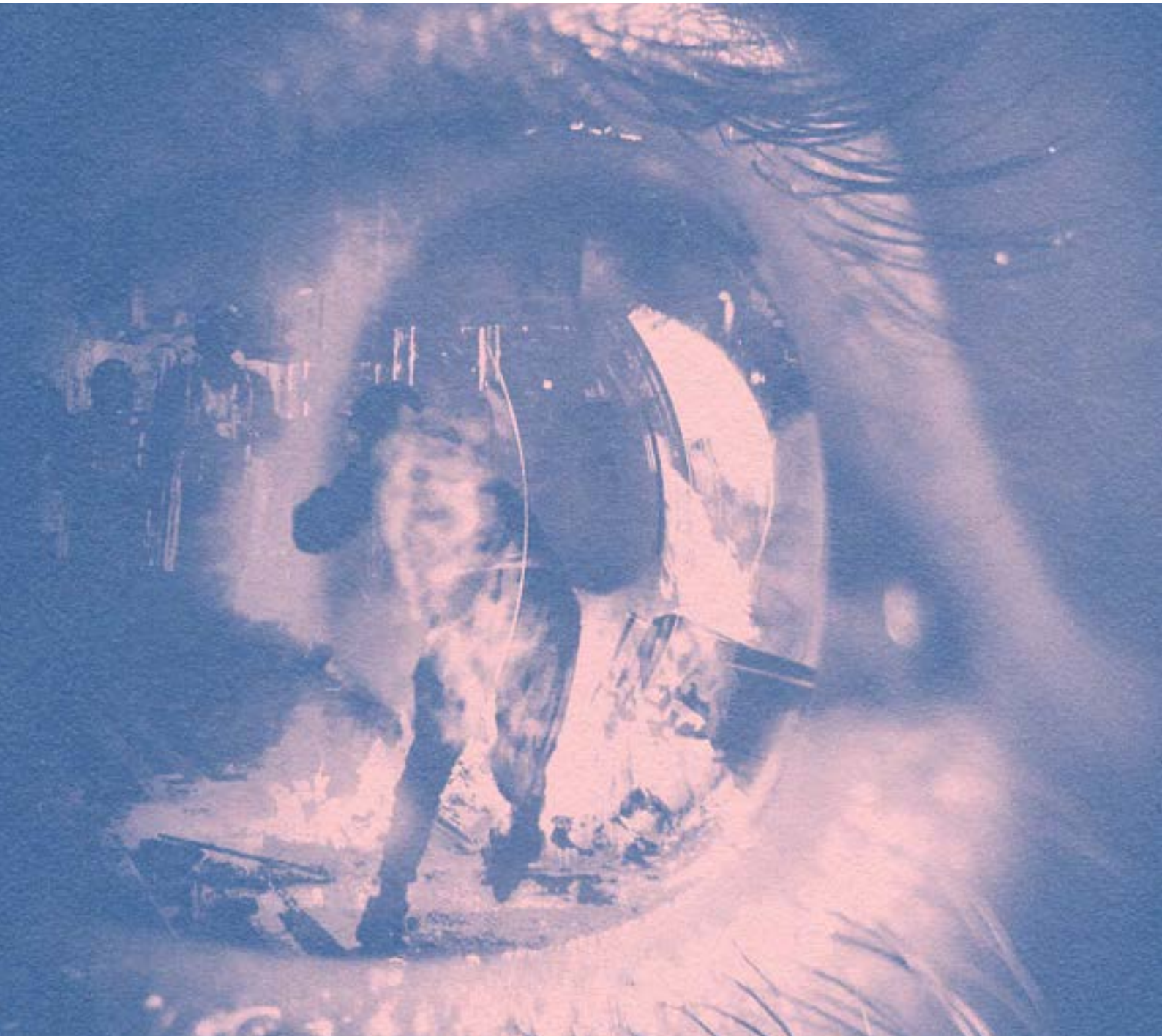


**HATE**  
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# **FEAR & HOPE 2024**

## **The Case for Community Resilience**



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### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Policy and Communities at HOPE not hate**

HOPE not hate focuses on the organised far right, the communities susceptible to them and the issues and policies which give rise to them. The Policy and Communities team at HOPE not hate delivers on the second and third missions of the organisation. Their work combines policy influencing, public attitudes research, in-depth work in communities alongside training and support for sectors working in communities affected by far-right activity.



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# Executive Summary

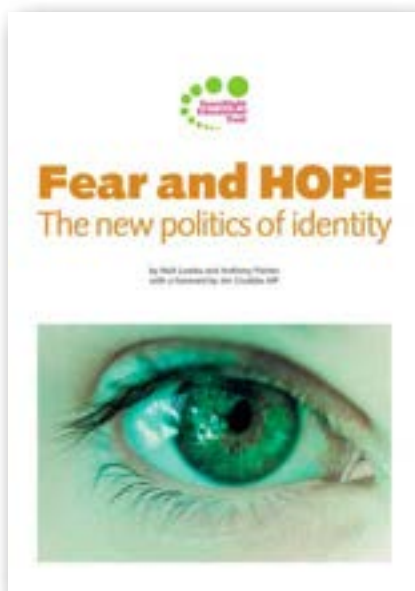
We released our first *Fear and HOPE* report in 2011, and this year will be our seventh with a nationwide focus. In *Fear and HOPE 2024*, we examine social attitudes through the lens of three characteristics: social connectedness, resource availability, and agency and empowerment. We find a relationship between economic insecurity, democratic distrust, a lack of social connectedness and feelings of anger, pessimism, fear and hatred.

Divisive narratives and disinformation about minority groups are accepted in communities where connectedness, resource availability and agency are low. For this reason, we have to look at wider structural solutions that go beyond cohesion initiatives. Building resilience in communities can reduce the power of divisive far-right narratives.

## Community resilience

Community resilience is the sustained ability of a community to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations or disruptive challenges. When ‘trigger events’ happen in resilient communities, people are able to reject hateful actors seeking to exploit the situation. On the other hand, as we saw in Southport in August 2024, in communities with lowered resilience misinformation is more likely to spread and tensions can spill over into violence.

- A community’s ability to withstand far-right agitation relies on three characteristics: social connectedness, resource availability, and agency and empowerment.
- Building resilience to far-right interference requires communities to holistically address all three of these characteristics as they relate to key divisive issues such as multiculturalism and immigration.
- Resilience in our communities is low. 61% of people think there is an increasing amount of tension between different groups living in Britain, the highest since 2018.
- Contrastingly, local pride remains high. 62% of respondents think that their local community is peaceful and friendly. Building



resilience narratives that tap into local identity and connection provides opportunities for preventative work.

- Sectors adjacent to community resilience should use the framing and language of resilience. This will position their work within a wider ecosystem of social impact, even if this is not their primary purpose.

## Segmentation

As in previous *Fear and HOPE* reports, we commissioned a segmentation to put British adults into groups based on their attitudes. This year, we combined original questions from the 2011 report with new questions which reflect the changing nature of society today.

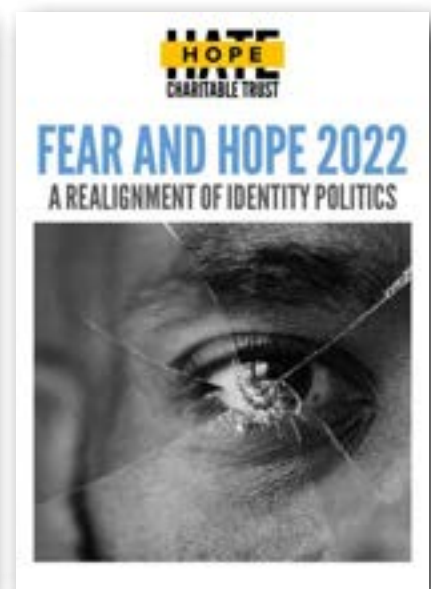
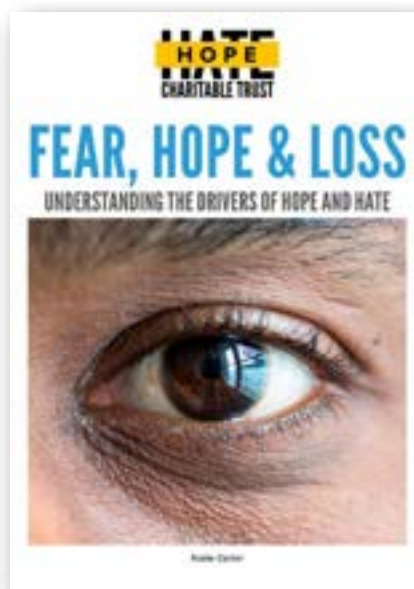
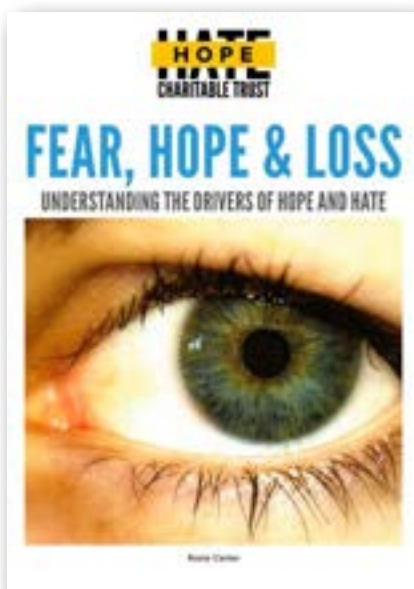
- The new segments we found are: Multiculturalists, Hyper-progressives, Cherry-pickers, Traditionalists, Islamosceptics, and Nativists.
- Our biggest segment is the Multiculturalists (24%), the most progressive and accepting group. There is an even split between the broadly progressive and broadly reactionary groups.
- The other progressive leaning groups are the Hyper-progressives and the Cherry-pickers. Both groups are positive about multiculturalism and immigration but negative about non-Muslim minorities such as Hindus and Jews. The Cherry-pickers are more optimistic than the Hyper-progressives, who are disillusioned with politics.
- On the more hostile side of the segmentation, the Traditionalists are affluent, positive but sceptical of multiculturalism and minorities. The Islamosceptics have extremely negative views about multiculturalism and Islam but have positive or neutral views about non-Muslim minorities.

- The Nativists are the most hostile group, with negative views of multiculturalism across the board and feelings of competition between themselves and immigrants or minorities.
- The most hostile and pessimistic segments, the Islamosceptics and Nativists, are more likely to be experiencing economic deprivation and have had fewer educational opportunities. This suggests that improving people's material circumstances may soften attitudes.

## Pessimism and economic security

Pessimism is high across the board and the cost of living, the economy and healthcare remain people's top issues of focus. This pessimism is easily exploited by the far right into distrust and fear of the other, as they can create narratives of scarcity that pit different struggling groups against each other. For feelings of hope to last, they will have to be supported by genuine improvements to standards of living.

- 75% of people think things are worse now than they were ten years ago for Britain as a whole, and 52% of people also think things will be worse in ten years' time.
- This sense of continuous national decline and pessimism is compounded by the current economic difficulty: those who feel financially desperate or are only just getting by are twice as likely to feel pessimistic about the future (61% and 62%) than those who feel well off (28%).
- Scarcity narratives around the economy and cost of living create a sense of competition and resentment between social groups for access to housing, jobs, healthcare and education.





## Multiculturalism

Attitudes towards multiculturalism are shaped by debates around British identity and the characteristics that make up Britishness. For some, opposition to multiculturalism is rooted in perceptions of Britishness as an ethno-religious (white, Christian) identity, not a socio-cultural one. Others simply feel destabilised by rapid change around them.

- People are more positive about local identity than national identity: 52% of people think that Britain's multicultural society is not working. However, 62% of respondents agree that their local community is peaceful and friendly.
- Racial, ethnic and religious divides are seen as the biggest causes of division in the UK, with 63% believing that relationships between different ethnic groups have gotten worse over the last ten years.
- Attitudes to Islam are more closely tied to immigration and multiculturalism than to their attitudes towards other ethnic or religious groups. This shows that anti-multiculturalism is rooted in anti-Muslim sentiment.
- The Government has a responsibility to intervene – they must not be neutral actors. 72% of respondents want to see the Government improve cohesion between different communities.

## Decoupling Islam from other religious minorities

People's views on immigration and multiculturalism are shaped by their attitudes towards Muslims rather than other ethnic and religious minorities. This includes other religions with high numbers of ethnic minority followers, such as Hinduism and Sikhism.

- People are around three times more likely to believe that Muslims cause problems in the UK (46%) than Jews (15%), Hindus (16%) or Sikhs (14%).
- Those who think multiculturalism has undermined Britain are twice as likely to think Muslims cause problems in the UK.
- Older Hindus and Buddhists are the most likely to view Muslims, but not Jews, as a problem in the UK. South Asian politics are affecting intra-ethnic tensions and community relations in Britain, and need to be addressed.
- Our polling was conducted between 5 July and 2 August 2024, allowing us to assess the impact of the Southport murders and far-right riots on public attitudes. Attitudes towards multiculturalism, Muslims and immigration were negatively impacted, but not towards other religious and ethnic minorities.
- Work on cohesion must go beyond relations between White British and ethnic minority

communities. Building solidarity across ethnicities and experiences of migration is crucial, but religious and cultural differences can stand in the way.

## Migration

Attitudes towards migration have worsened considerably since the start of 2024, with a 10% increase in people thinking that immigration has been bad for the country. The number of people to whom immigration is an important issue has doubled from 13% to 25% over the last five years.

- Immigration continues to polarise: 54% of people agree that many organisations, including in the public sector, could not cope without immigrants.
- The Conservative party's hostile rhetoric and policy has contributed to the salience of immigration within far-right and anti-multiculturalism discourse and the scapegoating of migrants, in particular people seeking asylum.
- The language and framing of migration influences how people perceive it. The impact of 'Stop the boats' rhetoric on public attitudes is clear: 70% of people think people who are fleeing war, conflict or persecution should be allowed to live and work in the UK, whereas only 19% think people who cross the Channel in small boats should.
- Prioritising dealing with the asylum backlog and creating a functional and compassionate asylum system is a priority for this government, but there

also needs to be a reframing of immigration, moving away from the sensational and towards compassion and acceptance of migration as inevitable.

## Democratic Satisfaction

Low turnout rates in the 2024 General Election reflect broader feelings of disenfranchisement and distrust with politics. Although democratic reform was not included in the Government's first round of legislation, creating greater democratic satisfaction should be a priority as feelings of being ignored can be exploited into violence and disorder in extreme circumstances.

- One in three (34%) of those who voted in the General Election did so tactically or in protest, rather than for a party whose stances and policies they agree with.
- 66% of people think that the political system is broken and 59% agree that the British Government is rigged to serve the rich and influential. Scandals and party political reshuffling seem to have had an impact on overall trust.
- Disenfranchisement with political systems escalates pessimism as legitimate channels of change appear broken. This can be exploited into a wider anti-politics movement that further breeds distrust and fear, through which the far right can present themselves as legitimate opposition to mainstream power.



Photo: Sandor Csudai

# Introduction

**Nick Lowles,**  
CEO of HOPE not Hate



More than a decade after the release of our first *Fear and HOPE* report in 2011, it is fantastic to introduce a new edition – the seventh in total. Like the first, this new report seeks to understand where Britons are today and discover the issues that are both pulling them apart but also bringing them together.

A lot has happened in the 13 years since the publication of the first report. We have had austerity, Brexit, COVID-19, the cost of living crisis and then, earlier this year, the defeat of the Conservative Government. Each of these tumultuous events have had a profound impact on British society and the people who make it up.

In *Fear and HOPE 2011*, we highlighted the centrality of economic pessimism being a driver of fear and hate. While that remains the case today, our new 2024 survey finds cultural issues becoming increasingly important drivers in dividing opinion.

In our segmentation, we find that perceptions of financial security and attitudes towards politics and democracy are influential in shaping opinions on key issues, as well as towards optimism and hope more broadly. We also find diverging attitudes between minority communities and a growing gap in opinions between men and women. We discover that it is becoming ever more difficult to classify people into progressive and reactionary groups, as a growing number of people exhibit both of these traits at the same time.

This report could not have been more timely. It comes just two months after far-right riots erupted across the country and three months after the far-right party Reform UK won over four million votes for an election platform dominated with anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. It is clear that British people are increasingly divided, and that many are fearful for the future.

The riots might already seem a distant memory for many, but our polling suggests that the attitudes amongst a significant chunk of the population have

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worsened. Unfortunately, rather than understanding and addressing the causes of the disorder, too many political leaders and commentators have simply moved on.

Sadly, we all know that when issues are left unaddressed, fear and anger re-emerge and can become even more hostile. An ongoing concern highlighted in the report is the low level of satisfaction towards our democratic system, which results in increasingly low electoral turnouts but also adds to the growing attraction of extremism as a means to find solutions.

*Fear and HOPE 2024* is more than a snapshot of where Britain is today: it is a route map for us to build a better society. Addressing fear and hate in society requires action from us all. Our recommendations range from calls for national Government to build greater community resilience, to urging our civil society partners to help us counter the narrative that multiculturalism has failed by developing a new national story of 'us'. Narrative change has to come alongside material change to people's circumstances that allows them to be optimistic about the future.

This new report will guide HOPE not hate's own work over the next couple of years. It will help us to identify the issues that our research team need to monitor, the tensions our community organisers need to be mindful of and the hopeful solutions that people want to enact at the local level.

If there is one single takeaway from this report, it is that doing more of the same is no longer enough. The very concept of Britain's multicultural society is under greater attack from the far right than at any time since the 1970s. As *Fear and HOPE 2024* graphically highlights, the British people are becoming increasingly pessimistic about its success. Without urgent action, things will only get worse.

However, the future is not set. If we get organised, create a new story of Britain and find more effective ways to engage with people who are sceptical, then opinions about our multicultural society can become more favourable and community resilience can be strengthened. *Fear and HOPE 2024* is an essential tool in helping us on that journey.

# 1 Fear and HOPE 2011-2024: Looking back

# Ten years of the tribes: 2011-2021

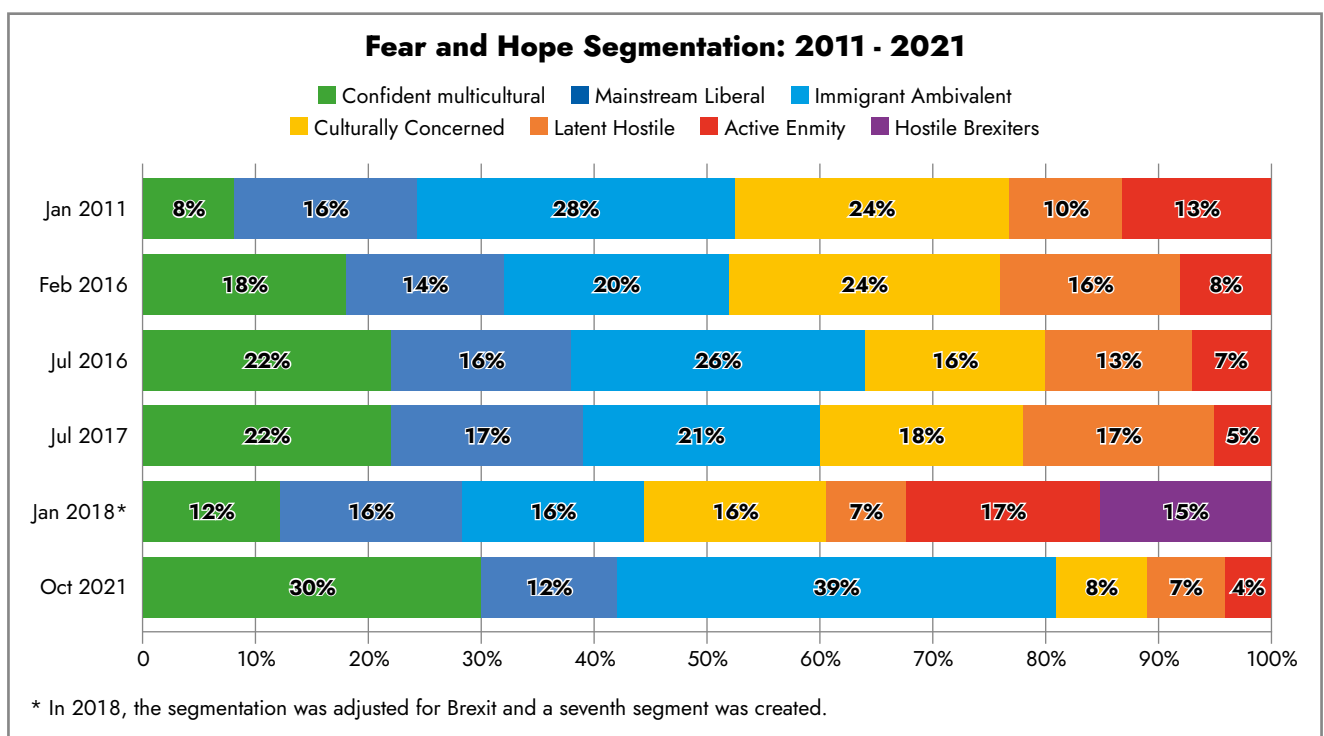
A seminal part of our Fear and Hope reports over the years has been the analysis and creation of ‘identity tribes’ - people grouped together by shared opinions and values. Segmentation provides an evidence-informed illustration of public attitudes and how they have changed over time. Instead of grouping people by demographics such as ethnicity or religion, it provides further nuance into the prevalence of certain attitudes within these groups. The tribes previously formed a basis for campaigning efforts, helping people understand who the most persuadable groups are.

The explanatory value of segments relies on their ability to be distinct groups; if segments become too large, or segments are no longer significantly different from each other in their attitudes, then their delineation becomes arbitrary. Where this becomes the case, it suggests that the questions being used to create the segments no longer polarise or divide opinions in the same way.

The February 2016 and July 2017 datasets were segmented according to exactly the same variables

as 2011, yielding slightly different proportioned numbers of the same six tribes. This indicated a shift towards confidence in multiculturalism, with those in the two tribes most positive about it comprising around a third of the population. Despite this shift towards liberalism from the middle, the two most hostile tribes remained relatively stable in number.

In *Fear and HOPE* 2018, survey questions on Brexit revealed a seventh cluster of data in a sample from YouGov polling, leading to the creation of a seventh tribe. This was partially in response to the impact of Brexit, which played a large part in shaping identities and therefore contributed to polarisation within the dataset. We also found that trust in institutions and how people related to the establishment was a key factor in forming the segmentation. An extra segment was added to accommodate the observation that amongst those most hostile to multiculturalism, there were two schools of thought. The Hostile Brexiters identified strongly as leave voters, and were optimistic about the impact Brexit would have on their lives individually and on the UK as a



whole. On the other hand, the Anti-Establishment Pessimists felt completely detached from the political system, and did not believe that votes (including the Brexit referendum) would change their personal circumstances.

Finally, in the report preceding this one, Stack Data Strategy recreated the 2011 model using a logistic regression replication method that was trained on the same data. They applied this 2011 model to respondents in the October 2021 survey to predict which segments they would have belonged to in 2011. In this case, the original six tribes seemed to break down: rather than having six relatively evenly distributed groups, there was a heavy leaning towards the more progressive groups.

This should not be interpreted as immigration ceasing to remain relevant, as two things are notable about the October 2021 data: firstly, a key aspect of the segmentation is based on frequency of contact with different religious groups, and immediately post-pandemic these figures had not returned to normal. Secondly, and most importantly, the far right

has become increasingly politically fractured since 2018 and their activism has been shaped by issues beyond immigration.

The segmentation methodology, designed in 2011, did not contain a way of measuring reactionary views on culture war issues outside of immigration, multiculturalism and identity. Therefore although the hostile segments appear small, those who are neutral or positive about migration but have hostile views on, for example, the climate crisis, trans rights or anti-racist education were obscured by the segmentation. For more information on methodology, see the methodology section at the end of the report.

With this in mind, we have commissioned a brand new segmentation from this report, with the aim of gaining an accurate picture of the landscape in the UK today. Many of the same questions from the older segmentations have been used, but with added questions that reflect changes that have taken place since 2011.

**KEY FINDINGS FROM FEAR AND HOPE OVER THE YEARS**

**2011** The first report captured key fault lines along a new politics of identity, culture and nation. Namely, it found that attitudes towards Britishness and identity are closely linked to attitudes towards race and immigration. The report found a clear correlation between economic pessimism and negative views on immigration, linked to the 2008 financial crisis and the beginnings of austerity.

**2016** This report found that England had a more tolerant and multicultural society than in 2011, with attitudes towards race and migration softening, partially due to growing optimism about the economy in spite of austerity.

**2017** In this report we focused on the dramatic polarisation exposed by the Brexit referendum of 2016. Whilst attitudes to immigration and race continued to soften, we found that polarisation following the referendum had deepened, with the country split into increasingly irreconcilable groups. Remain voters, who had previously been content, were especially angry and resentful.

**2018** We expanded on our recurrent finding that there is a link between economic pessimism and negative views towards immigration: feelings of displacement and loss contribute to hostile attitudes. The areas with the highest concentrations of

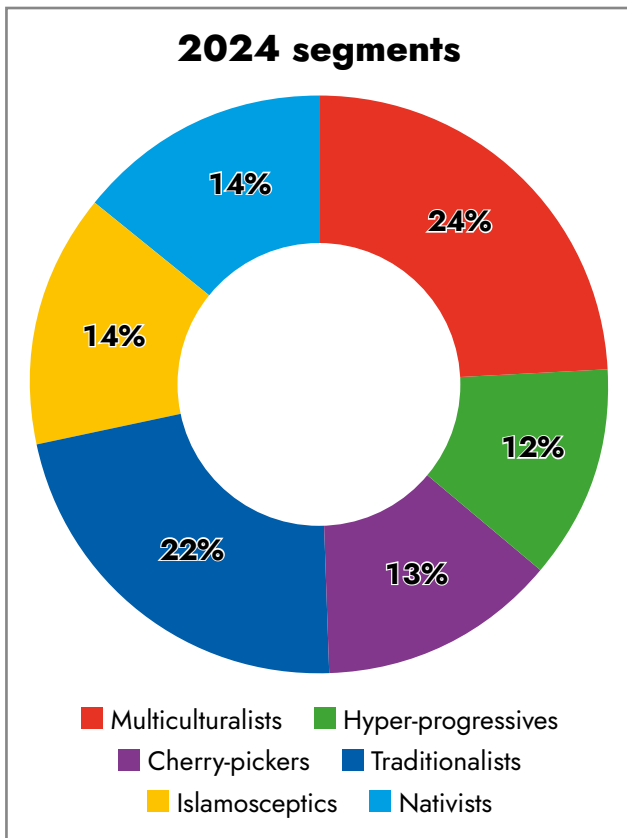
hostility were ex-industrial or isolated communities with significant socio-economic challenges, where work is scarce, precarious, low-paid and low-skilled. We also found that concerns had shifted from immigration to integration, with a correlation between Eurosceptic and Islamophobic attitudes.

**2019** This report looked at the continuing impacts of Brexit, finding that the lengthiness of the process was eroding trust in the political system and that being a ‘leaver’ or a ‘remainer’ was part of many people’s identity. We also found that the public continued to see Muslims much more negatively and as much more distinct than any other group. Anti-Muslim sentiment was most prevalent in those with wider hostile attitudes, but was present even in those with otherwise liberal and tolerant attitudes.

