowed something because I was deemed to be already in a first [group].”

–White male participant, Preston

“We... have Black Awareness Month... adverts come up [on the hospital screens]. And I’ve got a work colleague, old guy in his 60s... he goes, ‘Imagine if there was a white month... what if we had a white awareness month?’... and I’m like, ‘No, it’s because we’re the minority in this country.’... Trying to educate people like that – this is what we are up against.”

–Black female participant, Walsall

Overall, these findings suggest that analyses of differences in response through a solely “white vs BME” lens may miss much of what’s going on. Attitudes to race have become aligned with the broader left-right political cleavage, especially among white respondents, where political affiliation predicts views on race as much as age or class. This polarisation exists within the ethnic minority population too, with ethnic minority Labour and Green supporters holding very different views to those of Reform UK or the Conservatives.

Class and education also play a part in predicting attitudes to racial equality. Graduates and higher socioeconomic grade (AB) respondents – both white and ethnic minority – are consistently more likely to see structural barriers as real, feel progress has occurred, and feel comfortable discussing race. While this runs alongside the political divide, and is clearly correlated with it in some respects, it suggests that attitudes to race may also be influenced by exposure to change, diversity, economic insecurity and to different arguments as to the causes of inequality.

Talking about race may be getting harder, not easier

These significant divides by age and politics may make it harder to build consensus for change. Even having a conversation between different groups could be more difficult: while 45% of younger people (aged 18-34) now feel more comfortable talking about race than in 2020, only 20% of over-55s feel the same. A Green Party and a Reform UK supporter may be talking about an entirely different victim dynamic if they tried to talk to each other about racial discrimination.

There is evidence, too, of growing fatigue among some groups with discussion of racial equality. Previous research by British Future five years ago asked respondents whether we talk too much or too little about race, or whether it is discussed about the right amount.³ We asked the same question again in 2026 to see whether there had been any shift.

Among ethnic minorities, nearly twice as many people felt we talked about race ‘too much’ today (28%) as the 15% giving that answer in 2021. Among white respondents the results were just as

striking, with 4 in 10 white people (40%) now feeling that race is over-discussed, compared to a quarter (25%) feeling this way in 2021.

This is driven largely by the views of older white people, with over-55s twice as likely to feel race is discussed too much (45%) as too little (23%). The picture for 18-34s looks very different, with young people evenly split (32% too little, 31% too much).

Similarly by politics, people considering voting Labour want us to talk more about race by 35% to 30%; as do Greens (by 46% to 26%) and more narrowly Lib Dems (34% to 32%). Yet a majority of Reform UK considerers (54%) think we talk too much about race (too little 20%) as do a plurality of Conservative supporters (by 46% to 26%).

It will be hard to bridge this widening gap – between a younger, diverse and left-leaning group eager to discuss how to make change happen, and an older and more right-leaning group who feel this conversation has gone on too long already.



3. Prejudice, Identity and Social Cohesion

Evidence in this chapter highlights how everyday experiences of racial prejudice shape people's sense of belonging, safety and British identity.

While the public broadly maintain anti-racist norms, our research reveals nearly half (46%) of ethnic minority respondents report having experienced prejudice based on their race or nationality in the past year, rising to a majority (57%) among young people aged 18-34.

When prejudice occurs, the vast majority of victims do not turn to official channels – we found that only 15% report incidents to the police, 19% to employers and 10% to hate crime charities. Instead, victims talk about their experiences within private networks of family and friends (52%) or remain silent (26%), leaving daily hostility unaddressed and invisible in formal statistics.

In the aftermath of the 2024 riots, one in three ethnic minority citizens (34%) also report heightened anxiety and a diminished sense of local safety.

We also explore shifting notions of Britishness in a tense political climate. While most report feeling at ease with the use of national flags, one in four (25%) express concerns about their use as an expression of nationalism. Younger ethnic minority Britons express higher concerns about national flags, yet equally express interest in marking inclusive historical milestones such as Windrush Day.

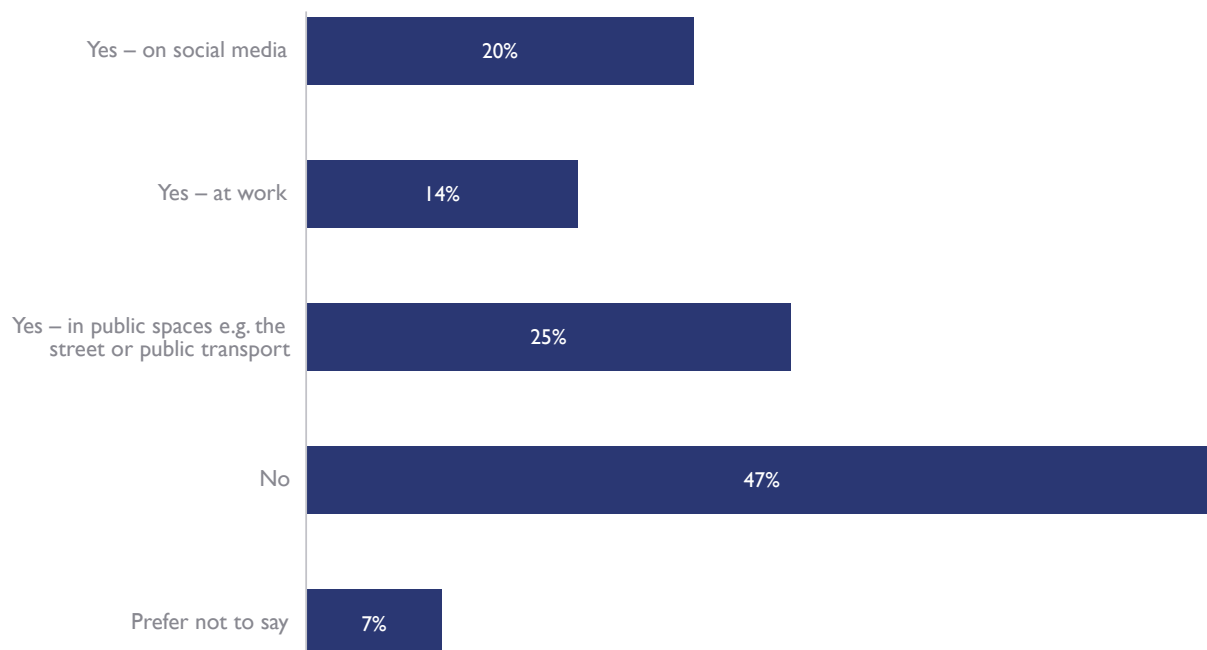
Nearly half of ethnic minorities report facing prejudice in the last year

While our research finds that the British public largely perceive day-to-day community life as cohesive, this stands alongside rising concern about the acceptability and prevalence of racist hate, particularly online and after the emergence of far-right rioting.

Concerningly, our survey of people from ethnic minority backgrounds reveals that almost half (46%) report experiencing prejudice based on their ethnicity or nationality over the past year.

Figure 3.1: Experience of prejudice in the last year by ethnic minorities

“In the past year, have you experienced any of the following? Select all that apply”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Respondents were able to select multiple categories to indicate where they had faced prejudice. One in four (25%) experienced incidents in public spaces (such as the street or public transport), while one in five (20%) had encountered prejudice on social media and 14% in the workplace. Members of our focus groups expressed frustration that racism had become amplified by sections of the political class and by online social media platforms that reaped engagement through polarising content, while failing to police hate speech.

Young people in particular appear the most exposed and likely to self-report incidents of prejudice. A majority of ethnic minority respondents aged 18-34 (57%) had faced prejudice first-hand, more than double that reported by over-55s (27%). Experiences were higher for young people in all the listed settings but notably reports of online prejudice were three times higher (27%) than among over-55s (9%).

“If you go to Welsh events, I think sometimes we stand out like a bit of a sore thumb, because my kids, especially my one daughter, she’s a lot darker than the rest, and she was on the bus on the way home from school, on the school bus, she jumped on, and a boy had sat down, and then she asked if she could sit. And they were like, ‘Oh, look at this. It’s like, Rosa Parks all over again.’ I was like, wow, is that really a thing?”

–Mixed-race female participant, Cardiff

“I think what we’re seeing is a rise of right-wing views because of social media and the anonymity that it offers people... the algorithms tend to drive people with similar views to each other, and you’re driving subset communities around a political viewpoint... I think it’s going to be very hard to break.”

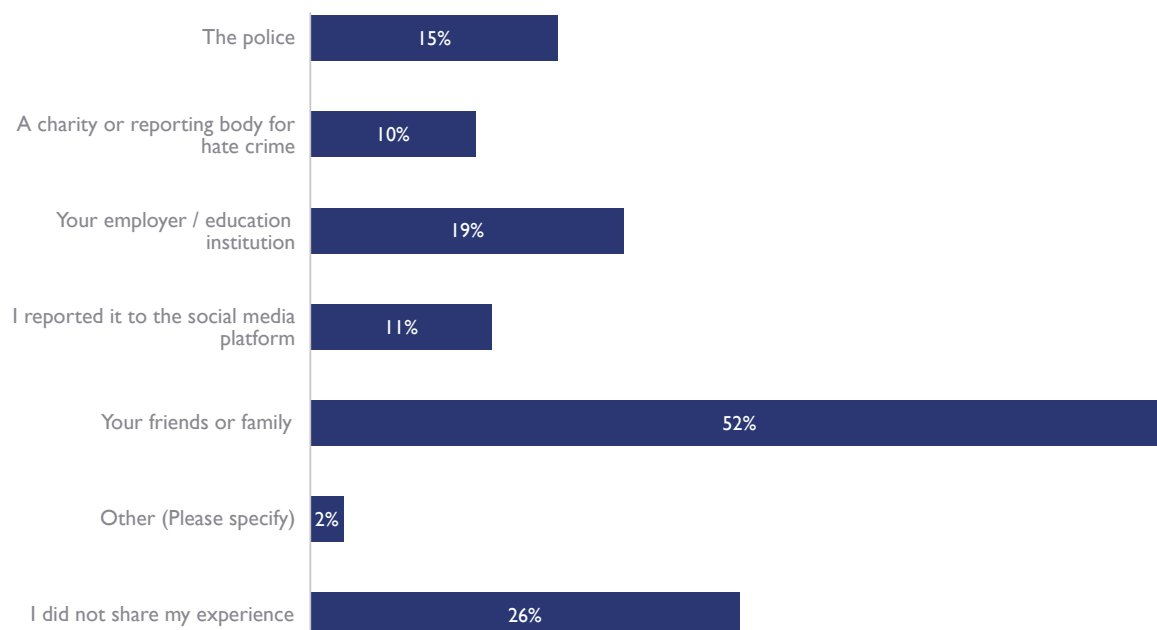
–White British female participant, Edinburgh

“In terms of the media, we have to remember, it’s not just traditional media, people are looking at social media and WhatsApp forwards and TikTok, and it’s absolutely vile what’s out there...even if the traditional media is saying something which could be quite measured, it’s the social media and, you know, Joe down the road, who has an opinion about a brown individual in his neighbourhood, who can open up his phone and spew absolute racist comments and also get a following out of that, which is quite shocking and scary, I think.”

– Asian female participant, Belfast

While racist prejudice was noted across ethnic groups, Black respondents said they faced the highest proportion (52%) as did Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents (49%), including at a time where British Future research has evidenced increasing levels of anti-Muslim hostility.⁴ Self-reported incidents were comparatively lower among Chinese respondents (31%).

Figure 3.2: Most ethnic minorities do not report hate incidents to official channels
“Did you share your experience with any of the following people or organisations?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Among those who did face prejudice based on ethnicity or nationality, only a minority reported this through official channels. Fewer than one in five reported the incident to the police (15%) or an employer/educational institution (19%) while just one in ten reported the incident to a charity or reporting body for hate crime (10%).

Our focus groups suggested that, for many victims of racial and identity-based prejudice, formal reporting channels – an employer’s HR department, law enforcement or official bodies – are viewed with scepticism. We heard from members of the public concerned that the often-emotional process of navigating complaints systems rarely led to meaningful outcomes or accountability.

“I did receive a lot of problems from young, young kids, due to the fact that maybe they’ve never seen a black person before. A few racial jokes and stuff like that, even from teachers themselves. Nothing was ever done, even when I did report it, even when I did call it out.”

–Black male participant, Edinburgh

When individuals experience racial and identity-based prejudice, their primary response is to seek informal support rather than go through formal routes. The data shows that victims are more likely to confide in friends or family (up to 52%) than any official institution. This reliance on personal networks is especially strong among younger Britons and graduates, who may join or form networks to gain a sense of belonging or support.

Muslims and Black communities are widely seen to face the highest levels of prejudice

The research finds a broad inter-ethnic consensus about which groups in British society are more likely to face prejudice and discrimination. This is important as an inoculator against efforts to stir up inter-group tensions and grievances using ‘competing grievance’ claims, in which perceptions of prejudice against ‘my’ in-group are combined with scepticism or indifference about prejudice faced by other groups.

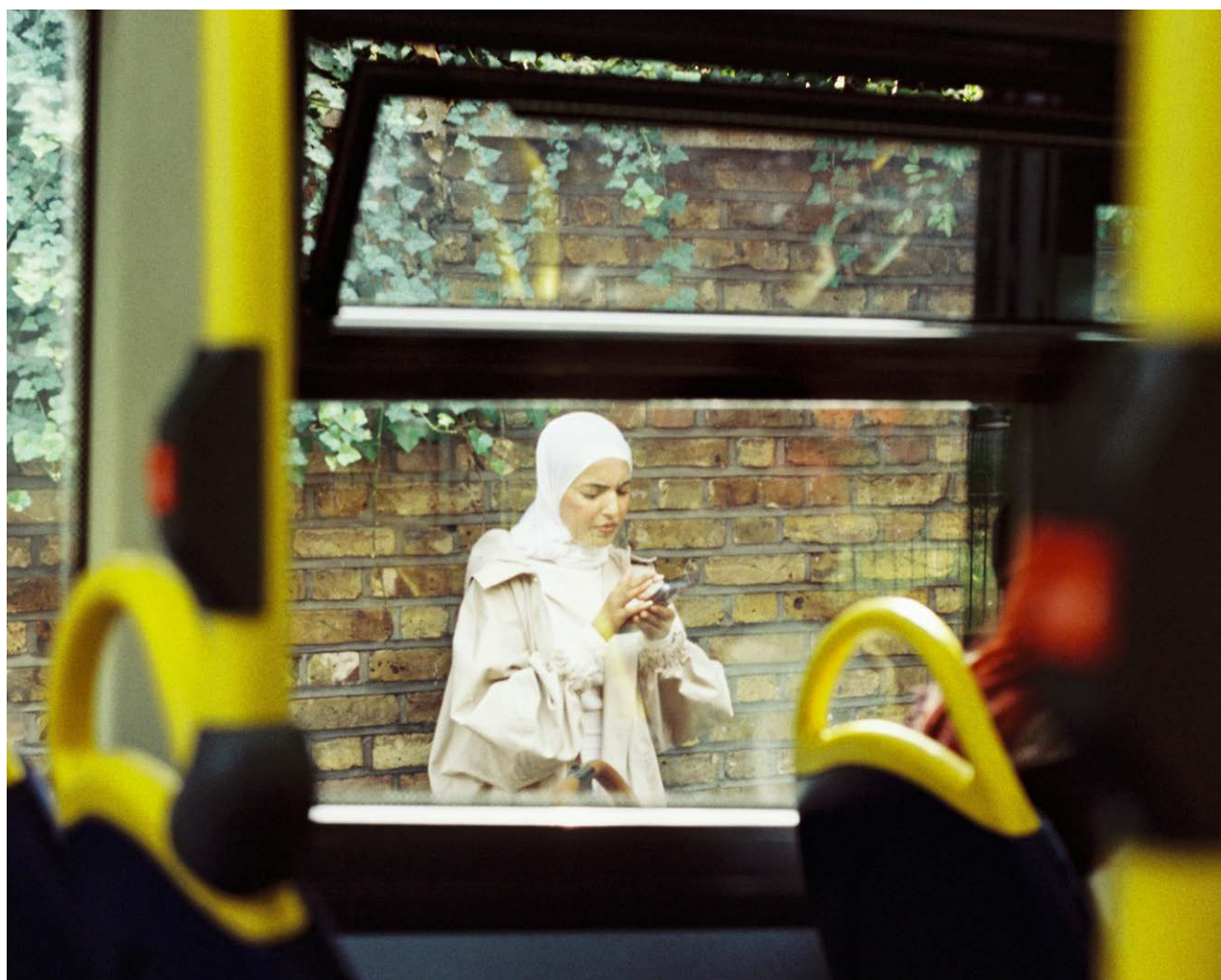


Figure 3.3: White and minority perceptions of who faces the most prejudice

“For each of the ethnic groups listed, please say how much prejudice, if any, there is against them?”

