



# Multicultural Britain 2020: A turbulent year



What people think,  
feel and do



## FOREWORD

**METE COBAN MBE** – Chief Executive of My Life My Say

I very much welcome this report from Opinium on Multicultural Britain in 2020. As inequalities rise and hostilities increase; the lived experiences for BAME people in the United Kingdom are truly disturbing. From the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 in BAME communities to the misuse of police force against Black people, these global issues have come to define our collective experience as BAME people living in the UK.

As an immigrant son of a cab driver and care worker who grew up in council housing, I'm living proof that social mobility does happen and that where you start in life doesn't always pre-determine where you land. But in modern Britain, stories like mine seldom take centre-stage nor are celebrated enough.

**This report published by Opinium is not only timely but serves invaluable to legislators and the wider population if we are to understand and address the issues that BAME people face in modern Britain. In turn, crafting a society that works for every citizen.**

The research conducted this year that focuses on race, discrimination, policing, education and Coronavirus is alarming and highlights some very concerning statistics. A particularly worrying find is that the majority of BAME people have faced discrimination because of their race and ethnicity. Further still, another saddening find is that 46% of BAME people have faced discrimination on multiple occasions, which is an increase from last year. This research also explores the perceptions that BME people have about our institutions, and how they can uphold systematic and institutional limitations, contrary to the view held by white counterparts, who, when polled, see it as a lesser issue.

As an ethnic minority, I have experienced first-hand discrimination and have seen the rise in racism in Britain. Opinium's research is absolutely integral for Britain's policymakers to understand the scale of racism and discrimination in our country. I have been working for many years to empower young people, particularly from BAME backgrounds, to get involved in democracy and political activism.



This work is especially urgent as the global pandemic has exposed and amplified deeply entrenched inequalities that exist in our society. We should not accept this as a social norm, or look to everyone else to pick up the slack.

This is a challenge that requires a collective response whether from government, industry or the individual, we all have the ability to make things better.

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## METHODOLOGY

We conducted a nationally representative online survey of 2,000 UK adults and conducted an online survey among 1,000 nationally representative ethnic minorities (Fieldwork 18th June- 30th June 2020). A subsequent survey of 2,001 nationally representative children in England in primary or secondary schools was also conducted (Fieldwork 18 June – 25th June 2020).

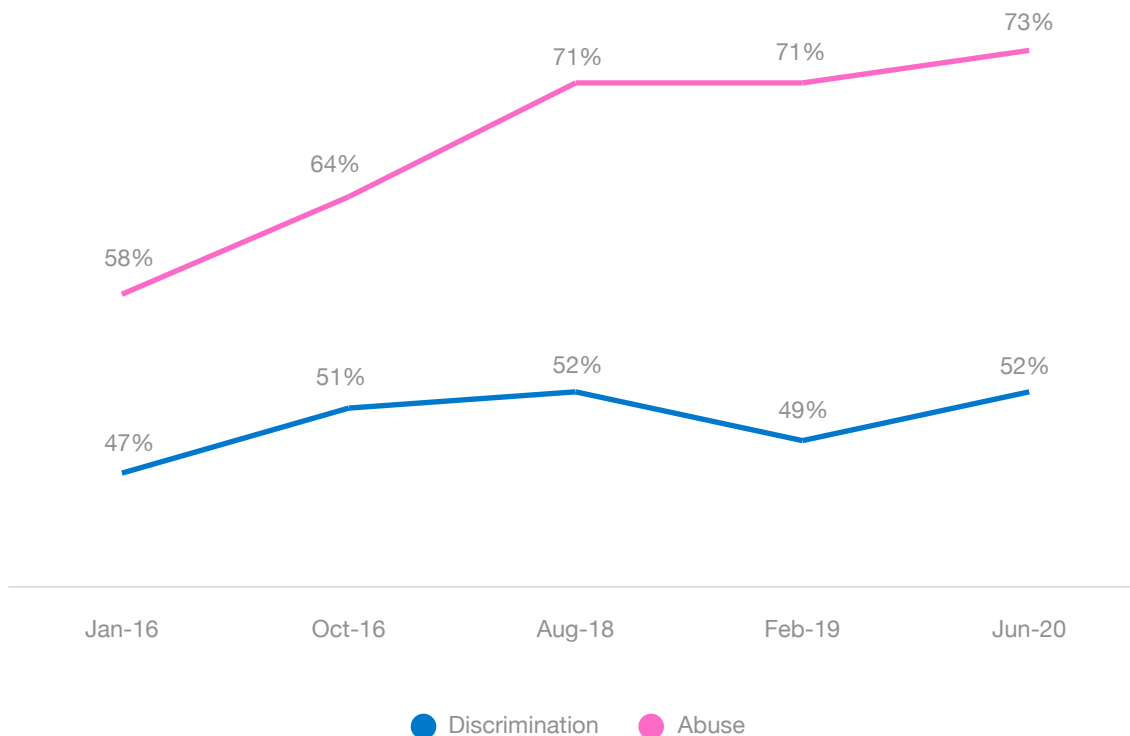
The survey has been weighted to match the demographic make-up of UK adults and of ethnic minorities in the UK. The target source for the ethnic minority survey this year differ from the previous year, with a switch to targets from the Annual Population Survey. Opinium has conducted analysis into the effects of this switch on comparability. This included stress testing the findings that are different from last year to make sure they are different across the old and the new weighting. From this stress testing, we are confident any year on year changes mentioned in this report are robust and genuine changes.