**2022** We found a realignment of identity politics: rather than focusing mostly on immigration and race, there were many more in-roads through which a diverse collection of people with reactionary views could join together. Although culture war issues did not have a large directly polarising effect, they did successfully reframe political debates to become more reactive.

# The segments in 2024: A changing Britain

We commissioned Focaldata to create a new segmentation to reflect the changing issues of focus. The six segments below offer a picture of public attitudes to multiculturalism today. The methodology used to create the 2024 segments is as close to the original 2011 method as possible, incorporating previously asked questions with new questions relating to newly salient issues.



## Multiculturalists

The largest segment, making up almost a quarter of the overall sample, the Multiculturalists reflect the finding from previous *Fear and HOPE* reports that many people's attitudes towards immigration, multiculturalism and also LGBTQ+ and religious groups are more tolerant. Members of this segment span the age range fairly evenly, but they are more likely to have degree level or above qualifications and they are slightly more likely to be based in Greater London and the South East.

Multiculturalists are positive not only about immigration and multiculturalism, but also about Muslims, other religious minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. For example, 79% agree that most Muslims have integrated successfully into wider British society (average 50%) and 64% think that people should be able to identify as a different gender as one they were assigned at birth (average 41%). They are consistently less likely than average to think religious minorities and LGBTQ+ people cause problems.

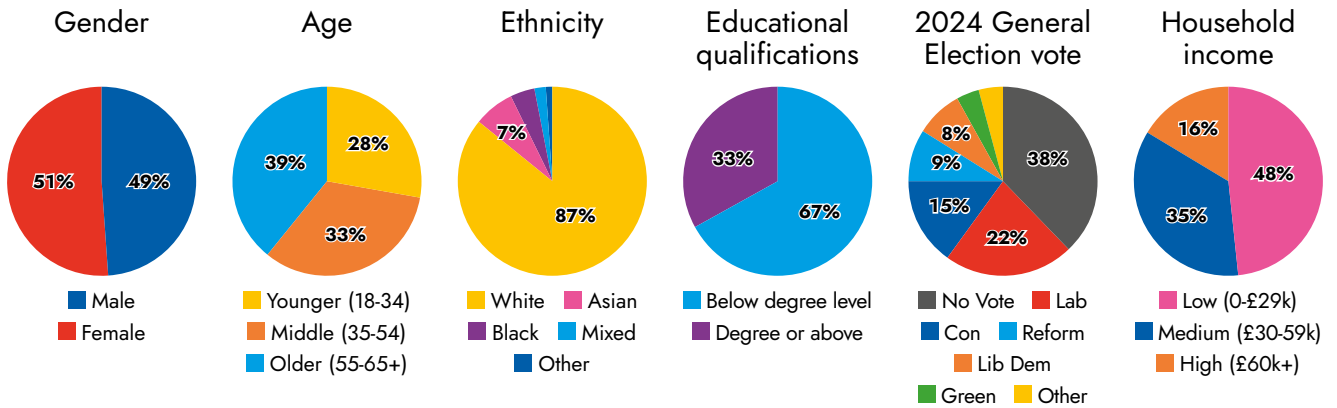
Members of this group are middling in political distrust/pessimism scale. They are slightly more likely than average to have voted in the 2024 election: half of them think that at least one political party represents what they think, in line with the sample average. They are more optimistic than other segments, but overall do not feel confident about the future: 44% think things will be better for Britain in 10 years' time (average 30%) and 48% think things will be better for themselves (average 37%).

## Hyper-progressives

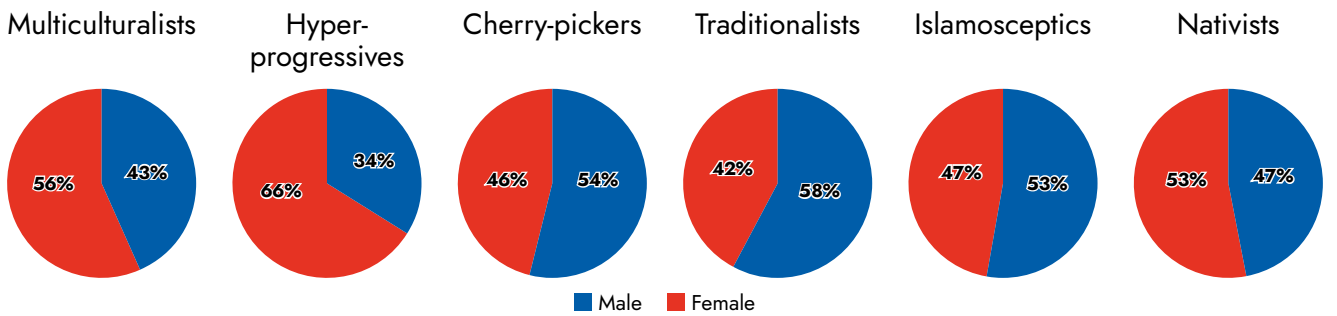
This smaller segment has positive beliefs about multiculturalism and immigration. However, they are also more likely to have negative views of religious minorities, specifically Jews and to some extent Hindus. Hyper-progressives are more likely on average to be accepting of LGBTQ+ people, including trans people, but are slightly more likely to believe Hindus cause problems in the world (24% vs. 18%), but not in the UK.

However, this segment is much more likely to believe Jews cause problems, both in the UK (28% vs. 15%) and in the world as a whole (49% vs. 29%). The Israel-Palestine conflict has a part to play in this, as

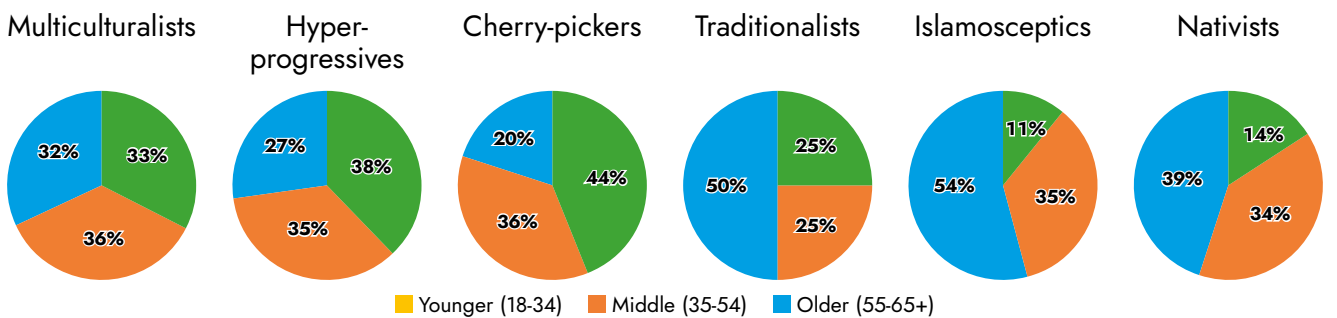
**Total sample (nationally representative)**



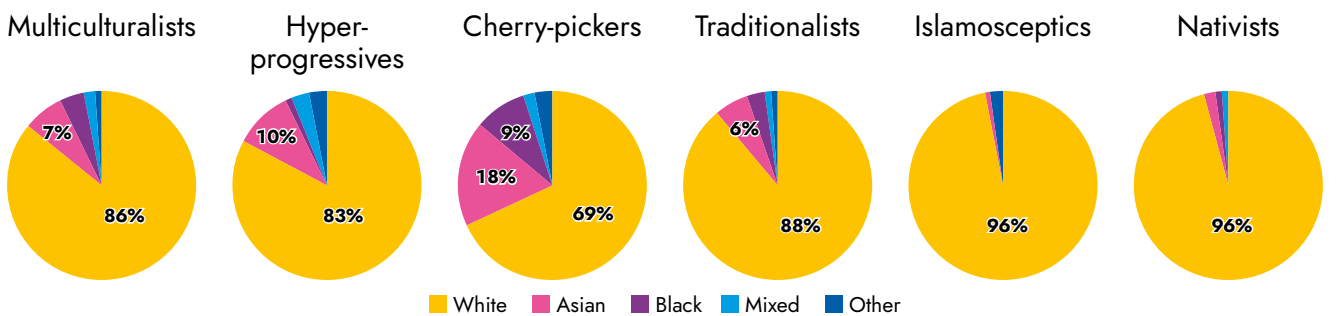
**Gender**



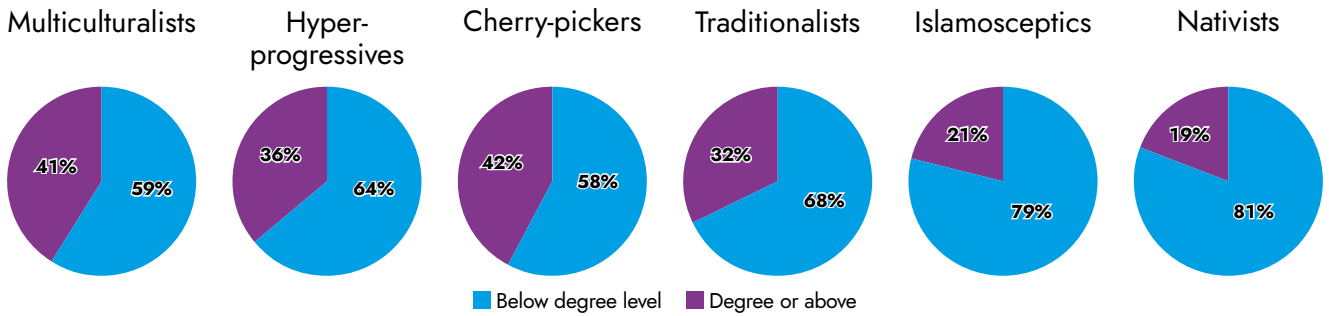
**Age**



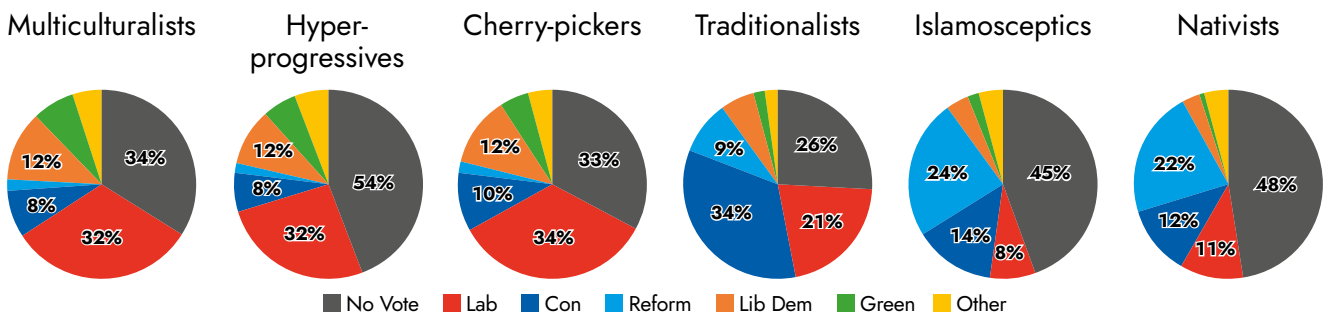
**Ethnicity**



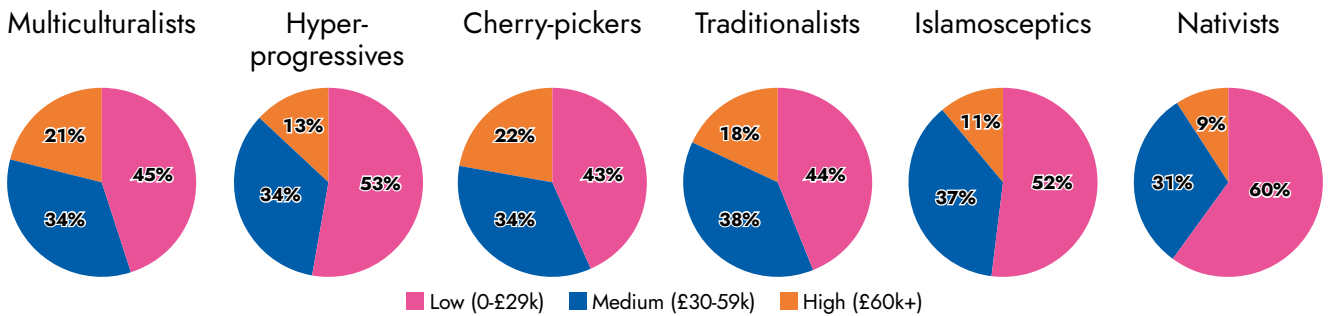
**Education level**



**General Election 2024 vote**



**Income**



Hyper-progressives are more likely to believe that pro-Israel campaigners cause problems (56% vs. 47%), and less likely to believe the same about pro-Palestine campaigners (30% vs. 52%). This suggests a conflation between Judaism and Israel's role in the conflict. They were twice as likely to vote Green (9% vs. 4%) and Independent (4% vs. 2%) which could be related to pro-Palestine candidates. This suggests that members of this segment have an international approach to identity and politics.

Two thirds of this segment are female and they are more likely to be non-religious of any segment (57% vs. 45%). Muslims are also slightly overrepresented in this group. Hyper-progressives were also more likely than average not to have voted in the last general election (46% vs. 35%), and they were more likely to vote in protest or tactically. This reflects a

wider pessimism and political disconnection. 91% of this segment believe that politicians don't listen to people like them, and 93% agree that the political system is broken. When it comes to themselves and their families, 51% believe that their lives will be worse in ten years' time.

**Cherry-pickers**

Members of this segment have broadly positive beliefs about multiculturalism and immigration and high levels of trust and optimism in society. 63% agree that discrimination is a serious problem for Muslims in Britain, 54% agree that the media is too negative towards Muslims (average 37%) and they are less likely to say that having a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures has undermined British culture (19% vs. 44%).

Somewhat paradoxically, however, they also tend to have negative views of non-Muslim groups. For example, they hold higher-than-average negative views about Hindus - 29% agree they cause problems in the UK (average 16%), and Sikhs - 24% agree that they cause problems (average 14%). They are also more likely than average to think that lesbian, gay and bisexual people cause problems in the UK (32% vs. 23%). This suggests that views about multiculturalism and diversity more broadly are focused around the Muslim experience for many, and intra-ethnic tensions across the South Asian diaspora in particular could be an interesting dynamic within this segment.

Their optimism about society is some of the highest of the sample: 55% think life will be better for themselves and their families in 10 years' time (average 37%) and 49% think life will be better for the UK as a whole (average 30%). However when it comes to political representation they are neither optimistic nor pessimistic, responding on the fence to a number of questions on politicians and the political system.

The Cherry-pickers skew much younger, with 18-34 year olds overrepresented. 42% of Cherry-pickers have degree level or above qualifications, compared to an average of 33%. There is also much greater ethnic diversity in this segment - only 69% are white compared to 87% of the whole sample, with 18% coming from an Asian or Asian British background and 9% from a Black or Black British background.

Muslims are also overrepresented in this segment (16%, average 5%), and correlated to this is overrepresentation of people from Asian and Black backgrounds, which is why they might have more lenient views on multiculturalism and migration. There are average numbers of Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs.

## Traditionalists

The second largest segment, the Traditionalists have negative views about multiculturalism but middling views on non-Muslim minorities. It is one of the more optimistic segments, and also one of the more affluent. Traditionalists are more likely than people in other segments to own their home outright (49% vs. 39%) and describe themselves financially as feeling comfortable or well off. This segment is more male, and more likely to be religious - 59% are Christian, compared to an average of 45%.

Their economic security also offers Traditionalists a positive outlook when it comes to the country and politics. Members of this segment are more likely to see voting as a credible mechanism for change (74% vs. 63%) and trust the government to act in their best interest (41% vs. 25%). 70% feel optimistic about the future, and 39% think life is better now

for themselves and their families compared to ten years ago, compared to an average of 25%. Unlike the Islamosceptics and Nativists, who are also anti-multiculturalism, this segment has less of a perception of decline.

However, this segment views immigration as having been bad for the country (71% vs. 55%) and has negative views about Muslims and multiculturalism. Only 29% think that discrimination is a serious problem for Muslims in Britain (average 51%). Like the Islamosceptics, they do not view Jews, Hindus as Sikhs in the same negative light, with views on whether these groups cause problems broadly in line with the average.

When it comes to the LGBTQ+ community, they are more likely to think Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people (31% vs. 23%) and Trans people (40% vs. 30%) cause problems. 45% actively disagree that people should be able to identify as being of a different gender to the one they had recorded at birth. The traditional values of this segment mean that they are accepting of religious non-Muslim minorities to a greater extent than they are of LGBTQ+ people.

## Islamosceptics

This segment is much more likely to be older, and alongside the Nativists has the least ethnic diversity of any segment - 96% are white. Almost a quarter (24%) of this segment voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election. Members of this segment are less likely to have educational qualifications beyond degree level, and more likely to be on low incomes.

People in this segment tend to have some of the most negative beliefs about multiculturalism, immigration and Muslims, but have positive or neutral beliefs about non-Muslim minorities. 77% think that Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation (average 50%) and 59% agree that the arrival of immigrants has changed their local community for the worse (average 34%). 92% think that immigration into Britain has been a bad thing for the country (average 55%).

However, Islamosceptics are much less likely than average to have negative views of Hindus (0% vs. 16%) and Sikhs (1% vs. 14%). This is surprising, given that they have negative views of Black and minority ethnic people - 42% think that they cause problems. This suggests that their perceptions of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism are primarily shaped by their views on Islam.

They are also more likely than average to agree that progressive activists cause problems, including the "far left" (66% vs. 47%), climate activists (76% vs. 55%) and pro-Palestine campaigners (78% vs. 52%). Their views on the LGBTQ+ community are broadly in line with the average.



The Islamosceptics have some of the lowest trust and optimism: 96% think things are worse for Britain now than they were ten years ago, and they think this trend will continue, with 81% thinking that things will be even worse in ten years' time.

## Nativists

This segment has the most negative views about immigration, multiculturalism and Muslims, as well as non-Muslim minorities. For example, 95% think immigration has been bad for the country, and 83% think having a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures has undermined British culture.

Nativists are overwhelmingly white (96%) and a higher than average proportion did not vote in the most recent General Election (45%). A fifth (22%) voted for Reform. They also have some of the lowest levels of political trust and optimism, with only 28% feeling optimistic about the future, compared to an average of 52%.

Members of this segment are far more likely to have experienced deprivation: four fifths (81%) do not have degree level qualifications, and this segment has the biggest proportion of lower income members. 26% rent their home from the council or local authority, compared to an average of 19%.

Nativists' experiences of financial hardship and disadvantage appear to shape their views towards politics. 43% consider themselves disadvantaged in society (average 27%), and this is reflected in their financial experiences: they are much more likely to describe themselves as financially desperate (15% vs. 8%). Similarly, 79% think that the British government is rigged to serve the rich and influential (average 59%).

This lack of opportunity is also reflected in perceptions of competition and coexistence between Nativists themselves and immigrants. 57% think that immigrants have made it harder for them to get a fair wage for their work, compared to an average of 34%. 69% agree that the arrival of immigrants has made their local community worse (average 34%) and only 25% agree that they would like to get to know their neighbours better (average 41%).

## Segmentation methodology

The segmentation is a result of finding factors: indexes of polarising issues where people's attitudes range across a spectrum. We then take responses to the factors and group them using a technique called Latent Class Analysis. In this case, six groups were found where individual respondents within the group share similar responses to each other on the key questions affecting the factors. By looking at the demographics and attitudes of each segment, we can understand different perspectives across the UK.

The segmentation groups people together based on their alignment with three factors, which were chosen because they reflect polarisation within the data.

The factors are:

1. Negative attitude towards multiculturalism, immigration and Islam
2. Distrust in politics and pessimism
3. Negative attitudes towards non-Muslim groups (Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, LGBTQ+)

Each question included in a factor has either a positive or a negative impact on it (it is either a manifestation of the factor or a reaction against it, but demonstrates strong opinions either way). An example of a negative or positive impact question is given for each of the three factors.

Factor 1 has the most explanatory value of all the factors, accounting for 20% of the overall variance in the data, which is more than twice as much as either Factor 2 (8.5%) and Factor 3 (6.7%). Attitudes to multiculturalism, immigration and Muslims are therefore the most significant input for understanding attitudes more generally.

Originally the 2024 analysis was done with four factors, with multiculturalism/immigration and attitudes to Muslims separated. However, the separation of these factors did not add explanatory value to the segmentation.

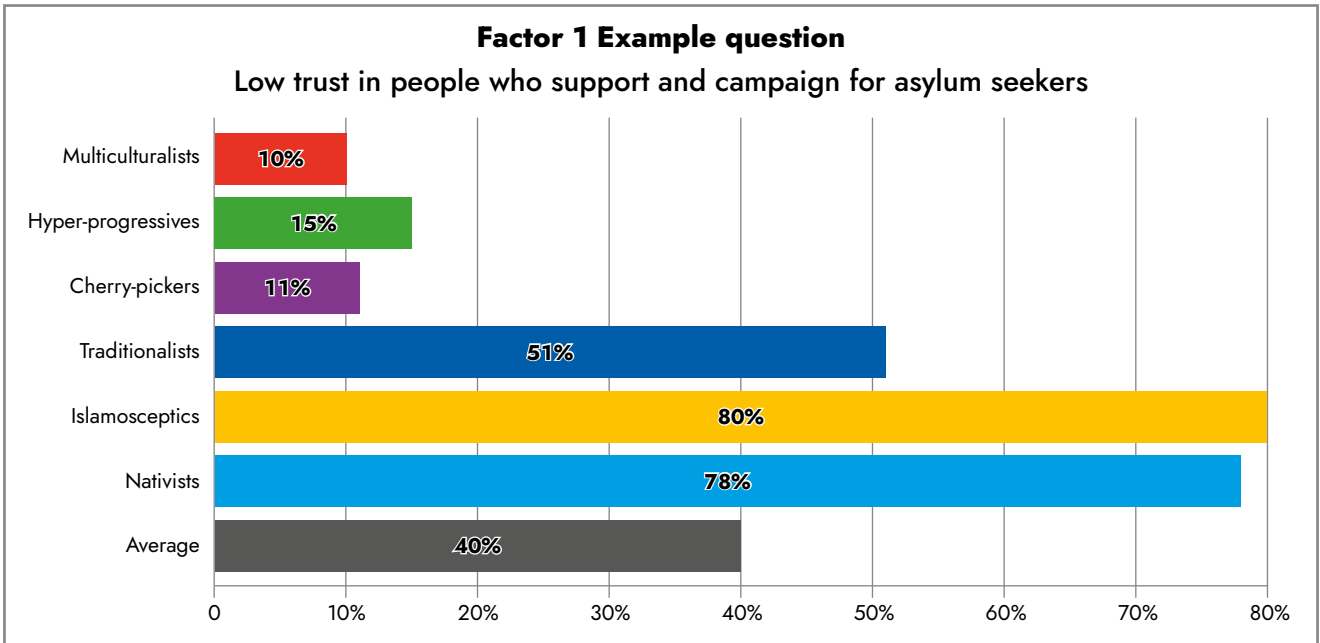
This demonstrates how perceptions of multiculturalism and immigration are closely tied with perceptions of Muslims in particular, in a way that is not true of other predominantly ethnic minority religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism.

**Factor 1: Negative attitude towards multiculturalism, immigration and Muslims**

This factor includes questions on British culture, immigration and asylum and Muslims in the UK, as well as general attitudes to anti-racism.

Example questions:

- + Distrust for people who support and campaign for asylum seekers
- Agreement that immigrants have added richness and variety to British culture

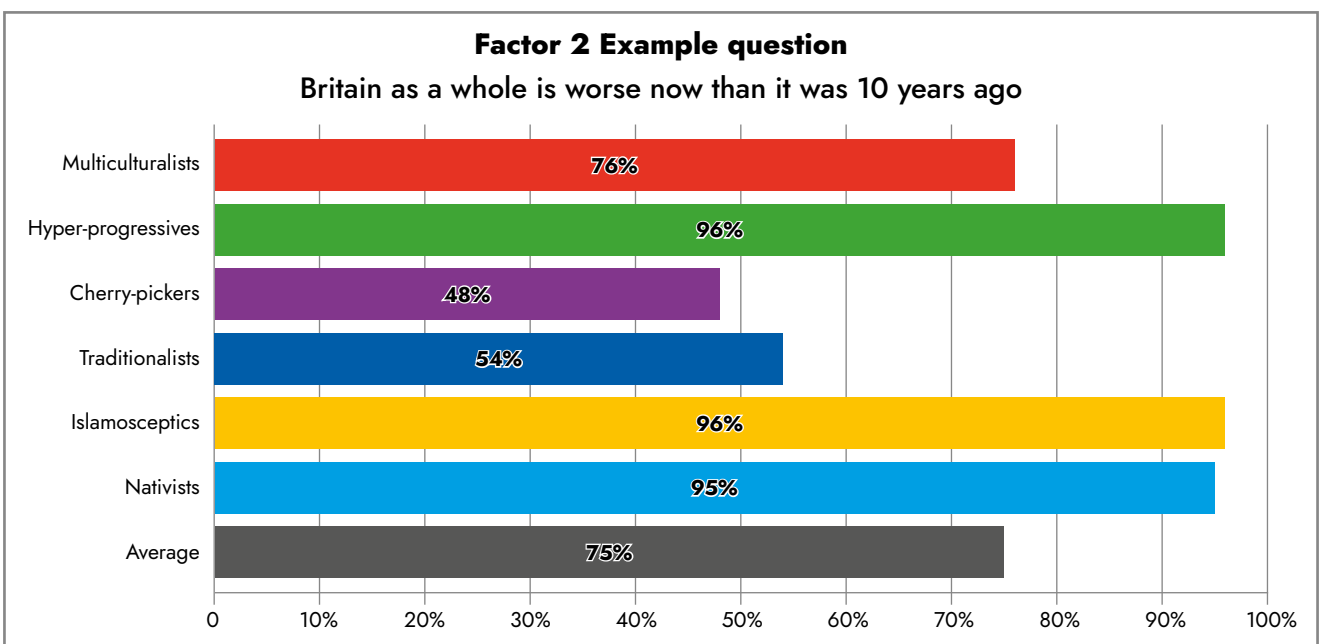


**Factor 2: Distrust and pessimism**

The questions in this factor pertain to a general distrust and disenfranchisement with the political and media system, as well as pessimism about how things compare now to the past and how they will change in the future.