White/Ethnic minority perceptions %	A lot	A little	Hardly any	None	Don't know
Muslims	39% / 43%	32% / 24%	11% / 11%	6% / 9%	12% / 13%
Black	17% / 35%	44% / 34%	20% / 12%	8% / 8%	11% / 11%
Jews	29% / 24%	32% / 26%	16% / 18%	8% / 13%	15% / 18%
South Asian (e.g. Indian, Pakistani)	21% / 31%	41% / 33%	16% / 13%	8% / 10%	13% / 12%
Hindus	14% / 18%	35% / 32%	24% / 21%	10% / 12%	18% / 17%
Sikhs	13% / 16%	32% / 32%	24% / 19%	12% / 13%	18% / 19%
East and South East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Thai)	9% / 13%	30% / 33%	32% / 22%	13% / 14%	15% / 18%
Mixed race	9% / 11%	29% / 33%	33% / 26%	13% / 13%	15% / 18%
Central and Eastern European	12% / 11%	33% / 33%	30% / 29%	11% / 14%	14% / 14%
White British	16% / 7%	19% / 13%	27% / 26%	28% / 40%	11% / 14%
Christians	12% / 9%	21% / 18%	31% / 25%	22% / 32%	14% / 15%
Atheists	6% / 7%	14% / 16%	31% / 24%	30% / 29%	19% / 24%

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

There is, however, a substantial gap in perceptions of anti-Black racism, with twice as many people from ethnic minority backgrounds (35%) perceiving high levels of prejudice against Black people, compared to just 17% of white respondents. Indeed, while Black respondents were also the most likely to report facing prejudice, white respondents are more likely to see this as broadly similar to prejudice against other groups. Some 47% of Black respondents felt they experience “a lot” of prejudice, compared to 28% of Indian respondents, 31% of Pakistani respondents and 20% of Chinese respondents, whose views are closer to the white British score (17%). These findings of inter-ethnic gaps echo similar survey results by British Future in 2021 and 2018.⁵

There is a shared view that Muslims face higher levels of prejudice, echoing findings in a recent study by British Future on anti-Muslim hostility.⁶ Only around one in five among the white (17%) and ethnic minority (20%) samples responded that people of Muslim faith receive ‘hardly any’ or ‘no’ prejudice. Collective memories of the riots surfaced concerns that Muslims faced more hardened far-right hatred as well as frequent casual prejudice, with participants of that faith sharing personal accounts of heightened abuse in recent years.

“Before, I used to not wear a [head] scarf. So maybe last three years, I’ve started wearing a scarf covering my head. And you’ll be amazed the amount of people that will walk past you and ignore you. I go for a beauty product into a shop, was dressed in my work gear, I’d be attended to straight away, but with a [head] scarf on, it’s slightly different. And they’re looking at the way you look instead of, you know...they’re judging you by the book”.

—Asian female participant, Edinburgh

“I’m Welsh. I was born here. My mum was born here, and my dad, but I’m part West Indian, part Portuguese, part Arab. I’ve got a mixture of races going on, but I’ve just come back from Paris with my granddaughter for the weekend, and we were in the airport, and I had my necklace on which has my name in Arabic. And there was a gentleman, I shouldn’t say he’s racist. I don’t know. I was sat next to him and said hello, and he said to me, ‘should you be wearing that necklace where you’re going?’ And I said, ‘Excuse me, wearing a necklace?’ He said ‘I’d tuck it in if I were you, they’ll think you’re a terrorist’. I didn’t say anything. But, I mean, I’ve been hearing a lot of things lately about that. People around here go ‘I don’t say that I’m a Muslim, or I’m an Arab’ because you get labelled. People don’t like to say where they’re from.”

—Mixed race female participant, Cardiff

East and South East Asians (ESEA) were comparatively felt to face less prejudice across society than other racial categories. However, among Chinese respondents (the largest and most reportable ESEA population in the survey sample), 13% felt the group received ‘a lot’ of prejudice and 48% reported receiving ‘a little’.

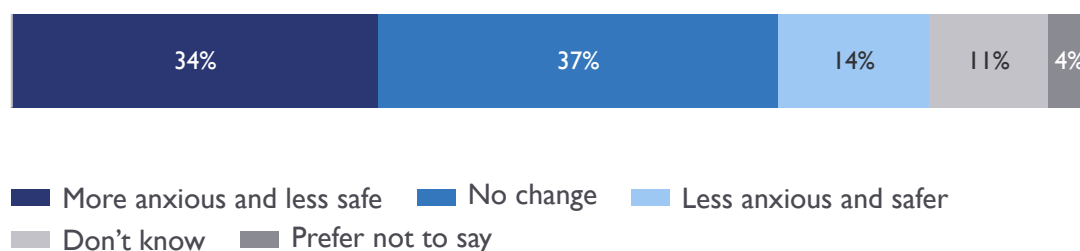
Some one in six white people (16%) feel that white British citizens receive ‘a lot’ of prejudice, an increase of seven percentage points from when British Future polled the question in the wake of Black Lives Matter in 2021. A small fringe of ethnic minority respondents (7%) agreed with this. The perception is twice as high among voters considering Reform UK at the next election (30%) compared to those likely to vote for left-of-centre parties such as Labour (14%), Liberal Democrats (14%) or Greens (11%). This question may be answered in different ways, such as those feeling that white people face other non-racial forms of prejudice – such as by gender, disability or sexuality. However as we explore in Chapter 4, this finding is also consistent with a rising section of the white public who see race in zero-sum terms, holding grievances about supposed ‘reverse racism’ outstripping other forms of prejudice.

Concerns over safety after the riots, particularly among women and South Asians

In the aftermath of the far-right riots in 2024, there are signs of lasting impacts on people’s sense of security and community safety among those from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly women.

Figure 3.4: One in three ethnic minorities feel less safe since the 2024 riots

“Since the July and August race riots of 2024 that started in Southport and spread to numerous cities and towns across England and Northern Ireland, how, if at all, has your feeling of safety or anxiety in your local area changed (compared with before the riots)?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Today, one in three people from ethnic minority backgrounds (34%) feel ‘more anxious and less safe’ in their local area compared to before the riots, while a similar proportion report no change (37%) and 14% say they feel safer. Over the course of the focus groups, the shock at seeing riots driven by anti-migrant and race-based hate was raised frequently and families spoke of lasting concerns about letting children out by themselves. Others talked of avoiding areas of their town or city that were now felt to feel more hostile due to having had racist incidents or where there were flags on lampposts as part of the anti-immigration ‘Raise the Colours’ campaign.

“Mosques and temples were attacked and people in the community were attacked...I have children – who are British – but who will experience these things”.

–Asian female participant, Walsall

A recent (white) graduate was taking her Black partner into Walsall town centre and was anxiously for his safety:

“I just wouldn’t want to take [my Black partner] into town centre... that’s where you hear a lot of attacks... when you walk down the high street, it’s full of flags... that’s just a sign of whether you feel safe in the area or not.”

–White female participant, Walsall

Compared to Black respondents (28%), people from Indian (40%), Pakistani (40%) and Bangladeshi (38%) backgrounds were all more likely to say that they felt more anxious and less safe, reflecting how the far-right riots had stigmatised and stereotyped brown-skinned people as ‘illegal migrants’. Women from ethnic minority backgrounds were also six percentage-points more likely to say that they feel less safe (37%) than men (31%).

“Since the flags have gone up in the area, it feels like it’s given people a bit of permission to kind of stand up and be outward. And I know a few of my colleagues have been racially assaulted, verbally and physically, which is quite disheartening, really.”

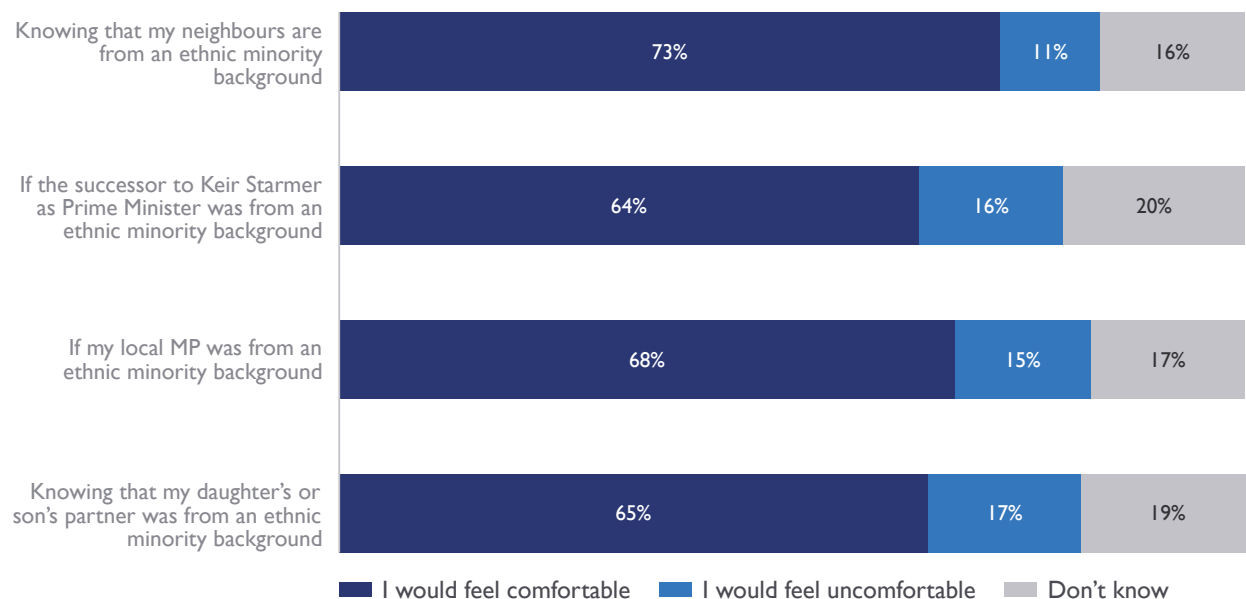
–Mixed-race female participant, Walsall

Everyday tolerance is the mainstream norm but a persistent minority still harbours racist attitudes

While anxieties have increased about the threat of racist hate and potential for community disorder, the research also indicates that a broad majority in society continue to uphold anti-racist norms, while a small but often vocal fringe hold rejectionist views.

To gauge the extent of anti-prejudice norms versus racial hostility, the survey asked respondents whether they would feel “comfortable” or “uncomfortable,” in four scenarios of their neighbour, local MP, Prime Minister or their son/daughter’s partner being from an ethnic minority. By examining responses to these specific situations, from who lives next-door to who leads the country, this polling helps to establish the extent of normalised acceptance of ethnic diversity compared to the scale of overt, hardened racial prejudice.

Figure 3.5: Levels of social comfort and discomfort with diversity (white respondents)
“Would you feel comfortable with the following?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Among white respondents – across these questions – there are strong foundations of two thirds that would feel comfortable with political representatives from an ethnic minority background, or would feel at ease with a child's partner being from a different race. This rises to three quarters (73%) who would be comfortable with having a neighbour from another ethnic background. Clear majorities uphold this norm across all of the age cohorts and across supporters of the main political parties. This remains consistent with findings by British Future in 2022, suggesting that – despite recent tensions and eruptions of unrest – values of acceptance remain widely held and ethnic diversity continues to be seen by most as an everyday norm. In fact white responses are highly similar to the answers from ethnic minority respondents.⁷

At the same time, a prejudiced rump say they feel uncomfortable with diversity: with having an MP (15%) or Prime Minister (16%) of an ethnic minority background, or in day-to-day life having a neighbour (11%) or child's partner (17%) from an ethnic minority background. This suggests that while there has been generational progress in shrinking racist hate, there remains unfinished progress to address hardened prejudice among a small but not insignificant group of around one in six people.

Some one in five men (20%) would feel uncomfortable with their son or daughter having a partner from an ethnic minority background compared to one in seven women (14%). Previous studies, however, complicate this notion of a gender gap: suggesting that men are more likely to openly express racist views, but that women hold grievances while holding these back in some settings.⁸

It is curious that, among white respondents, age has less of a correlation with attitudes on these questions. Those aged 18-24 are just as likely to feel hypothetically uncomfortable with their son or daughter having a partner from another ethnicity (16%) as over-65s (18%). In focus groups, some concerned parents highlighted how the rise of controversial online influencers could imbue sexist and racialised attitudes among younger generations where these became viral, and where platforms failed to moderate hate.

“All these, toxic men with big egos, across the internet. They’re promoting sexism and then that paints a bad picture on normal men as well. [...] And a younger generation of men are seeing that, thinking, ‘Oh, this is okay. We can treat people like this.’ Stuff like that just needs to get restricted. I’m all for free speech, but when your free speech is influencing a whole generation and bringing [them] up a certain way... it needs to be more restricted.”

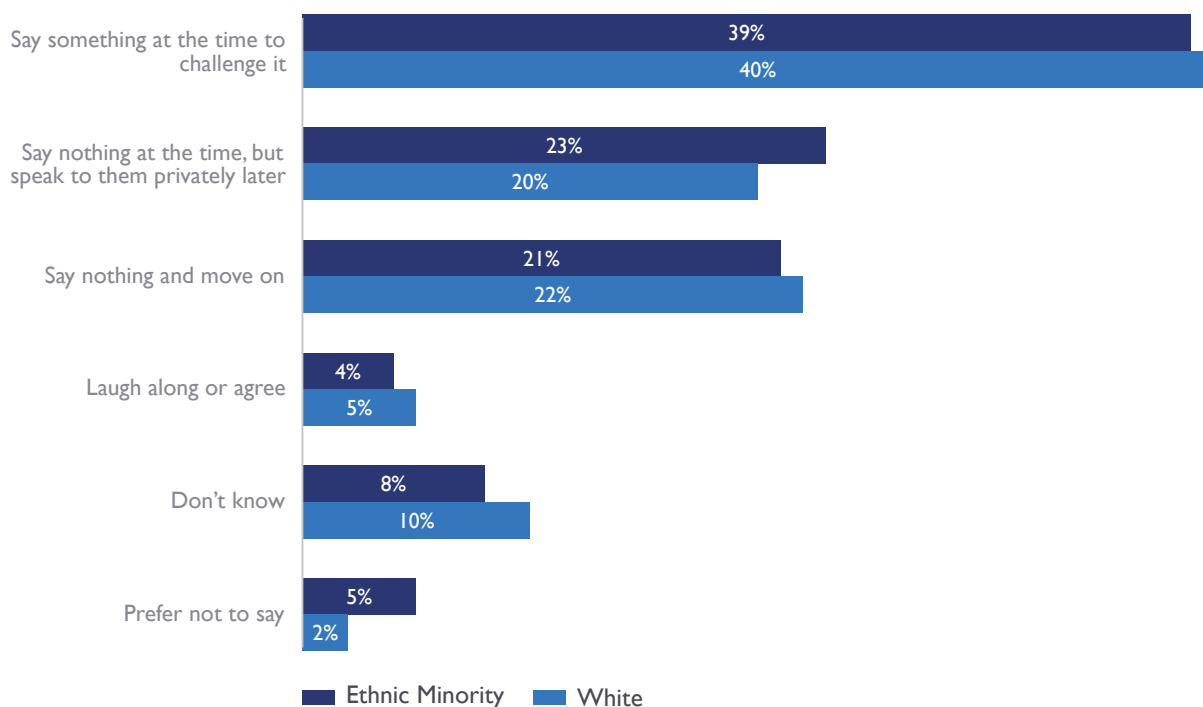
–Asian male participant, Edinburgh

While most people across the spectrum of political views are at ease with multi-ethnic diversity, there are clear differences between supporters of different parties. Among those considering voting Reform UK in the next election, one in four (27%) would be uncomfortable with an MP from an ethnic minority background, three times the proportion of those considering Labour (9%) and significantly more than those considering the Conservatives (18%). Three in ten (29%) Reform considerers would take issue with their son or daughter having a partner of another ethnicity. While still a minority of the supporter base, it will be essential for leaders to draw clear lines between debating issues of immigration, identity and integration and voicing views that are racially prejudiced.

Six in ten white Britons would call out racist behaviour

Figure 3.6: Most people say they would call out racism

“Imagine you are with friends or colleagues, and someone makes a prejudiced joke about a person’s race or ethnicity (who is not present at the time). What would you be most likely to do?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Understanding how people respond to casual or overt racism highlights the gap between holding anti-prejudice values and actively enforcing them. Yet in addition to being comfortable with ethnic diversity, a majority of the white public would also intervene and challenge somebody making a racist joke. This spans four in ten (40%) who say they would do so in the moment and one in five (20%) who would do so privately later on. A further one in five (22%) would act as passive bystanders and choose to “say nothing and move on”. Willingness to step in is also consistent with the percentages in the ethnic minority sample. Only a small hardline minority report that they would laugh along and join in (5%).

The finding suggests that racist humour and hate speech is still widely stigmatised across society, failing to pass the ‘dinner table test’, although focus group conversations at points aired certain casual prejudices against particular groups – such as against Muslims and people seeking asylum – which were less robustly opposed by other participants and appeared to have more mainstream acceptability.