## DISCRIMINATION AND IDENTITY

### Discrimination faced



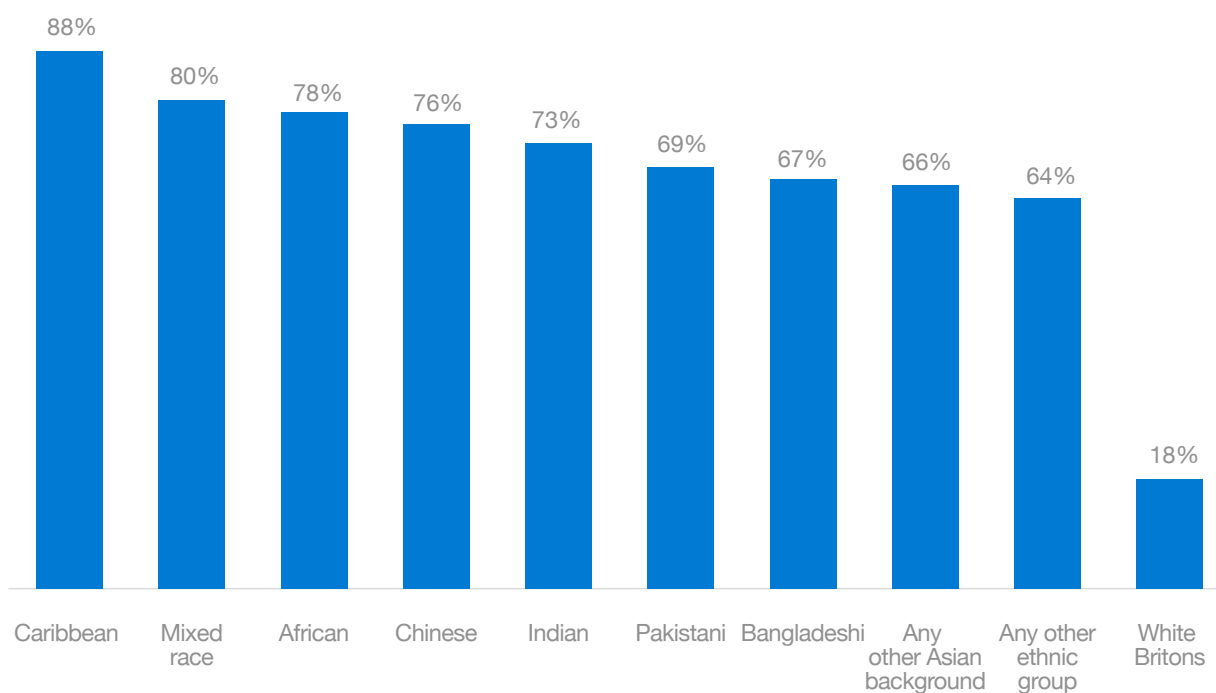
Over the past four years of the Opinium Multicultural Britain series, we have tracked racial and ethnic discrimination rates, seeing an increase over time. Half (52%) of minorities say they have faced racial abuse, a similar proportion to previous years. When we first started the series in 2016, 58% of ethnic minorities said they faced discrimination because of their race or ethnicity. This year, almost three in four (73%) minorities say they have faced discrimination. This is broadly similar to 2019 (71%), but the proportion of minorities saying they have faced discrimination several times has increased to just under half (46%) from 40% last year. Therefore, people that have experienced discrimination, are becoming more and more likely to say that this is not just a one-off occurrence.

### There has been an increase in racial discrimination rates among certain ethnic groups.

Three in four (76%) Chinese people reported being discriminated against, compared to two thirds (68%) last year. Black minorities have also seen an increase in racial discrimination rates with 81% saying they have faced this compared to 74% last year.

The chart below shows a more detailed breakdown of racial and ethnic discrimination faced by various ethnic groups:

#### Proportion of ethnic groups who have been victims of ethnic discrimination



For those ethnic minorities who have experienced discrimination and / or abuse, it is most likely to come from strangers (72%). However, a sizeable minority are facing discrimination or abuse from those around them in the workplace. Three in ten of those who have faced discrimination or abuse say this comes from a colleague (30%) whilst a quarter (24%) say they have faced this from their line manager or wider management.

Looking towards the types of racial discrimination faced, half (49%) of ethnic minorities who have experienced discrimination or abuse said they had been abused directly, while 44% had been on the receiving end of a racist joke or insult.

## UNDERSTANDING RACISM AND SOCIETY

In this report we looked to probe people's perceptions around the progress of anti-racist efforts over the last two decades, and how common racist acts and beliefs are among British society. Generally, as has been the trend previously, it appears that ethnic minorities and white Britons share the same sentiments around racism within society, but *the extent to which they agree* is quite varied.