Example questions:

- + Agree that Britain as a whole is worse now than it was ten years ago
- Trust in the Government to act in my best interest

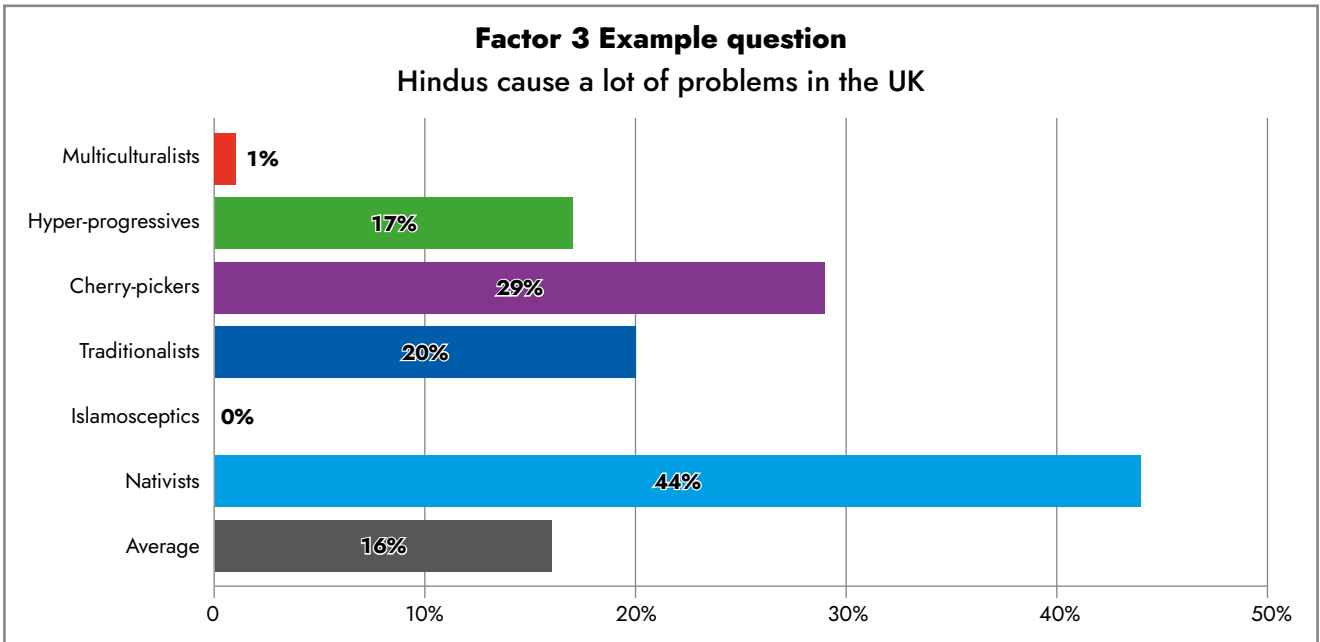


### Factor 3: Negative attitudes towards non-Muslim groups

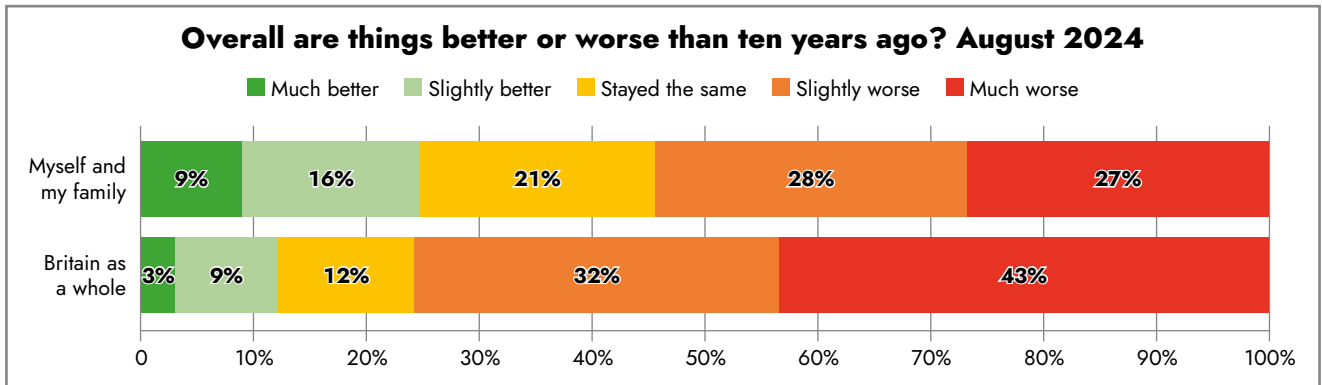
This factor includes questions about other groups in society that are not Muslim, including religious groups like Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Christians, as well as the LGBTQ+ community, including trans people. This factor only has positive impact questions, because all the questions included in the factor measure negative attitudes.

Example questions:

- + Agreeing that Hindus cause a lot of problems in the UK



# What's changed since 2010?



## Introduction

In our 2024 polling we find that the majority of people feel that life is worse now than it was ten years ago. This is particularly acute for their views of the nation as a whole. Here, we take a whistle stop tour of the political, social and economic events that have had a lasting impact on the UK over the previous 14 years to understand what may have contributed to this.

Any overview of such a long period will inevitably gloss over finer details, but this is a selection of the domestic issues and events which have shaped government policy, public attitudes, media discourse and community relations. These have affected access to resources, social connectedness and feelings of agency and empowerment in various ways, meaning that they have had an impact on community resilience.

Of course international events also shape domestic attitudes. The election of Trump in 2016 and the rise of populist and radical right parties in Europe, conflicts and climate disasters prompting migration to Europe and wars in Syria, Palestine, Ukraine and more have all been crucial to shaping views today. Globally, a sharp increase in the availability, use and influence of technology has also had a profound impact. Here, for concision, we focus on the UK specifically.

## Continuing economic uncertainty

The Cameron coalition government of 2010 inherited the ongoing effects of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, with recovery slow and quantitative easing in place. George Osborne spearheaded austerity, a



Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng  
Credit: Andrew Parsons CCHQ / Parsons Media

fiscal policy of spending cuts with the aim of being “responsible” and reducing the budget deficit. Largely viewed as a political rather than practical choice, few positive economic effects had been felt by 2014, leading to austerity being extended until 2019. Austerity-induced spending cuts are considered to have led to a decline in health and social outcomes, especially in already deprived parts of the UK.<sup>1</sup>

The 2016 Brexit referendum vote triggered a period of economic uncertainty, although proponents promised huge returns once the process was complete. Electoral victory in 2019 came with promises to “get Brexit done”, lower taxes and spend on Levelling Up. The rapid onset of COVID-19 pandemic forced a change of plan. There was huge

government spending to prop up businesses and wages, but the level of demand meant that this rarely moved beyond sticking plasters. Similarly unexpected was Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in fuel and food prices soaring.

After Johnson's departure, Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng's "Growth Plan 2022" prompted chaos in the markets: sterling dropped and mortgage rates increased. This announcement took place against the backdrop of high inflation, and real-time wage stagnation, resulting in a cost of living crisis.. Use of food banks, warm spaces and other support services has increased as people struggle to afford high prices of basic goods.<sup>2</sup>

Local government finances are a current cause for concern. Councils saw big cuts to their funding during the austerity of the 2010s, with spending on some services down between 40% and 70%. Funding has decreased in real terms since 2010, as income through taxation and business rates fail to meet the rising demands and costs needed to maintain services, which often far outpace economy-wide inflation.

#### KEY MOMENTS:

- **2010** The introduction of austerity policy; Osborne pledges to cut public spending dramatically.
- **2012** The Health and Social Care Act drastically reorganises the NHS, leading to an increase in privatised services.
- **2015** The benefits cap is lowered with the aim of incentivising "work over welfare"
- **2020** Spending and borrowing rapidly increases to try to recover pandemic-related economic losses.
- **2021** Rising prices for essential goods such as gas, electricity and food paired with real-time fall in income is labelled a cost of living crisis.
- **2022** Kwarteng's "Growth Plan" mini-budget creates market chaos.
- **2024** The final Cost of Living support payment is paid in April, with certain benefits instead rising by 6.7%.

## A hostile immigration system

The main focus on migration at the time of the formation of the 2010 coalition government was from the EU, though a constant focus on illegal immigration led to Home Secretary Theresa May introducing "Hostile Environment" measures. This included curbing the access to housing, healthcare, banking and charitable services for those living in the UK without legal right to be there, as well as

## The Housing Crisis



Credit: Stephen Richards via Wikimedia Commons

From 2010 to now, housing in the UK has been plagued by two main issues: rising prices and inadequate supply.

This is particularly acute for lower-income households. Severely impacted by Thatcher's Right-to-buy scheme in the 1980s, low supply of social housing has pushed many ineligible or waiting for council housing into homelessness and resulted in greater social inequality in property ownership.

Beyond this, standards of living in rentals - both privately and council owned - can be variable. The 2017 fire in Grenfell Tower, West London highlighted issues of safety of social housing, with calls for regulation to ensure greater protection of tenants.

Government initiatives such as Help to Buy (2013) and the Housing Infrastructure Fund (2017) have attempted to address the housing crisis by supporting first-time home buyers and incentivising construction of housing, but these have not been sufficient or effective. The Renters' Rights Bill is back in the King's Speech for the new Labour government.

Homelessness remains a problem in the UK, and has increased sharply during the cost of living crisis. Temporary accommodation meant to bridge a transition between homelessness and housing is often being used for years, with usage at an all-time high.<sup>6</sup> Temporary accommodation is also being used to house people awaiting asylum application decisions, which can take a year or more to be made due to a large backlog of cases. This can be in unsuitable and unsafe sites, such as the Bibby Stockholm barge or ex-RAF sites.

deporting homeless non-nationals. Crucially, this did not happen in isolation, but was part of a wider European shift to the right on immigration policy as concerns about immigration were heightened across the continent.

The Hostile Environment resulted in the deportation and forced statelessness of many of the Windrush generation. Alongside this, deaths have occurred in the Channel, Eurotunnel and in lorries driving from Dover with distressing frequency since the start of the hostile environment. Though it was intended as a deterrent, it failed to have this effect.

Geopolitical and environmental crises have prompted migration to the UK, as they always have and will continue to do so. Around 2015, during the peak of the crisis in Syria, focus on small boat crossings and dangerous journeys into Europe dominated headlines and remained there ever since. The UK government has established safe routes to aid the fast processing of asylum claims for some, including Afghan, Ukrainian and Hong Kong nationals. However, the vast majority of those wishing to come to the UK are stuck between a rock and a hard place: an increasingly restrictive points-style system or a risky route with uncertainty and hostility on the other side.

Findings from the British Social Attitudes survey suggest that whilst attitudes to immigration softened between 2014-2021, they have started to partially reverse.<sup>3</sup> The last few years have intensified and toxified both migration discourse and policy. ‘Stop the boats’ narratives that sensationalise channel crossing numbers alongside performatively cruel policies like the Rwanda Plan, exemplifies a complete detachment from *why* people are making dangerous journeys.

This heightened and hostile salience impacts public attitudes, which politicians and the media then capitalise off to gain support. This sets off a downward chicken-and-egg spiral of increasingly cruel policy to appease an increasingly concerned public. Cruel policies are seldom effective policies. For example, the refusal to tackle the backlog of hundreds of thousands of asylum application cases compromises safety and lives in order to keep a political football in play.

**KEY MOMENTS:**

- **2012** The Hostile Environment policy is introduced, negatively impacting the lives of migrants in the UK.
- **2015** A record high of attempted Channel crossings alongside media focus on the Jungle camp in Calais brings small boat crossings to national attention.
- **2018** The Windrush scandal breaks, exposing the unlawful detention, denial of rights and even deportation of British Caribbeans.
- **2021** Free movement for EU citizens ends following Brexit and the establishment of a settlement scheme in 2019.
- **2022** The Rwanda asylum scheme is introduced, intended to deter arrivals to the UK. The Court of Appeal rules it unlawful; this is upheld by the Supreme Court.
- **2023** The Illegal Migration Act is passed

**Ongoing impacts of Brexit**

Euroscepticism steadily increased during the 2000s. In 2013, Cameron delivered a speech where he promised a referendum on EU membership if the Conservatives won a majority at the 2015 General Election. The referendum took place on the 23rd June 2016, with Cameron resigning the following day when the result was confirmed to be 52% in favour of leaving. Almost four years after the referendum vote, and after an arduous negotiation process, the UK formally exited the EU on the 31st January 2020.

Separating the economic impacts of Brexit from the impacts of the pandemic is not simple, but broadly it is accepted that Brexit has reduced the long-term financial productivity of the UK, as Britain is yet to benefit from the dividend it was promised for its economy.<sup>4</sup> In areas with a higher proportion of EU workers, sectors such as

transport, hospitality and retail have struggled to replace staff who have emigrated. 2021 Census data suggests that as many as one million EU citizens in England and Wales may have left following the Brexit vote.<sup>5</sup> It remains to be seen what will come of proposed trade deals with other countries.

Beyond the exit process itself, the Brexit vote revealed social and political faultlines in the UK. Many saw the vote as a referendum on sovereignty. Others used it as a protest vote, to show politicians not to take the voting public for granted. Others were persuaded by divisive and alarmist rhetoric on immigration, fearing a loss of British identity. In the 2017 and 2019 elections, voters in many Leave-voting constituencies switched loyalties from Labour to the Conservatives, partially prompted by a craving for change and recognition.

## The British Far Right

The organised far right has changed significantly since 2011. The last 13 years have seen the total collapse of the British National Party (BNP), once the most successful far-right party of the postwar period; the rise and fall of UKIP, the influential radical right party; the disintegration of the English Defence League (EDL), once a major force in the international far-right scene, as well as its milder but larger successor, the Football Lads Alliance. Countless small but extreme groups have similarly arrived and departed, including the nazi terror group National Action. Perhaps most notable is the emergence of post-organisational far-right networks and, recently, the dramatic rise of Reform UK.

The most dramatic shift on the extreme far right is the total disintegration of the BNP in the years following the 2010 general election. Once the most significant electoral force on the far right, the party has all but vanished. Out of the ashes of the BNP, three notable organisations have since emerged. In 2011, the anti-Muslim party Britain First was launched by former BNP activist Paul Golding and while the organisation still exists to this day, it lacks any real influence.

More recently, in 2019, Patriotic Alternative was started by another former BNP figure, Mark Collett and, despite recent splits, has developed into the most active fascist group in the UK. The most extreme group to emerge from former BNP activists was National Action, founded by Benjamin Raymond and Alex Davies in 2013. This nazi terror organisation was subsequently proscribed in 2016.

Another major organisation to collapse in this period was the EDL which, following the departure of founder Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) in 2013, limped on for several years before essentially disappearing. Though no longer leader, Lennon remains the most prominent figurehead on the British far right and can now mobilise his followers on the streets to protest in numbers that would have been unthinkable at the height of the EDL.

While Lennon is the well known street activist on the far right, Nigel Farage has undoubtedly had the most profound impact. As leader of UKIP, he was instrumental in the party's success, which reached such levels that then Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron pledged a referendum on EU membership that ultimately led to Britain leaving the EU. Farage has since led the UKIP successor party, Reform UK, to unprecedented success at the 2024 general election, receiving 4.1 million votes and 14.3% of the total, which represents the largest ever vote share for a far-right party at a general election.



The election result, shocking as it was, was the product of an emergent radical right ecosystem in the UK. In recent years, we have seen a whole infrastructure developed to support and propel radical right politics, consisting of journalists, academics, think tanks and activists. In addition to helping lay the groundwork for Reform's growth, it has contributed to a radicalisation on the right of the Conservative Party. Failure to deliver on Brexit and immigration has also pushed people to find more extreme forms of representation.

Beyond traditional organisations, however, the near-ubiquitous use of social media has helped foster whole new forms of far-right activism. This includes new transnational networks such as the international alt-right, which coalesced behind Donald Trump's presidential campaign in 2016 and has had an enduring influence on modern far-right politics, especially online.

In addition to formal groups with organised internal structures, vast post-organisational networks act as a conduit for far-right politics. Thousands of individuals offer micro-donations of time and sometimes money to collaborate towards common political goals, outside of traditional organisational structures. These movements lack formal leaders but rather have figureheads, often drawn from a selection of far-right social media 'influencers'.

For most of the post-war period, 'getting active' required finding a party or campaign, joining, canvassing, knocking on doors, dishing out leaflets, attending meetings or marching at protests. Now, from the comfort and safety of their own homes, far-right activists can engage in politics by watching videos, visiting far right websites, networking on forums, speaking on chat services like Discord and Telegram, and trying to convert 'normies' on mainstream social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. The fact that this can all be done anonymously hugely lowers the social cost of activism.

## Trust in democracy and public life

The incoming coalition Government in 2010 promised to ‘clean up politics’ following the parliamentary expenses scandal in the face of an economic recession. Public anger and distrust prompted a large number of resignations, sackings, de-selections and retirement announcements together with public apologies and the repayment of expenses.

The Partygate scandal, where multiple parties and gatherings were held in Downing Street from 2020-2021 despite lockdown measures being in place in many parts of the UK, hugely dented public trust in politics. The lack of accountability and sensitivity shown by Boris Johnson and his government was galling for many. Johnson was also the subject of other scandals, including failure to disclose donations, a legal challenge due to his early prorogation of parliament and making a U-turn around the dismissal of MP Owen Paterson after he broke rules on paid advocacy.

The media has continued to play a key role in shaping social views and trust in democracy. The Leveson enquiry, which took place between 2011 and 2012, highlighted the need for greater press scrutiny and data protection. Politicians remain visible on media rounds, with clips also being shared on social media. Alternative news channels such as GB News (2021) and Talk TV (2022) have given right-wing voices a platform. Despite relatively low viewing figures, both channels have been criticised for stoking culture wars.

Attitudes to democratic rights and public life have shifted in the last 14 years. The murders of MPs Jo Cox and David Amess alongside social media attacks highlight the new risks of being in politics in the UK today. At the same time, governments have

challenged the balance of power: for example, Sunak pursuing the Rwanda deportation policy despite the Supreme Court ruling it unlawful and Johnson’s prorogation of parliament. Proposed changes to the democratic system, such as the 2011 AV referendum, have been rejected, but a growing voice is calling for democratic reform. Consecutive governments have also curbed the right to public protests, for example through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022).

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### KEY MOMENTS:

- **2011** A referendum proposal to switch from first-past-the-post voting to the alternative vote was rejected.
  - **2012** The Leveson report into UK press practice finds issues with intrusion, surveillance and irresponsible reporting.
  - **2016** Labour MP Jo Cox is murdered by far-right Thomas Mair.
  - **2019** Parliament is prorogued by Boris Johnson, prompting outrage and legal action.
  - **2019** The term “culture war” comes into mass public consciousness, describing the fault lines on which public opinion can be formed and polarised.
  - **2021** The Partygate scandal breaks, with the Mirror reporting on parties and gatherings taking place in Downing Street despite lockdown restrictions.
  - **2022** The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act enables the police to restrict protests in new ways, and sentence those who “cause public nuisance”.
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# 2 Defining community resilience

# What is community resilience?

Capitalising off the agenda set in the political mainstream, the far right have sought to refocus divisive discourse to local contexts in order to get a foothold within communities, often to worrying levels of success. Neighbourhood bonds have broken down, communities have become radicalised, and the far right have been able to push their own hateful agenda.

This summer, we saw the radical right fare well in the General Election. Despite only winning five seats, Nigel Farage and Reform UK came second in 98 other seats and took 14.3% of the popular vote – the third party by vote share. But why have they been so successful? The answer to this can be explored through the lens of community resilience.

Community resilience is the sustained ability of a community to use available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations or disruptive challenges, both natural and man-made, sudden or chronic. It is crucial for sustainable and thriving communities, as it allows for the adaptation and growth of a community during and after periods of hardship.

Resilience relies on three key characteristics.

- **Social connectedness.** When community members consider themselves a part of a greater whole, they participate in and feel valued by their community. This fosters a sense of togetherness, relatability, and connection that form the basis of informal safety nets and support networks that can be essential in a time of need or when formal mechanisms for support fail.
- **Resource availability.** A community with economic security and stability reduces overall vulnerability to the impacts of external stressors by providing a safety net through access to necessary public services that can act as a buffer against economic strain. Having enough additional resources to be able to scale up provision during and after times of hardship is crucial for mitigating and recovering from the negative impacts of adverse situations. This includes governmental, third sector and community resources.
- **Agency and empowerment.** Individuals within communities must have a motivation and confidence to actually share social connectedness and resources to tangibly build and deploy resilience during hardships, working towards self-sufficiency. Perceptions of community power and agency in decision-making are crucial here, as is, ultimately, how people feel about their role in shaping the wider community.

**Social connectedness**

**Community resilience**

**Agency and empowerment**

**Resource availability**



Photo: Londoncentric via wikipedia

Fourteen years of sustained stress across social, economic, political and cultural frontiers has weakened community resilience drastically; a result of a combination of poor Government policy on specific issues as well as a deprioritization of communities in general.

The culture wars pursued by the Conservative Party for political gain have eroded the social bonds that underpin our communities. Time and time again, we have seen communities pitted against each other: cis women against trans women, homeless veterans against people seeking asylum, Muslims against Jews. Unsurprisingly, 61% of respondents think there are increasing tensions between different groups in the UK.

Draconian cuts to public expenditure have eroded community ability to withstand external economic stresses brought on by the likes of the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine. This has culminated in the cost of living crisis we see today; over one third of our polling respondents identified as being either financially desperate or financially worried. Consistently unmet needs have hugely increased vulnerability to future economic shocks by eroding safety nets, as more and more people find themselves in economic precarity.

The centralisation of power and resources away from grassroots organisations has massively reduced agency, turning communities into passive recipients of services. Situated within a wider context of rock-bottom democratic satisfaction and weakened trust in public institutions, perceptions of problems being “too big to solve” and lacking political will to address issues has formed scepticism about the difference that individual or community action can make. Over two thirds of Britain feel unlistened to by those in positions of power, and want more power to influence and hold decision makers to account.

At its most basic level, the sense of solidarity or common struggle that would otherwise hold communities together during hardship has broken down. This provides fertile ground for the far right; where there is a lack of resilience, trigger events that put strain on a community can be exploited by divisive actors to spread hate and recruit supporters.

Broadly, the resentments and frustrations that people see in their own lives are easily exploited by the far right into blame, scapegoating and anger at a changing world. This can be easily misdirected towards other vulnerable groups: young Black men escalating crime, LGBTQ+ people threatening family values, or ethnic minorities wiping out British identity. Perceptions of scarcity and economic insecurity escalate this further, as people are turned against each other in a perceived competition for resources. Particularly where communities feel powerless and there is a perceived absence of political will to address issues, they look for alternative forms of representation that are proposing more extreme ‘solutions’.

Many are receptive to the simplistic narratives that the far right push as it allows them to see light at the end of the tunnel and a quick-fix solution to all their problems. Not only are these solutions unworkable and do absolutely nothing for the issues they claim to address, they actually worsen them. The far right do not care about communities or the issues they face, they only care about how they can exploit them to further their hateful agenda. By whipping up hate, the far right actually further erodes resilience, as community bonds continue to break down.

Without intervention, this sets the country in a dangerous direction, one where a complete breakdown of the community unit not only risks pushing individual households into increasingly isolated hardship, but also provides a vacuum of affinity, kinship and sense of wider purpose that the far right can exploit and fill.

# What's been tried before in community resilience?

Applying the idea of resilience to communities has long taken place in public health and environmental studies. More recently, resilience has been applied to community wellbeing more generally.

## Social Connectedness

Social connectedness and community cohesion has been notably missing from political agendas for a long time. A number of sporadically commissioned reviews and programmes completed over the last two decades have presented little more than missed opportunities for effective or streamlined work, as tangible implementations of their recommendations are notably missing. While there is some essential work happening across the country, there has been a failure to invest and institutionalise social connectedness and cohesion. As such, there is no strategic approach to address these issues.

### *Integrated Communities Action Plan*

The last major government strategy on cohesion was the 2019 Integrated Communities Action Plan<sup>9</sup> (ICAP) devised under Sajid Javid in his time as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. This strategy, along with the Integrated Area Programme (IAP),<sup>10</sup> was an important moment in terms of framing the issue. Whilst it focused narrowly on immigration rather than addressing cohesion more broadly, it was still considered an improvement following the widespread disappointment in The Casey Review in 2016. Whilst spotlighting the Government's failure to consider cohesion, Casey failed to frame it as a "two way street", instead claiming it was a mistake to make significant effort to accommodate people "coming in from the outside" and that the onus of change should mostly be on immigrants themselves.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of this work has been difficult to fully assess due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However some evidence collected suggests a positive while limited impact of the investment made, particularly where action plans were locally led, with a reciprocal exchange of ideas and feedback between councils and communities. Once the projects ended, positive impacts being monitored began to dissipate, and as this work was not a government priority it was shelved once Javid moved on. The success of the ICAP and IAP has demonstrated the need for cohesion strategies and projects to be long term.

### *The Khan Review: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience*

Sara Khan's 2024 review, *Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience*,<sup>12</sup> builds on and strengthens the ICAP and IAP even further. Crucially, it differentiates between 'integration' and 'cohesion': whilst the former puts the onus on newcomers to 'join' and contribute to a community, cohesion more holistically describes the importance of the host communities' environment to facilitate this process. Additionally, it emphasises the need for cohesion measures to be a long term and cross-departmental government priority, guided by an overarching strategy but locally crafted and delivered.

Importantly, the review also expanded the focus of social cohesion beyond racial or religious lines to a broader, more holistic definition that we also employ throughout this report. The review highlights the other fault lines upon which relations can break down, such as political affiliations, protected characteristics, class and the holding of certain beliefs and opinions. Similarly, they also consider tensions at an intra-racial and intra-religious minority level; a growing source of cohesion tension across the UK. Despite this progressive understanding of cohesion, there has been little to no evidence of the recommendations being actioned.

## Resource availability

Councils play a crucial role in communities' access to resources, as they are at the heart of local public service delivery and economic development. This is crucial for resilience in terms of forming a safety net that protects during economic strain, but also contributes to local placemaking, which is crucial for social connectedness.

However, this importance unfortunately comes into conflict with the economic reality of the funding landscape for local councils.

### *Funding boosts*

The COVID pandemic greatly accentuated understanding of the importance of well-funded councils and local services. Central Government boosted local financing, providing approximately £9.7 billion in additional funding in 2020–21, alongside a further £3.5 billion in specific COVID-related

## Assimilation, integration and cohesion: What's the difference?

**Assimilation:** Assimilation requires newcomers into a society to conform to the host country's pre-existing identity. Immigrants adopt the culture of a host country and reject their own heritage or culture. This approach has been widely critiqued for the colonial power dynamics associated with the resulting loss of culture and history, and the negative psychological effects it can also have on immigrants.

**Integration:** Integration involves newcomers adopting certain aspects of the host country's culture, whilst preserving elements of their own. The overarching aim is to maintain aspects of individual cultural identities, but also create common cultural values and customs. Whilst the preservation of immigrant culture is often applauded as an improvement on the assimilation approach, integration has been critiqued for conceptualising cultural coexistence as a 'one-way street'. Crucially, it puts an onus on newcomers to adapt to the host country's culture and overlooks the role that the host country should also play in welcoming them.

**Cohesion:** Cohesion defines cultural coexistence as a two-way street, with responsibilities placed on both immigrants and those already in the host country. Like integration, it allows for immigrants to maintain their cultural identity, whilst adopting certain values and customs that create a shared identity. However, it identifies cultural coexistence as a collaborative process, one where host communities also have responsibilities to respond to, adapt to and accommodate newcomers to create an environment that is welcoming, tolerant and not only upholds, but celebrates, cultural difference.



funding. The impacts of this in the short term were largely successful; despite the huge challenges, many councils' financial positions generally improved over this period.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite these funds being topped up several times since the pandemic and in the face of high inflation, council spending has fast outpaced funding in both 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Increases in funding have been absorbed by rising demands and costs for key services, and overall economy-wide inflation. As a result, providing real-terms funding boosts for councils remains challenging and Starmer has already hinted at a "painful" autumn budget, despite his promises to not introduce "austerity 2.0". Unless demand and cost pressures drastically reduce, the number of councils finding themselves under severe economic strain will almost certainly increase.