The survey also suggests that confidence in calling out prejudiced behaviour has risen across the generations. Seven in ten white respondents aged 18-24 would call out a racist joke (including 51% in the moment), compared to a narrower majority of 54% among over-65s (36% in the moment).

It is common in focus groups to hear reflections – between the generations – on how children had educated or established boundaries on prejudice as debates on race evolve, with parents also doing so among their grandparents. Whilst this survey did not measure responses based on self-reported interactions with people from ethnic minority groups, young people are also significantly more likely to hold multi-racial friendship groups and so understand – first or second-hand – how racist behaviour might impact those targeted.

“I think the current generation, they [are] very self-aware, like being racist, but it can go the other way. So it can [become] polarising [into] two sides... the social media... they kind of create, like, people who are racist and people who are super activists and antiracist.”

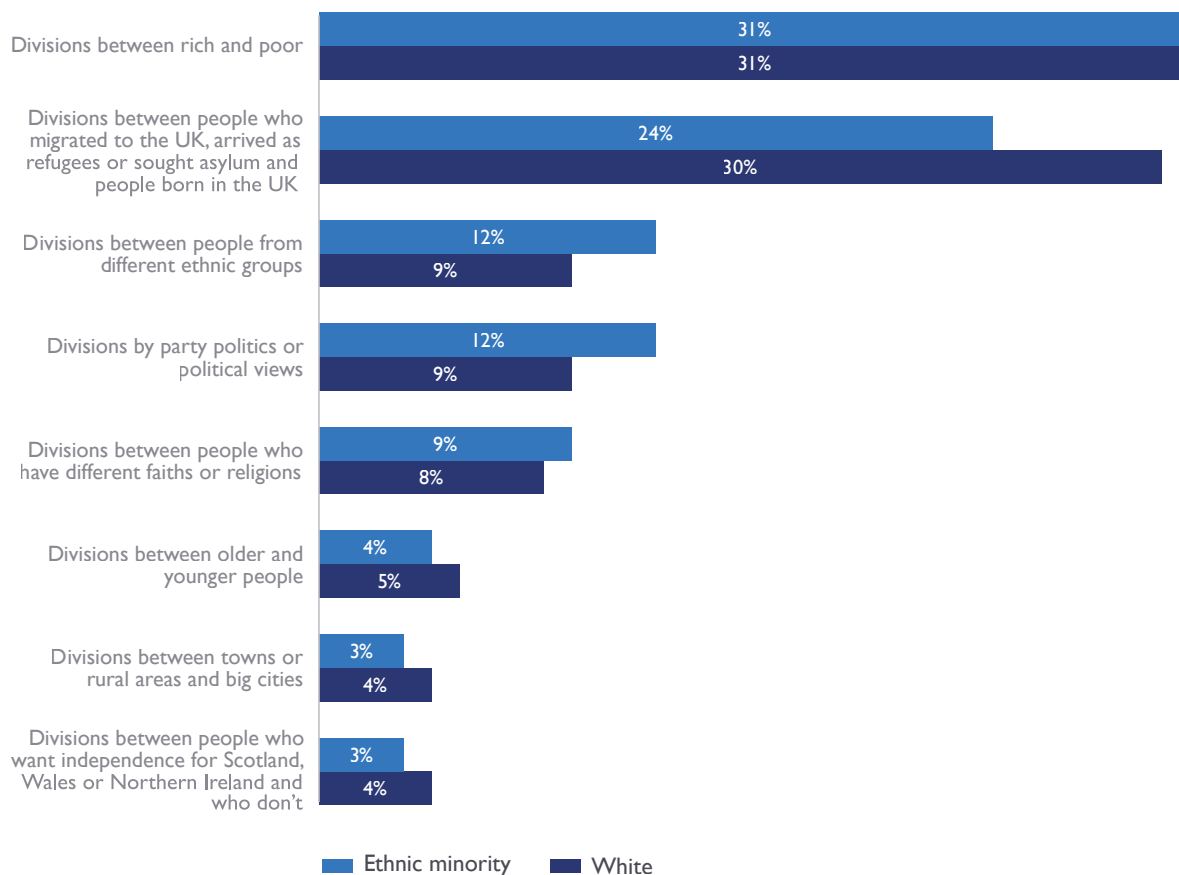
–Asian female participant, Edinburgh

The public share concerns about deepening divides over economic class and immigration

As well as examining people’s experiences and attitudes with regard to racial prejudice, the research also explored the wider mood of the nation on cohesion, including which issues were felt to be dividing the public most.

Figure 3.7: What do people think is causing division? (Top concerns)

“Which issues do you think most divide people in the UK today? (Rank your top 3 with 1 being your most important concern)”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

It is notable that divides between rich and poor are placed top by white and ethnic minority respondents alike, selected by one in three (31%) and ranked in the top-three most divisive issues by a majority (55%) of both samples.

In our public discussions, frustrations about the rising cost of living, housing costs and scarce opportunities drove a sense of pessimism about the direction of the country. As we explore in Chapter Four, while some viewed economic fairness in more ‘them vs us’ terms – voicing perceptions that one ethnic group received preferential treatment in workplaces or politics – it was also true that a wider number of participants found common ground, empathising across ethnic lines with those experiencing similar difficulties.

Concerns about economic divides are also particularly strong among young people, with those aged 18-24 proving twenty percentage-points more likely in the white survey to rank the issue in the top three than those over-65, and eleven points more likely among ethnic minority respondents.

In our qualitative conversations, the younger generation believe they are playing by the rules, but that the rules have changed. We heard how soaring rents and stagnant salaries meant that getting on in life felt harder, no matter how hard they worked. Similar experiences were heard around the UK. In Edinburgh, well-paid young workers felt locked out of buying a home. In Belfast, migrant youth were left without proper language support in schools while facing growing hostility from locals who blame newcomers for limited resources. In each case, straining local economies and fewer opportunities for social mobility placed pressure on community cohesion.

“Everything we pay for is going to a very small percentage of people. So for me, that’s not fair. You know that that’s not how capitalism was set up to be. So it’s the reason why my children will probably never afford to buy their own home unless they get lucky somehow or basically, without sounding glib, until my mother passes away and her inheritance comes filtering down [...] I mean, I have a master’s degree. I have two degrees. My wife has two master’s degrees and a nursing degree, we’re not on huge wages in any way, shape or form.”

–White British male participant, Cardiff

“I think there’s definitely a divide between people that are rich, or people who are not. [...] You get to a situation where, you know people that aren’t as well off, they’ll start hating all the rich people. But the real problem isn’t the rich people or the poor, it’s the people above, you know the government, and the people that decide the legislation or the tax rates. [...] It needs to change, because you used to be able to afford a house, but now it’s like, you can’t even save a deposit up”.

–Asian male participant, Edinburgh



Economic inequality is then followed closely by immigration as a leading source of division. This was ranked top by a higher proportion of white respondents (30%) compared to those in the ethnic minority sample (24%), with a majority in both surveys (63% / 59% respectively) placing it in their top three most divisive issues.

This cross-ethnic concern likely reflects a variety of motives behind people's views on the immigration debate. Within the white survey, people with negative attitudes to the impact of immigration were 14 percentage-points more likely to select this as their most divisive issue (40%) compared to people in the 'balancer' middle on immigration attitudes (26% ranked top) or with more liberal views (24%).⁹ This surfaced often in focus groups, where high profile media coverage of boat crossings, individuals who have committed criminal offences, asylum hotels and the circulation of online misinformation were cited in often tense conversations.

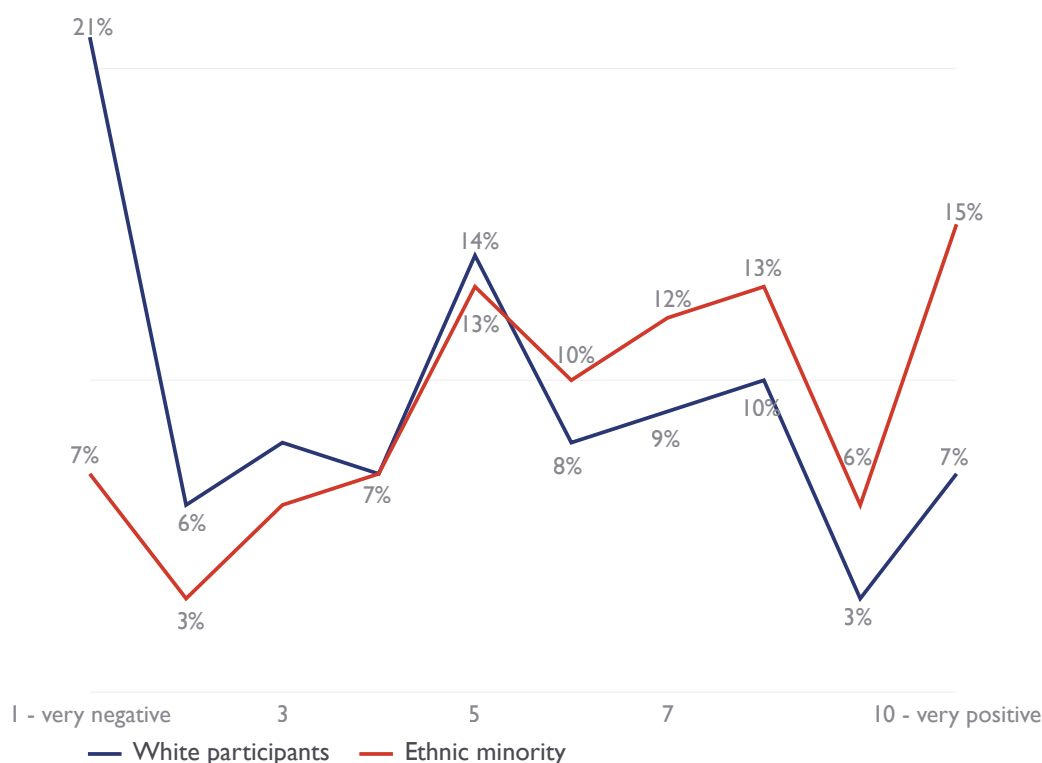
In the ethnic minority survey there was less correlation between negative attitudes towards immigration and selecting this as their leading driver of division. In focus groups, people from minority backgrounds were comparatively more concerned about the potential backlash when polarisation over migration spilled into racialised stereotyping and targeted abuse.

"When you put the television on and you see people in the media saying, 'Look at Dover, there's 50 people come on a boat'... Most people are fleeing persecution, no problem, but when they keep coming and coming, they all class us as the same, right, because we've got brown skin. The government's allowing them to stay in hotels and get a lot of stuff for free. This is what's alienating the white people, and they're taking that out on the ethnic minorities that have been here for 50, 60 years... The media are portraying every single body coming across as criminals, rapists... That's causing a major problem for people living here peacefully."

—Asian male participant, Walsall

Figure 3.8: Comparing attitudes to immigration

“On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being very negative and 10 being very positive), do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, including your local community?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Expectedly, as many ethnic minority Britons have either personal experience of migration or closer understanding through a parent or grandparent, their attitudes towards immigration are largely more positive. A majority from ethnic minority backgrounds (56%) give a positive score of 6-10, when asked to rank the overall impact of immigration to the UK, compared with 37% among respondents in the white survey. As Figure 3.8 shows, divergence is most pronounced at the extremes, with three times as many white respondents giving the most negative score, and twice as many ethnic minority respondents giving the most positive score.

At the same time, however, our focus groups also highlighted that positive views were not uniform among ethnic minority participants, with some nuances and scepticism emerging through the conversations, including from people who had themselves moved to the UK. Frustrations tended to focus on refugees and people seeking asylum, referencing a desire for controlled numbers and a perceived unfairness at the entitlements of those who come to the UK seeking sanctuary, compared to those who had migrated for work.

This latter perception often appeared driven by low awareness about the limited rights of people seeking asylum to work upon arrival. There were also signs that some participants aired negative views about refugees as a way of deflecting racialised stereotypes where people from visible ethnic minority backgrounds were assumed to have arrived through these routes.

“Now, if you’ve got a different skin colour, people look at you differently. The only thing you can do is stop people coming in – less refugees on the boats.”

– Asian male participant, Preston

In Figure 3.7 examining perceived divisions, it is notable that ethnic divides come third: selected as top by only around one in ten (9% of white respondents, 12% among ethnic minority respondents). Partly this relates to a broad agreement, heard in focus groups, that community tensions were centred around recent shifts in immigration more than multi-ethnic diversity itself.

Yet a clear theme across the focus groups was also that local lived experiences of diversity were largely positive. People tended to be optimistic about race relations in their area, with a general view across ethnic lines that people from different backgrounds mix and get along well. Discussions included descriptions of neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools where relationships across ethnic backgrounds were largely positive, cooperative and unremarkable. However, this was contrasted sharply with concerns about national political discourse and media coverage, which was often felt to present communities as being in greater conflict than their everyday experience suggested, and which was felt by some to have amplified the issue of asylum.

“People can see that there’s others already here from different communities... there were no problems [between ethnic groups] after the 80s, everything kind of died down. But since the media keeps portraying these people on boats... that’s causing a major problem.”

–Asian male participant, Walsall

Perceptions of being British

Social cohesion is dependent on whether people feel they belong. To understand why prejudice persists on our streets and online, we also sought to examine how people view British identity today.

Few view being born in Britain as a requirement for British identity

Our research finds that modern Britishness is defined far more by shared laws and civic values than by ethnicity or birthplace. However, belonging is experienced differently across communities and generations, with focus group discussions surfacing the nuances of how different people describe home and a sense of national values.

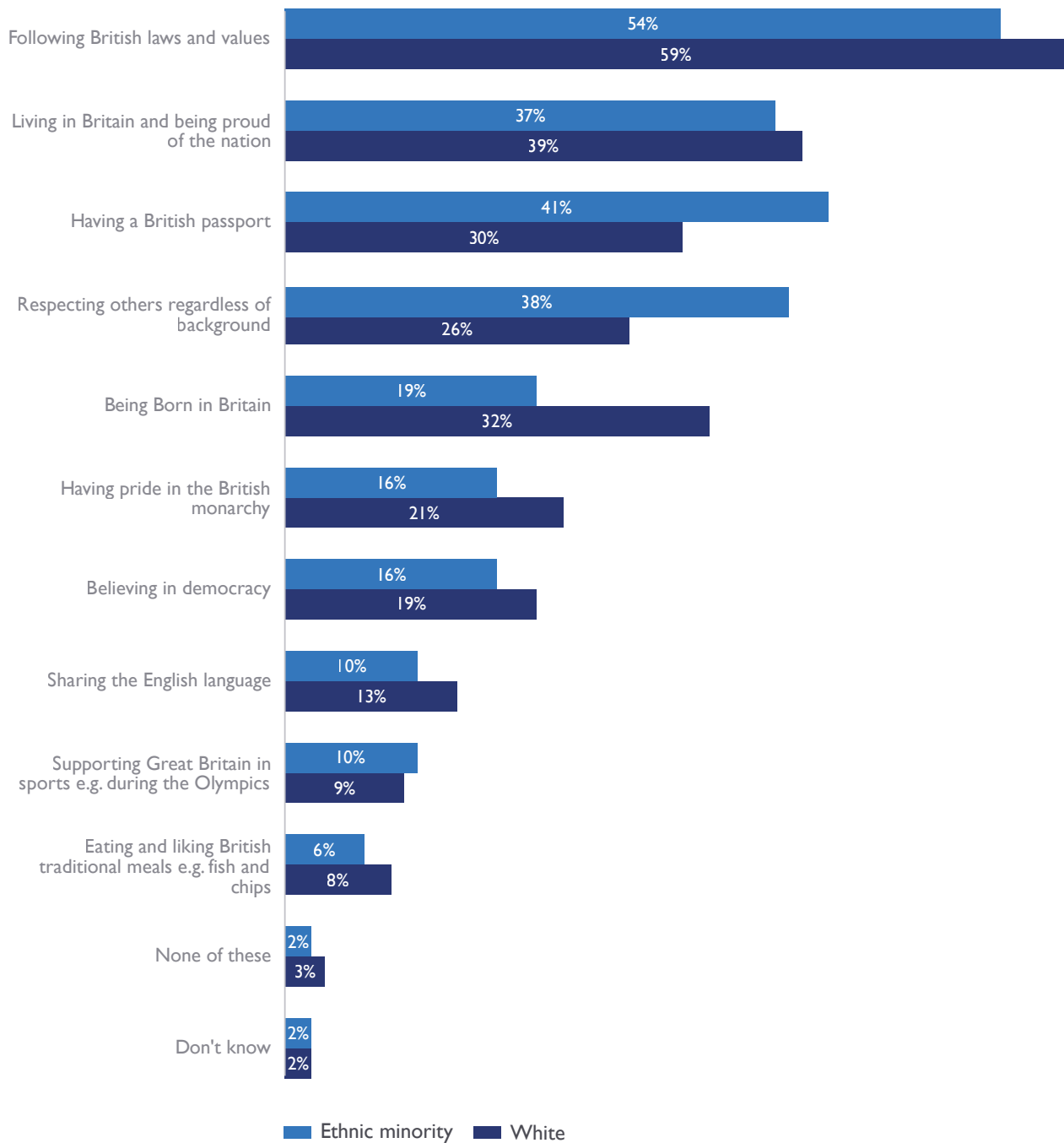
We find that ethnic minority participants place greater weight on formal markers like a British passport, seeing citizenship as a crucial anchor for security and equal standing. Over time there have been generational shifts, with younger people feeling more ambivalent about traditional national symbols and showing lower awareness of post-colonial history. Yet, when asked, a clear majority agree that events like Windrush Day belong in Britain's national story.