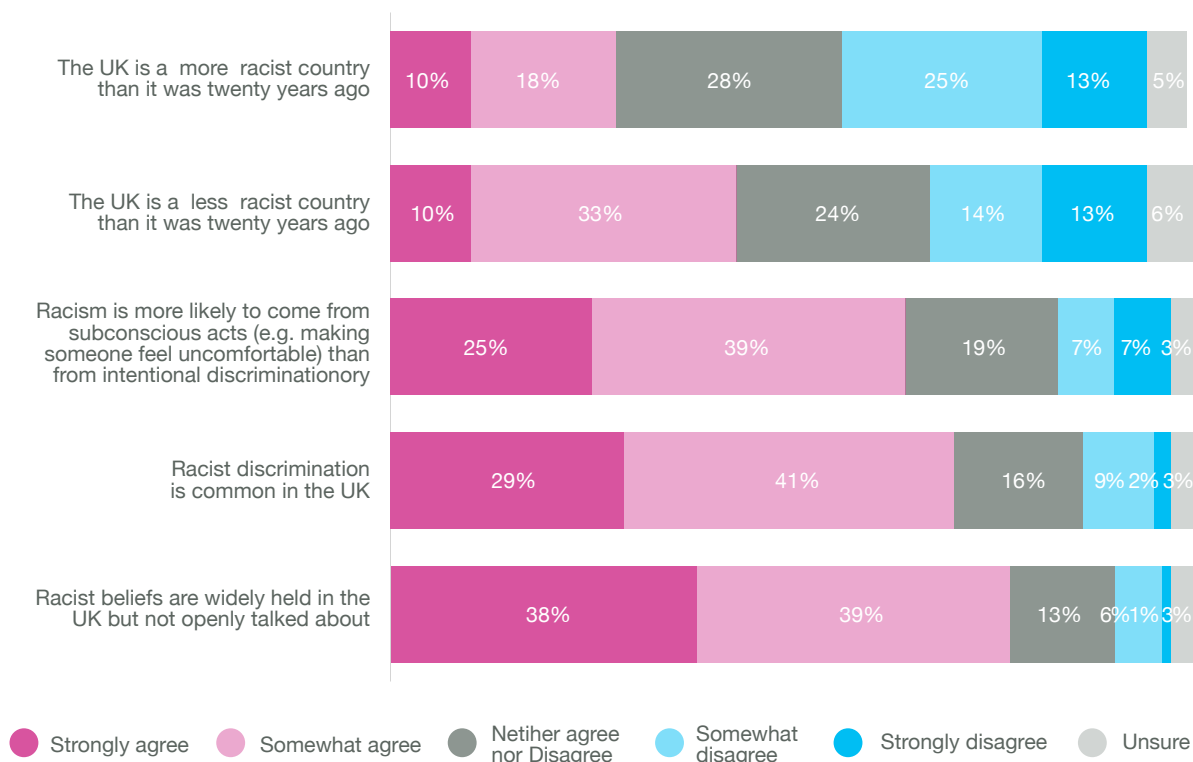
**Just over half of white Britons believe racist beliefs are endemic in society, though they are not openly talked about (53%).**

Amongst ethnic minorities, these beliefs are far more widely held – just under eight in ten ethnic minorities surveyed expressed the same sentiment (77%). Similarly, when considering how common racist discrimination is in the UK, ethnic minorities were more likely to believe that racist discrimination is common with up to seven in ten ethnic minorities expressing this sentiment (70%) as compared to half of white Britons surveyed (49%).

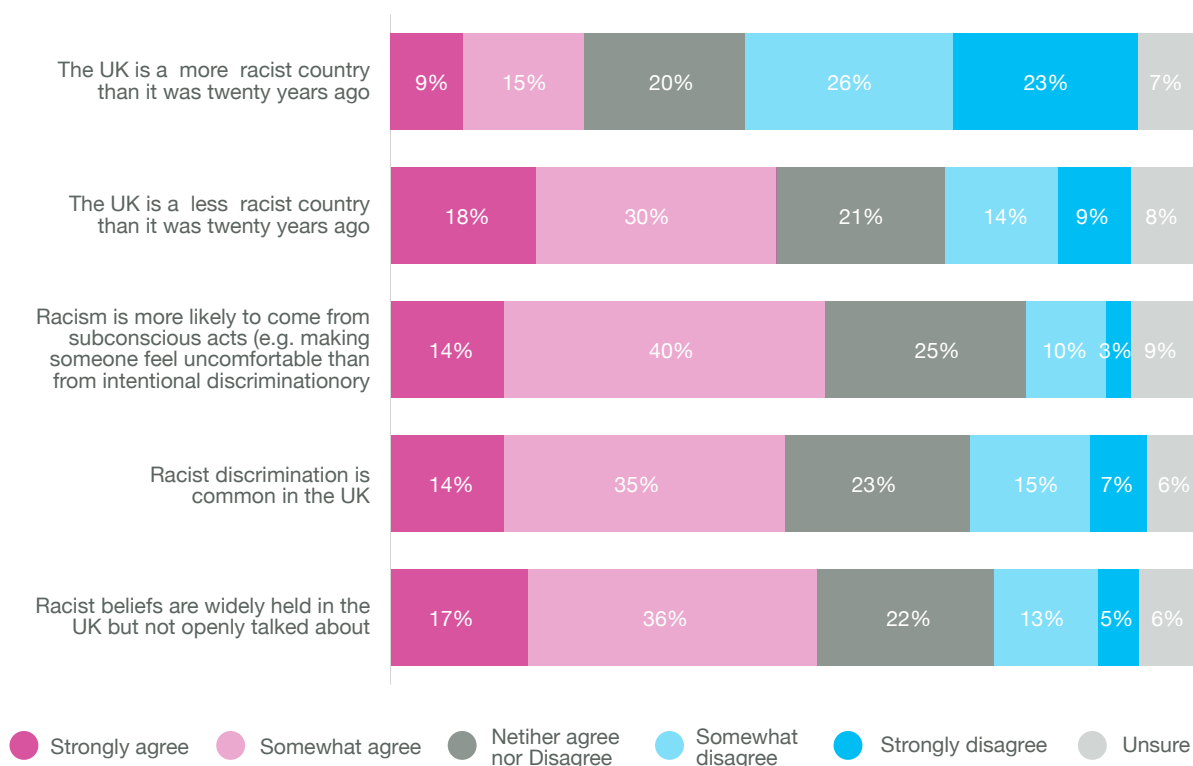
Yet, when considering the 'conscious' nature of racism and progress over the last twenty years, this gap begins to drop somewhat. Half of white Britons believe racism is more likely to come from subconscious, non-intentional acts of violence (53%), rising to just under seven in ten of ethnic minorities surveyed (64%). Moreover, a similar proportion of white Britons believe that the UK has become a less racist country in the last twenty years (49%) – marginal differences are observed among ethnic minority respondents (43%).