### *Local government finance reform*

Whilst the 2010s saw significant cuts to many areas of public spending following the 2008 financial crisis, it also saw major reforms of the local government finance system. This was based around decentralisation, giving councils stronger financial incentives to boost local socio-economic performance and grow their economies. Recognising that the effort to provide stronger financial incentives to councils should be supported by updated and flexible spending needs assessments, the Government announced a 'Fair Funding Review'<sup>14</sup> in 2016, with the aim of implementing funding reforms in April 2019. While imperfect, the set of reforms the Government had planned would have led to a more rational, less arbitrary system of local government funding. Implementation dates were unfortunately pushed back and then postponed due to COVID.

Attempts to save council financing with short term boosts of funding will only become increasingly futile, particularly in the context of high inflation, increased demand and cost, and an overall challenging economic landscape.

Unfortunately, the most recent indications for the October budget suggest Labour's economic approach will resemble Conservative austerity-style 'book balancing' rather than longer term structural reforms. However, Labour have committed to restarting work into reforming local government finance systems, suggesting a recognition of the need for more structural changes.

## Agency and empowerment

Empowerment is frequently part of a broader strategy to engage local communities at the neighbourhood level through devolution, decentralisation, and localism. However, rather than empowering communities, strategies have often ended up reinforcing the power base of the controlling institutions with only marginal gains at the local level.

### *State-led empowerment*

State-led empowerment denotes area-based initiatives that are heavily influenced and funded by the central government, but where delivery is managed at the local level.

Although providing opportunities to access much-needed funding, these programmes are largely considered ineffective both for community improvement and empowerment. Local nuance is absorbed by overarching government guidelines, consequently often overlooking key localised blockers to community betterment. Additionally, genuine local agency is stifled by the continued centralisation of power and decision-making.

The 2018 Civil Society Strategy<sup>15</sup> recognised that despite clear objectives and substantial funding, previous attempts to ‘regenerate’ local places had underachieved because well-meaning schemes were imposed top-down, and therefore lacked both local nuance and legitimacy. They created short-term opportunities for community empowerment but in relatively ‘closed spaces’ defined by government objectives, with little opportunity for the power they provided to spill over into broader forms of community agency. Structural and legislative changes were subsequently made to further decentralise power, for example the introduction of elected local mayors further enhanced local direction, control and accountability of these projects.

### *State-enabled and self-help empowerment*

State-enabled empowerment covers initiatives where permissive legislation allows the establishment of local decision-making bodies to facilitate a true devolution of power from the national to the local.

Participatory democracy has also been an important focus of devolution, ensuring citizens are able to engage in community decision-making. Focus on building their capacity was heavily promoted by the 2010 Coalition Government, their “Big Society” portrayed as an alternative to Labour’s “Big Government”, designed to “empower communities to come together to address local issues”.<sup>16</sup> The Coalition passed the Localism Act in 2010,<sup>17</sup> which introduced new powers to enable neighbourhood development planning and establish neighbourhood forums. These forums have no statutory powers but have the opportunity to take ownership of

community assets, co-produce neighbourhood plans, and co-deliver community services.

In 2019, the Government funded and launched the Innovation in Democracy programme<sup>18</sup> to pilot new approaches to participatory and deliberative democracy, predominantly through citizens’ assemblies and associated methods. Largely, the assemblies had positive impacts on empowerment for all involved,<sup>19</sup> and produced several practical recommendations for local authorities.

Despite their potential, with no clear funding streams and a sparse economic landscape, the outcomes of state-enabled empowerment programmes will be limited. Community forums depend heavily on volunteers, similarly many local councils simply do not have the capacity to properly support co-production processes. Opening up new spaces with true transformational potential for empowerment requires time and resources, neither of which are readily available. As a result, communities are given a ‘voice’ but relatively little empowerment.

## Community resilience

### *Levelling Up agenda*

Whilst there have been various attempts at addressing the aspects of community resilience separately, the Levelling Up agenda was arguably the first attempt at creating an integrated strategy that claimed to address them all simultaneously. Explicitly linking economic opportunity and productivity with community empowerment and cohesion, it was an opportunity to holistically rebuild communities that had been ‘left behind’.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, since its implementation, the programme of work has been faced with multiple issues. Crucially, with a funding pot too small to transform regional inequalities alone, the most exciting opportunities lay in the possibility of reforming local spending. However, there was an inherent inconsistency between a local leadership that allows for nuance and flexibility and Whitehall’s desire to oversee all aspects of spending. This resulted in incredibly rigid and centralised budget allocations, for which councils had to bid against each other, with complex and shifting sets of criteria. An analysis last year by The Guardian found Conservative seats had been awarded significantly more money per capita than areas with similar levels of deprivation.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, only 10% of the allocated £10bn budget has been spent by councils, and often not in the places most in need. The Public Accounts Committee also found that barely any of the 71 “shovel-ready” projects due to be completed in March 2024 month were on track.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the Levelling Up agenda is now widely regarded as not just a missed opportunity, but a

sabotaged opportunity. Ultimately there was a failure to recognise the need for wider systems change, particularly when it came to devolving power and spending. This has not only wasted the Levelling Up opportunities, but also soured relationships between central and local governments, the latter of which feel let down by the big promises made when the agenda was introduced.

#### *National Resilience Framework and Resilience Directorate*

Overseen by the Cabinet Office, the National Resilience Framework seeks to strengthen the UK's resilience in order to “better prevent, mitigate, respond to and recover from the risks facing the nation”. It does so by considering “the chronic vulnerabilities and challenges that arise from the geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts, systemic competition, rapid technological change and transnational challenges such as climate change, health risks and state threats that define contemporary crises”.

Whilst theoretically a framework and a space in which to address resilience challenges and vulnerability to far-right agitation, local contingency planning undertaken by Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) tend to focus only on risks identified through the National Security Risk Assessment (NRSA). Crucially, the threshold for risks included in the NRSA must have a substantial impact on the UK's safety and/or critical systems at a national level. This includes the most large-scale disorders that would significantly impact the emergency services. The vast majority of far-right instigated disorders, however, would not reach this threshold. As a result, community resilience as it pertains to far-right agitation is not a focus of the LRFs.

## **What next?**

Whilst viewing the problem that communities face through the lens of community resilience is a fairly novel framework and hasn't been holistically addressed beyond the failed Levelling Up agenda, ultimately when it comes to practical implementation we are not really reinventing the wheel. There have been numerous instances of work towards the individual components of community resilience and, as this section has laid out, lots of learnings and best practice assessments from this that mistakenly have not been used to progress work in this area.

The successes of the Integrated Areas programme demonstrates the opportunities that co-creating local, place based identities brings for cultivating and strengthening social connectedness, particularly when communities themselves are closely involved in these processes. Efforts to improve local resource availability must go beyond short term funding boosts, and commit to reforming and restructuring local Government funding mechanisms in a way that

prioritises rational resource allocation and security. State-enabled, self-help programmes that set up and encourage engagement with participatory and deliberative democracy processes are a key area for developing agency and empowerment at a local level.

Whilst there is undoubtedly a lot to be done and we are in no way diminishing the scale of work that will be required, this is not a piece of work that has to be started from scratch. We know what works and what needs to be done - we just need political will and leadership to implement it.

# **3 Community resilience: the new faultlines**



# The 2024 General Election

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called a surprise summer election on the 22nd May, after months of speculation as to when it would be. On the 4th July, the UK went to the polls.

Labour's landslide of 412 seats indicated the British public's desire for change: many Conservative MPs lost what had previously been considered safe seats. Beyond merely losing, many Conservative candidates came third or even lower in individual constituencies.

The election results demonstrate a genuine frustration with the current political climate, with smaller parties cutting through to voters on issues like immigration, conflict in the Middle East and the climate crisis. Reform UK were second in 98 seats and the Green Party in 40 seats.

Despite only winning five seats, Reform UK took 14.3% of the popular vote – the third party by vote share. The scale of this vote, primarily a protest around immigration, sovereignty and Britishness, confirms how susceptible voters are to divisive narratives which capitalise on existing fears without offering a genuine political solution.

With only 59.9% of eligible voters casting a vote, the turnout rate in the election was the lowest it has been since 2001. With younger, more deprived<sup>23</sup> and outside-of-London eligible voters less likely to participate, the elected government is not as representative of the nation as it could be.

Two key themes emerged from the election that relate to community resilience: migration and democratic satisfaction. Reform and the Conservatives broadly entered into a race to the bottom on immigration, and the Liberal Democrats, Greens and Labour all highlighted plans for democratic reform in their manifestos, including votes for 16-year-olds.

However, one theme that was conspicuously missing from political conversations, manifestoes and policies was multiculturalism and social connectedness. This is an area that HOPE not hate have identified as a key challenge over the coming years: without government intervention, communities across the UK will be ill-equipped to respond to flashpoints that risk escalating tensions.

The new government has launched straight into action, making big changes such as scrapping the Rwanda plan and pay rises for junior doctors and



Credit: Hullian111 via Wikimedia Commons

teachers who have been on strike. However, the road to change will not be easy, and the situation Labour has inherited does not help: overcrowded prisons, long NHS waiting lists and struggling transport infrastructure are just a few of the challenges Starmer and his government face.

Most recently, the rioting following the tragic attack on a children's summer holiday dance class in Southport has posed a significant challenge to the new government. Sooner than expected, the risks of prioritising community cohesion as a key issue have become starkly apparent to the new Government, as has the urgency of confronting divisions and building resilience.

# The August 2024 riots: a watershed moment

Following a horrific attack in Southport, Merseyside in which three young girls were murdered and many were injured, heightened emotions and grief were exploited. Rioting broke out across the UK in early August 2024, expedited by the rapid spread of mis- and disinformation about the attack.

High profile far-right figures and people engaging on social media were quick to create, amplify and spread rumours about the attacker being a Muslim, ‘illegal’ migrant who had arrived on a small boat a year ago.

Tommy Robinson posted a seven minute long video onto X with the caption: “There’s more evidence to suggest Islam is a mental health issue rather than a religion of peace”. In this video he recklessly told his 800,000 followers: “They’re replacing the British nation with hostile, violent, aggressive migrants ... Your children don’t matter to [the Labour government]”.

Newly elected Reform UK Member of Parliament Nigel Farage further stoked the flames by taking to X and asking “whether the truth is being withheld” about the identity and terror-status of the incident, further fuelling speculations that this was an Islamist attack.

None of these malicious rumours were true. These narratives were being spread to justify pre-existing hostility towards these groups and to continue and escalate the targeting of these communities across the UK. Even after the police released information about the identity of the attacker with the explicit aim to “remove some of the misreporting” around it, misinformation continued to spread, and riots continued to be organised.

In some locations protests took place peacefully, despite being fuelled by hateful attitudes. In other places vehicles were set alight, shops were opportunistically looted and people were harmed. In Southport, rioters attacked a mosque, pelting it with bricks. In Rotherham and Tamworth, they tried to barricade and set fire to hotels with people who had sought asylum still inside them. Individual hate crimes were perpetrated against Muslims, immigrants, people seeking asylum, and people of colour in towns and cities all over the country.

The 17-year-old Axel Mukanwa Rudakubana has since been charged with three counts of murder and ten counts of attempted murder, and many more people have been charged and sentenced with crimes associated with taking part in the riots.



## A challenge to resilience?

The Southport riots have exposed the sheer volume of people across the UK who not only hold racist, anti-migrant and anti-Muslim views, but are also willing to act on them, given the opportunity. People went beyond legitimate forms of legal protest and freedom expression to incite violence and even encourage acts of terror. For example, one message listed a number of immigration services and called for them to be attacked and even burned down.

The speed with which misinformation and disinformation was spread and how quickly people were willing to believe it is deeply concerning. It illustrates the volatility of community relations, and the high levels of vulnerability that many communities have to far-right agitation.

The scale of the riots is a confounding factor for those looking to explain community-based far-right activity in the UK as the result of economic, social and political marginalisation. To claim that people were encouraging or attempting to harm or kill others because they did not receive enough economic or educational opportunities feels simplistic and even insulting.

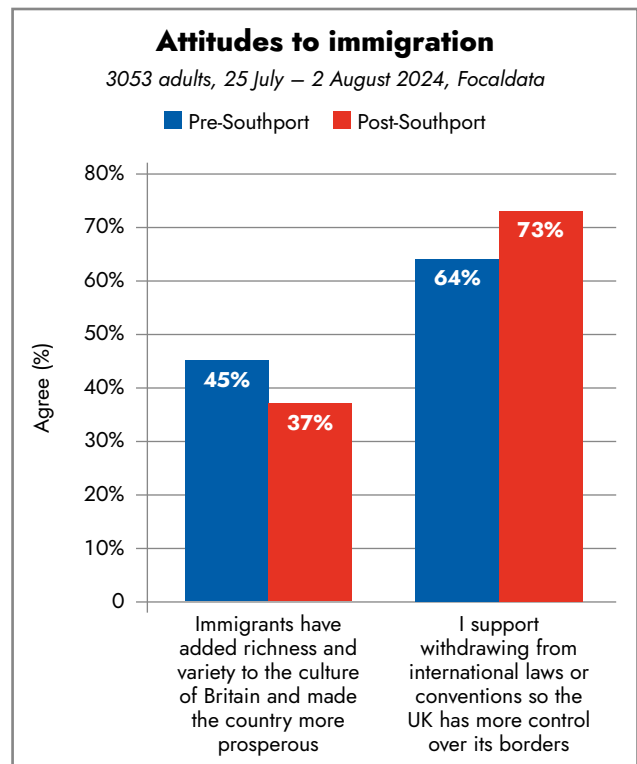
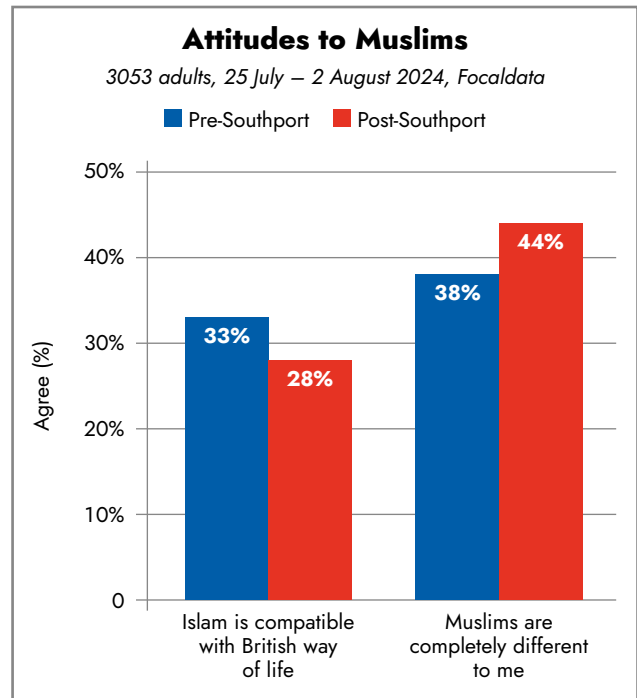
Rioters demonstrated the depth of their racist, Islamophobic and xenophobic convictions in a way that cannot be totally explained away by “legitimate concerns” about immigration, as many who took part in or incited violence have tried to do. But many working class people who are struggling with the cost of living not only refrained from taking part in violence, but even took part in counter demonstrations or community-based rebuilding activities to support those who were being targeted by hate.

## How have public attitudes changed?

Although we are yet to see the full fallout from the riots and subsequent arrests, there are already indications that the rioting has affected people’s views towards Islam, immigration and multiculturalism.

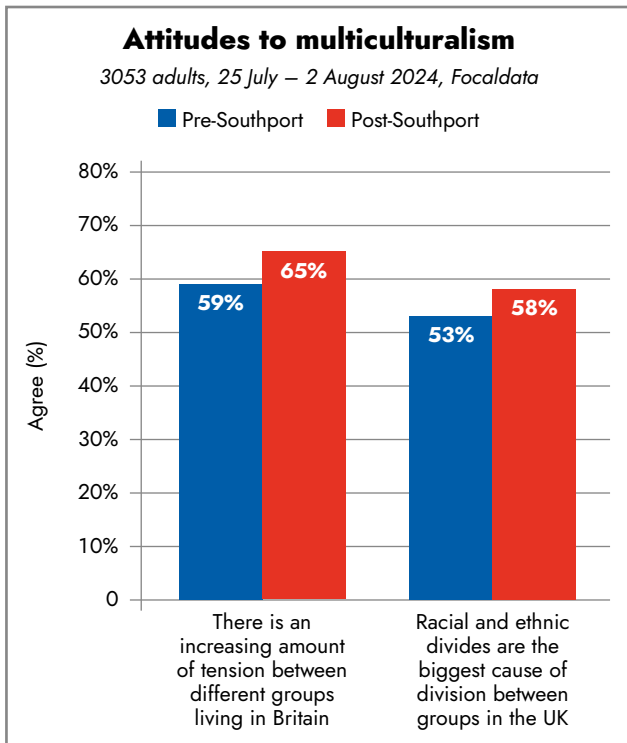
Our polling was coincidentally in the field between the 25th July and 2nd August 2024, split across the first outbreak of violence in Southport on the 29th July. This created two sets of results: a pre-Southport set (25 July – 29 July 2024, 2213 people) and a post-Southport set (30 July to 2 August, 840 people). Significance testing was then undertaken to identify statistically significant differences. All results reported below achieved a 95% confidence rate of statistical significance.

We found that attitudes to Muslims and immigration got slightly worse after the 29th July, with a 5% decrease in those who think Islam is compatible with a British way of life, down from 33% to 28%.



Similarly, the number of people who view Muslims as having ‘completely different’ values to them has increased by 6%, from 38% to 44%.

Those who agree that immigrants have added richness and variety to the culture of Britain and have made the country more prosperous decreased from 45% to 37%. Most strikingly, support for hostile immigration policy increased by 9%, with 73% in the post-Southport data set being in favour of ignoring or withdrawing from international laws or



group of people exploiting trigger events to pursue their hateful agenda and increase division. Whilst the violence from this particular event has dissipated, it leaves the question of what the next trigger event will be that sparks the next bout of violence that further divides communities.

conventions so that the UK has more control of its borders.

Even in the period immediately after the violence first started, people appear to recognise the impact the riots were having on the UK in real time. Two thirds (65%) of the country now identify growing tensions between different groups of those living in Britain, a 6% increase from the pre-Southport set. Additionally, over half (58%) of the population see racial and ethnic divides as the biggest cause of division in the UK, an increase of 5% following the events in Southport.

### Where do we go from here?

The riots must be a sobering wake up call for the Government regarding the state of community resilience today.

What should have been a period of mourning for the country became hijacked by violent displays of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hatred. What is particularly worrying is the speed with which this shift occurred. Even after the police released the identity of the attacker with the explicit aim to “remove some of the misreporting” around it, misinformation continued to spread, and riots continued to be organised. This signals the sheer volatility around issues related to multiculturalism, and how depleted community resilience reserves are.

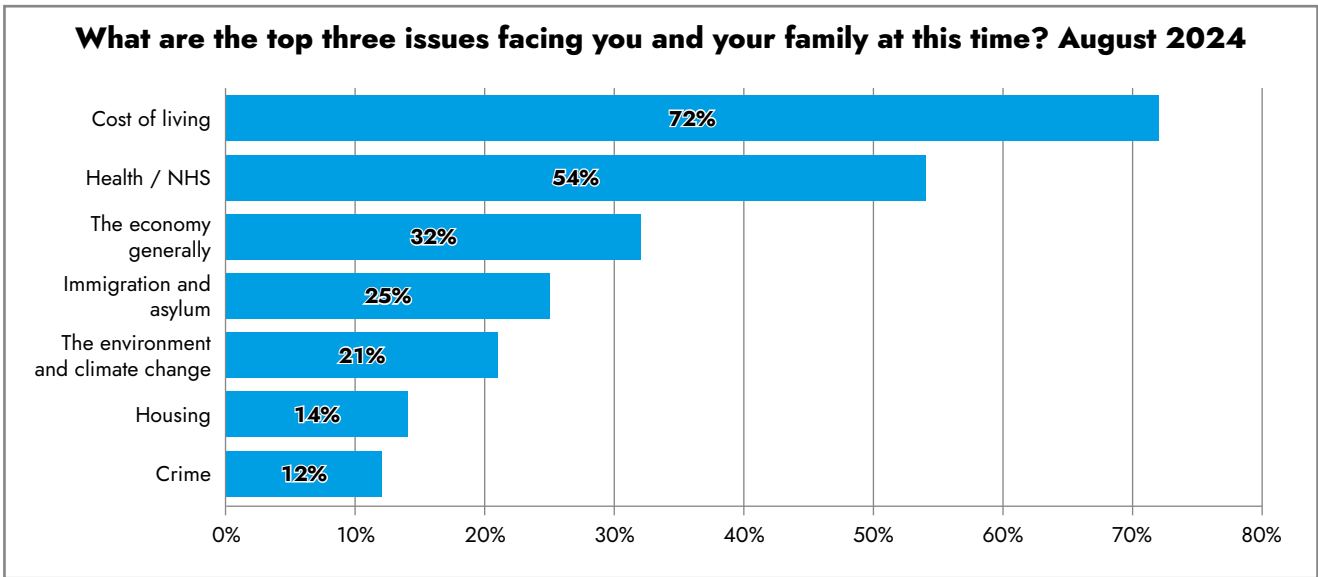
Crucially, the people who antagonised around the Southport murders were the same people who antagonised around the disorder in Harehill, Leeds in July 2024, around the conflict in Israel and Palestine since October 2023, and beyond. We see the same

External events out of the Government’s control that increase tensions between different groups are inevitably going to occur, but the Government plays an important role in encouraging communities to reach towards each other during these times of strain, not push each other further away. Building up resilience through social connectedness, economic security and empowerment would hugely lower the likelihood of volatility around trigger events because communities will feel more confident rejecting far-right antagonism and hatred more broadly.

The Government’s tough law and order response to the riots does not address the full issue at hand. Communities are still vulnerable to far-right inflammation around the next trigger event. Intense restorative work to address the fallout on community relations is needed to build resilience to any future agitation, and the Community Recovery Fund announced by the MHLCG will help local authorities to do so.<sup>24</sup>

However, this restorative work must go alongside deeper thinking about what led people not only to believe racist and Islamophobic misinformation and disinformation, but to then actually take this to the streets and participate in violent disorder. The social cost of participating in the far right has never been lower, with many engaging online unbeknownst to their loved ones or places of work. Many of those who left their homes to riot in August 2024 did so for the first time, identifying themselves as people willing to publicly represent those points of view. Understanding the relationship between street activism and the wider organised far right, online and offline, is crucial here.

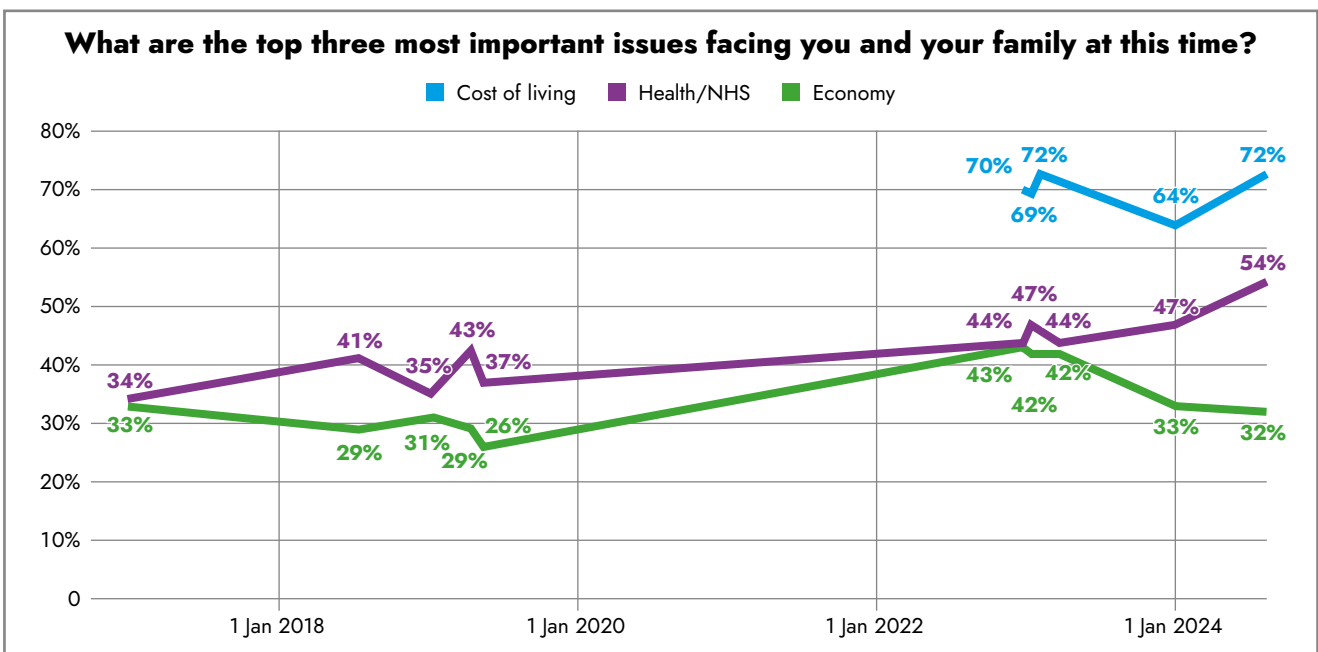
# The cost of living crisis

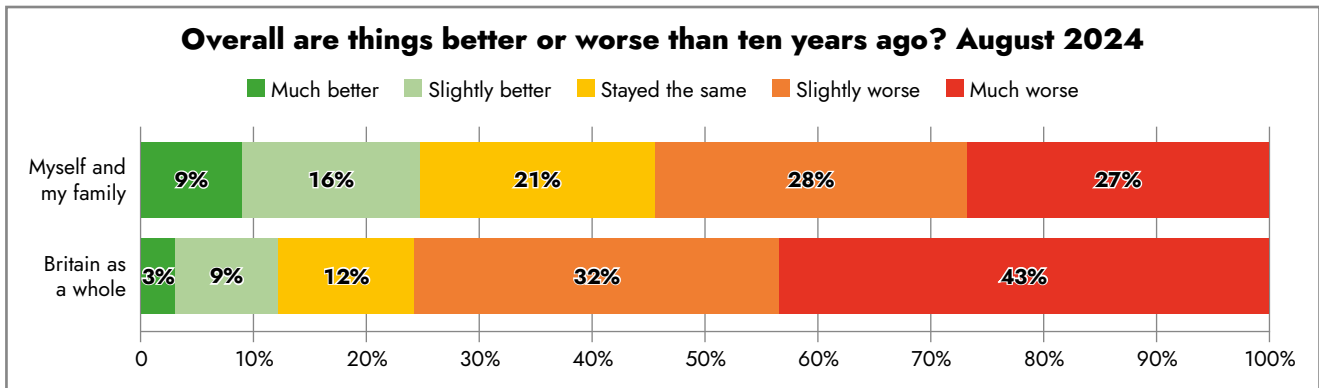


Despite Nigel Farage’s best efforts to make the 2024 election “the immigration election”, in reality the primary focus for the majority of people was around economic measures to ease financial hardship. The cost of living remains the biggest issue facing people and their families today, with almost three quarters of all respondents in our poll choosing it as one of their top three issues.