There is a broad consensus on Britishness being an identity shaped more by civic values than notions of where one is born. Asked to rank three factors that describe 'being British', a similar majority of both the white (59%) and ethnic minority (54%) participants selected "following British laws and values".



Fig 3.9: What does it mean to be British?

“Which of the following best describes what being British means to you? Select up to three options.”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Individuals in focus groups identified being respectful and polite as being inherently tied to British culture:

“I think what you would probably define as British values would probably be linked into being law abiding... If people are seen as law abiding and fine members of the community, then that’s pretty much acceptable... We’re a country built on multiculturalism, and we should be accepting, and as long as people are doing things within the law... people may be trying to use people’s differences to say that somebody isn’t British, but if it’s anything that’s within the law, it isn’t un-British.”

–White British male participant, Walsall

“When my friend came to the UK... one of the things he pointed out was that people were quite respectful here. He said there were lots of ‘thank yous’ and ‘pleases’... I think there’s lots of respecting when it comes to people trying to treat people fairly.”

– Mixed-race male participant, Preston

Amid heated debates about national identity, ethnicity and integration, our survey reveals that only a minority believe ‘being born in Britain’ is an important facet of Britishness. This was selected by just one in three (32%) in the survey of white respondents, with a similar proportion (30%) choosing “having a British passport”, a version of Britishness open to newcomers who stay and settle. Only one in five ethnic minority respondents (19%) selected ‘being born in Britain’ as something that defines Britishness.

Among white respondents, those aged 65+ are fifteen percentage points more likely to select “being born in Britain” (40%) than those aged 18-24 (25%). Only minorities across supporters of all the main political parties selected ‘being born in Britain’ as one of their three defining characteristics of Britishness.

Ethnic minority respondents were eleven percentage-points more likely to select “having a British passport” as a key facet of national identity (chosen by 41%), likely reflecting the experience of those who settled through the citizenship process, or whose parents or grandparents had done so. Some focus group discussions also linked the importance of holding citizenship to a need for ethnic minorities to ‘prove their Britishness’ due to increased anxiety about skin colour:

“For me, being British is about holding a British passport and contributing to British society positively... I might feel like I’m British, but I’m not seen as British... I’m born British... where do I belong?”

–Black female participant, Walsall

“I was a refugee. Now I have British citizenship. Before I became a citizen, I was working, paying my taxes, contributing to this community... but people still don’t see us as contributing to this country.”

– Arab male participant, Belfast

Civic values of “living in Britain and being proud of the nation” were also chosen by a considerable and equal portion of more than one in three people from both the white survey (39%) and the ethnic minority survey (37%). Sources of pride discussed in the groups included the NHS, football and a sense of day-to-day friendliness between people.

“I do identify as British because, you know, Britain, we do have some great opportunities here. You know, the NHS and that makes me proud and happy to be British in that sense. I wouldn’t say I’m patriotic, if you know what I mean.”

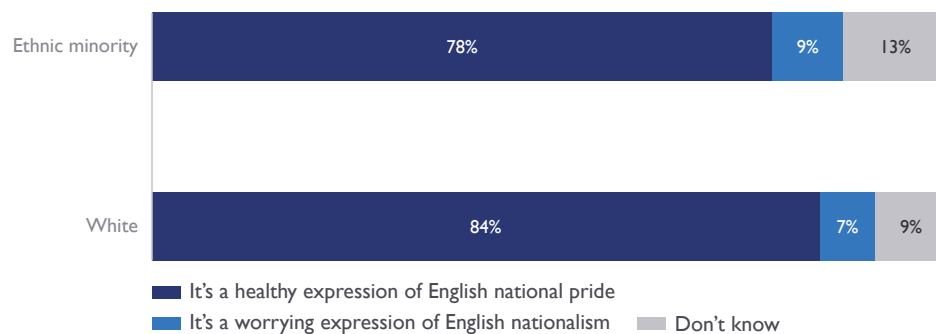
–Black Male participant, Walsall

National flags remain widely seen as a symbol of pride, while one in four are concerned about their use outside of major events

We asked participants how they would feel if they saw an English, Scottish or Welsh flag on someone's home, car, shop, or pub in different contexts (depending on their country of residence).

Fig 3.10: Feelings on flags – during a sporting event

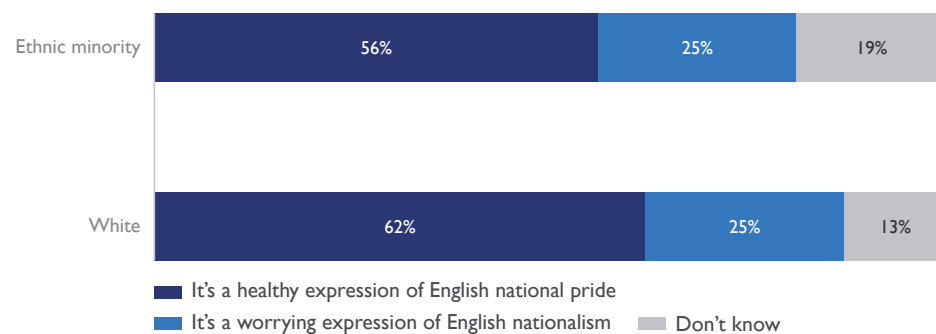
Which of the following, if either, best describes how you would feel if you saw an [England/ Scotland/ Wales] flag on someone's home, car, shop or pub when England/Scotland/Wales are playing in a major sports tournament?



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Fig 3.11: Feelings on flags – on a normal day of the year

Which of the following, if either, best describes how you would feel if you saw an [England/ Scotland/ Wales] flag on someone's home, car, shop or pub on a normal day of the year?



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

In the context of a major sports tournament, the vast majority saw this as a ‘healthy expression of national pride’. Among ethnic minorities 78% selected this option while just 9% highlighted concerns, with similar findings (84%/7%) among white respondents.

“I would wave, like the Saint George’s flag and things like that. You know, I like when England play football now it’s got a lot more black players...far better representation.”

–Black female participant, Peckham

On a normal day of the year, a majority still consider the flag a healthy symbol of pride, yet there were higher concerns among one in four (25%) white and ethnic minority respondents about scenarios where the use of the flag could feel othering or intimidating. This was a regular theme in focus groups, where participants contrasted moments of shared pride such as the World Cup with the more divisive ‘Raise the Colours’ campaign, which had seen the England flag and Union Jack used as an expression of discontent with immigration and diversity.

“When I drive home and I saw British flags flying around... people will be like, ‘Oh yeah, they’ve been put up by idiots.’ And I’m like, I don’t see the problem. Every time I walk into Cardiff, I see Welsh flags flying on the castle. So why is there a problem with British flags flying around? Sure, if it comes with an identity behind it of far-right nationalism, sure, but I haven’t seen that myself. I’ve just seen people who like flying a British flag.”

– White British male participant, Cardiff

Context was seen as crucial and participants differentiated between ad hoc attempts to raise flags on lampposts or bridges as more of a politicised, territorial claim compared to flying national flags in private property or official buildings. This is supported too by recent data from YouGov which finds broader scepticism across white and ethnic minority Britons to the use of the England flag where it is hoisted unofficially in public places.¹⁰

“[Area omitted] is an area where they used to have the KKK, and there are lots of flags, probably the most flags I’ve ever seen in any place in that area... I used to feel comfortable... but now I would never set foot in that area, just because they’re clearly making the stance that they don’t feel that people of colour are welcome in that area, at least that’s how I’ve interpreted the flags.”

– Black female participant, Walsall

There was broad consensus on this issue across ethnicities, but more contrasting views along lines of age and education. One in three ethnic minority respondents aged 18-24 (34%) expressed concern about flags as a worrying symbol of nationalism compared to 23% of those aged over-65. Among white respondents, a larger minority of graduates also express concerns (34%) than non-graduates (20%).

A strong appetite for more understanding of the history of race in Britain – yet public awareness is patchy across different groups

Our group discussions found a strong appetite among the public for more education and better understanding of the making of multi-ethnic Britain – and the history that explains the presence at scale of ethnic minorities in British society today. This was given a particularly high priority by ethnic minority participants – who often suggested this would improve relationships across groups, and help to reduce prejudices.

The nationally representative polling shows mixed knowledge. This includes when we asked specifically about the arrival of the Windrush in 1948, which is now marked officially as a key origins moment in post-war migration from the Caribbean and broader Commonwealth.

About half of the public is aware of the anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush being marked as Windrush Day, with similar levels of knowledge among both white (52%) and ethnic minority (46%) participants. Some ethnic groups were more aware than others. More than half of Black (58%) and Mixed (56%) ethnicity participants reported knowing about Windrush Day, compared to around a third of Pakistani (36%) Bangladeshi (36%) and Chinese (34%) participants.

As with many historical events, there is a significant age gap in awareness, particularly amongst white Britons: just 37% of those aged 18-34 knew of the event compared to 67% of over 55s. Young ethnic minority participants were more aware (43%), likely due to family history and remembrance of individual stories.

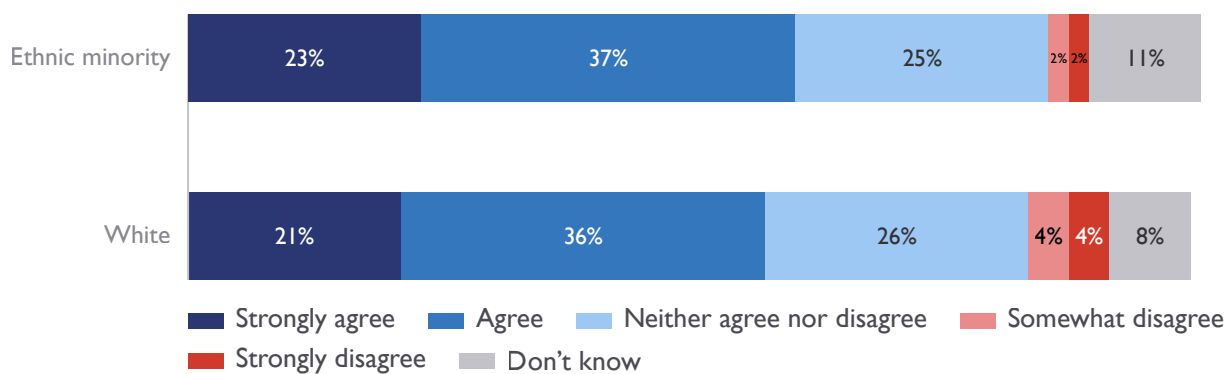
In focus group discussions, participants who had learned about the legacies of the Windrush generation spoke of the need to include these stories in the school curriculum:

“I think if they did change the education system... some people still don’t know why it’s called the Windrush line. Like, they don’t know about these boats. And there wasn’t only the Windrush boat. Maybe if they actually put that in history and actually change things... educating the children from way up, that would help.”

– Black female participant, Peckham

After receiving information about the event in the survey, around 6 in 10 people (60% of ethnic minorities and 57% White Britons) believe that Windrush Day should be seen as an important part of Britain’s national story, while a fringe of less than one in ten disagree. This spans a majority of supporters for each of the major political parties and a consensus across the age generations too.

Fig 3.12. To what extent to do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Windrush Day should be seen as an important part of Britain’s national story”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Participants in our focus groups reiterated the importance of recognising and representing the stories of multi-ethnic Britain, and the contribution of minorities to the society we share today. We also heard about the need to ensure awareness about the Windrush scandal and lessons for the rights of migrants to the UK.

“What they seem to forget is all the hard work ethnic minorities have done in the country. We built this country, more or less. You know, when after the war there was nothing here. People came. The Irish came, the people came on Windrush. Sikhs, Pakistanis came. We’ve opened shops, restaurants, they’re doctors, nurses. They seem to forget that when they need something, they’re there.”

– Asian male participant, Walsall

“The Windrush scandal exposed so much. Have we really come a long way? Have we really achieved equality we want?... We shouldn’t be gaslit.”

– Asian male participant, Peckham

These findings point to the importance of engaging in debates on identity to foster wider national confidence in cohesion. Ensuring individuals feel recognised and secure in their British identity can help local communities become more resilient against division and hostility. Engaging with diverse communities, celebrating inclusive symbols of pride, and sharing stories of multi-ethnic contribution to Britain can help everyone feel reflected in our national narrative.



4. Institutional barriers and trust

Our research sought to understand perceptions of fairness and how institutions treat people of different ethnic backgrounds. Both the survey and discussions examined the perspectives of white and ethnic minority participants on structural disadvantage and discrimination. Importantly, in a political landscape that can often present white working class and minority groups as competing for resources and attention in a struggling economy, we also explored where there is shared concern across the public, and where attitudes are more sharply polarised.

We find that while people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the UK are more likely to feel they are treated similarly to others, there is still a sizeable portion of around a third that are concerned about racialised unequal treatment. Our focus groups revealed emotive accounts of workplace discrimination, police profiling and frustrations about stereotyping in the media. Others shared personal experiences of unfairness and discrimination, even when they sometimes felt institutions were trying to be fair.

In a more contested political climate, we observe signs of increasing ‘zero-sum’ attitudes in our survey of the white public, particularly on views of government treatment. Yet the majority of the public remains open to the need for joined-up action across lines of race and class, where policymakers demonstrably tackle both together. Indeed, this strengthens legitimacy further among minority groups too, who see economic and ethnic inequalities as connected.

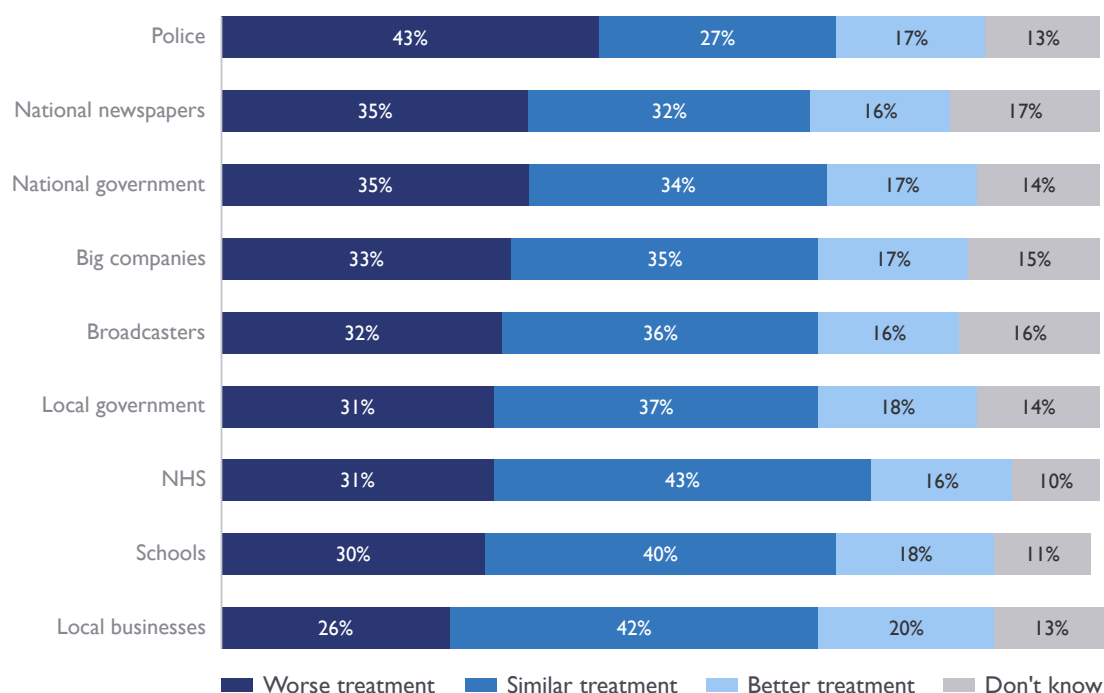
There are substantial concerns about unequal treatment among ethnic minorities

While less than half of the those from ethnic minority backgrounds feel that groups are treated differently on the basis of race, a substantial portion – around one in three – remain concerned about institutionalised unfair treatment in society. Focus groups highlighted how for many, despite resilience in the face of barriers, mistreatment remains common in everyday life.

In our representative survey, ethnic minority groups are particularly likely to point to concerns about the police. Respondents are more likely to say the police treat ethnic minorities worse than white people (43%) than would say groups are treated similarly (27%) or minorities are treated better (17%). This is true across all the reportable ethnicity groups.