## Perceptions on racism in the UK- ethnic minorities



## Perceptions on racism in the UK- white Britons





## EXPERIENCES OF CORONAVIRUS

As the pandemic reached its peak in the UK, it started to become clear that some groups were more affected by it than others; key-workers, the elderly, those on lower incomes, and those in more crowded housing conditions to name but a few. What also became apparent was that ethnic minorities, perhaps as result of the intersection between ethnicity and the above-mentioned factors, were also disproportionately affected. ONS statistics, after being adjusted for age, found that black people were four times more likely to die from Coronavirus than white people. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were three times more likely, and Indians twice as likely<sup>1</sup>.

The government report released in June acknowledged these clear discrepancies in outcomes for ethnic minorities when compared to white Britons but did little to try and explain why. Explaining why is no easy task and must account for all manner of different factors like class, health, living conditions to name but a few. However, what is clear is that the economic and social conditions of ethnic minorities in the UK make them more vulnerable to moments of crisis than white Britons. In our survey we attempted to pull out some of the differences in experiences of accessing healthcare during the Coronavirus pandemic.

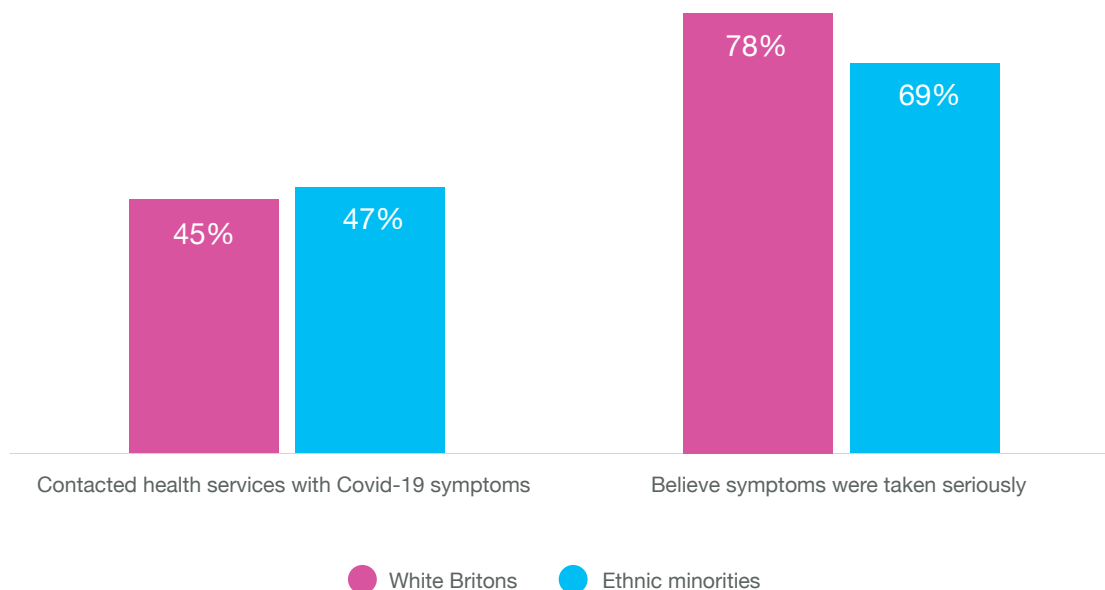
### Engaging with health services

When it comes to interacting with health services, interesting differences in experiences are apparent between ethnic minorities and white Britons. Although a similar proportion who had Covid-19 symptoms report contacting health services (47% of minorities contacted vs. 45% of white Britons), the white Britons were more likely to believe the healthcare professionals they contacted took their symptoms seriously (78%) vs (69% of ethnic minorities).