Cost of living, health and the economy have dominated the top three list since cost of living was introduced into our polling. With 22% of people in the UK living in poverty in 2024 and poverty deepening for 6 million people,<sup>25</sup> it is easy to see why these issues are of concern.

Alongside poverty and financial difficulties often





come narratives of scarcity. These narratives generate fear, panic, dejection and even suspicion by making people feel that there is not enough to go round and there is competition between those trying to access resources. The metaphorical language of austerity, which simplifies economic policy with its finite framing of buckets and maxed-out credit cards, contributes to this. Although this language is strongly associated with the Conservative party’s austerity agenda, both Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves have hinted at similar budgetary constraints using similar language.

These scarcity narratives have profound ramifications for how people view social relations. Fear can lead people to be more accepting of divisive narratives which portray other groups as competition. The far right can exploit this to guide resentment and suspicion towards certain communities – most often Muslims and people seeking asylum, as well as migrants and racialised people more generally.

In our 2018 *Fear, Hope and Loss* report we found that the places with the greatest anxiety around immigration and multiculturalism are also those where experiences of deprivation and industrial decline have been most acute. When we mapped our six “tribes” onto the 2015 index of multiple deprivation, we found that the Active Enmity tribe was concentrated in the most income deprived areas of the country, whereas the more liberal tribes were distributed across the areas with less income deprivation. The most illustrative factor was employment – those in the Active Enmity and Latent Hostile groups were far more likely to be out of work, but there was also a correlation between Active Enmity and low income, education and skills, health deprivation and disability.

In our 2024 dataset, we find that people who rent from the council or local authority or earn below the median national income are more likely to believe that immigration has been bad for Britain. Similarly, those who have been afforded fewer educational opportunities are also more likely to have negative views on immigration. These characteristics are overrepresented in our Nativists and Islamosceptics segments.

Experiences of financial security also play into attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism. 36% of those who describe themselves as financially desperate agree that immigrants have put their job at risk, twice as many as the 18% of those who feel well-off. Similarly, 49% of people self-describing as financially desperate feel that having a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures has undermined British culture, compared to 38% of those who feel well off.

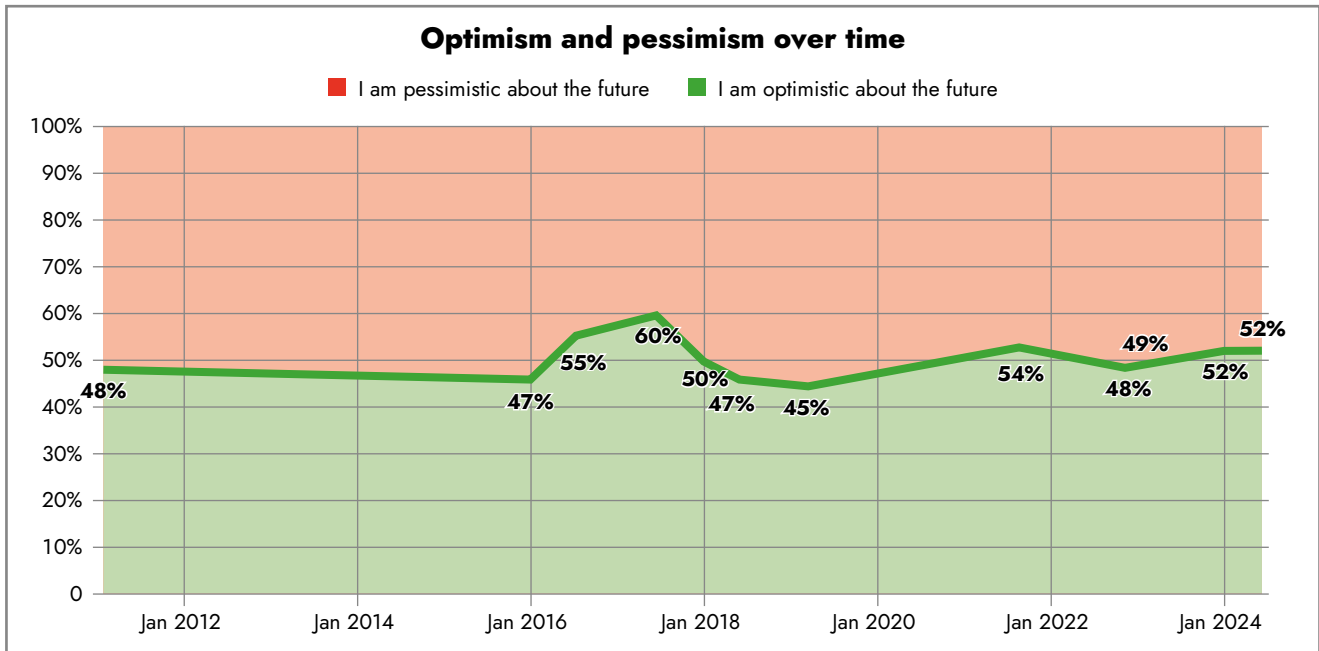
Those who feel financially desperate or worried are more likely to agree that people who are struggling have a right to seek help from the government, whereas 57% of those who feel comfortable and 53% of those who feel well off believe that government benefits are too readily available to people who have never contributed. “Benefits scrounger” narratives had died down since their peak in 2013-2016, but conversations around welfare reform and fitness to work have reignited them.

This ties in with our segmentation findings: although there are people across income levels who hold negative beliefs about immigration and multiculturalism, there is a strong correlation between our most hostile segment, the Nativists, and experience of economic deprivation. Similarly, analysis by the Financial Times found that 12 out of the 23 local authorities where violence erupted are in the top decile for deprivation.<sup>26</sup>

This is also not to say that these hateful attitudes are contained within lower social classes, or that these findings should be used to demonise them. Indeed, some of the most hateful actors we have seen spreading divisive scarcity narratives have been highly educated, high-earning homeowners with positions of power across politics, the mainstream media, and social media platforms.

One way to address scarcity-informed prejudice is to tackle scarcity itself. Experiences of education, housing, employment and cost of living are all contributing to people’s attitudes towards immigration, multiculturalism and social cohesion. Building up resilience to divisive narratives by reducing feelings of insecurity and competition reduces the power and impact of far-right scapegoating.

# Optimism and pessimism



From 2011 to 2016, pessimism became an increasingly minority view as optimism increased across the board as economic recovery following the 2008 financial crash restored a sense of greater security and contentment. The results of the EU referendum then had a large impact on how people felt about the future, and showed just how divisive and volatile the referendum result and Brexit process was: despite an initial increase in optimism immediately post Brexit, this began to fall noticeably within 6 months.

A bigger shift towards optimism from 2019-2021 could reflect the loosening of COVID-19 related restrictions after the vaccine was developed and rolled out, alongside general gratitude for life. Another slight drop in 2022 could reflect continuing economic hardship with heating bills and mortgage rates rising, following the start of the war in Ukraine in February and the Truss/Kwarteng Mini Budget in September. Broadly, however, when it comes to how people view life in post-pandemic Britain it appears that optimism is stabilising.

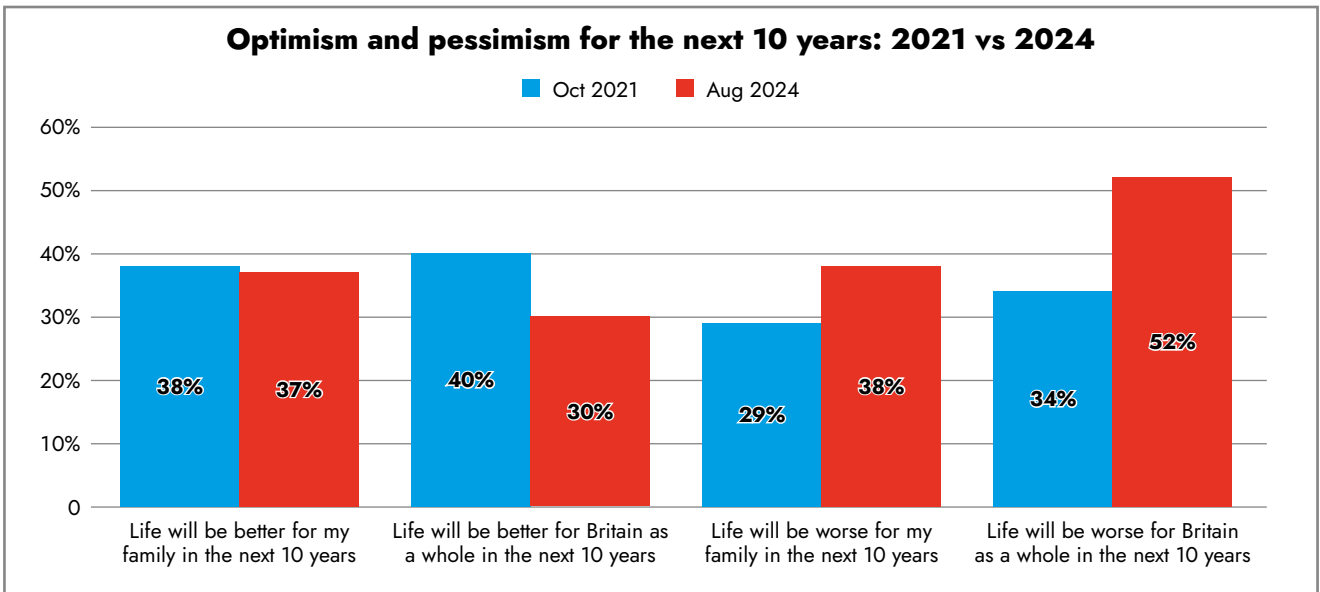
Despite this, when people are asked about real life situations rather than feeling optimistic or pessimistic, people tend to lean towards thinking things will be worse in the future. There is widespread negativity when they think about life over the next ten years, especially when it comes

to the state of the nation. Half of 2024 respondents think that life will be worse for Britain as a whole in ten years' time, compared to a third in 2021. 38% also think things will be worse for themselves and their families, compared to 29% in 2021.

This is mirrored in how people compare the present day to ten years ago: 54% of people think things are worse for themselves and their families in 2024 compared to ten years ago, whilst 75% think things are worse for Britain as a whole. The sense that the nation and quality of life are in decline contributes to a state of pessimism about the future.

In the 2024 data, there is a clear correlation between optimism and experience of financial hardship, which is not surprising given the ongoing cost of living crisis. This is compounded by “cheapflation”, where cheaper consumer goods experience the sharpest price increases. With prices unlikely to return to normal levels, people need to see tangible wage growth to feel more certainty. For those who have become unemployed, or are precariously employed, faced rent or mortgage increases or taken on debt, the future still looks uncertain.

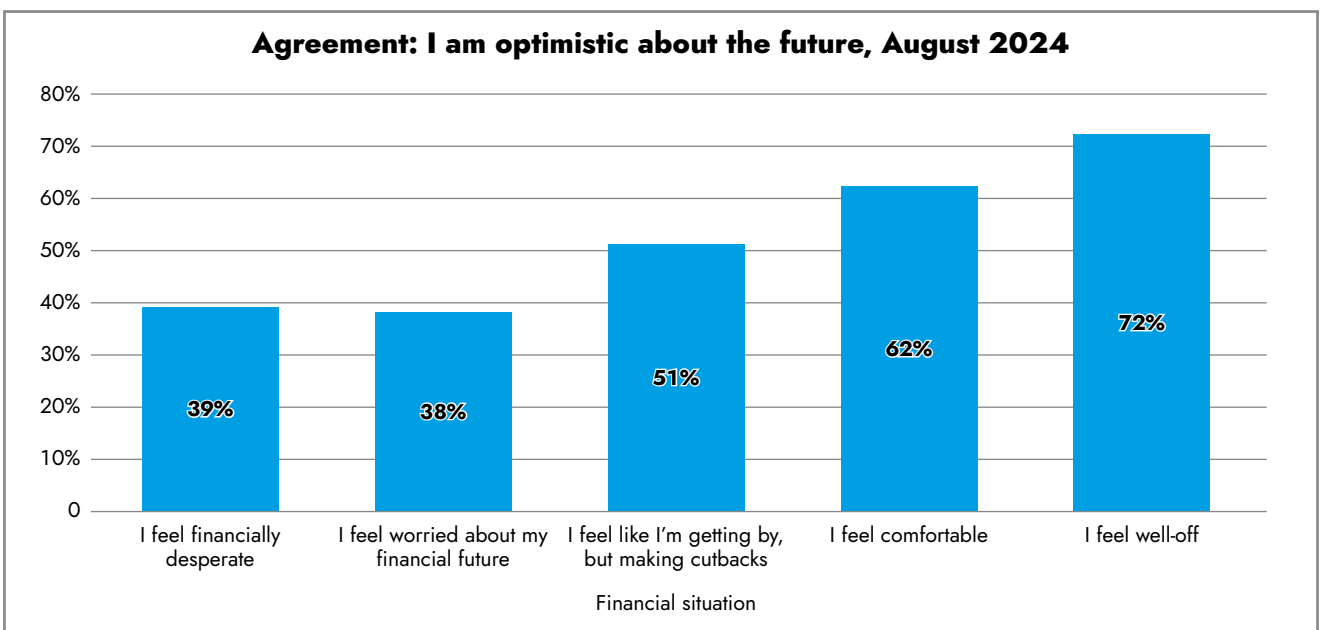
As in previous years, pessimism is a defining factor in our segmentation, meaning it is a metric through which we can separate people's attitudes. However, as we will go on to explore, pessimism and political



distrust do not directly correlate with having negative views about migration and multiculturalism in the same way that it did in 2011.

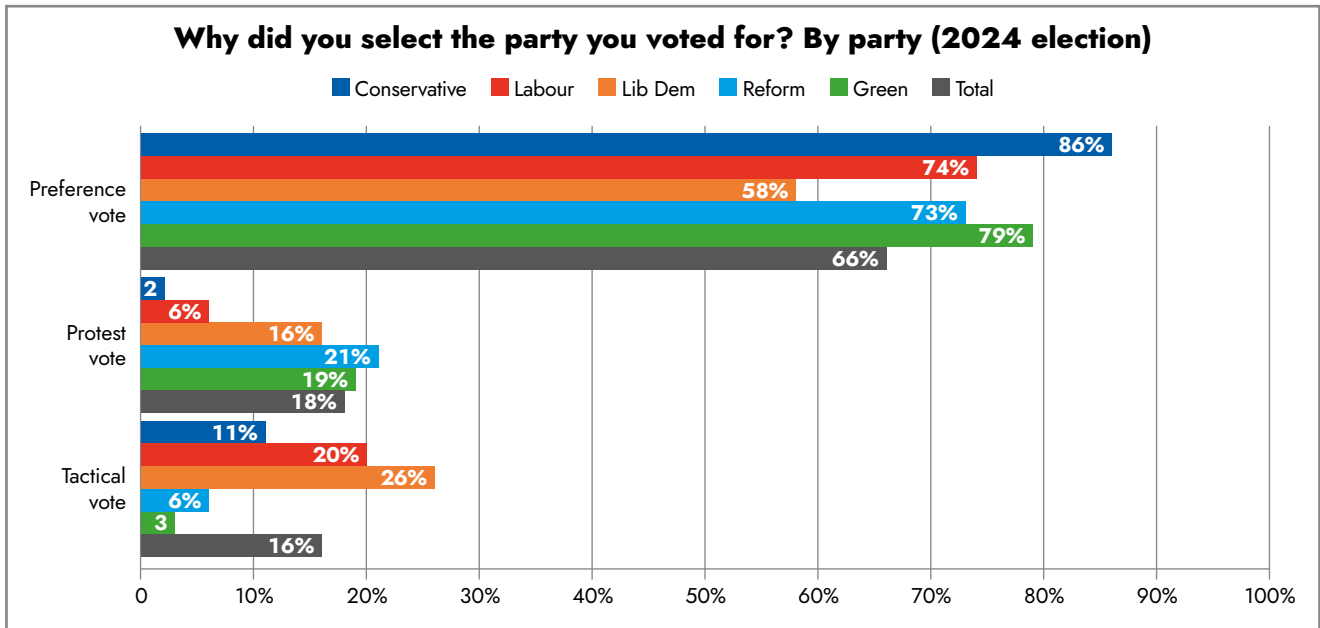
The two most hostile segments, the Nativists and the Islamosceptics, both have extremely high levels of pessimism and distrust in politics. Perhaps surprisingly, one of the less hostile segments - the Hyper-progressives - also has incredibly low trust. That members of this group are more likely to be younger, female and of an ethnic minority

background shows how pessimism is being felt across demographic groups. For all three segments, their disenfranchisement is reflected in low voting turnout rates: 54% for the Hyper-progressives, 48% for the Nativists and 45% for the Islamosceptics. This all suggests that satisfaction with democracy is closely linked with feelings of optimism: people need to see their lives improve in order to feel that their vote is important.





# Democratic satisfaction



Only 60% of registered voters - translating to only 52.8% of the voting age population<sup>27</sup> - cast a vote in the July 2024 General Election, a low turnout with a sharp drop of 7% from 2019. There are many reasons why this might be the case, including new rules on voter ID and the number of undecided voters.

Our polling shows that of those who cast a vote in the 2024 General Election, around a third did so tactically or in protest, to prevent another party from winning the seat or to express dissatisfaction with their “usual” party. A bill for democratic reform is not on the roster for the first year of government, and some argue it would not even be in plans for a first term. However, calls for lowering the voting age to 16, proportional representation and more thrum in the background as Labour have formed a government with only a third of the overall vote.

Voting in a general election is just a small part of participating in democracy, and satisfaction with politics as a whole is low: from our 2024 sample, 66% of people think that the political system is broken and 59% agree that the British Government is rigged to serve the rich and influential. Access to power, integrity and standards of public institutions, right to protest, strength of the judicial system and independent regulation are all issues that pertain to democratic satisfaction.

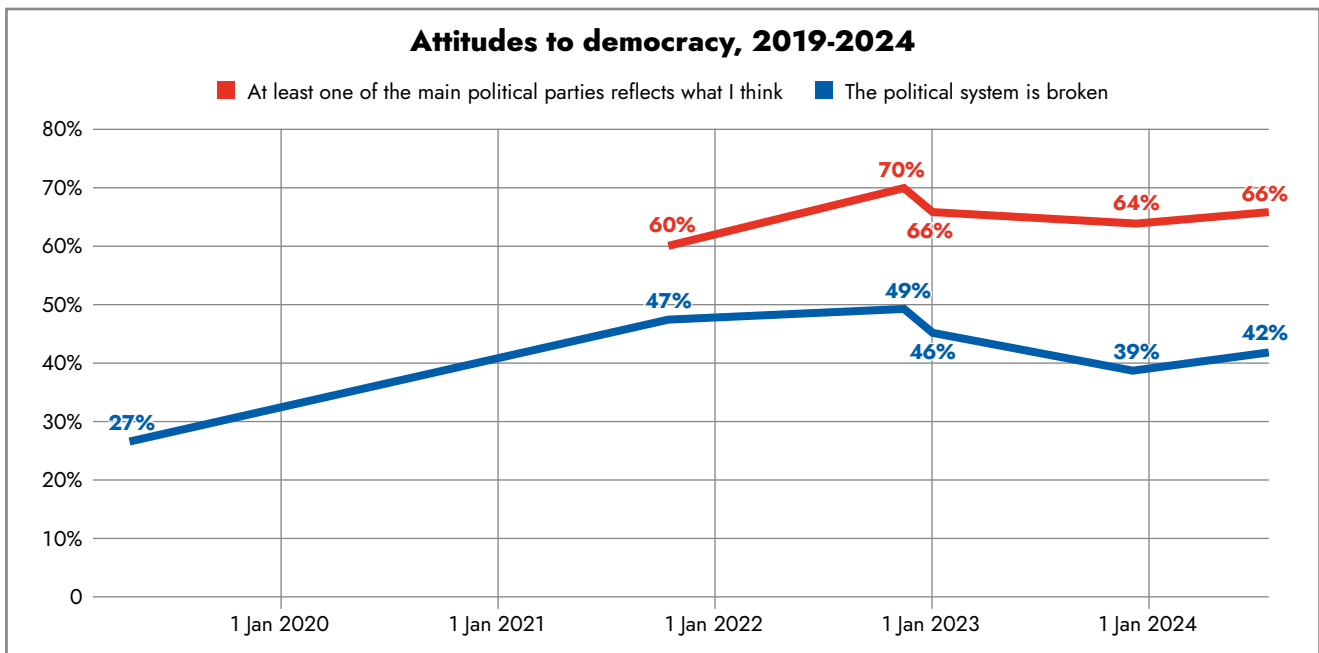
Frustration with the political system and political

parties has remained high since 2019, with a spike in belief that the political system is broken in December 2022 possibly linked to the breaking of the Partygate and PPE scandals. The British Social Attitudes survey found that a record high of 45% of people almost never trust governments to put national interests above the needs of their own party, an increase of 9% from 2019.<sup>28</sup> With trust so low, there is a challenge ahead for the government to heal the relationship between the public and politics. This is particularly the case for lower-income groups, who are much less likely to believe that it is worth voting.<sup>29</sup>

## Disenfranchisement and unrest

The riots following the tragic attack in Southport are indicative of how the manipulation of disenfranchisement can manifest as violence. 37% of our August 2024 respondents believe that voting is not a credible mechanism for change, which rises to 51% of people feeling financially desperate and 45% of people worried about their financial future. Although despondency with democracy does not directly correlate with this behaviour, if people cannot see change through voting then they may resort to other measures.

In our segmentation, the Nativists not only had the second highest proportion of people who did not vote or were not registered to vote in the 2024



General Election (48%), but they were also the most likely out of all the segments to cast their vote in protest, with almost a third (31%) doing so. Given that 41% of the Nativists who did vote in the General Election voted for Reform (22% in total), we can see a clear correlation between experiences of financial deprivation, lack of democratic engagement, political frustration and negative attitudes to multiculturalism, migration and minority groups.

More concerning, we find that support for violence increases by financial experience. 47% of those feeling financially desperate also agree that violence can be necessary to defend something you strongly believe in, compared to an overall average of 32%. Two caveats are needed: a response to a question cannot be taken as confirmation of intent to participate in violence, and the belief could be of any political leaning. However, low belief in the impact of voting coupled with an acknowledgement that violence can be necessary suggests that if these feelings of disenfranchisement are not addressed, unrest is a possibility.

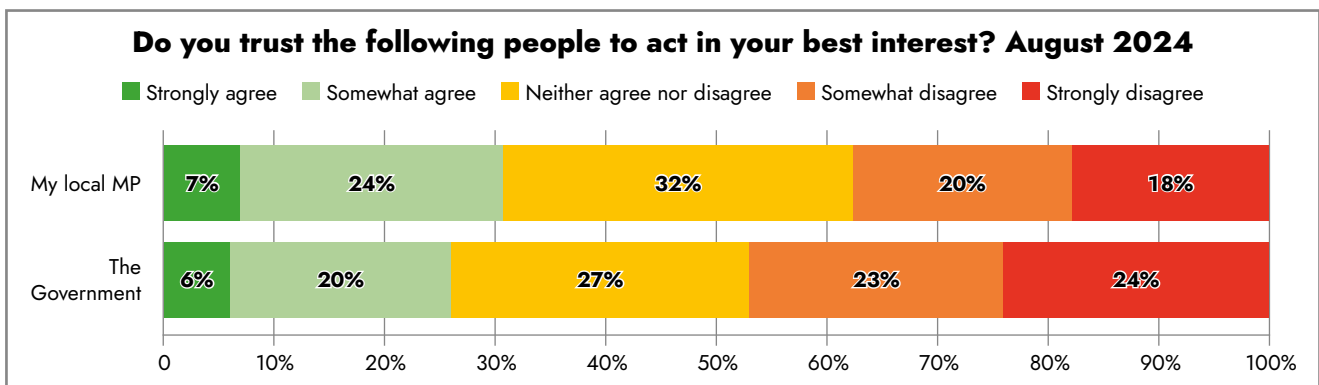
When it comes to tackling these feelings of

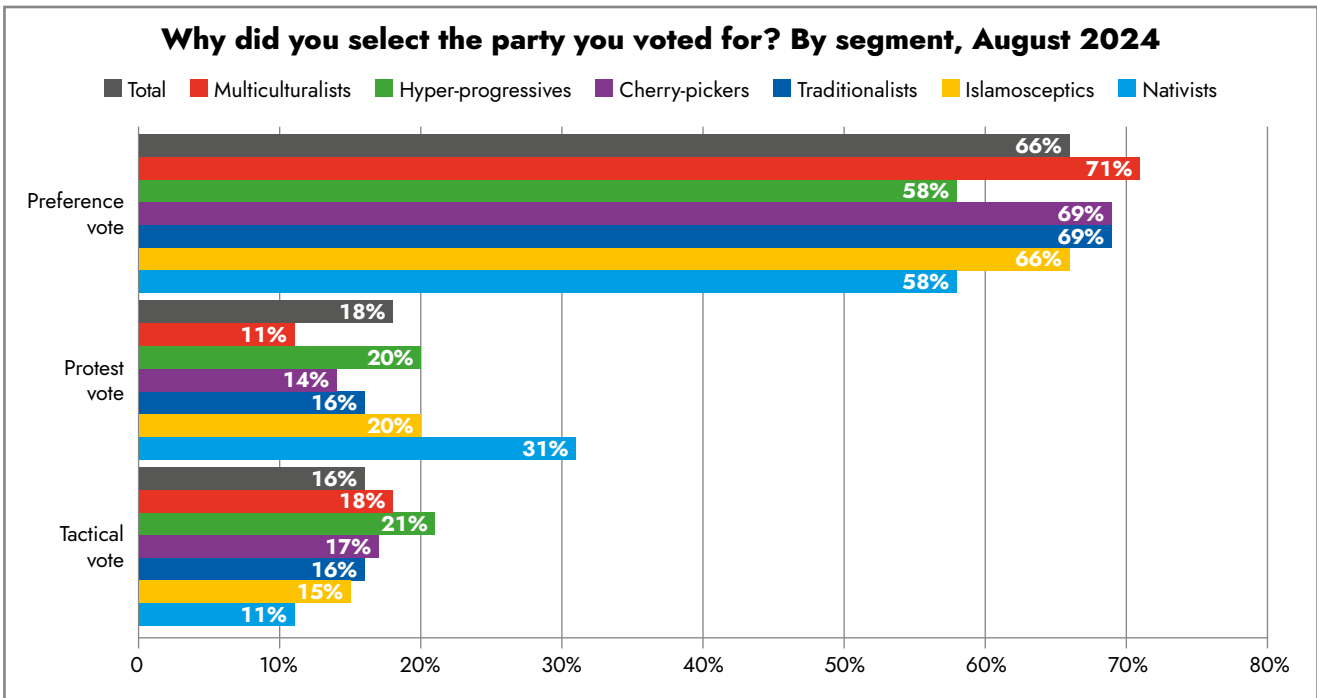
disenfranchisement, 80% of people agree that citizens should have more power to hold politicians accountable for their actions and decisions. Political scandals and perceived lack of resignations over breaches of good political practice can threaten the sense that politicians are accountable to voters. How accountability would take place is not clear, but the right to freedom of expression through protest and the freedom of alternative information through press and media are both important.