Figure 4.1: Do ethnic minorities feel fairly treated by institutions?

“Thinking about the following institutions, would you say that they tend to treat Black, Asian or Mixed-race people similarly or worse than they treat white people overall?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Older respondents are more likely to have concerns about institutional racism. Around half (48%) of over-65s say the police treat minorities worse, compared to 38% of those aged 25-34 and 42% of 18-24s. Yet in focus groups, we frequently heard personal accounts across the generations about the use of police ‘stop and search’ powers, or other incidents that had left people feeling targeted. While there was acknowledgement that brutality had become less commonplace than 30 or 40 years ago, those affected spoke passionately of the need to go further in rooting out institutionalised stereotypes and biases against minority groups.

“I have a 15-year-old son. His best friend is white. A few weeks ago, they were approached by police officers, and the way they were both treated was completely different. Like, my son was searched, his friend wasn’t searched. They said that there’d been reports that there was two boys, one of them had a samurai sword. So the way they were just treated was completely different.”

– Black female participant, Peckham

Around a third of minority respondents expressed concerns about media discrimination from national newspapers and broadcasters. Ethnic groups of predominantly Muslim faith feel this more strongly, with large proportions of Pakistani (38%) and Bangladeshi (44%) respondents feeling minorities receive worse treatment in the media. Across the UK, our discussions surfaced fears that coverage of terrorist incidents and crimes could disproportionately focus on brown and black people, often creating tensions felt to have fuelled recent race riots.

Ethnic minority respondents often felt that high-profile figures from ethnic minorities were covered differently in the media – with examples ranging from footballers and other celebrities to members of the public. This research took place before the intense media scrutiny of Professor Jason Arday, which ultimately led to the academic's death after his resignation from his Cambridge University post. This was a sharply contested argument about legitimate scrutiny of academic standards and the extent to which a black public voice faced disproportionately intense scrutiny. Over ten thousand people attended a vigil for Professor Arday and around one hundred thousand signed petitions seeking an inquiry into the media coverage. That scale of mobilisation reflects how this case is likely to have reinforced a pre-existing scepticism about fairness in the media, held by significant numbers of black and ethnic minority Britons in particular, though views of the causes of the tragedy and the media's role within it will differ.

"I'm seeing media hate, especially when it comes to people from Pakistani backgrounds. If somebody else goes in a school and shoots up a school, they've got mental health problems, as long as they're not Muslim. But Muslims will be targeted differently."

– Asian female participant, Edinburgh

"For me, I am a Muslim, a refugee and a British citizen now. Even before getting my citizenship I was working, paying my taxes and contributing to this community. [...] I believe the media needs to realise that Muslim refugees or Muslims – even if not all of them are good – there are lots of people trying to do something good for this country. [...] Most of the kidnapping and rape incidents that happen in the UK are from local people, but they only spotlight the refugees incidents, and that's why the media is actually getting dangerous day like every day."

–Arab male participant, Belfast

Ethnic minority respondents were concerned about inequality in government policies too. Respondents are ten percentage points more likely than their white peers to say the national government treats people like them worse along lines of race (35%), while one in three (34%) say all are treated similarly and a fringe say minorities are treated better (17%). Perceptions of worse treatment were stronger among people from Pakistani (38%), Bangladeshi (46%) and mixed (42%) backgrounds compared to Chinese (26%) or Indian (31%) respondents, reflecting strong concerns about a rise in anti-Muslim hate.

The breadth of concern may also pose challenges to the ruling Labour Party as it seeks to sustain its historical advantage in ethnic minority support. A third of ethnic minority 2024 Labour voters (33%) feel that the government treats minorities worse than white people. Among respondents considering voting Green at the next election this rises to 41%.

Institutions more likely to be seen to treat people of all ethnic backgrounds similarly included the NHS (43%), local businesses (42%) and schools (40%).

We heard varied views on the health service across the research. In focus groups many – particularly those working in the NHS – reported an inclusive atmosphere and praised a diverse staff that worked well together. However, women (35%) were nine percentage-points more likely than men (26%) to say that the NHS treated ethnic minority groups worse, with some female participants across the focus groups expressing concerns over disparities in maternity and neonatal support.

“I work for the NHS and there’s a very diverse community of people working there, so I never encountered any racism. I think everyone gets an equal opportunity. When I moved to the UK five years ago, I got interviews and a fair chance.”

– Asian male participant, Preston

“The maternal death rate for black women is just insane and there has been lots of research on it [...] we claim to be a first-world, developed country but you have all these women that aren’t being cared for properly.”

– Black female participant, Peckham



The youngest respondents aged 18-24 also show more concern about schools, with one in three (33%) feeling they treat ethnic minorities worse, compared to over-65s (24%). In focus groups parents said there had been progress in educating children on racism, diversity and cultural differences compared to their generation, but we also heard accounts from families and young people of ongoing challenges with racist bullying.

“With the children, they get called racist names a lot of times in school. My granddaughter is very fair skinned, if you saw her, she’s basically looked white. Yet she got called the N word in school last month. She’s just turned 11 now, so and it happens quite regularly, even with my friends’ children.”

– Black female participant, Cardiff

Unfairness in the workplace and services

Our survey reveals that a concerning high portion of ethnic minority respondents report first-hand experiences of racial discrimination within institutions. One in four (23%) say that “I have been treated differently or unfairly at work because of my race”, either often or very often in the past five years.

Figure 4.2: Ethnic minority views on fairness in the workplace

“Thinking about the last five years, how often, if at all, have you experienced any of the following situations because of your race? ‘I have been treated differently or unfairly at work because of my race’.”



Very often Often Rarely Never Don't know
Prefer not to say

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

We heard many accounts from focus group participants who had faced stereotyping and comments based on their race. Having a ‘foreign-sounding’ name or an accent was often viewed as a barrier, both at the application stage and with colleagues making prejudiced assumptions based on race, competency with language or ability. Some participants had adopted more western-sounding names or masked aspects of their culture, faith or identity around colleagues.

“When I came here, I had nothing, so I had to work myself up just to be in the same position. I paid my taxes every year. I’ve never been on benefits. And yet still I get racist comments, especially in employment. In my previous work, I had to leave because some of management team had given me comments that I did not like, so I had to go to HR.”

– Arab male participant, Belfast

Others also shared less obvious and identifiable cases that nonetheless appeared motivated by ethnicity, such as stagnant career progression opportunities while similar white peers progressed faster. Requiring visa sponsorship was noted multiple times among migrants as holding back potential opportunities and progression, where this placed additional costs and administration on employers.

“I feel visas are a very systemic problem. I feel like people are at a disadvantage if they are applying for a job with a non-permanent visa or temporary visa, versus someone who has permanent citizenship or who is a British citizen. From a systemic, sort of organisational point of view, that person is automatically going to be a disadvantage, even if they did tick all the other boxes.”

– Asian female participant, Edinburgh

“I worked in [anonymised company] for six years. A job came up. I applied for it, a girl who joined us with just six months’ experience, she applied for the same senior position, and this was the girl that I trained up, and she had a background in business, but the job was for accounting (for which I had an accounting degree, and I did my chartered examination). I went for the interview. I felt like I really aced the interview. I was really positive about it. And then they got back to me, saying, Yeah, you didn’t get the job, and the other girl got the job. I kept asking, on what kind of basis? But I felt like, in that company, we had a building of 700 people. There was literally about five ethnic minority people in there. So, yeah, more representation is needed, I think, of ethnic minorities within companies, especially in senior positions.”

– Asian male participant, Cardiff

Black respondents are notably more likely (31%) to report discrimination at work, followed by Pakistani (27%) and Bangladeshi (25%) respondents. Experiences are less widely reported among Indian (21%) and Chinese respondents (14%), though both latter groups are less likely to report concerns of racial disparity throughout the survey. Our focus groups suggested that there may be some cultural distinctions in how different ethnic groups respond to inequality or prejudice. Indian and Chinese participants were often likely to share concerns of wanting society to be fairer and more meritocratic, however many spoke of more individual philosophies around overcoming institutional hurdles. Among other South Asian, African and Caribbean cultures – particularly for those who were the children or grandchildren of migrants – we found participants more likely to use vocabulary that named racial discrimination, and a more collective identity about needing to work as a group to reduce gaps and barriers.

“I don’t really think about it a lot. [...] It doesn’t cross my mind very often. Some people obviously understandably, see [their racial identity] as very important. I don’t really think about it greatly.”
[Later on] “I wouldn’t say that I experience great amounts of unfair or unjust treatment, but it’s been eye opening listening to the others on the [focus group] today. I’ve always known that unfortunately it does exist and this gives me a different perspective.”

– Asian male participant, Edinburgh

Younger respondents aged 18-24 were also nearly twice as likely to say they had experienced discrimination (27%) than those later in their careers aged 55-64 (14%). Graduates (28%) were more likely to self-report compared than non-graduates (20%). Focus group discussions revealed different ways of describing unfair treatment across cultures and also varied ways of viewing the issues by generation. Younger participants were more likely to describe experiences through a language of structural barriers in society or their work. This was less common among some older generations, who were more likely to speak of ‘proving colleagues wrong’ through working harder or a sense of individual stoic resilience to overcoming unfair treatment.

“I think it is about grafting and making your own luck. If I look at my own career, I won’t name companies, but I’ve worked for a company that’s told me, from senior management that I was held back because of my colour. I work for another company now, right? And it’s the best company I’ve ever worked for. I don’t feel colour or, you know, ethnicity or religious background are a blocker, you know. So it’s, it’s just based on your own life journey.”

“I think it’s completely structural and economic, and while I think that people can individually, within certain careers, do well, regardless of their race or class, I think primarily, society is structured so that the wealthier you are, the better you can get on. And I also think that you know, Britain has been built in a way so that it is generally white males that can get on the best in society. And I think you see that at the higher levels, right? If you look in banking, for example, or you see it more at the higher levels that is predominantly [a] particular race and class that are running things and within politics too.”

– An older Asian male participant and younger Black female participant discuss fairness in society, Walsall

A similarly-sized group of one in four (25%) also report that “I have been treated differently by public services or authorities (e.g. policing, healthcare or housing) because of my race” often or very often.

Figure 4.3: Ethnic minority experience of different treatment by public services

“Thinking about the last five years, how often, if at all, have you experienced any of the following situations because of your race? ‘I have been treated differently by public services or authorities (e.g. policing, healthcare or housing) because of my race’”



Very often Often Rarely Never Don't know
Prefer not to say

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Those reporting such experiences are similarly more likely to be younger and from Black, Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds. In focus groups, participants opened up about a range of experiences from schooling to the NHS. A common theme to emerge was that services and institutions were often poorly prepared to field or address complaints about racial unfairness, with unclear or unresponsive processes to report incidents that became dispiriting for those who attempted to share their concerns. In jobs, participants were often more likely to have left after instances of discrimination than received support, while in services those who had challenged their treatment were left feeling frustrated and unheard.

“I feel as if teachers and leadership within schools are often hamstrung too in terms of being given the levers that they need to deal with issues. My friend has a particular issue going on just now with their child, who’s Black in a predominantly white school, dealing with racism, and the head teacher seems to have very little actually that they’re able to do. So yeah, I think they need to be given greater powers to deal with issues whenever they arise.”

– Asian male participant, Edinburgh

“In the NHS, there needs to be more inclusion. I would say they need to consider person- centred care. From personal experience, I would say they’re a bit nonchalant. They’re going through a lot at the moment, but this still needs to be aired. You tell them what you are feeling, this is what I feel and what is happening, but they are not listening. And when you complain about this, they ignore you and try to impose some [other treatment] on you, telling you it is something else.”

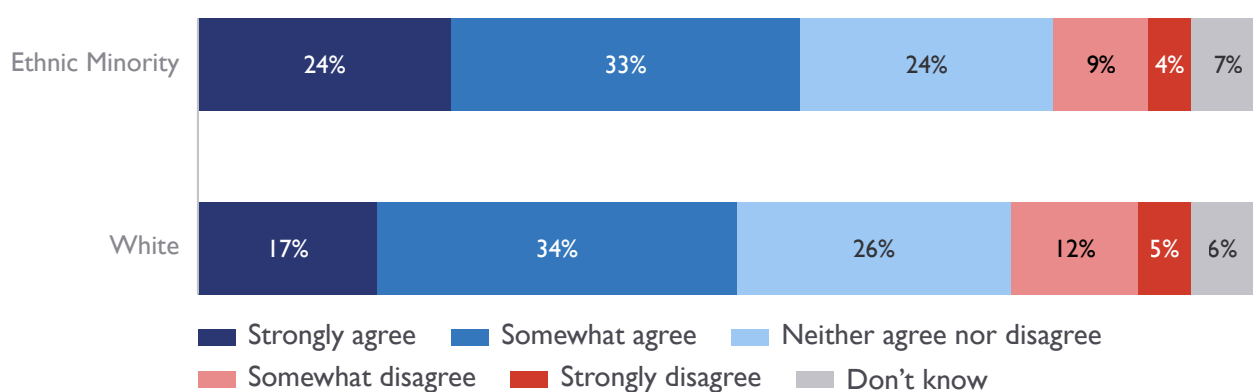
– Black female participant, Edinburgh

Concern about everyday racial discrimination is shared by the white public

Looking across ethnic minority and majority opinion, we find that the white public tend to start from a position of shared concern about unfair treatment and barriers along lines of race. Around half of white respondents (51%) agree with the statement that “Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK” while 17% disagree. These results are largely aligned with the views of ethnic minorities, of whom 57% agree and 13% disagree.

Figure 4.4: Shared concerns about discrimination

“Thinking about racial inequality in the UK today, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: ‘Racial discrimination is common in everyday life in the UK’”.



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

The proportion disputing everyday discrimination against ethnic minority groups increases by age, with only 8% of those aged 18-24 disagreeing compared to around one in four (23%) of those aged over 65. However, in all age groups, white respondents are more likely than not to begin from a shared norm that people from ethnic minority backgrounds face additional barriers. This is also true across political lines, where 2024 voters of all major parties prove more likely to agree than disagree, including Labour (63% agree/15% disagree), Liberal Democrats (44% / 21%), Conservatives (42% / 24%) and Reform UK voters (40% agree / 26% disagree). (Though as discussed in Chapter 2, some Reform UK voters may be referring to perceived discrimination against white people).

This shared foundation characterised many of the mixed focus group discussions. Older generations spoke empathetically of how police brutality was commonplace growing up and noted a concern that instances continued to sow mistrust today. Others voiced concerns about widespread racism in communities, as noted in Chapter Three. Even where views differed on the sources of discrimination or solutions, a shared aim of ‘live and let live’ respect, without disparities or stigmas, could be seen across those of varied ages, politics and backgrounds.

“I do think it’s quite difficult for me to have an opinion on this as a white person, but realistically I know that race makes a massive impact. I had a baby recently, and you hear so many accounts of black women saying that their pain wasn’t taken as seriously as other people’s, which is so sad because you’re in such a vulnerable position. And to think that happens is just a tragedy. Obviously, things get reported on completely differently in the media too based on what the person’s race is like, you know like on terrorism.”

– White female participant, Peckham

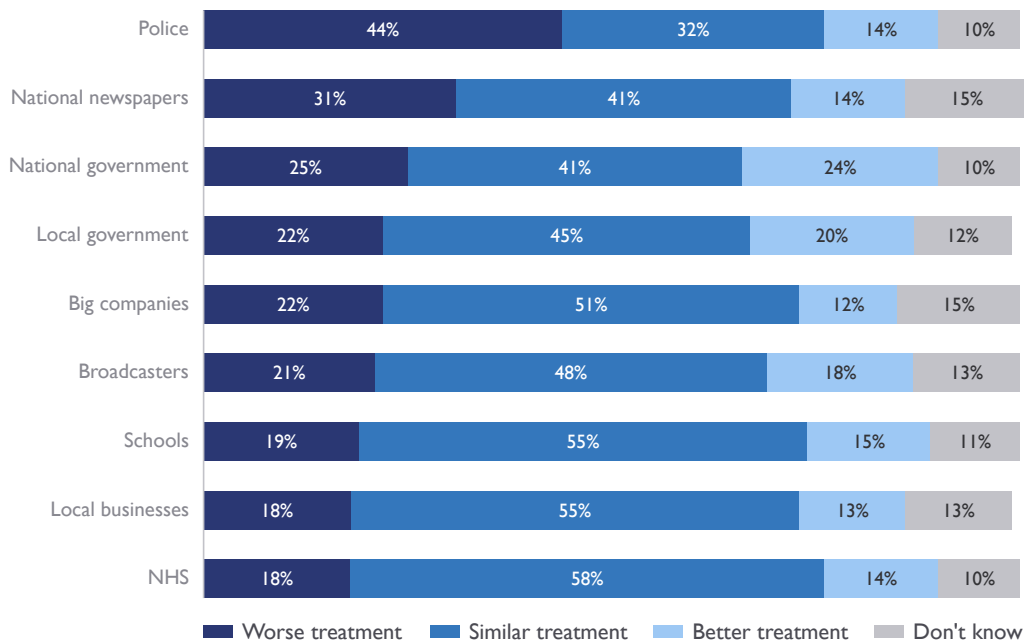
Yet there are signs of widening zero-sum attitudes on government treatment

Where views among white citizens become more mixed are on themes about the perceived treatment of ethnic minorities by the government. Asked how national government treats ethnic minority groups, there is a relatively broad view that the government is impartial with four in ten (41%) responding that groups receive similar attention. One in four white respondents (25%) take a view that ethnic minority groups face disadvantage. However, our survey finds a growing minority of a similar size (24%) that feels ethnic minority groups receive preferential favour and are treated “better” by national government. This group has increased by nine percentage-points from when British Future polled the same question after the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. One in five (20%) feels that local government gives preferential treatment to minorities.