<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020>

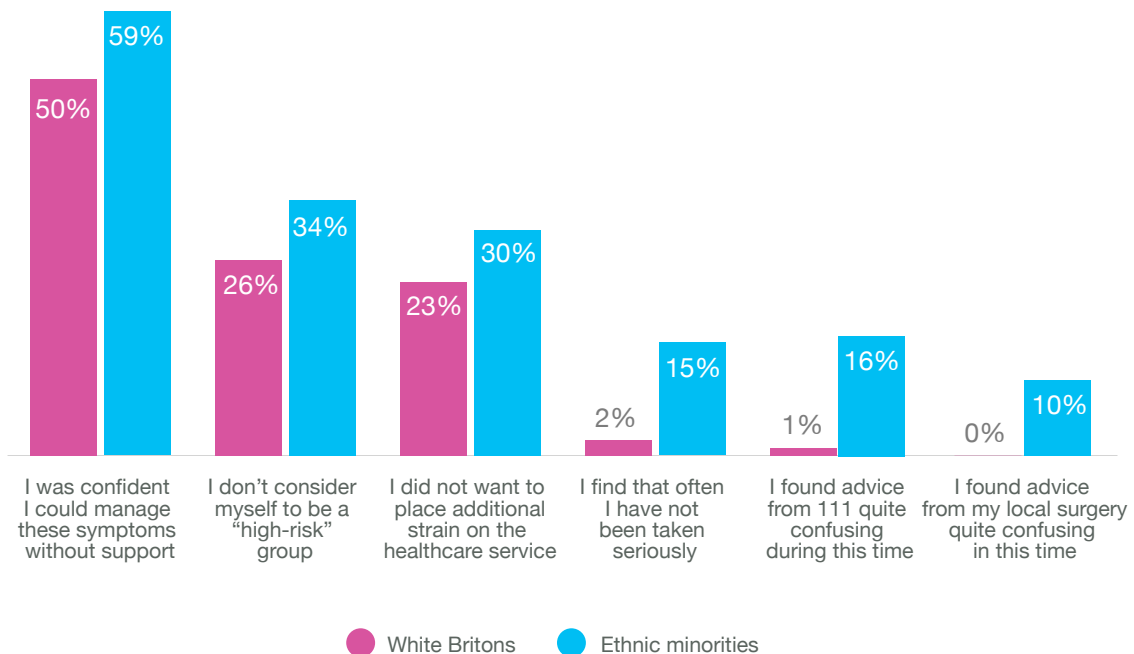
## Experiences when engaging with health services



For those minorities that had Covid-19 symptoms but chose not to contact the health service, their main reasoning was that they were confident they could manage their symptoms without support (59%), while 30% did not want to place any additional strain on the NHS. However, there are a sizeable minority who said they avoided any contact with the health service because they have not been taken seriously in the past when they have approached medical staff (15%). Ethnic minorities were seven times more likely to give this as a reason than white Britons (15% vs 2% respectively). Minorities were also more likely to find advice from their local doctors' surgery and 111 quite confusing in this time.



## Reasons for not contacting health service



## Other health effects

Amongst the uncertainty and anxiety there have been some benefits to lockdown. For some, it has given them more time to exercise whereas for others being stuck indoors has made it harder to get out and about. When it comes to physical health 43% say it has been positive compared to 31% who say it has been negative.

When it comes to mental health, a third (35%) of the ethnic minority population say the lockdown has had negative impact but a similar proportion (33%) say it has been positive.

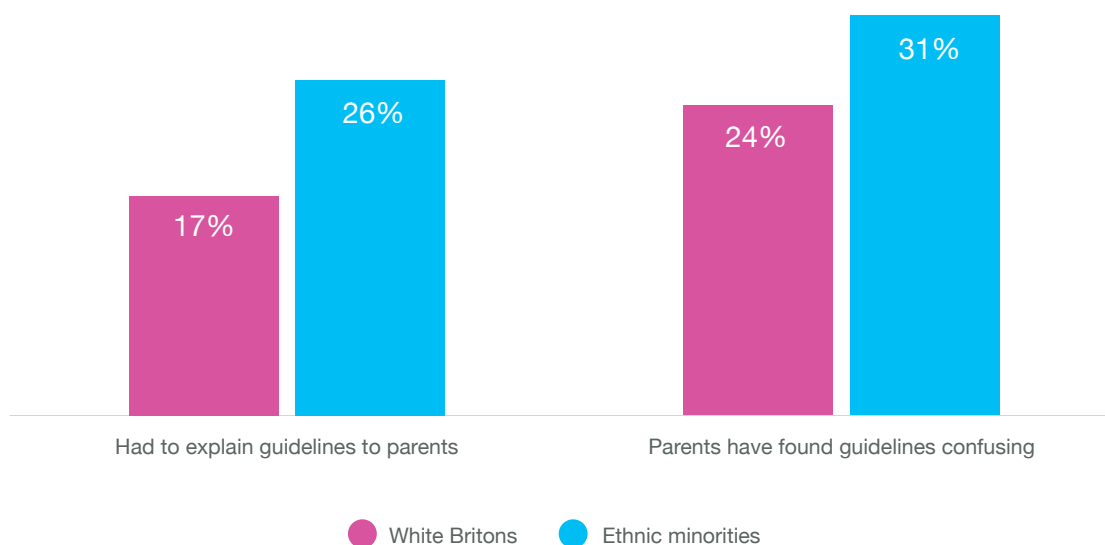
## Generational differences

Those from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely than white Britons to say that have had to explain the guidelines to their parents because they don't understand them (26% vs. 17%). They are also more likely to report that their parents have found the Coronavirus guidelines confusing (31% vs. 24%). One reason perhaps is that the parents and grandparents are more likely to be first generation immigrants whose first language is not English. Indeed, campaign groups recently wrote to the government urging them to do more to make sure guidelines are translated adequately<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53537062>



## Experiences when engaging with health services



## Media representation

In terms of reporting on Coronavirus, one in four ethnic minorities (23%) say that they feel as though they have been spoken about in a negative way in the press. This feeling varies among different ethnic minority groups. It is highest among those that are mixed race (32%), Caribbean (34%) and Chinese (27%).