When it comes to participatory initiatives, only 47% of people would be very likely or quite likely to attend a consultation/town hall meeting about an upcoming decision to be made about their local area. This suggests that although people feel strongly about having more of a say, there need to be accessible and usable mechanisms for this (regular and fair elections being one such mechanism).

### Young people and democratic satisfaction

In our 2024 *Fear and HOPE* sample, we find that young people are less likely than average to feel





represented by a mainstream political party. Additionally, in a poll of young people aged 16-24 from February 2024, we found that only 1 in 5 young people (21%) feel satisfied that the political system works well in the UK and almost two thirds (62%) think that politicians don't listen to people like them. Most notably, we found that the most progressive and socially accepting young people were likely to have even higher levels of distrust and political pessimism, suggesting that they might not be motivated to participate in solution building or progressive movements as they grow older.

Efforts to centre youth voices within politics and democracy can at times shy away from the political, whilst failing to be accessible to young people. The ceremony and protocol of politics and media can overwhelm and impress young people, meaning that they are less likely to speak freely. In this way, giving young people access to these conversations ends up being tokenistic and can fail to address key issues. Creating simple, easy-to-understand language around policies that affect young people and accessible pathways are crucial parts of building sustainably resilient communities.

### The far right in power

The far right thrive on democratic disenfranchisement as they present themselves as an alternative to the “Westminster bubble”. Despite sharing none of the hardships of many of those who follow them, Nigel Farage and Richard Tice managed to capitalise on discontent to generate support for their party. The electoral success of Reform UK has put democratic dissatisfaction back on people’s agenda, but without any credible solutions on offer

of how to remedy this. With far-right voices in the political and media mainstream, dissatisfaction builds with little opportunity for release.

### What’s next for democratic satisfaction?

Satisfaction with the democratic system is crucial to boosting agency and empowerment, a key aspect of community resilience. Building this satisfaction must go beyond removing the unhelpful, and into introducing bold new measures.

It is clear that continuing with the current status quo is not enough. Starmer said in his first press conference that he had made the standards for his ministers clear to rebuild public trust. The question remains when democratic reform will be in the government’s plans, and what will be included. The recent revelation of extensive gifts and hospitality received by the Labour party, including the Prime Minister, has called into question whether Labour can rebuild public trust. Starmer has announced that principles for gifts and hospitality will be included in the new ministerial code.

Proportional representation would mean that Reform UK won far more seats than the five they currently have in parliament. However, it would also mean that voters would feel that their ballots counted for more, and it would encourage the Conservatives and Labour to address a wider base of voters. When it comes to democratic reform, looking into the logistics and feasibility of processes like deliberative democracy and citizens’ assemblies that bring the public more into debates would be a good place to start.

# The Culture Wars

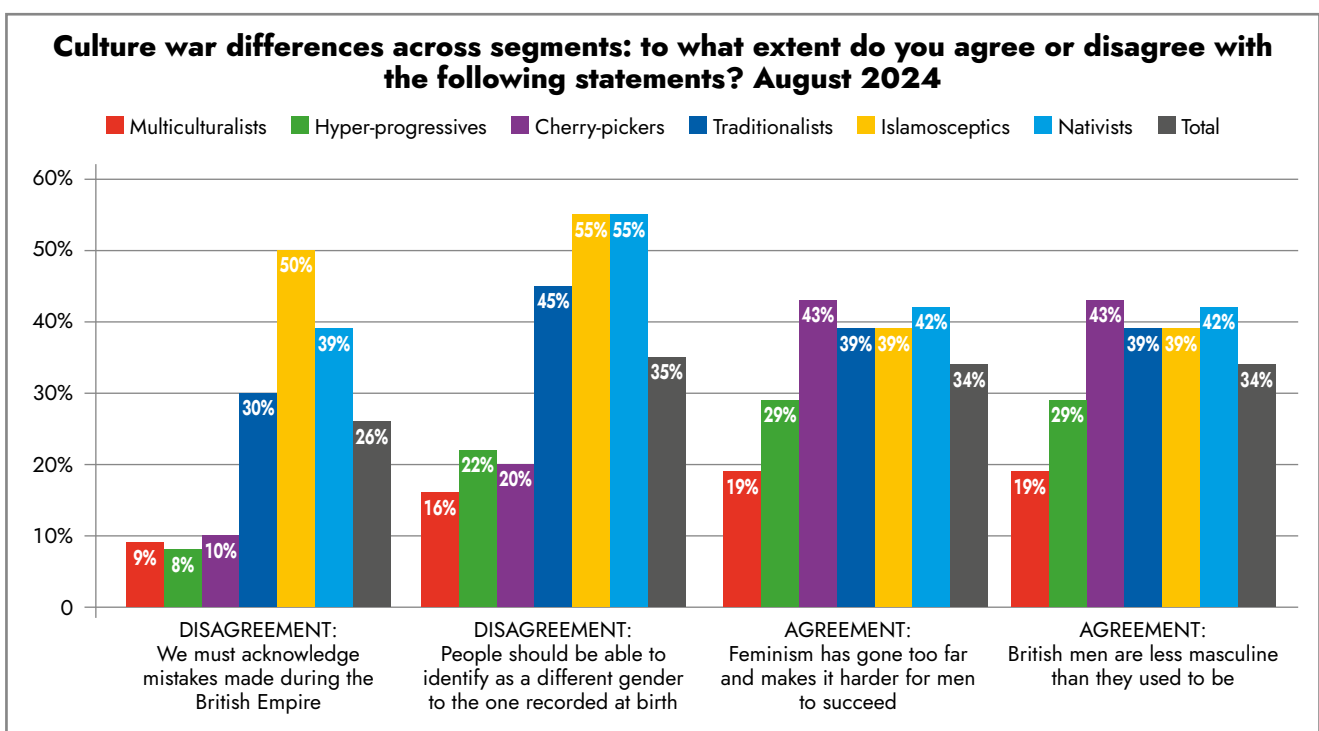
The idea of ‘culture wars’ has reached political saturation in the UK. Their existence is debated, as is the way that they work. What has been observed is how different issues become polarised to the point that someone’s position on a given topic becomes an important identity marker. Various identity markers can combine with others to form a ‘mega identity’, amalgamating a person’s stances across different axes.<sup>30</sup> It is partially through these mega identities that people form their subsequent stances on controversial issues. Whilst conversations around immigration have long influenced social attitudes, issues like trans rights, disability, colonial history and more are newly influential within culture war mega identities.

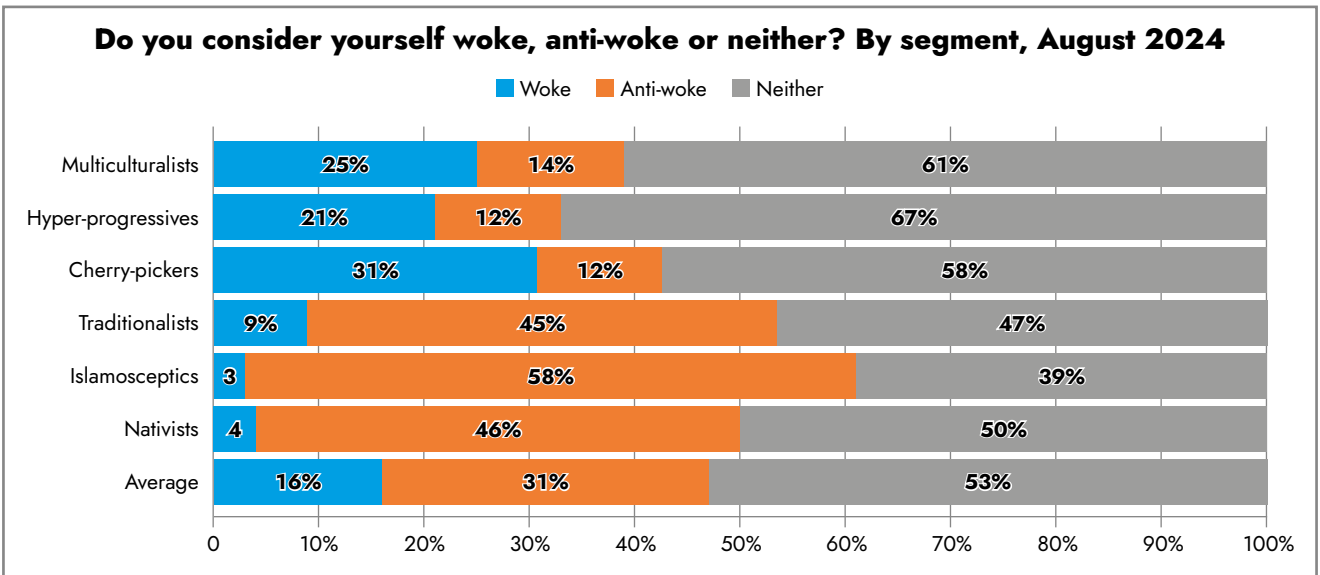
We find that our segments cluster around different combinations of views. Broadly, Islamosceptics and Nativists are most likely to have negative views about empire, trans rights and gender. Interestingly, the Cherry-pickers, despite being more in favour of multiculturalism and immigration, have less tolerant views when it comes to trans rights and both the Cherry-pickers and the Hyper-progressives have reactionary views on gender. The flattening of the

culture war issues to a progressive cluster and reactionary cluster is an oversimplification that fails to account for how identity, experience and attitudes can intersect.

It is worth pointing out that the phrasing of the question obscures personal opinions in favour of asking about problems. Respondents were just as likely to think that climate activists (55%) cause problems as the far right (56%). ‘Problem’ is likely to be relative here, as disrupting traffic and setting fire to asylum accommodation are issues of different magnitude.

It is also interesting to assess how different segments self-identify with the term ‘woke’. The Islamosceptics appear to be actively reacting against it, with 58% defining themselves as anti-woke. Curiously, the Cherry-pickers are most likely to self-identify as woke despite some members of the segment having conservative views around gender and sexuality as well as negative attitudes towards non-Muslim religious minorities. As with culture wars more generally, it appears that “wokeness” has less salience and relevance to popular attitudes than the media would make it seem.





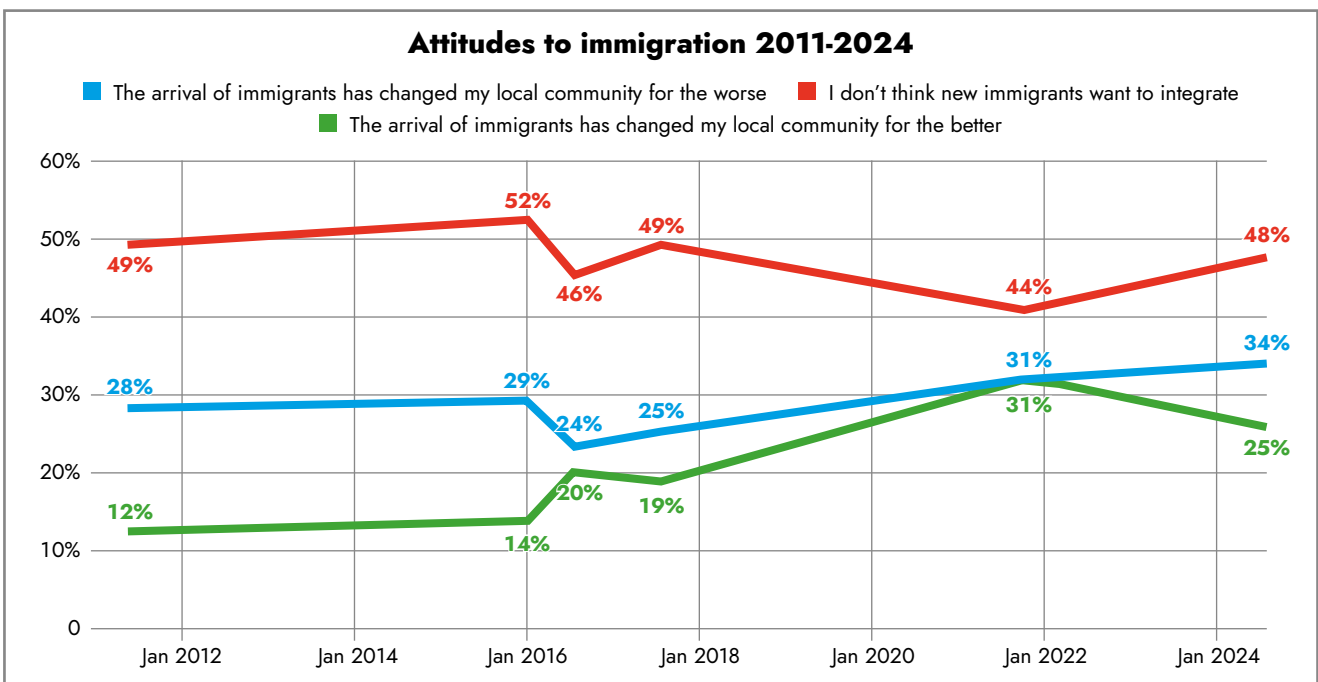
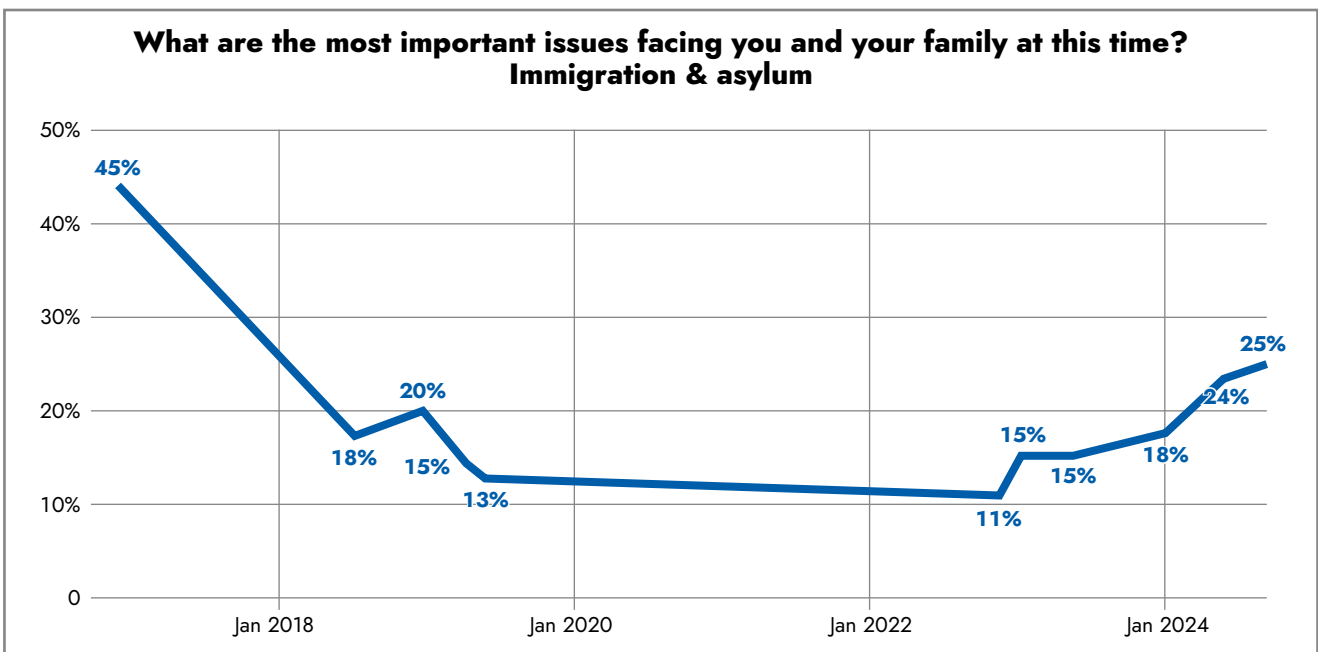
The answer to resolving some of the conflicts around the culture war topics and wokeness is twofold: we need less chatter, as well as more neutral chatter. On one hand, we need less conversation about some topics which are blown out of proportion or even fabricated narratives that have no productive end. An example of this would be conversations about whether the song Rule Britannia should be sung at

the end of the Proms concerts. On the other hand, there are some topics which are important, but they are receiving disproportionate focus and scrutiny. People arriving in the UK in small boats is an example of this. It is important to ensure that heightened emotions and sensationalised narratives are removed whilst retaining place for genuine debate about how to solve the issue.

# Migration and community resilience

Migration has been an issue of growing political salience over the last few years, including and up to the most recent election in July 2024. Although it has not been a top three issue for most people in the UK

(these spots are reserved for cost of living, health and the economy), the number of people to whom it is important has grown over the last five years, almost doubling from 13% to 25%.



Just before Brexit, immigration salience was also at an all-time high. Polling by YouGov in December 2016 showed that immigration was the second most important issue facing respondents at 45%, after Britain leaving the EU with 60%. Health (34%) and the economy (33%) were also high priorities. This previous peak demonstrates that concerns about immigration are not new, and nor is anti-migrant hatred.

The issues driving the public discourse on immigration can vary. It can reflect racial and religious hatred or suspicion, economic competition, political disenfranchisement or even personal or local insecurity. When politicians, the media and the organised far right manipulate and exacerbate these grievances in order to serve racist and divisive agendas, there are lasting impacts on communities.

### A hostile state of play

Two main political forces have an impact on attitudes to migration, the reality of policy and rhetoric. However, the relationship between these forces and the public is a downward spiral of chicken-and-egg:



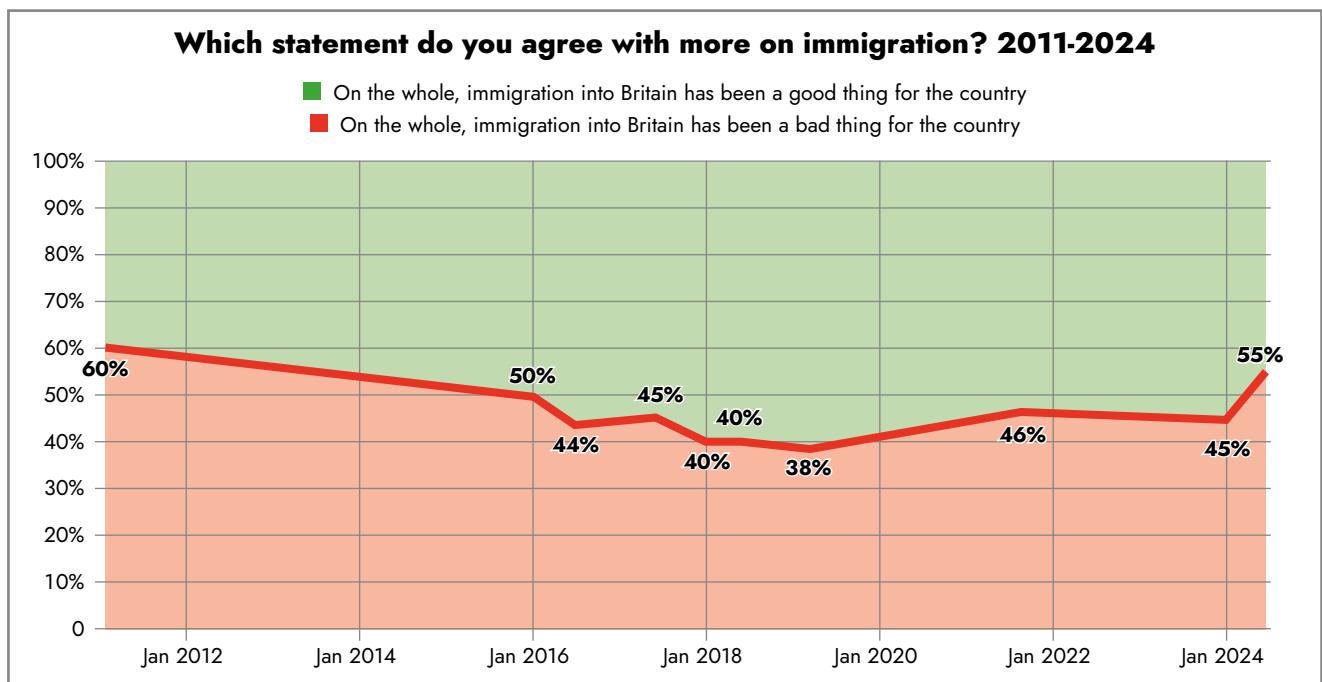
Whether concerns about migration are rational (driven by an understanding of the mechanisms) or emotional (driven by a sense of fear or threat), they are real and exploitable. The majority of the British public do not have a thorough understanding of how the UK or international immigration and asylum systems actually work, which leaves space for emotionally-charged and ideologically-driven rhetoric around migration to shape attitudes.

There was a feeling that Labour was out of touch with the British public on migration during the 2010 general election, and this might have cost them at the polls. The Conservative party has since sought to be tough on migration, constantly raising the bar for hostile politics.

Negative beliefs about immigration appeared to decrease following the Brexit referendum in 2016, but they have risen again in recent years.<sup>31</sup> This is partially due to political and media instigation, but also due to the conspicuity and strikingness of small boat crossings. Despite being only a fraction of overall immigration, Channel crossings have become totemic representations of the insecurity of Britain: the border, the culture and the (white British) women and children who live there.

Successive Conservative governments have consistently ramped up their Hostile Environment rhetoric and policy in the last few years, most noticeably with reframing certain types of people and journeys as 'illegal'. Debates around the right to work or study, as well as EU migration, are relegated to the background, perhaps because they are less emotive, less scrutinised and ultimately less useful at the ballot box.

Bad immigration policy exacerbates community tensions around migration by prolonging or





emphasising points of friction. The asylum system in particular can be exploited through cost of living and scarcity narratives because of the complex way in which it runs, and the ease of creating disinformation and emotive narratives around it.

2023 saw this rhetoric take hold in conversations around temporary accommodation for people seeking asylum. Rumours began to spread about people seeking asylum receiving special treatment, often comparing this to long waiting lists for council housing for people born in Britain, or lack of support for homeless veterans.

Rather than view all of these groups as vulnerable and in need of dignity and compassion, many were quick to create a hierarchy of deservedness; people seeking asylum were not just seen as competitors for resources, but as less deserving than British people.

The Conservative Party has stoked up hatred whilst destroying any semblance of an effective asylum decision process. People seeking asylum are left out of communities and stigmatised before they even have a chance at life in the UK. Measures such as offshore processing in Rwanda, the use of the Bibby Stockholm barge and ex-RAF sites as accommodation are not only performatively cruel, they are expensive and unworkable, exacerbating the problems experienced in communities. These policy failings have directly fed into far-right rhetoric and boosted its impact on communities.

When asked to choose their top words to describe the Conservative Government's approach to migration in a poll of almost 25,000 people in January 2023, "ineffective" (32%) was the top choice but

"not strong enough" (25%) and "unrealistic" (22%) were in second and third place, reflecting a split of opinion. The British public clearly feels strongly about immigration, and it contributes to feelings of economic scarcity, loss of control and suspicion that threatens social connectedness. For this reason, the way the Government handles - or fails to handle - immigration affects community resilience.

The new Labour government is unlikely to keep up the hostility of rhetoric of the Conservative party, and this is undoubtedly a positive thing. However, the question remains about how to solve key policy issues, which include, but are not limited to the backlog of undecided cases and accommodation for those awaiting decisions, no recourse to public funds and homelessness, health and social care recruitment and postgraduate visas.

### Far-right anti-migrant activity

Immigration has always been a key issue through which the far right stoke divisions and it is currently their predominant issue of focus. Despite far-right arguments being brought into the mainstream by political rhetoric on immigration, many have been against both Conservative and Labour government approaches, saying that the former does not go far enough and the latter is too soft. Some welcomed the election results, as they feel that a Labour government will expedite social collapse and allow for a hardline undercurrent to gain strength.

Far-right anti-migrant activity in communities has included holding demonstrations outside accommodation housing people seeking asylum, leafleting local areas sharing messages that directly invoke scarcity narratives, and organising community-based activities such as litter picks and walks to attract members. Some activists refer to themselves as "migrant hunters", going to accommodation or support services for people seeking asylum and filming them in a way they claim is journalistic, but intended to "expose" the truth of the system. They harass or intimidate people, filming without their consent. Some of these accounts have thousands of subscribers.



Image: [https://www.patrioticalternative.org.uk/leaflets\\_and\\_resources](https://www.patrioticalternative.org.uk/leaflets_and_resources)



Using slogans like “enough is enough” and “we were never asked”, the far right have capitalised on frustrations with migration and turned disillusioned communities onto wider racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia. The post-organisational nature of online far-right activity means that there is no longer one main group exerting this influence, but rather a network of individuals who share and repost content across localised groups. Sometimes these are perceived as groups with “local concerns”, either to fret about potential migration or to surveil people in the local area.

In 2023, over a hundred anti-migrant demonstrations took place across the UK. Whilst some were locally-led, other demonstrations were organised and attended by far-right groups such as Patriotic Alternative, Britain First and Homeland. Demonstrations were advertised through an online ecosystem of large groups on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram.

As well as sharing information about events and camp-out protests, the groups are full of anti-migrant, racist and Islamophobic content, including rumours about alleged crimes committed by people seeking asylums in communities. Much of this is disinformation.

### Who is welcome in the UK?

When asked which groups of people should be allowed to live and work in the UK, people place an emphasis on skill and benefit for the country: health and social care workers (84%) and high-skilled professionals (86%) had the highest acceptance rates.

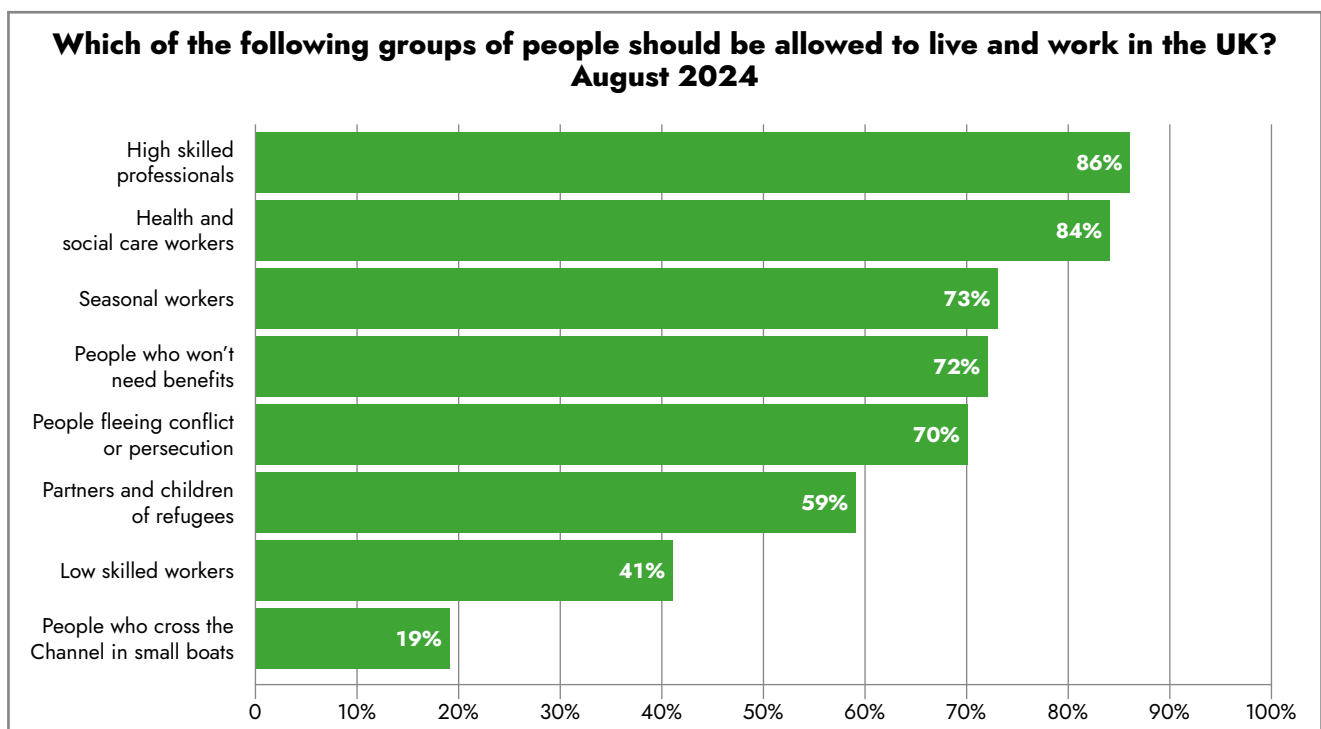
Interestingly, rates of acceptance for people fleeing

war, conflict or persecution (70%) were in line with seasonal workers who come for a fixed time period (73%) and people who are wealthy enough not to need benefits (72%). This is higher than acceptance for low-skilled workers (41%), which adds nuance to the perception that people value those who come to the UK with something to contribute over those seeking sanctuary. Most interestingly, public support for asylum seekers and refugees clearly depends on framing, as acceptance for people who cross the Channel in small boats, many of whom seek asylum upon arrival in the UK and are therefore also fleeing conflict and persecution, was only 19%.