Figure 4.5: Some white respondents feel government treats minorities better

“Thinking about the following institutions, would you say that they tend to treat Black, Asian or Mixed-race people similarly or worse than they treat white people overall?” (White respondents)



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

It is noteworthy that class does not appear to be a driver of discontent. White respondents in socioeconomic group DE were just as likely to say that ethnic minority groups are treated worse as those in AB and were, in fact, more likely to say minorities are treated “much worse” (16% vs 9 %); meanwhile those from less wealthy backgrounds were no more likely to feel minorities are treated better.

White respondents are split more clearly by age, with the youngest respondents particularly less likely to share this view of the government. The proportion of 18-24s who feel that the government treats ethnic minorities “better” is a fringe of 13%, half the proportion of 35-54s (27%) or over-65s (25%).

There are also stark differences by political preference. Anxieties about establishment favouritism are felt most keenly by 2024 Reform voters, a majority (52%) of whom view ethnic minorities as receiving “better” treatment (29% similar treatment; 15% worse). By comparison, one in three Conservative voters (31%) feel minorities fare better (48% similar; 13% worse). Concerns are markedly lower among left-of-centre voters, where just one in five white Labour voters (20%) feel minorities have better treatment, lower than the share of respondents who say there is negative discrimination (43% similar, 30% worse).

During mixed ethnicity focus groups, white participants generally listened attentively to concerns by ethnic minority peers about gaps and barriers in government policy. However, at points, tense conversations emerged over the extent to which race featured as a policy priority in relation to the cost of living and public services.

“I would probably argue there’s more of a hyper focus on it [from government]. If you hyper focus on race, you can effectively stir up hate or create a very intense environment, you can effectively win more votes as well. So I feel like maybe there’s too much of an excessive focus, where there should be more of an equilibrium. [...] I feel like sometimes that takes away from other key factors, like the NHS, or other topics that need to be focused upon.”

– White British male participant, Preston

“I do three different jobs at the moment, just to get enough money in. And I worked at BBC for 10 years. One of the things that I really noticed was they were all about diversity. You know, all these schemes to bring in a diverse workforce, but they never, ever covered the working-class demographic. I think there’s a real problem there, because then all of those institutions [...] are full of like Oxbridge people.”

– White British female participant, Cardiff

Attitudes concerning equality within other institutions are less divided. There is stronger shared concern among white respondents about discrimination within the police, where more were likely to say that ethnic minorities receive worse treatment (44%) than similar (32%) or better (14%) treatment. Fieldwork pre-dated debates following the murder of Henry Nowak, however, which have since ignited some on the political right to call for a reassessment of police anti-racism policies.

One in three white respondents (31%) also see national newspapers as treating people from ethnic minority backgrounds worse, more than double the proportion who feel that print media show favourable treatment to minorities (14%). White respondents were more likely than ethnic minority respondents to see unfairness in the media as a particular challenge for newspapers, rather than broadcasters too, with a narrower gap among ethnic minorities between different types of media outlet.

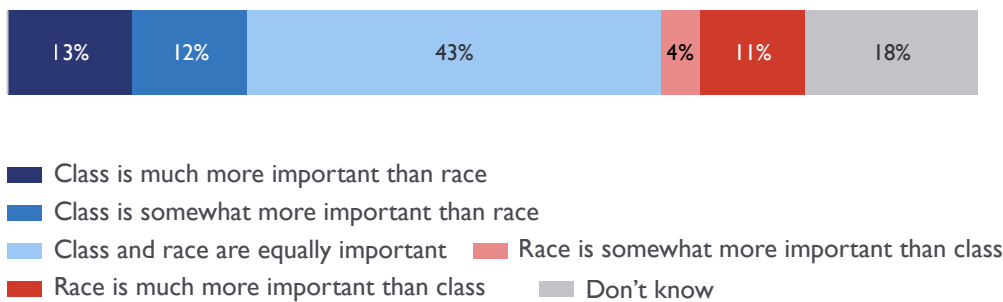
A joint class-race focus builds more consensus for equality

Sections of the media and political conversation in the UK have given increasing emphasis to a sense of zero-sum politics in recent years, often alleging that in an economy of limited resources, politicians must choose between ‘white working class’ and ‘ethnic minority’ communities.

However, we find that the public tend to begin from shared starting points on the need to see fairness across ethnic and socioeconomic gaps. In our survey of white adults, we find it is a minority of one in four that see social class as ‘somewhat’ (12%) or ‘much more’ (13%) important than race. A broader section of more than four in ten (43%) report that ‘class and race are equally important’. One in six (15%) then comprise a group of white respondents who view race as a more pressing issue.

Figure 4.6: Do white people think class matters more than race in determining life chances?

“Thinking about class and race background, which do you think people’s life chances depend more on?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

While media debates may amplify those with the loudest and sometimes most controversial voices, our research points to a broader coalition for action on inequality that does not see either class or race policies as in contention. Far from an anti-equality backlash, this would suggest a majority coalition of white Britons can be constructed to support race equity efforts where these also engage wider barriers. This is also true across white respondents of different socioeconomic grades, where those in DE were less likely to feel class was more important than race (23%) than people in AB (28%).

Importantly, ethnic minority participants in our research shared a similar view: that addressing prejudice and poor treatment by class should form an essential step for action on racial disparities. As noted in Chapter Two, when asked about the issues most dividing the public, there is equal prioritisation among white and ethnic minority groups alike that divisions between rich and poor affect us most (ranked top among both samples, and in their three most pressing divides by majorities of 55% in both surveys).

In focus groups, participants often shared experiences of how their life barriers were layered, impacted by assumptions on their race but also barriers of growing up in more deprived, under-invested areas or having fewer opportunities and workplace connections than middle class peers.

“I think education, social status, and what area you’re from matter as well. Because, like, if you’re from an affluent area, you are more likely to have a better class of education, and your parents might have had a good job, and they could give you a leg up. And for someone in a working-class family, they might not have the same opportunities.”

– Black female participant, Preston

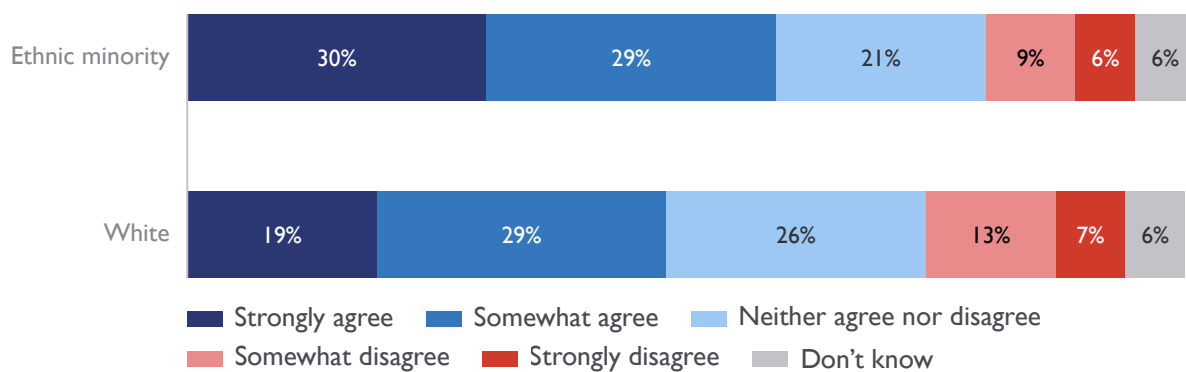
As we explore in Chapter Six, joined-up interventions bridging class and racial lines can therefore serve a dual purpose: unlocking majority support across the public to resist a ‘me versus you’ polarisation, while better reflecting and serving the needs of ethnic minority communities.

Appetite for action is strong but political trust among the ethnic minority public is low

Our research revealed a clear eagerness to see overdue action against racial barriers. But a common theme was also that of low trust in government to reform institutions demonstrating unfair barriers or discrimination.

Figure 4.7: How much should the government prioritise racial equality?

“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Reducing racial inequality is a priority for government”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

A majority (59%) of ethnic minority respondents view racial inequality as being a priority issue by the government. This appears a common consensus across all ethnicities and for all age categories. Around half of white respondents (48%) agree, with only 20% expressing disagreement. However, as we dug into these attitudes in more detail, participants tended to struggle to identify government measures and felt change had been more rhetorical than practical.

“When something bad happens, you tend to see change coming from that, you know. But there’ll be a bit of change, and then it kind of just goes back to how it was before. It’s very superficial, like naming a tube line after a historic event [the HMT Empire Windrush], instead of actually teaching the history to children.”

– Black female participant, Peckham

We also heard concerns that Labour were seen to have retreated away from supporting fairness on race, particularly regarding the reforms to settlement routes, as the government deliberated on potential changes to how long people already in the UK since 2020 would wait for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

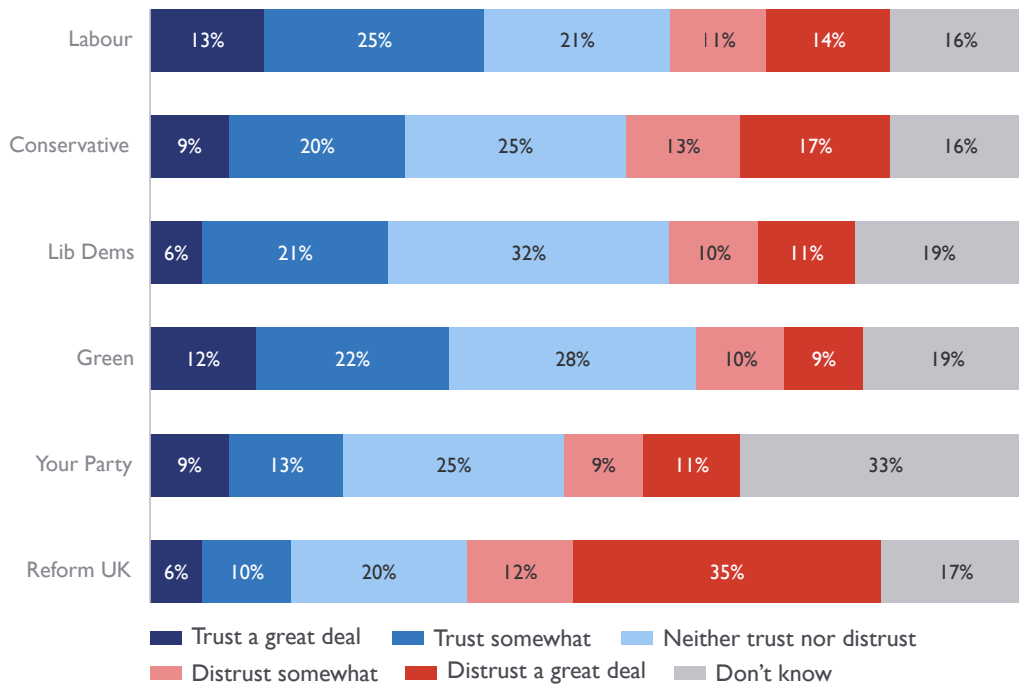
“The rules should not change for people who are already in the UK. I moved five years ago with my wife, on a student visa and her on a dependent visa. Later I worked with two companies and I’m currently working in NHS. There are many of these cases among immigrants, especially in the Indian community. It’s been a nearly a year when they announced the [Immigration] white paper, and from then, it’s been full of uncertainty what’s going to happen. Will [they] deport the existing immigrants? There’s lots of back and forth, but they haven’t given any clarity yet.”

– Asian male participant, Preston

Meanwhile, trust in the mainstream political parties, and confidence that prioritisation of race will lead to improvements in fair treatment, is low.

Fig 4.8: Ethnic minority trust in UK political parties

“How much do you trust each of the following political parties to treat people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds fairly in the UK?” (Ethnic Minority responses)



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

Net trust among ethnic minority voters in left-of-centre parties is positive but weak. Around four in ten (38%) trust Labour to treat people of all ethnic backgrounds fairly while 25% mistrust the party (net +13%). Trust in Labour is presently highest among black voters (net +25%) and Pakistani voters (net +21%) but lower among Mixed-race (+3%), Chinese (+4%), Bangladeshi (+8%) and Indian (+11%) respondents. A theme of mounting frustration was common across our focus groups, among people of different ethnic backgrounds, that Westminster had failed to make meaningful interventions on racial inequalities. None mentioned Labour's proposed Racial Equality Act or identified the party as having a clear forward vision for addressing disparities.

“I don’t really think they [Labour] want to talk about race. It’s not a mainstream issue for them. If they can keep whatever our view is under the radar, and just not talk about it, it’s not a problem... A significant proportion of what goes on in politics is not necessarily following a set principle or policy that they’ve done, that they’ve created to be elected. It’s more about firefighting, whatever the current big disaster is that’s happening. Hence we’ve currently got the issue with Iran and everything that’s going on, and suddenly they’re coming up with a new plan to help us with our gas and electric come the summer. So I think it’s they, from my perspective, it seems that any view on race or ethnicity is kept to a bare minimum.”

– White British male participant, Preston

The Greens fare similarly among ethnic minorities, with 34% reporting that they trust the party to be fair for people of all ethnicities and 19% distrusting the party (net +15%). There were more positive scores from mixed race (net +17%) and Bangladeshi (+22%) respondents than black respondents (+13%). The Green Party is also more trusted on race by younger voters, with a net score of +22% among 18-24s compared to just +4% among over-65s.

The Liberal Democrats have a relatively neutral reputation among minorities on racial fairness (27% trust/21% distrust / net +6%). Meanwhile the Conservatives are trusted and mistrusted by respondents in relatively equal measure (29% trust/30% mistrust/ net -1%). Within ethnic groups, Chinese (+14%) and Indian voters (+9%) report mildly more trust in the Conservatives than Black voters (+7%). Yet the Tories carry stronger net negative scores with Bangladeshi (-20%) and Pakistani (-13%) voters.

Ethnic minority trust in Reform UK is much weaker, with almost half (47%) of ethnic minority respondents mistrusting the party to treat ethnic groups fairly (35% distrusting the party a great deal). Some one in six trust Reform UK on the issue, giving a net negative score of -31%. Mistrust is clear across all reportable ethnic minority groups. Similar concerns surfaced over the course of our discussions. Many participants felt that Reform UK was scapegoating migrants, Muslims and ethnic minority groups for social problems such as a struggling economy, breeding community tensions by exacerbating local frustrations. Many also felt a nervousness that a future Reform UK government could enact policies of deportation that target ethnic minority families or measures that exacerbate inequalities through stripping rights to public funds and services.

“...I think since the days of Farage and the likes of Tommy Robinson and people like that, I’ve seen a real deterioration in diversity and people getting on together. I came to the UK when I was four years old. I’m fiftyseven now.”

–Asian, male participant, Walsall

“...about Nigel Farage – if he gets in, I’m telling you I’m going to leave the country, because... he’s poisoning people’s minds over here. That man is... a dangerous man. He’s a dangerous person... he’s a dangerous person, trust me.”

–Black male participant, Peckham

Anxieties about Reform UK are shared across demographic differences in our survey. However though still a minority, scepticism of the party is softer among younger people from ethnic minority backgrounds compared with their elders. Views are negative but softer among 18-34s (net -22%), who were nine percentage-points more likely to trust the party and fifteen points less likely to distrust Reform UK compared to over-55s (net -46%). While further research is needed to identify these splits in generational attitudes, we heard some younger participants in focus groups mobilised by issues of immigration and asylum that may be shifting ethnic minority voting behaviours into a more plural, fragmented pattern than seen before.

Inclusion must be seen to work for all in contested times

In an increasingly diverse society, the question of whether fairness must be a zero-sum contest between different groups could become a defining issue at the next general election. Efforts to address structural barriers and institutional discrimination will require parties to find a voice on race, responding to concerns of sluggish change and stalled commitments in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests. At the same time, media and online debates about equality have also become more embittered, characterised by perceptions of opposing groups competing for resources and attention in a struggling economy.

In this more contentious climate, there can be a temptation for policymakers and institutions to dodge ‘difficult’ issues or change the conversation, finding safety in the avoidance of backlash. However, our attitudes findings suggest that this would miss a crucial point. Beyond the loudest and most polarised voices, a quieter but substantial coalition for equality exists, one that is often overlooked by political and media debate. Mobilising this broad group could help advance progress across different groups, challenging disadvantage by race, region and class.