## BLACK LIVES MATTER

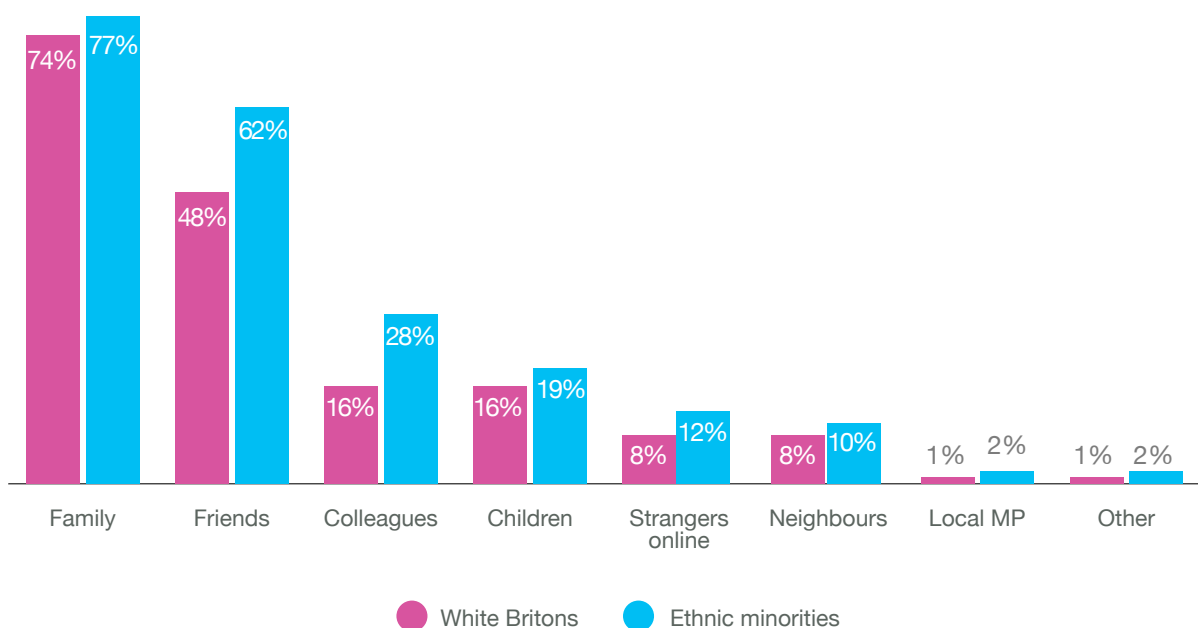
### Three in four ethnic minorities are in support of the Black Lives Matter protests

The death of George Floyd in May sparked a big debate around the existence of racism in society. There were protests held at the time all around the world.

Regardless of their thoughts on the protests, the stream of think pieces, podcasts, and interviews circulating online have brought the topic of race to the surface, encouraging more and more people to have those historically 'difficult' conversations about race. This is true of all ethnicities; two in three (64%) white Britons have had conversations about race in the week that we surveyed them, 19% of which say most, or all their conversations that week had been about race. The conversations are even more prominent amongst ethnic minorities, with 84% having spoken about race in the week we surveyed them, 43% of which stating that most, or all their conversations had been about race.

So, who are people having these conversations with? It seems for most family is the safe haven for these types of conversations, with three in four (74%) white Britons who have spoken about race, doing so with their family. This is also the case for ethnic minorities with 77% talking to their family about race. However, while family is by far the preferred choice for white Britons, as shown in the chart below, ethnic minorities are more likely than their white British counterparts to have these conversations with their friends.

#### Who have you had these conversations about race with?

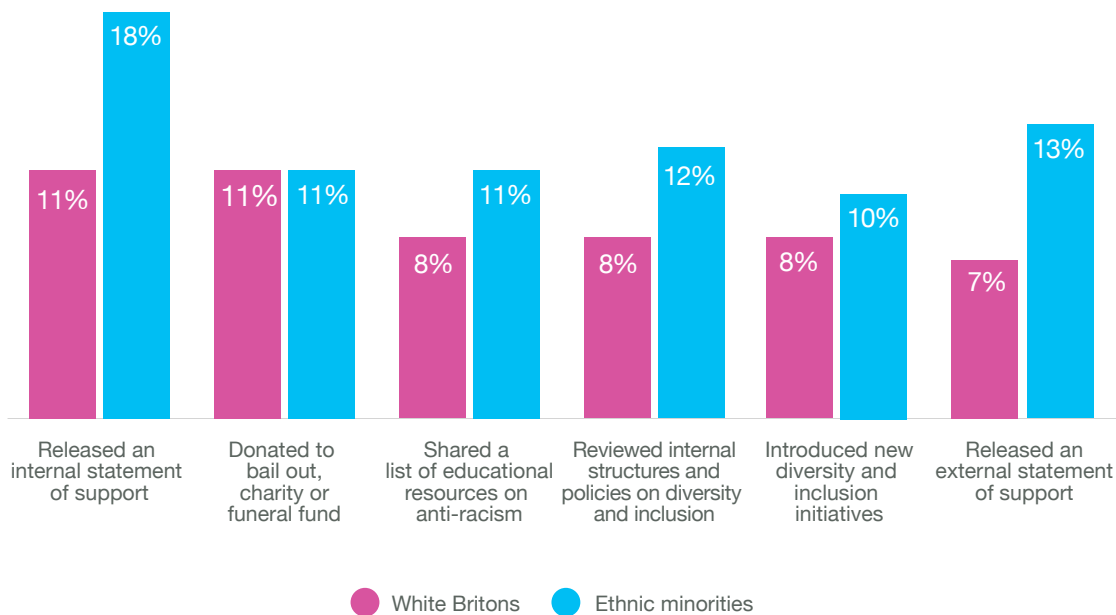


Perhaps most encouragingly, our research found that both white Britons and ethnic minorities feel relatively comfortable when having these conversations regardless of the audience.