### Framing migration

The above shows that an important part of tackling the exploitation of the topic of migration by the far right will be reframing the conversation in a more accurate, compassionate and realistic way. People agree with helping people seeking asylum when the issue is framed straightforwardly and without sensationalist terminology.

The question arises of who should assist with framing this conversation. When it comes to who people trust when speaking about asylum seekers and refugees, people were twice as likely to trust their friends and family (62%) over media outlets including the BBC (33%) and GB News (23%). Interestingly, when it comes to political parties, trust was low all round: 21% for Conservatives, 31% for Labour and 28% for Reform. This suggests that campaigning efforts around changing the conversation on migration need to include interpersonal and community narratives as well as politics and the media.





### Attitudes to immigration policy

In terms of policy solutions for immigration, the public is split. Around half are responsive to policy ideas which centre compassion: 51% of people said they would support opening up more safe and legal ways for people to claim asylum so they do not have to make dangerous journeys across the Channel. That said, 53% also support ignoring or withdrawing from international laws or conventions so that the UK has more control of its borders. The policy with the most support (59%) is practical and non-emotive: committing to reducing the time it takes for asylum applications to be processed.

In a poll of 9,311 people conducted in January 2023, we asked people which migration policies they would support. 58% said that Britain should be taking fewer asylum seekers - even if they are fleeing war, persecution and conflict, however 59% agreed that the UK government should be doing more to provide safe and legal routes for those fleeing war, persecution and conflict.

People appear to be concerned about the scale and feasibility of having asylum seekers, but broadly support the idea of helping people in need. Migration is inevitable and even needed within the UK context, and communicating this is a complex but necessary challenge. For example, 55% agree that Britain's refugee policy should be guided by having a set limit on the number of people who come to the UK each year. In many ways, people's lack of understanding and perspective around large numbers and scale is an unavoidable cognitive quirk, but when it is so easily manipulated by the far right it is worth attempting to find counter-narratives which can address this.

### How migration is linked to community resilience

Community resilience is crucial for sustainable and thriving communities, as it allows for the adaptation and growth of a community during and after periods of hardship. Here, we look at how migration affects the three main characteristics of resilience.

#### Social connectedness

Mis- and disinformation about the legal system, organisations in the sector and people seeking asylum are plentiful on social media, politics, the media, and also in communities. Inflammatory rhetoric about migration threatens to undermine existing social connections and prevent new ones from forming. We have seen this most recently with the riots of August 2024.

Online anti-migrant rhetoric focuses on the dangers of Muslim migrant men, arguing that they have an innate desire to inflict violence on women and children. Across communities, hostility towards ethnic minority members of the community has increased. Panic and prejudice makes people start rumours about the wrongdoing which play on real anxieties around safety and wellbeing.

With issues like child sexual exploitation and violence against women and children still fraught, there is high risk of the far right using these narratives to induce mass panic and create division. We saw this in February 2023 with unrest outside the Suites Hotel in Knowsley, or in March 2024 when the horrific acid attack of a mother and daughter by refugee Abdul Ezedi was used by the far right to spread hatred.

Additionally, people seeking asylum are not able to be embedded in the community through work and often lack the money or confidence to get involved in local life. This means that most people who hold anti-asylum views will have never meaningfully interacted with them. This lack of interaction contributes to the ability of rumours to spread.



An example of disinformation and divisive rhetoric being shared on Facebook, April 2023

#### Resource availability and mobility

Over £300 million has been spent on the fruitless Rwanda programme<sup>32</sup> and in the year to March the government spent £3.1 billion on hotel accommodation for asylum seekers, equivalent to more than £8 million a day. This spending has used not only Home Office budget, but also diverted foreign aid,<sup>33</sup> with £4.3 billion going towards asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. The Home Office has consistently failed to budget realistically for the asylum system, resulting in overspending that

took from reserves intended for emergency or unexpected spending.<sup>34</sup>

People seeking asylum do not have a say in where they are housed, they are directed by the Home Office. To keep costs down, dispersal accommodation and hotels used are in towns and areas where the cheapest accommodation is available. In many cases, these are areas where there is already low resource availability and low resilience more generally. There is then a higher risk of cohesion issues spilling over, as people are more susceptible to believing divisive narratives of scarcity and competition.

It is undeniable that communities are struggling to access basic resources – dentists, GPs, food banks, social housing and community services are all struggling to meet rising demands with changes in costs and funding. In many ways, the economic arguments people make in opposition to people seeking asylum reflect a desperation in their own lives.

However, rather than pointing a finger at the money wasted by the Government on ineffective migration policies and programmes and broader inadequate local funding, many scapegoat their frustration towards those viewed as receiving the benefits of this spending at the expense of spending on the wider community.

There is an urgent need for the Government to review asylum processes and finances. However, there is also an urgent need to reframe conversations around resource availability, away from depictions of competition for finite resources and towards one that is solidarity-based.

#### *Agency and empowerment*

A lack of agency in asylum policy is most keenly felt by people holding anti-migrant views, as encapsulated in far-right slogans like “we were never asked”. This is often linked to a wider perception of powerlessness about the ways in which people’s local areas are changing, such as the decline of the local high street or loss of local identity through demographic change. This perceived lack of control is powerful but ultimately slightly misplaced: whilst people might have a say in migration policy through voting in an election, it is unrealistic within the current system to expect democratic decisions on individual aspects of how the policy is enacted.

That said, helping people understand who is making decisions can be helpful because it can prevent far-right actors from exploiting discontent and apathy with divisive narratives. Also, releasing information in a timely way can give people a feeling of being involved. In cases of hotels in communities being used to accommodate asylum seekers, this is difficult because of the way the Home Office releases information to different partners. However, meaningful community engagement that does not

over-promise and under-deliver can bolster trust in public institutions such as the local authority and police service.

## **What is next for migration?**

Although tackling anti-migrant rhetoric sounds simpler than overhauling migration policy, both have their challenges. The scrapping of RAF Scampton as a potential accommodation site for people seeking asylum is a positive step, but RAF Wethersfield and Napier Barracks remain operational at the time of writing. The Government has not committed to a target for reducing net migration, mindful that this will be scrutinised. This could be a positive indication of trying to prevent sensationalist speculation around migration. They can start to improve things by reintroducing some much-needed compassion, but a cynical approach to winning over anti-migrant voters means they might not see this as in their best interest.

Tackling those in positions of influence and power who stoke the flames when it comes to migration will be another challenge. We need courage and leadership by political parties to call out hateful rhetoric. Parties should establish standards for responsible language and clear processes for taking action when MPs do not meet them.

Many changes that organisations working in the migration and refugee sector are already calling for will have knock-on positive effects for communities. Allowing people seeking asylum the right to work will allow them to mix with others and increase perceptions that they contribute to the community. Opening more safe and legal routes through which people can access a life in the UK will give communities a greater sense of control. Community-based welcome schemes in the style of Homes for Ukraine also increase feelings of agency.

A more radical alternative to actively improving public perceptions of migration might be simply ceasing to give it prominence in the national conversation. Migration is an inevitable part of human life, and whilst governments might try to influence its specifics, they should not be calling this fundamental premise into question. Breaking the vicious cycle of top-down fear-mongering and bottom-up discontent is crucial to weakening the far right.

# Multiculturalism and community resilience

## What is multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism can be understood in two ways:

1. The demographic reality of a society in which numerous ethnic and cultural groups exist;
2. A state's capacity to manage cultural plurality and achieve cultural coexistence.

In political and popular discourse, the term multiculturalism therefore both evokes demographic changes as well as the political, legal and cultural debates over how to respond to and accommodate them.

Government responsibility rests with the latter, which encompasses a broad spectrum of initiatives aimed at achieving collective recognition, respect and valuing of different groups of people, who all have the same rights, responsibilities and laws. As discussed previously, managing cultural plurality within the UK has been approached through the idea of a shared national identity of Britishness; cultural difference is recognised and valued so long as there is a minimum common ground of shared values and responsibilities that allow for successful coexistence.



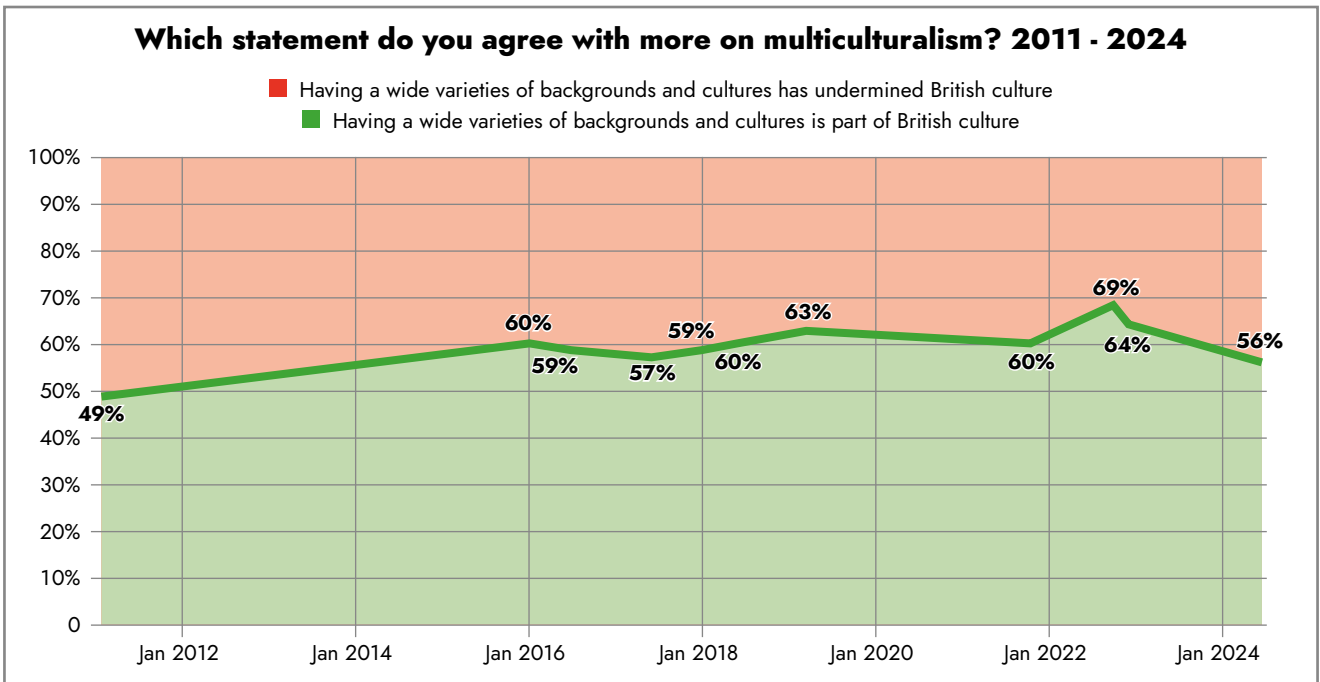
## Assimilation, integration and cohesion: What's the difference?

**Assimilation:** Assimilation requires newcomers into a society to conform to the host country's pre-existing identity. Immigrants adopt the culture of a host country and reject their own heritage and culture. This approach has been widely critiqued for the colonial power dynamics associated with the resulting loss of culture and history, and the negative psychological effects it can also have on immigrants.

**Integration:** Integration involves newcomers adopting certain aspects of the host country's culture, whilst preserving elements of their own. The overarching aim is to maintain aspects of individual cultural identities, but also create common cultural values and customs. Whilst the preservation of immigrant culture is often applauded as an improvement on the assimilation approach, integration has been critiqued for

conceptualising cultural coexistence as a 'one-way street'. Crucially, it puts an onus on newcomers to adapt to the host country's culture and overlooks the role that the host country should also play in welcoming them.

**Cohesion:** Cohesion defines cultural coexistence as a 'two-way street', with responsibilities placed on both immigrants and those already in the host country. Like integration, it allows for immigrants to maintain their cultural identity, whilst adopting certain values and customs that create a shared identity. However, it identifies cultural coexistence as a collaborative process, one where host communities also have responsibilities to respond to, adapt to and accommodate newcomers to create an environment that is welcoming, tolerant and not only upholds but celebrates cultural difference.



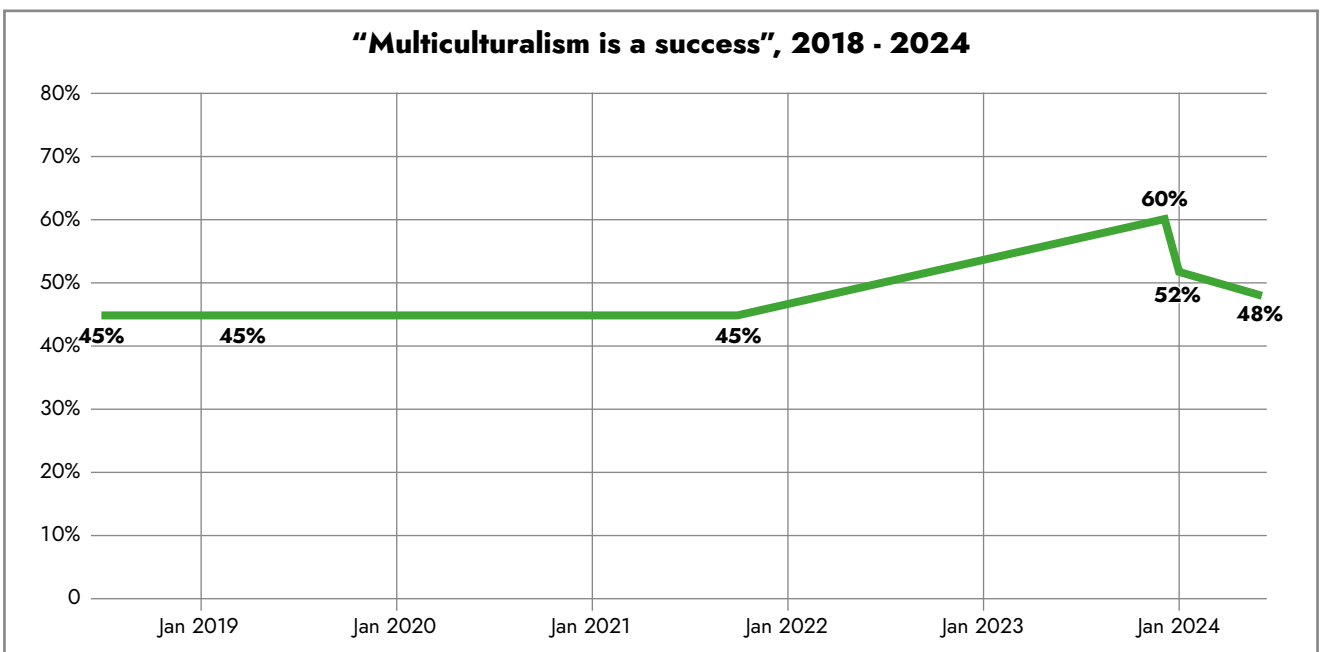
## Public attitudes

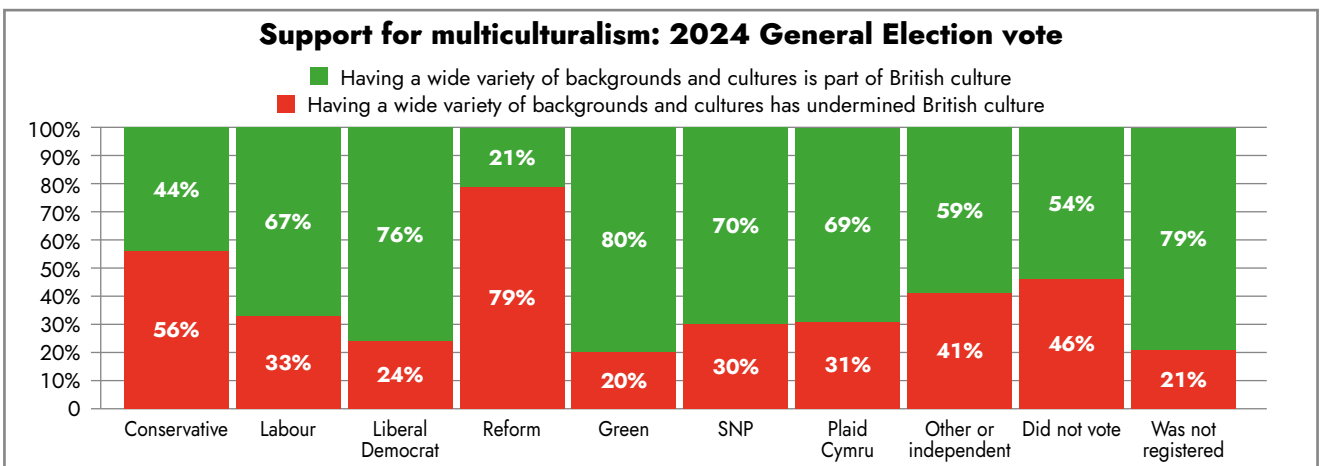
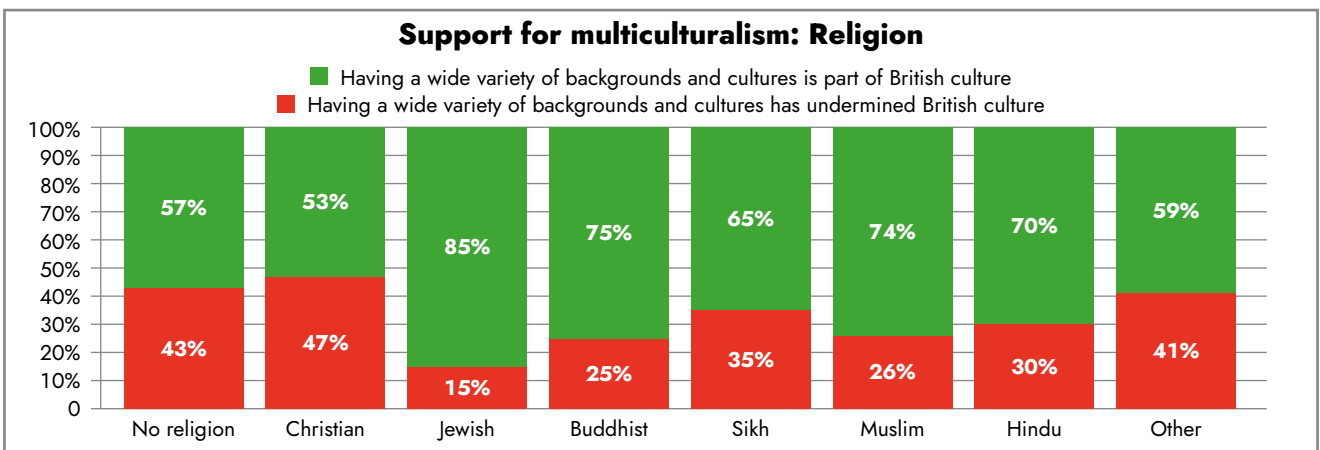
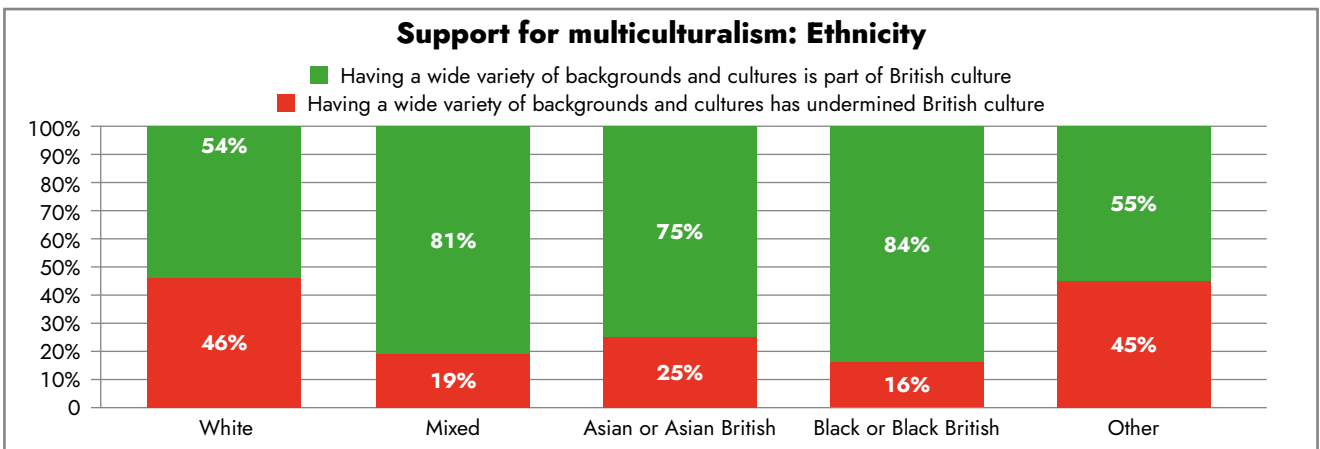
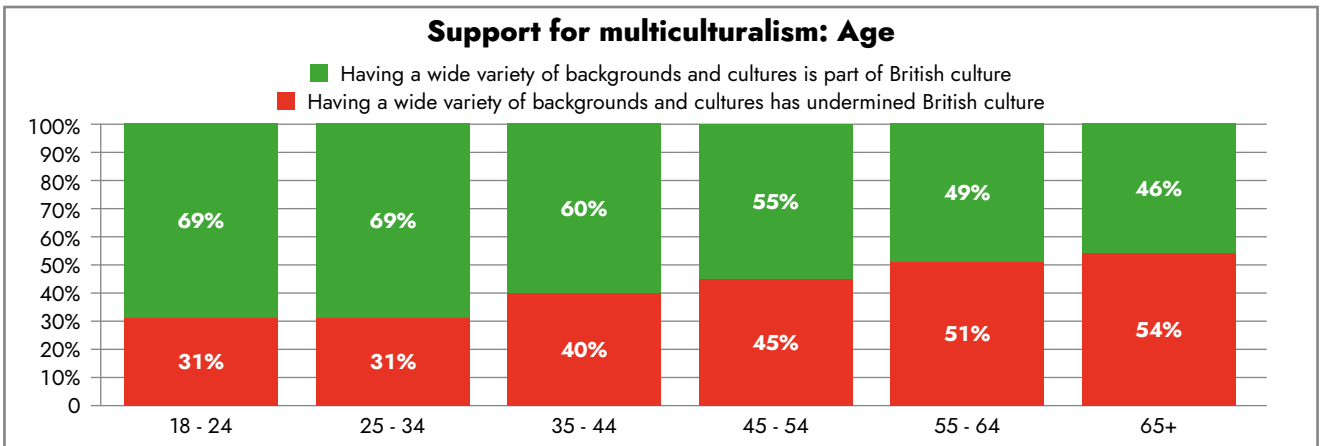
Over the last few decades there has been notable progress in attitudes towards diversity, reflective of improvements in race relations more broadly. Whilst this trend is due to a combination of intersecting factors, it is likely largely driven by two long-term social trends: generational shifts in tolerant attitudes and rising education levels.

However, in recent years there has been a discernable dampening of attitudes towards multiculturalism. Today, over half of the country

believes that multiculturalism is not working, and just under half believe that multiculturalism has undermined British culture.

Analysis of our polling shows people who are older, white and have below degree level qualifications are more likely to be opposed to multiculturalism, as does having right-leaning political views, being Christian or non-religious. Interestingly, despite the general trend that women lean towards more liberal attitudes, gender does not have a significant influence on attitudes towards multiculturalism.





## A battle for British identity

*British identity in a state of flux*

British identity used to be an ethno-religious characterisation reflective of pre-WWII war demographics - white and Christian. But the post-war collapse of the British empire, and the migration that followed this, saw the reality of what Britain and Britons look like change drastically. The political and cultural construction of Britishness was made fragile by this process, prompting the pursuit of a new British identity that would unite the increasingly diverse population.

There have been various high points where inclusive British identities and narratives of belonging have been spotlighted. The 2012 Olympics and the Diamond and Platinum Jubilees of Queen Elizabeth II are both examples of when a broad range of groups have all been invited to celebrate and participate in Britishness.

However, the broader success of these moments in creating an inclusive British identity have been limited by a narrow and shallow conceptualising of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been largely understood through the lens of integration and assimilation, and primarily in terms of racial rather than cultural difference.

Former Prime Ministers David Cameron and Theresa May in particular constructed national identity in terms of a shared and cohesive set of 'British' values. The pursuit of a multicultural Britain under the ex-Conservative Government has been carefully and purposefully constructed as arguably nothing more than a multi-racial monoculture, racially inclusive but culturally exclusive - they don't have to look like us but they have to *act* like us.

This has allowed cultural racism to replace biological racism as justification for negative attitudes towards ethnic minority communities. Those who oppose the demographic changes occurring in Britain have a

loophole to articulate this racism through narratives of 'Britishness' - the 'crisis' of multiculturalism has become an acceptable means to oppose the realities of a demographically diverse Britain.

Key trigger events have been exploited by divisive actors to highlight the 'dangers' of multiculturalism and 'failures' of integration and assimilation to make a wider case for excluding certain groups from not just British identity but British soil. The grooming gang scandals in Rotherham and Oldham were 'proof' that Islam 'promotes' paedophilia, the 2017 Islamist terror attacks 'confirmed' that 'violent' Muslims were not loyal to Britain, and the attack of a 31-year-old woman and her two children in Clapham by Afghan asylum seeker Abdul Azedi in February 2024 fed into 'Stop the boats' discourse about immigrants as a danger to women.

Many minority communities have pushed back against this framing. Crucially, their exclusion from British identity is not just a conceptual question of imagined communities but has real tangible and violent repercussions as related to the privileges and protections afforded by 'Britishness'. Riots broke out across the country in 2011 following the shooting of Mark Duggan by the Metropolitan Police in Tottenham. Nine years later, protesters took to the streets despite lockdown restrictions for Black Lives Matter in the UK, highlighting the active racism that remains woven into the structures that create Britain and the automatic exclusion of minority communities from 'Britishness' that this upholds.