Building broad-based support for action on equality will require engagement with major concerns, particularly over policing, political and media representation and perceptions about employment barriers. Crucially, trust must be nurtured among ethnic minority citizens tired of tall talk and timid action. Yet while anxieties about race policy among the white majority are on the increase, there remains a demonstrably larger group, spanning differences by politics, that is open to advancing fairness. This group recognises ethnic and economic barriers as important, interconnected challenges to be addressed together. As we discuss in the next chapter, shared public priorities on jobs, opportunities and the cost of living can offer untapped opportunities for policymakers to build support for change, with policy plans helping to realise a vision of equity for all.



5. Public Priorities for change

People across the largest minority ethnic groups jointly prioritise closing the racial pay gap as the top area for action through which to promote equity. This is also understood as the most effective route to fairness among white respondents. Both groups also support gathering statistics on race to measure and provide evidence for better policy.

Further action in the workplace is seen as important for advancing opportunity and dismantling inequality at work. Fairer recruitment practices, alongside improved progression opportunities and senior representation, emerge as top public priorities.

While there is broad agreement on the starting points for action, however, trust in the prospects of change is low. There was widely felt pessimism expressed in the focus groups about the likelihood that policymakers would really deliver improvements. By contrast, there is optimism that local community groups, more than central government, can deliver change. Participants had more confidence in grassroots efforts to drive local changemaking and togetherness.

As well as exploring the racial barriers and experiences of prejudice faced by people from ethnic minority groups, this study looked to identify people's priorities for change to better deliver equity, opportunity and cohesion.

There is a clear scepticism that government will deliver improvements to persistent disparities. This is fuelled by concerns that race often receives sporadic attention from governments in times of crisis, but rarely gains the sustained attention to generate significant reforms. In this context, our research set out to understand where there are common foundations for action on race equity, through which government can command broad legitimacy across minority groups and secure support and solidarity with white voters.

Research for this first Voices for Equity report sought to map the key starting points, which we will revisit and research in greater detail in the project's final report. Our qualitative conversations across the UK also created open spaces to hear nuanced ideas of where meaningful change could be brought closer to people's everyday lives, from addressing UK-wide issues through to improving local efforts for inclusion.

Fig. 5.1: Public priorities for change on racial equality

“What are the top three areas relating to racial inequalities that you would like to see addressed? (rank 1 being the most important)”

Issue	Ethnic Minority	White
Closing the racial pay gap and ensuring equal pay for equal work	25% ranked 1st (37% ranked in top three)	18% ranked 1st (29% ranked in top three)
Improving representation and progression of ethnic minorities in employment and leadership roles	19% ranked 1st (41% ranked in top three)	9% ranked 1st (25% ranked in top three)
Ensuring fair recruitment practices and tackling workplace discrimination	15% ranked 1st (43% ranked in top three)	16% ranked first (37% ranked in top three)
Addressing racial disparities in education (e.g. access to quality schools, colleges, university opportunities)	10% ranked 1st (39% ranked in top three)	8% ranked 1st (33% ranked in top three)
Ensuring fair treatment by policing and the criminal justice system for ethnic minorities	7% ranked 1st (31% ranked in top three)	13% ranked 1st (37% ranked in top three)
Reducing inequalities in healthcare outcomes for ethnic minority communities	5% ranked 1st (24% ranked in top three)	6% ranked 1st (25% ranked in top three)
Promoting accurate and positive media representation of ethnic minorities	4% ranked 1st (16% ranked in top three)	5% ranked 1st (20% ranked in top three)
Anti-racism initiatives in community spaces	4% ranked 1st (15% ranked in top three)	6% ranked 1st (19% ranked in top three)
Tackling racial inequalities in housing and access to safe accommodation	2% ranked 1st (11% ranked in top three)	2% ranked 1st (14% ranked in top three)
Strengthening social services to better support ethnic minority communities	2% ranked 1st (11% ranked in top three)	3% ranked 1st (13% ranked in top three)
Other	0% ranked 1st (0% ranked in top three)	2% ranked 1st (3% ranked in top three)

Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

A shared call across ethnic minority voters for closing racial pay gaps

Asked to select their priorities for change, from a list spanning media representation to housing and health equity, a focus on equal pay emerged top across all reportable minority ethnicities. One in four (25%) selected this as their most important issue and nearly four in ten (37%) in their top three. Similarly this the most selected issue by white respondents too for addressing racial disparities, albeit narrowly.

Across our survey findings and focus groups discussions, equal pay emerged as a key benchmark of workplace fairness. However, wage disparities do not exist in a vacuum. Research participants consistently linked equal pay with access to opportunities, career progression and senior mentorship. Everyday barriers such as accent bias or a ‘glass ceiling’ build up over time to reduce fair career progression and lifetime earnings. Tackling the ethnicity pay gap therefore requires a joined-up approach where pay transparency must go together with fair recruitment, mentorship, and clear pathways to promotion across all sectors.

This joined-up approach aligns with the ambition of the proposed Race Equality Act, shifting the responsibility for workplace fairness from individuals to employers and institutions. However, reporting pay data alone will not deliver lasting change. To make a long-term difference, mandatory reporting could help intuitions introduce clear employer race action plans, anonymised recruitment (such as blind CVs), unbiased recruitment panels and mentoring and sponsorship schemes. The Race Equality Act must also consider class and regional divides, linking workplace standards with local economic investment to support working-class ethnic minority communities across the regions.

During focus group discussions, ethnic minority participants did not actually use the technical term “ethnicity pay gap” but consistently described having to navigate the processes and rules that manifest the gap. While not always overt and therefore hard to pinpoint, this left a sense of unfairness and unequal expectation – including that they had to work harder for equal recognition. People said they felt judged for having an accent or if English was not a person’s first language, leading to comments and stereotypes about their capability. We often heard concerns that people from visible minority backgrounds tended to hit a glass ceiling compared to their peers, with concerns of being passed over for promotion.

"I've got on well with a lot of my colleagues but I'd say there's certain peers that are from an African heritage, and they weren't born here, so they've got an accent. Do you know what I mean? And they didn't get seen the same way I was. People would look at the Black colleagues differently, like how you wore your hair... all those things would be a factor."

–Black female participant, Walsall

"There is a ceiling... certain positions... I couldn't move up past a certain position. And the main reason for that is that I'm not yet a British citizen."

–Asian male participant, Belfast

Beyond equal pay, people prioritise career progression, fair recruitment and senior representation in leadership

Broader progress towards fairness in the workplace is then also prioritised with similar levels of support shared across minority ethnic groups in the survey. One in five (19%) ethnic minority respondents select 'Improving representation and progression of ethnic minorities in employment and leadership roles' as a priority, ranked in the top three issues by 41%. Participants in discussions often shared a sense of injustice that – while racialised decisions were rarely overt – senior management positions were less diverse than entry level roles and failed to reflect the diversity of the wider sector or area.

"As an Asian woman working at director level, you really do have to prove yourself. It's much, much harder for somebody of colour to get to where they are, opposed to, say, a white male manager... you have to work twice as hard."

–Asian female participant, Walsall

“If you look at senior leadership level – Vice Chancellors and that – it’s basically all white men. Lower down you see more diversity, but the higher up you go, the whiter it gets.”

–White male participant, Preston

Ensuring fair recruitment practices and tackling workplace discrimination was selected as a top concern by 15% but proved the most widely chosen within ethnic minority respondents’ top three issues, chosen by 43%. We heard accounts across the age generations of people who – through having an ‘ethnic’ name – had felt they needed to apply for more jobs to reach the interview stage, despite holding strong qualifications. This even led some to alter their name or nationality. Others spoke of an underlying sense that they were overlooked at interview due to biases or assumptions. Cumbersome demands for employers to apply for visa licenses and arrange sponsorship was also felt to block those who had migrated to the UK from entering many workplaces, where existing policies were not in place.

“My name’s Hannah Harris [changed for anonymity], if you look at that on paper, it works in favour for me. But then when employers see me, there’s many times people call Hannah but then never look in my direction. In the waiting room, I remember going for an interview, the person calls my name but starts looking at the white girls. [...] You do have to apply for more roles to get the job, and if you’re working then it’s harder to get higher up – raises and promotions, career opportunities.”

–Black female participant, Preston

These compounding factors added together meant many minority workers entered employment later, progressing more slowly and accruing less pay. Better laws and regulation to dismantle unfair barriers were widely seen in the groups as a clear, obvious route to reducing the persistent economic impacts of racial discrimination.

Some pointed to a sense of confidence and reassurance where their employer had introduced clear strategies or quotas that balanced skill-based hiring with benchmarks to improve diversity across positions and seniority.

“I think we’ve come a long way, actually, compared to, say, 20 years ago, it was very difficult for someone who is not originally from here or not from here full stop, to apply and get a job, or even get shortlisted for an interview. Once you see a name that is not John Smith, for example, it probably will not get shortlisted to begin with, or will not get interviewed. Even if the person was very highly qualified, he will just get about, just getting interviewed and then get a thank you letter. I think we’ve come a long way now with the popularity of diversity, equality and inclusion. And now there’s percentages. In [anonymised sector], there is a percentage of the staff that has to be from ethnic minority backgrounds, for example. So it’s, I think it’s to do with the main framework”.

–Asian male participant, Preston

We also heard about the value of mentorship for progression and EDI channels to raise concerns and foster constructive discussions about creating a fairer workplace. One Asian woman described the role played by her line manager of seventeen years, who encouraged her to apply for more senior roles and supported her alongside her role as a “diversity champion”. She said that she has progressed and has not felt blocked by race in her organisation.

“Now, I have been in a company for 17 years, and I haven’t seen anything that I have been treated differently for jobwise or education or anything like that. To be honest, it was my own manager who put me through a degree and who put me through a master’s as well, and who has helped me to go further. So I have had a good experience with my work and colleagues... I am the diversity champion in my company – I engage with everyone who are not from here (UK) and I try to look after them as well. So, yeah, I have had a little bit of a good experience in my work...”

Others too spoke of a sense of fairness where blind CV recruitment had been introduced to limit bias in the recruitment panel.

“Everyone has to submit their application online. We have something called Team Taylor, and it gives everyone a fake name, basically. So it’ll be something like ‘blue starfish’ has applied for this job, and you cannot see anything to do with gender, race or age, so you just get the fake name, and then you get the CV, and then when you do your hiring, you know, selection, yes, no, it is purely based on the merit of that candidate. So I thought that was really good when they brought that in, because, again, it takes away any kind of ageism or anything like that. It’s very much based on experience and what they can bring to the to the role.”

–White British female participant, Walsall.

It is notable too that in many conversations, nationwide reform of workplaces was discussed alongside the need to tackle wider barriers by class or regional inequality. Respondents outside of London emphasised that while individual talent and effort are important, opportunities to develop and become more socially mobile are far from evenly distributed across the country. They highlighted (with some frustration) how regional disparities, underinvestment in local infrastructure and unequal access to social capital directly challenged the idea that career recruitment and progression are based on meritocracy. Disadvantages by geography or socioeconomic background were seen as inseparable from efforts to improve upward mobility.

“I think it’s basically the north-south divide, like the south get more opportunities with work than the north do. I mean, it’s getting a bit better now with Manchester and Leeds, but the smaller towns, cities, they need more money spent on them to get more opportunities for employment, and also just like a better standard of living. Blackpool is considered one of the poorest areas of Lancashire, and they could do with more money being invested, more education, things for them to do. It just depends on the area that you live in.”

–Black female participant, Preston

Education seen as a route to reduce racism over the generations

While a smaller group of one in ten prioritise action to 'Address racial disparities in education (e.g., access to quality schools, colleges, university opportunities)' this was seen as an important wider issue for attention, ranked in the top three issues by 39% of ethnic minority respondents and with similar prioritisation in the white survey.

The issue of attainment disparities was rarely raised in focus groups, however a clearer theme to emerge was of addressing racism in and beyond the classroom through promoting values of understanding, respect and shared history between young people. Schools were often felt to be ill-equipped to address prejudice from students and some even shared experiences of targeted stereotyping by teachers, with parents interested in better training and reporting procedures for teachers. We heard suggestions that curricula could be improved to foster awareness about racism and cultural differences – such as better citizenship or religious education – as well as improved diversity in histories covered, to broaden pride in the contribution to the UK by people from across racial backgrounds.

"I think the curriculum probably has a part to play in educating people as well, and I think that's really important. Like being able to educate people at an early age shows why diversity is both a good thing but also has those negative stereotypes attached to it. I think that without that education, then nothing's ever going to change."

–Black female participant, Preston

The younger respondents aged 18-34 also referred to the significance of education in changing mindsets.

"Education is very important, because if you're educated, you'll not carry a stone and throw it to someone knowing that they have a different skin colour. I remember in year 2000 I was taught by a lovely gentleman, and he asked me, What religion are you? So I said, I'm a Muslim. And he asked me [in Northern Ireland], Are you a Muslim, Catholic or Muslim, Protestant? So it's again, about education. It's about the awareness that others do exist, and the others are here to help, and live and let live."

–Asian male participant Belfast



Those impacted by prejudice in public services are eager to see better inclusion practices

While less widely selected, other key themes to surface included ‘Ensuring fair treatment by policing and the criminal justice system for ethnic minorities’, ranked in the top three by 31% of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds and 37% in the white survey.

We heard ethnic minority respondents highlight issues surrounding local policing practices, emphasising the need for unbiased conduct and improved community relations from local police forces. There were some who criticised the police for the persistence of stop-and-search as a lived reality for young Black and Asian men, seen as an institutional bias left unaddressed for generations. Clearer measures to address bias and prejudice among those in authority, with consequences for those guilty of discrimination, was seen as crucial to trust building.

“Let’s say, if I’m alone in a car or with people the same colour as me, my car does get stopped. I know other are having the same problem with police.”

–Asian male, participant, Edinburgh

“I’ve got a Tesla, a nice Tesla, but I think I get stopped more than if I was an English person driving that car. I got stopped about three weeks ago, and they took my licence, and then they said we’re just gonna do some checks. They asked if I had insurance and if everything is OK. Like, why wouldn’t it be OK? Why would you think I would drive an expensive car without insurance? I thought that was quite offensive, because it was a bit racist. Why was she surprised about my insurance and asking if everything was okay? So, um, little micro, I don’t know what to call it really. Is it aggressions? Is it racism? I don’t know...”

–Black male participant, Peckham

“Accountability was the word by the tip of my mind. But yeah, we spoke about policing and some of the issues there, I feel like there’s a very light touch whenever there’s infringements or officers that are sort of abusing power whenever it comes to matters of race, that doesn’t seem to be very much punishment or pushback. There certainly doesn’t seem to be a massive sort of fear for contravening those rules.”

–Asian male participant, Edinburgh

Similarly the NHS, though praised by some for its diverse workforce, was noted by others to need to offer further training and awareness courses that helped ensure people from ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds could feel heard and respected. Maternity care was pointed out in particular as in need of reform after media coverage of disparities in treatment for Black women. Yet broader issues of how to build trust and understand different ways of communicating health problems was seen as important for improving preventive treatment.

“When it comes to the NHS and healthcare, if my mum goes to the hospital because she really feels quite unwell, and you know, my mum will tough out a lot. Because of the way she speaks English, you know, with her accent, and sometimes it’s a bit difficult for her to be able to tell what’s wrong with her, they kind of automatically just think – which she’s been told before – ‘you’re just looking for an excuse to not go to work’. Or, I can’t write you a note for you to not go to work, you know. And at no point has that been something that she’s asked for. So even now, at this point, my mum kind of just doesn’t really attend appointments until she actually has to go. And it’s been kind of a recurring thing with her and her health care, if I’m not there to kind of advocate for her behalf. And also the language barrier can be a bit a bit difficult as well. So yeah, I think it does impact it a lot.”

–Asian female participant, Peckham

“With the NHS...maternity that’s been in the news a lot recently, we’re seen as stronger women, we can manage the pain, or we’re known as being just dramatic. We get stereotyped.”

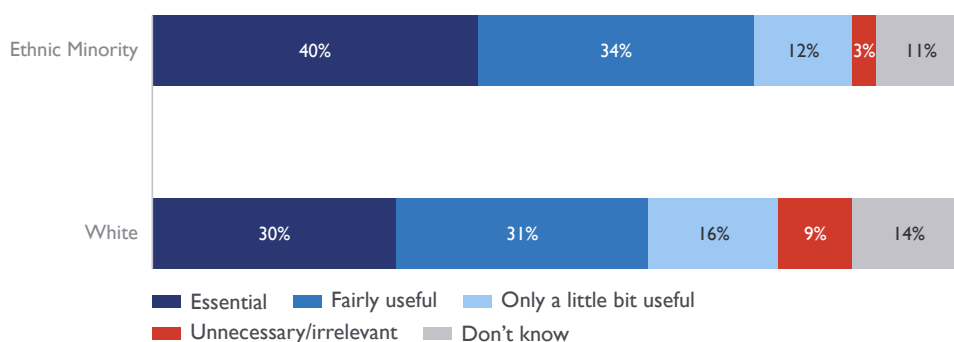
–Black female participant, Walsall

Collecting race data is seen as common sense for effective outcomes

There is a wide consensus that policymakers should collect statistics on minority groups in areas such as employment, health and policing to help identify and address disparities. The vast majority of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds – three in four (74%) – see this as essential (40%) or fairly useful (34%). A clear majority of six in ten white respondents (61%) hold similar views, with only a 9% fringe of the white sample considering this unnecessary or irrelevant.