## A third of workers say their employer has responded to the Black Lives Matter movement

The extent to which the Black Lives Matter movement has permeated our discussions is seen in the fact that a third (34%) of British workers state that their employers have responded in some way to the movement. Breaking this down by ethnicity, we see that 28% of white Britons say their employer has responded to the movement compared to 40% ethnic minority workers. Looking at the ways in which employers have engaged in the conversation surrounding the movement, statements of solidarity top the list. The other ways in which employers have responded are shown in the chart below:

Has your employer done any of the following in response to the Black Lives Matter movement?



While, three in five (61%) white Britons are satisfied with their employers' response to the Black Lives Matter movement, ethnic minorities are less inclined to feel the same way, with just over half (53%) feeling satisfied with their employers response to the movement.



## Three in ten ethnic minorities are fearful of interactions with the police

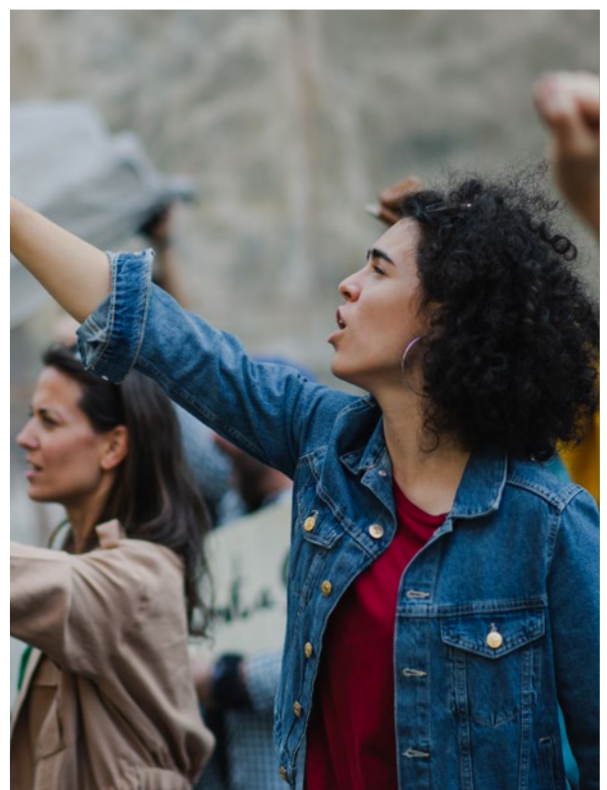
2020 marks 35 years since the Broadwater Farm riot in Tottenham, North London. Tensions between the police and the local Black community in the area had grown to boiling point due to the perceived unfair treatment of Black people by a predominantly White police force. The riot is thought to have been sparked by the death of local resident Cynthia Jarrett, a Black woman who died of a heart attack during a police search of her home. Years later in 2011, we saw a similar story play out after Mark Duggan was shot and killed by armed officers in Tottenham. His death sparked riots in the local area and across the country. It added tension to the already strained relationship between the police and ethnic minority communities in the country.

Signs of the historically fraught relationship between the police and ethnic minorities are still present today with three in ten (28%) ethnic minorities feeling fearful when interacting with the police, compared to just 11% of white Britons who describe their interactions with the police in the same way. While ethnic minorities in general are more likely to feel fear when interacting with the police, the nuances between the experiences of various ethnic minorities is highlighted when comparing Asian and Black experiences with the police. Black people are more likely than those of Asian heritage to feel fear when interacting with the police (35% vs 24%).

Delving into the reasons why ethnic minorities are more inclined to be fearful when interacting with the police, racial profiling is a concern for some as highlighted by Black participants of the research:

**‘I am fearful of what could happen to me during these interactions because of my skin colour, and what has happened to others that look like me.’**

**‘Majority (of the police) are white. just have black parents have thought their children to be careful of police, white parents consciously or unconscious have instilled element of hatred in their children against blacks. and the stories just passes on generations to generations’**

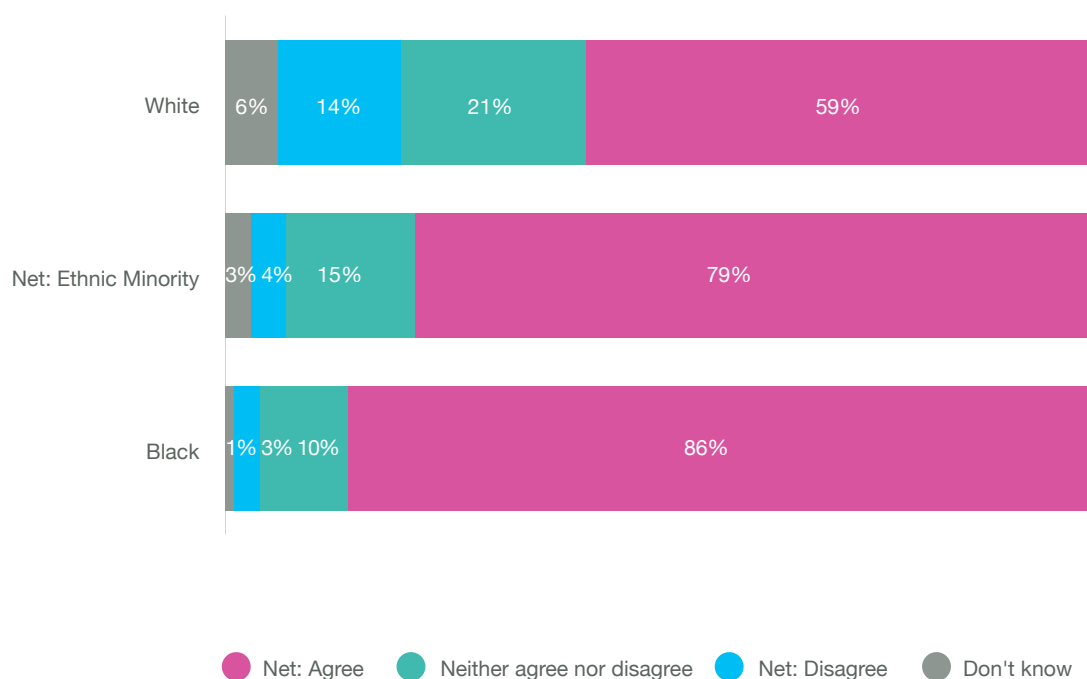


It is a statement rooted in the historically turbulent relationship between the police and the Black community. The tales of the traumatic experiences of Black communities at the hands of the police are not only being passed from generation to generation but actively lived by a number of 21st century Black Britons when we consider stop and search figures. Government figures show that during 2018/19 Black people were eight times more likely than White people to be stopped and searched by the police (ONS, 2019).

**Drawing on the traumatic nature of their experience with the police, the data also shows that police were five times more likely to use force against Black people than White people (ONS, 2019).**

Given this state of play, it is perhaps unsurprising that less than half (49%) of Black people feel the police keep them safe compared to 71% of white Britons. While their experiences with the police may differ, both white Britons and black Britons feel the UK government needs to do more to tackle institutional racism in the police and justice system. However, there is a stronger call for change amongst Black and ethnic minority communities in general as shown in the chart below:

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the UK government needs to do more to tackle institutional racism in the police and the justice system?**



## One in two ethnic minorities feel the school curriculum in England does a poor job in teaching children about Britain's historical globe role.

In his 2018 book *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*, rapper and political commentator Akala speaks about his experience of the British education system as a young Black boy. Reflecting on the content of his history syllabus at school, while tales of Henry VIII and the British and American defeat of the Nazis were a prominent feature, he notes the absence of teachings about the realities of the British Empire.

Although Akala was able to fill these gaps in knowledge through his attendance of a Pan African Saturday school, the same cannot be said for children across the UK. The universality of Akala's experience is seen in the fact that more than half (52%) of ethnic minorities in England and 40% of white Britons think the school curriculum in England does a poor job in teaching children about Britain's historical global role including topics such as the British Empire and its impact. Other aspects of history UK adults perhaps feel should be covered further include Black British history, with 70% of white Britons and 78% of ethnic minorities stating that it is important that this is taught in schools.

Further to this three in five (57%) ethnic minorities in England feel that schools in England do a poor job in raising awareness of racism in the UK. The stark difference in the experiences of ethnic minorities and white Britons in the UK is seen in that a third (33%) of white Britons feel the same. However, both white Britons and ethnic minorities alike believe it is important that British schools teach about awareness of racism (80% and 88% respectively).





## CONCLUSION

This year we find that while racial discrimination rates are broadly consistent to last year, more and more people are experiencing this on more than one occasion. While overall racial discrimination rates have remained consistent, some ethnic groups (primarily those that are black minorities or Chinese) have witnessed an increase in racial discrimination.

**Half of minorities (51%) have seen or experienced someone making a racist comment in jest, or making comments with racists undertones (50%).**

The death of George Floyd sparked conversations and protests across the world about racism. In the UK, 80% of the minorities we surveyed said that has spoken about race in the past week (fieldwork dates 18th June-30th June), rising to 90% of those from a black background. Young people in particular were more likely to be having these conversations. Many people from a white background (64%) were also having conversations about race at the time.

In the US, the role of the police and racism was a prominent part of the conversation during the summer. While circumstances in the UK are different, we did find signs of the historically fraught relationship between the police and ethnic minorities in our survey, with ethnic minorities much more likely to feel fearful when interacting with the police, compared to white Britons. There are variations according to ethnicity; Black Britons are more likely than those of Asian heritage to feel fear when interacting with the police. Worrying, just under half of Black people feel the police keep them safe. This shows there is still a lot for the police to do in order to foster a relationship where many in the Black community feel safe interacting with the police and trusting that they are there to protect them.



To tackle racism in the UK, over three in four (79%) ethnic minorities think the UK government needs to be doing more to tackle institutional racism. Beyond this, there is a broad consensus that there are gaps in the school curriculum in terms of teaching about racism and British history. Over half ethnic minorities living in England think schools do a poor job in raising awareness of racism in the UK, 52% of ethnic minorities and 40% of white Britons think the school curriculum in England does a poor job in teaching children about Britain's historical globe role and in raising awareness of racism. However, the vast majority of ethnic minorities think it is important that British schools are educating children about these, and that schools are teaching about Black British history.

Speaking to secondary school children in the UK, there does appear to gaps in what they are taught. Students were less likely to say that are taught about Black British history and the British Empire than about different cultures and racism awareness. Students themselves are less likely on their own initiative to look for information on the British Empire and black history than racism and different cultures, so it is important that schools are filling in this gap.



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## About Opinium

Opinium is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people think, feel and do. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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