Figure 5.2: Consensus support for collecting data on race

“How useful do you think it is for policymakers to collect statistics on different minority groups, faith groups, and national origins when addressing issues of race and fairness in areas such as education, health, employment, housing, and policing?”



Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,009 White GB and 3,014 ethnic minority GB adults, 30 March-29 April 2026

As well as helping institutions benchmark and assess progress, our focus group discussions also suggested that a clearer evidence base on outcomes between ethnic groups might take the heat out of contested debates on equity, inclusion and diversity.

Authoritative findings could help individuals exemplify and validate whether their experiences were part of wider trends, where many from ethnic minority backgrounds often reported a sense of unfairness within work or a public service but struggled to diagnose it as racism based on an individual incident. Similarly, clear accounts explaining where disparities exist and relate to unfair barriers or disadvantages could help legitimise efforts to alleviate them, where these are viewed with more scepticism or uncertainty among people who are white. Some people in our focus groups, for example, noted a wariness of institutions ‘box ticking’ to meet a political agenda in ways that put identity or background before merit. Data that proves diversity gaps in recruitment, retention, progression and pay – as well as transparent recruitment processes – could help disprove assumptions of favouritism or bias based on political correctness.

“I think sometimes hiring people of colour can be a tick box exercise. And as a result of it being a tick box exercise for a person of colour getting that job, I think the infrastructure is not in place to support or the knowledge or the training to support that person of colour.”

–White female participant, Walsall

“Maybe sometimes the wrong person was appointed just to fill a role, or employed into roles that they probably weren’t suited for. And then now that has tainted the whole diversity, diversity and inclusion movement, because people who experienced it when it was first introduced – and it wasn’t taken seriously and was just dealt with as a tick box exercise – that seems to have like carried on in people’s mindset that this is what’s still happening. And I think everything’s moved on much more now. So people are getting roles based on their competencies, really, however, people are still tied back to how it was when it was first coming in.”

–White British male participant, Walsall.

Beyond government, community groups are considered effective champions for change

As highlighted by organisations like the Race Equality Foundation, government action is fundamental to driving nationwide reform but is not a silver bullet for racial discrimination.¹¹ Our findings reveal that public trust is also increasingly placed in everyday local institutions, particularly grassroots projects, and civic organisations rather than central government alone.

Asked about their ideas for change, many from ethnic minority backgrounds tended to share a sense of scepticism about national change. This included mistrust in the government to prioritise pro-equality policies and an anxiety at the increasingly fractious political conversation about diversity, inclusion and immigration in the UK.

“I don’t really look to the government to improve race relations in this country... I don’t necessarily think there is any particular policy or anything that could really improve it. I think it goes deeper than that... I think it’s up to communities and it’s up to people. If we want to see race relations get better, it’s up to people to come together in community.”

–Black female participant, Walsall

However a clear contrast was drawn with more local, community-driven initiatives to promote cohesion and togetherness across ethnic lines, and to build trusted relationships for change-making within and between racial groups. These grassroots groups for neighbourhood local action were seen as spaces for hopeful optimism and viewed with more confidence. People expressed interest in seeing them better supported to bring power and moments for connection closer to communities.

In each group there were signs of hope and confidence that such localised movements could bring change closer to home and involve individuals in building togetherness or pushing for changes in their area. Examples included local events that helped communities connect and mix across their differences, such as a grassroots-led supper club. Another participant spoke of their local community action project and wishing to be more empowered by the “active local involvement” of their community in making difficult collective decisions.

“Be nice if we had more community groups that the council listened to... with things like the [local community centre]... it feels like we have to make, like, a really, really big point... We don’t want developers coming in, and we don’t want ‘affordable’ housing which is just 80% of market rate... It’d be nice if maybe we had, a community committee group that could be consulted...a representative from each of those roads to say what their neighbours felt.”

–White female participant, Peckham

It was common for participants in the focus groups to see these smaller, community-driven efforts as more impactful to their sense of voice and a more tangible source of hope than centralised national policies, which could feel distant and abstract.

“Setting up like meetings with the community leaders and, you know, talking about what kind of problems we face, what kind of stuff that we can do, like to stop hate crime.”

–Asian male participant, Walsall

“I mean, you shouldn’t even need to have a policy [on race], but just focus on communities, and allowing communities to almost regulate themselves. Because I think, if communities can get on with each other and cooperate with each other, then that’s going to spread out further afield”.

–White British female participant, Preston

Across all communities, there is a clear consensus that building a fairer society requires a level playing field, greater meritocracy and more transparency from entry-level recruitment to senior leadership progression. While ethnic minority Britons feel the urgency of career progression barriers more acutely, the shared commitment to closing the race equality gap and improving workplace fairness demonstrates that closing the race equality gap is widely understood as a collective benefit for workers, employers, and the wider economy.

As confidence in central government dips, the public’s faith has shifted somewhat toward everyday civic institutions, schools, local employers, grassroots projects and community networks. Across the country, communities are demonstrating a strong appetite for local agency, recognising that building social cohesion and dismantling barriers often starts with small-scale, active involvement. From local festivals to local safety coalitions, people are seeking collective responsibility to foster mutual respect, reduce friction and build safer, more inclusive environments for future generations.

People remain anxious due to ongoing far-right rhetoric on social media platforms, but grassroots efforts provide a grounded, practical foundation of hope. The challenge for policymakers and institutional leaders is to think not just about systemic reform from the top, but to network with, listen to and empower local people in ways that foster agency and a sense of confidence to build progress. The next and final chapter will examine how we can build on this foundation, exploring the strategic opportunities to restart efforts to drive lasting, systemic change on racial equality.



6. Conclusion: Signposts for race equality in polarised times

How should the new government approach issues of race in Britain? It inherits a fractious public conversation about race. The Voices for Equity research shows how these heated and polarised debates feed perceptions of increasing division. The risk is that this entrenches a sense of pessimism – across those from ethnic minorities and the white majority group – about the future of our multi-ethnic society.

It will take political leadership to change this. The core challenge for the new government is to set out a stronger vision for how we handle our differences and ensure fair chances for all.

This is the first major output of a three-year research project, setting out the ‘state of the nation’ challenges we face. This first report recommends a framework for a stronger vision of how a changing society should treat people from different backgrounds fairly, respect their differences, and bring people together. Its recommendations are as follows:

1. Be proactive, not just reactive, about equality and fairness in an increasingly diverse Britain

Government action and political attention to race has been primarily event-driven, over the decades since the Brixton riots of 1981 to the violent disorder after the Southport murders. Some inquiries have opened up broader questions of institutional change, such as the Macpherson report a generation ago. Many have seen efforts fizzle out once the headlines move on.

Political leaders may find themselves needing to respond to external events – especially when online eco-systems can turn any local event into a national flashpoint with unprecedented pace and intensity. But fairness in a multi-ethnic society requires more than stronger resilience to external shocks. What is missing is any sustained focal point where the government itself sets the agenda, rather than reacting to events.

The government currently marks National Windrush Day on June 22nd as a celebration. It could combine that with a high-profile, annual ‘state of the nation’ moment – to communicate about its vision of fair chances for all, review progress and barriers in key priority areas, and explore the policy changes needed to make further progress.

2. Challenge zero-sum thinking – by embedding race equality in a broader agenda for fair chances.

Public frustrations – about the cost of living, low trust in government and other institutions and a sense of social division – are widely shared across British society. Yet the Voices for Equity research illustrates the risks of increasingly zero-sum political and media arguments about opportunity and fairness, pitting the needs of different groups against each other as competing demands, or competing grievances about who is heard or unheard.

The growing ethnic diversity of the UK has seen the voice, presence and profile of ethnic minorities in public life expand over time. Yet this can be double-edged – increasing pressure on government to act on race equality yet risking a backlash among those who perceive this as a threat that leads to less attention for other people. This is a major challenge for the pursuit of racial equality.

It will be more difficult to make significant and sustained progress on race equality without political leadership that articulates a broader mission. That should combine commitments to pursue fair chances for all, and to tackle unfair barriers on every front, together with practical tools to embed that approach in decision-making across the key areas of public policy.

3. Audit fair chances – to make the fairness case when specific interventions are necessary

Some of the biggest gains for race equality may often come from progress in government action on universal goals, such as the elimination of child poverty. Significant progress would see disproportionate gains for the most disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities with higher child poverty rates, alongside others affected.

But an effective fairness strategy will also need the tools to address specific barriers. An audit can help to show how these meet a public ‘fairness test’ – that there is a specific gap that needs more attention in employment, health or education.

Where there are such gaps, targeted interventions should prioritise different minority and majority groups to raise the floor for those currently falling behind. Ensuring that all children have good outcomes at age five, or reducing the number of NEETS at 16, for example, may need to pay particular attention to children of a traveller background, and specific cohorts of white, Black and Asian working-class boys.

4. Increase the local and regional understanding of disparities in opportunities, including race equality, and recommend local/regional responses

As part of its broader devolution agenda, the national government should work with city-regions and others to break down opportunity data – by ethnic group, social class, generation and gender – within regions. The successful convergence of aggregate majority/minority educational outcomes in recent years was driven by strong improvements in London. Disaggregating disparities and gaps on key measures by region would allow a focus on narrowing key gaps by race, class and gender. These could include, for example, on the age 5 GLD (Good Level of Development) outcomes; age 16 GCSE outcomes; Higher and Further Education participation and outcomes; as well as other measures across available data.

5. Make the practical case for progress on key priorities – for example the unfairness of ‘CV name bias’

Conversations about race and fairness can be polarised across divides. But this research finds that broader public support can be unlocked, across all groups, when there is a clear fairness case about the need for action, with a practical agenda to address key challenges.

This might mean focusing on key disparities like tackling bias in recruitment for jobs; stronger action on hate crime, offline and online; and a balanced approach to teaching the history of race and Empire. These are all areas with a broad, inter-ethnic consensus, across minority and majority groups, for constructive action.

One of the most compelling examples of structural unfairness in British society is the evidence that having an ‘ethnic-sounding’ first name or surname still significantly affects how many interviews you will get when you apply for a job. Just about everybody agrees that must change. The government should set a clear priority to eliminate this obvious unfairness – and challenge all sectors to step up, to track their efforts to monitor, reduce and eliminate this injustice.

At present, academic studies intermittently submit identical CVs from hypothetical candidates with different names, proving that progress in eliminating conscious and unconscious bias remains stubbornly slow. Yet this method could be implemented in real-time, year on year, from university applications and across sectors from law and finance to construction and supermarkets. The Government could work with stakeholders to develop appropriate models, including using the civil service to pilot and test models for how to do this in practice. It should monitor where the problem is being reduced, celebrating progress as well as identifying and targeting sectors where it persists.

6. Prioritise fairness at work – and depolarise the debate about equality, diversity and inclusion

Fairness at work emerged in the attitudes research as a key public priority. Yet organisations retreat if the terrain of equality, diversity and inclusion seems increasingly heated.

Organisations do not need to keep up a running commentary on global affairs, on issues that are outside their areas of expertise and purpose. But it will be as important not to retreat too far – and to defend, entrench and extend approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion that are central to workplace culture and performance, particularly to meet the expectations of ethnic minorities and of younger people across minority and majority groups.

The government is introducing mandatory pay gap reporting for large employers of over 250 people. This will cover a minority of employees. The government should consult on the forms of reporting that could be effective for medium-size employers, and ensure that there is tailored and evidenced advice for smaller organisations in the private and voluntary sector about the practical steps they can take to promote fairness in recruitment, progression and retention.

7. Tackle racism of every form – and pay more attention to the causes of racism too

Past progress in attitudes to race across generations is no longer being experienced and many people feel it is being reversed. Increasingly visible online racism is playing a driving role in this, with content, language and behaviour that had been de-normalised in real-world spaces being proactively normalised online. This risks – and may already be causing – spillover effects back into offline and real-world settings, including in public spaces.

The government should increase the pressure on Ofcom to take stronger action where major social media platforms are failing to uphold their legal duties to remove and prevent unlawful content. It should also consider using its soft power to shift engagement and audiences away from platforms that are reluctant to comply even with legal obligations, and which actively promote and protect toxic behaviour and hateful content.

Governments have been increasingly proactive in addressing religiously motivated hate crimes, which have spiked to 10,000 incidents a year. There has been no similar focus on hate crimes that are racially motivated – even though there are ten times as many. The UK government last had a hate crime strategy in 2016–20, with successive governments not finding the bandwidth to revisit or update this.

The government should use current definitions of religious and racial hatred to articulate clear and consistent principles that apply to all forms of hatred and prejudice, against all ethnic and faith groups.

The principles of the definition of anti-Muslim hostility, for example, would fit for any religiously-motivated hatred. Analogous principles should articulate the boundary between legitimate critique and democratic political protest, and prejudice, hatred and hostility. A consistent framework should be augmented by specific materials for education and training.

A more robust model for risk and threat monitoring would provide an evidence basis for resourcing the protection of specific community spaces, both faith and secular. This would reflect an increased need to act on antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of hatred where necessary. Appropriate updates on this should be provided for parliamentary and civic society stakeholders, as well as the broader public.

An effective government anti-hate strategy would identify the synergies between work on misogyny, racism and religious hatred. It would work with civic society partners to test and target interventions that are effective in shifting the conduct and attitudes of perpetrators, and which help to inoculate more people among key demographics targeted by those seeking to socialise hatred and prejudice.

8. Ensure that people from all backgrounds benefit from policing strategies for safer streets

Policing has long been a focal point of debates about equal treatment by ethnicity, but the more polarised politics of recent years has seen police increasingly cross-pressured. Forces face scrutiny and challenges about two-tier policing in different directions, alleged to be simultaneously unfair to ethnic minorities and to those from the white majority group, rather than policing consistently across those of all characteristics and backgrounds.

The Action Plan of the National Police Chiefs' Council included important commitments but had a flawed core narrative. The plan had too narrow a focus: it was addressed largely to the black community, acknowledging a historic legacy of mistrust, without setting this in the context of policing across all ethnic and faith minority groups and the majority population too. It risked undermining important commitments through performative rhetoric about anti-racism – reflecting an anxiety about the legacy of unfair treatment, rather than a culture shift.

So the core goals of fair treatment for all by the police – and rooting out unfair barriers for anyone – should be reasserted in principle and more closely monitored in practice. The government and the police should be clear that closing stark recruitment gaps

to ensure police forces better reflect the communities they serve is not just a diversity metric – it is essential to operational success, community intelligence and public trust. It should ensure that there is effective training, alongside monitoring of the experiences of Asian, black and white victims of crime.

A stronger focus on conducting local community consultations would help police forces understand specific drivers of distrust. It could also help police adapt to better reflect and engage across ethnic and faith groups, generations, genders and social class, to support tailored place-based efforts to address trust gaps in fair policing that seeks to keep everybody safe.

9. Strengthen the foundations of shared identity in schools

National and local government should ensure there are strong educational resources to understand the making of multi-ethnic Britain – including the story of Windrush and post-war migration, and the scale of Empire and Commonwealth contribution to the armies that fought the first and second world war.

All school and college students should have the opportunity for social contact with peers from different ethnic, faith and class backgrounds. Schools and colleges should be able to decide the approach they want to take.

The Department for Education should also work with appropriate experts to develop teaching materials to boost children's skills in critical thinking, dialogue and conflict resolution. This would help build greater resilience to online mis- and disinformation and extremist narratives, as well as local myths that reinforce prejudice.

10. Empower Local Communities and rebuild grassroots cohesion

With trust in central government low, local neighbourhood initiatives represent an important lever for social trust and community safety.

Councils and combined authorities should establish local Community Consultation Committees, formally empowering neighbourhood resident panels to give diverse local communities a direct voice on housing, infrastructure and safety decisions.

Decentralised Grassroots Cohesion Grants could provide targeted micro-funding to support local, resident-led initiatives, such as cross-cultural community hubs, sports projects and neighbourhood events that foster genuine everyday connection across ethnic, faith, and class lines.

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Notes and references

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⁸ See for example comparisons of gendered citizen panels in The National Conversation on Immigration: <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Final-report.National-Conversation.17.9.18.pdf>

⁹ Based on cross-tabulations with our 1-10 question on the impact of immigration attitudes (see Figure 3.8). Migrant sceptics answer scores 1-3; those in the balancer middle 4-7 and migration liberals 8-10.

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British Future...

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank and registered charity engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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