*Who is British today?*

When asked what the most important characteristics are to be regarded as British, the most common answers from polling respondents were: contributing to British society e.g. through tax or work (63%) and embracing and being proud of British customs and way of life (49%).

This is reflective of the socio-cultural and political construction of British identity in the post-war

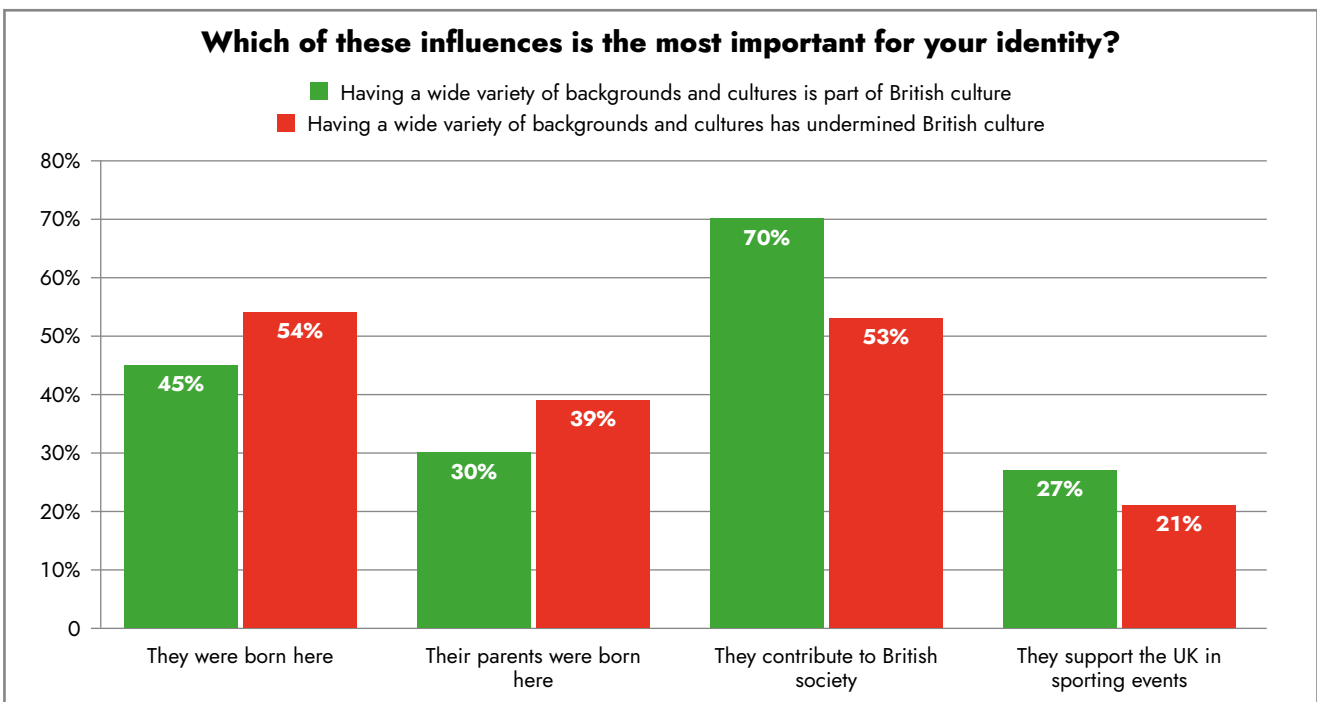




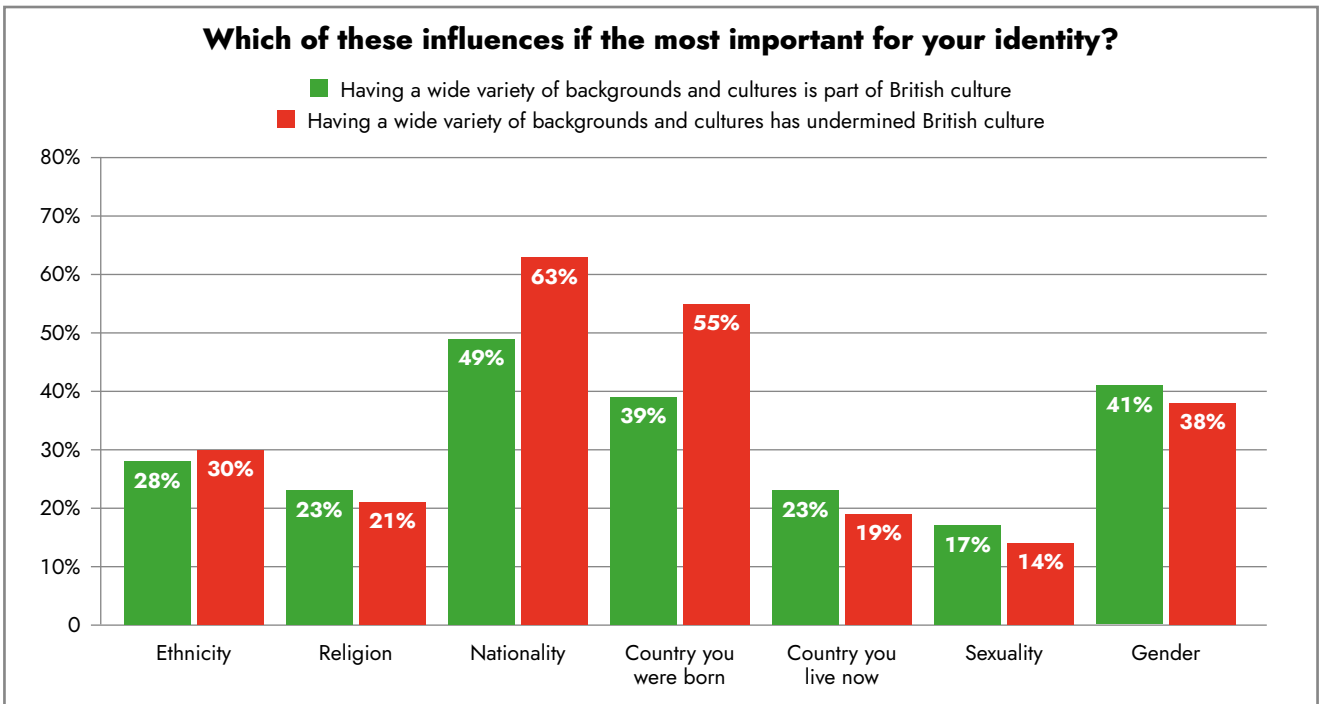
period. The contribution of commonwealth workers to rebuilding the nation was front and centre of this. Despite the mistreatments of these workers later exposed by the Windrush scandal, this framing of Britishness has seeped into public consciousness and remains today. Similarly, as explored elsewhere

in this report, the framing of multiculturalism as a shared culture of customs and values has become the most recent way in which Britishness has been positioned.

Whilst these narratives were created to make British identity more inclusive, they are also being





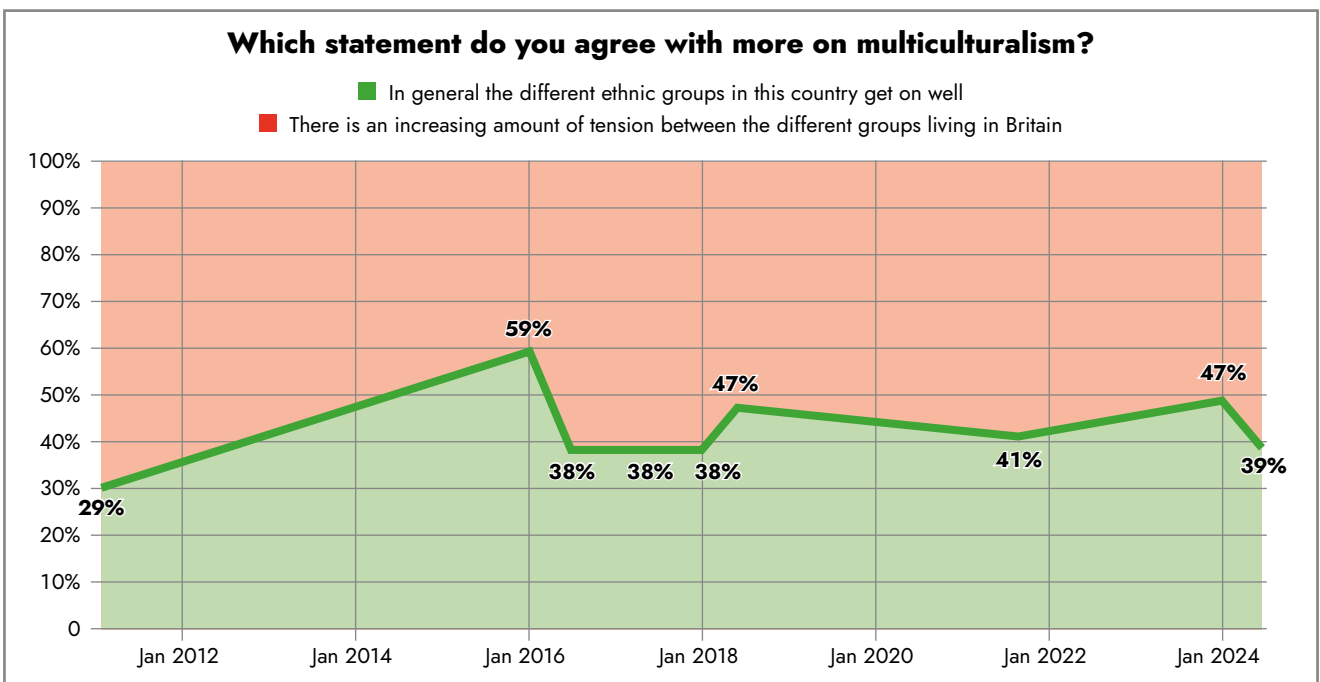


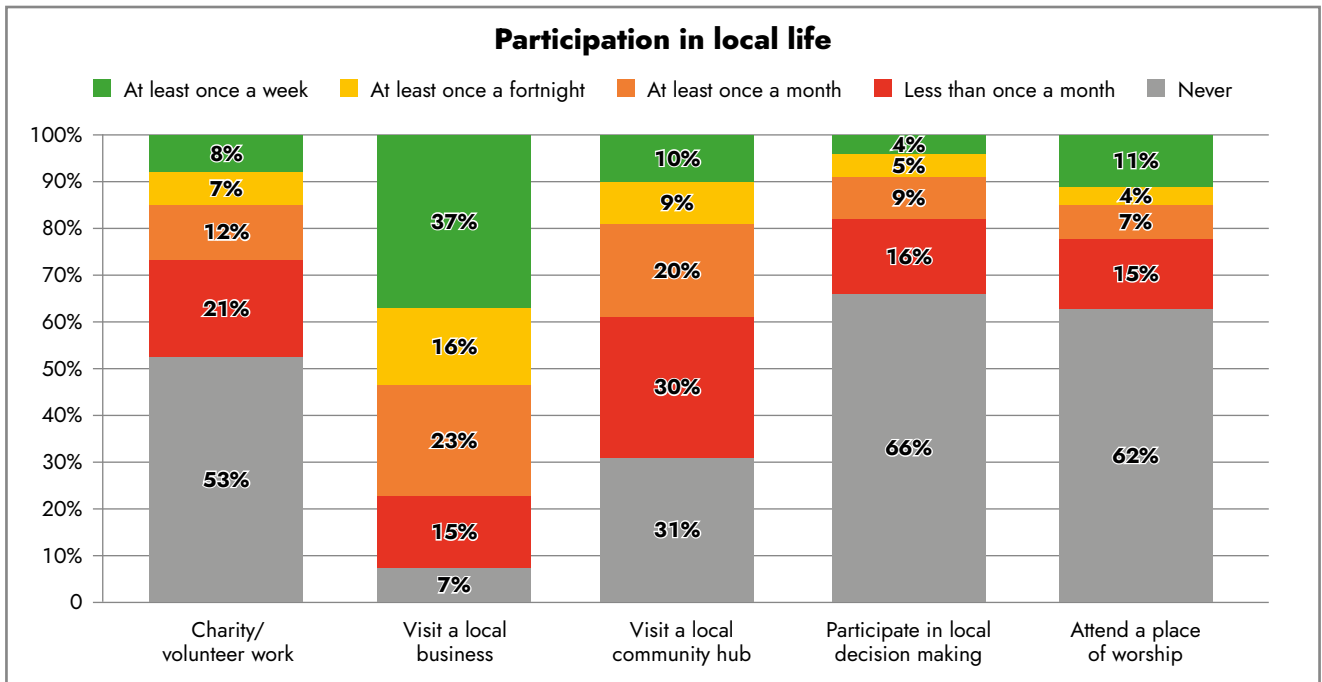
used as evidence that multiculturalism is failing. Indeed, scrounger narratives about immigrants and ethnic minorities are front and centre of many anti-multiculturalism narratives, particularly the perception that certain minority communities have more children to claim more benefits. Similarly, discussions about (in)compatible values have recently been on the front pages in response to the pro-Palestine demonstrations and, and the ‘sectarian’ Muslim vote that has been painted as being contradictory to the interests of the British vote.

Perceptions of British identity are attuned to wider perceptions of multiculturalism. Those opposed

to multiculturalism are more likely to subscribe to immutable ethnocentric markers of British identity, and much less likely to adopt the socio-cultural interpretations developed under the banner of multiculturalism. For example, 54% of those opposed to multiculturalism think being born in Britain is one of the top three most important factors that make someone British, compared to 45% of those who are in favour of it. This also aligns with how this group views their own identity; they are more likely to believe that ethno-national characteristics are the most significant influences on their identity.

This is unsurprising. For many, opposition to





multiculturalism is rooted in exclusive perceptions of white British racial and Christian religious identity being diluted by the increasingly diverse reality of a demographically changing country and the incorporation of what are perceived as inferior cultures. It is clear that many in this group are resistant to attempts to reframe Britishness as an socio-cultural identity, instead of just an ethno-religious one.

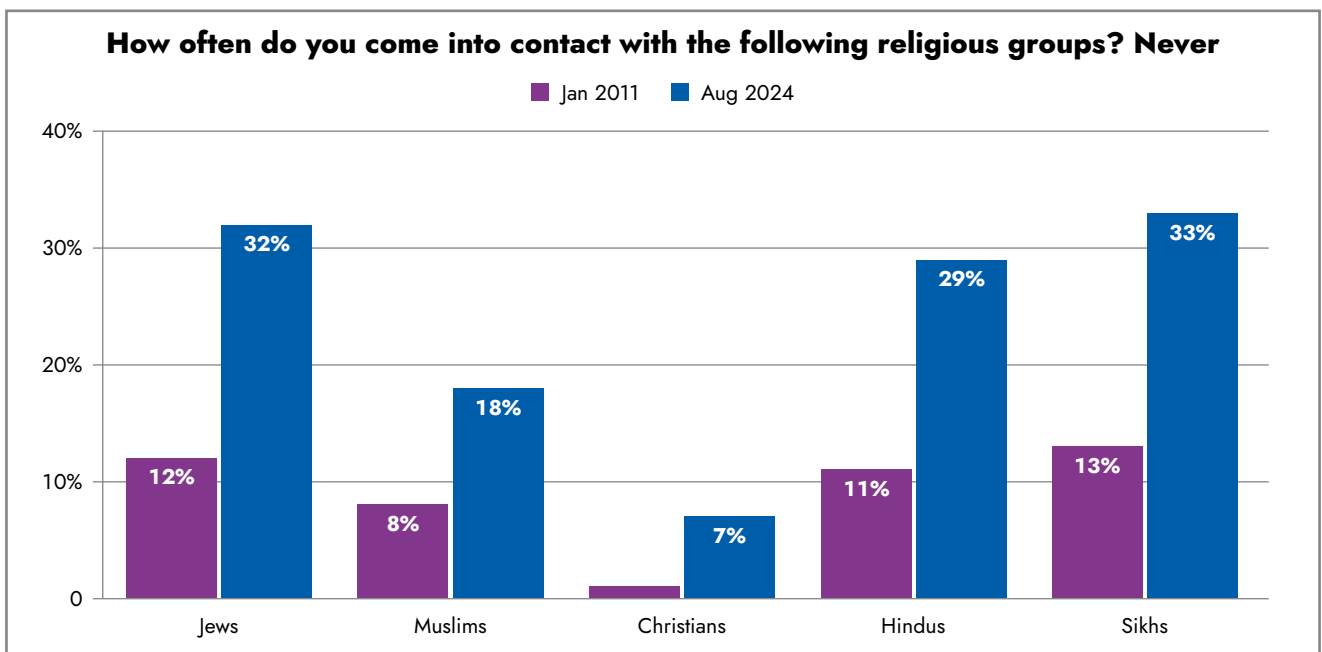
### Impact on cohesion

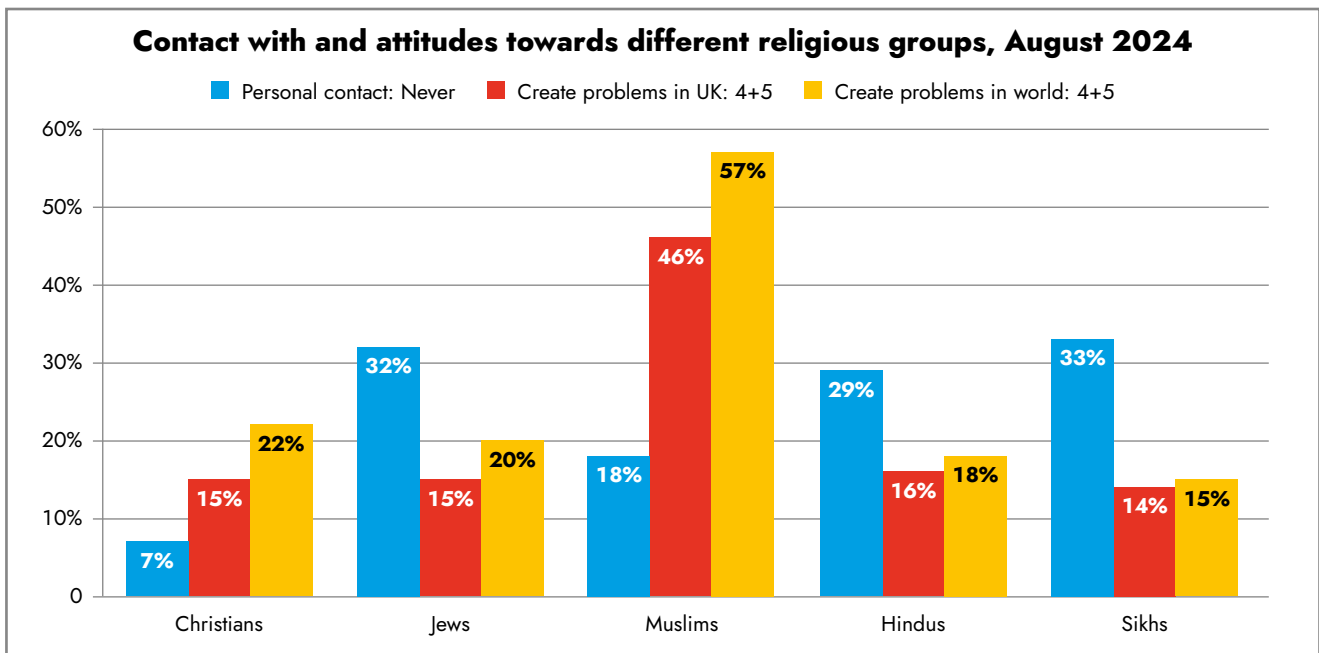
This growing opposition to multiculturalism is notably impacting cohesion. Six in ten note an increasing amount of tension between different

groups living in Britain (61%), in line with the post-Brexit peak in 2016 (62%). Today, half see race and ethnicity (54%) and religion (48%) as the biggest causes of division in the UK, with 63% believing that relationships between different ethnic groups have gotten worse over the last 10 years.

### Local experiences

Interestingly, there is notable dissonance in perceptions of national versus local community and identity. Whilst 61% think tensions between different groups are getting worse nationally, 62% of respondents agree that their local community is peaceful and friendly. Interestingly, despite





attitudes towards multiculturalism and perceptions of cohesion worsening over time, appetite for strong local relationships has remained consistent. Today, 41% want to get to know their neighbours better.

However, there seems to be a disconnect between appetite, opportunity and take up for strengthening local social connections. Participation at the local level in community spaces is low - only 27% volunteer in their local community and 39% visit a local community hub more than once a month.

It is therefore no surprise that contact between different religious groups has considerably reduced, with the percentage of those never coming into contact with other groups doubling since 2011. These shared community spaces and opportunities for participation in local community life are crucial for forming connections outside of your immediate circle and strengthening the creation of a local identity that includes multiple demographics. However, the cutting back of local funding for 'non-essential' services as well as increased individualisation of society more broadly has resulted in the reduced existence and use of such spaces and opportunities.

Intergroup contact theory, first introduced in the 1950s, suggests that positive interactions between people from different groups can reduce prejudice and promote more harmonious relations. However, it is too simplistic to employ this approach to say that reduced contact has been the cause of enhanced hostility towards different minority groups, and multiculturalism more broadly. Our polling finds that level of contact does not correlate with hostility of attitudes. Respondents were twice as likely to never come into contact with Jews and Sikhs than Muslims, but three times less likely to believe these religious groups create problems in the UK compared to Muslims.

This supports the decoupling analysis discussed elsewhere in this report, and adds important nuance to discussions about multiculturalism. Opposition to multiculturalism is not simply opposition to the 'Other'; for many it is driven by anti-Muslim sentiment in particular, irrespective of levels of contact.

### Multiculturalism has "failed"

These dampening public attitudes towards multiculturalism come as little surprise when assessing the wider political landscape within which they have formed. Multiculturalism has been under attack by the right for many years now, with widespread efforts to pitch it as having failed. This anti-multiculturalism agenda is no longer confined to the fringes, and is now increasingly a mainstream, and therefore normalised, narrative.

But what does failure actually mean? It is largely referring to the second definition of multiculturalism given above, arguing that the state has failed to 'manage' cultural plurality and that cultural coexistence has not been achieved.

This is a recurrent framing whereby ethnic minority groups within Britain are accused of failing or refusing to assimilate or integrate into British values and way of life. Crucially, rather than offering practical recommendations for how a more unified national identity could be constructed, this is often accompanied by inflammatory and alarmist calls about the supposed threat that this presents to wider society. Worryingly, this framing is increasingly used by 'mainstream' politicians:

- In 2011, David Cameron used his first speech as Prime Minister to critique multiculturalism for creating communities that behave in ways that

“run counter to our values”. Whilst he correctly identified that building a stronger sense of national and local identity holds “the key to achieving true cohesion”, he went on to blame “passive tolerance” for multiculturalism as a cause of terrorism in the UK.<sup>35</sup> Many commentators at the time were disappointed that he so intimately connected issues of national identity, multiculturalism and cohesion along with Islamist extremism.

- More recently, just weeks before Hamas’s attack in Israel and Israel’s disproportionately brutal response in Gaza, Suella Braverman echoed Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech to criticise the “misguided dogma of multiculturalism” as “toxic”, for Europe. She claimed that many who enter the UK do not “sign up for British values” and are “undermining the stability and threatening the security of society”.<sup>36</sup> Given her then role as Home Secretary, it is no surprise that the wider political response to pro-Palestine demonstrations was so hostile.
- Similarly, around the 2024 General Election, Muslims voting for independent candidates running on pro-Gaza platforms were accused by Labour candidate Jonathan Ashworth as engaging in “sectarian politics” and voting against the interests of the country.
- In his election campaign speech in Blackpool, Nigel Farage spoke of “young men” in “Blackburn... Burnley... Leeds... [and Bradford]” who were “allowed... to come in too fast” and have been “impossible to integrate”. Whilst not referring to Muslims directly, his reference to them “loath[ing] Judeo-Christian Values” that are the “fundaments [sic] upon which our country was built” makes it clear to whom he was speaking about.<sup>37</sup>
- As part of his campaign for Conservative Party leadership, Robert Jenrick has claimed that Britain is “under threat” from mass immigration.



He argues that “non-integrating multiculturalism” has resulted in the “dismantling of our national culture” and “weakened English identity” which has “put the very idea of England at risk”.<sup>38</sup>

Stripped back, opposition to multiculturalism is a reaction to the demographic changes occurring in Britain. For some, this is simply a reaction to destabilisation they feel about the rapid changes occurring around them. However, for others, this is rooted in the perception that Britishness, and therefore Britain, should be exclusively white and/or Christian.

**1. Controlling participation in public life**

For some, the story of multiculturalism failing is used to advocate for curbing (perfectly legal) activities of groups that they view as unsatisfactory, by portraying it as antithetical to British values. The aim of this framing is not necessarily opposing the demographic realities of multiculturalism or calling for an exclusively white, Christian Britain, rather pushing for an ‘assimilation’ approach to cohesion that controls how these groups can participate in public life; multiculturalism is tolerable so long as those of different cultures behave in a certain way. For this group, Britishness isn’t explicitly about how people look but how they act, but how they act is largely prescribed by the socio-cultural and political norms dictated by whiteness and Eurocentricity.



Many hostile reactions to the pro-Palestine protests have used this framing and as a result we saw counter-terrorism laws being tightened in order to restrict protest activity. The marches supposedly being an “affront to British values” and encouraging “extremist ideologies” saw Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, introduce a new, stricter definition of extremism in March 2024.<sup>39</sup> Although this definition is non-statutory and applied only to the Government and civil service, many have viewed this to be an attempt to specifically clamp down on Palestinian solidarity and Muslim ‘mob rule’, as well as an opportunity to press forward with the recommendations from the Shawcross report. The Shawcross report itself is already criticised for its overt anti-Muslim framing and attempts to restrict Muslim participation in public and political life.

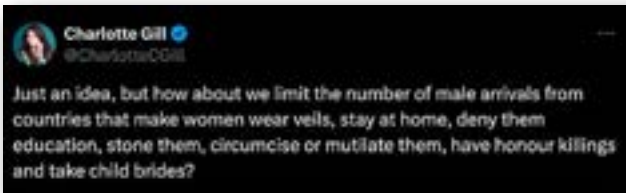
**2. Controlling immigration**

For others, the failure narrative ties heavily to wider discussions around curbing immigration. The aim here is to spread panic about the supposed risks and threats of multiculturalism, the cultural

incompatibility between different groups and the resulting failures to culturally coexist in order to heavily restrict, or even completely stop, the number of non-white or non-Christian people coming to the UK.

This is not to say that everyone wanting to restrict immigration is doing so for these reasons. This particular anti-multiculturalism framing often gets muddled in with other concerns about the scale of migration into the country and the pressure this places on public services. But a distinction between the two is crucial; the key difference is that this group leans heavily into racist tropes around criminality and fundamental cultural incompatibility in order to push their anti-immigration agenda.

We saw this in 2017 after the Westminster Bridge terror attack, where Nigel Farage claimed: “Frankly,



if you open your door to uncontrolled immigration from Middle Eastern countries, you are inviting in terrorism”. Similarly, following the acid attack on a woman and her daughter in Clapham, London in February 2024 by refugee Abdul Ezedi, rather than focusing on the need to address violence against women and girls, many on the right chose to focus on his ethnicity and immigration status in order to demonise refugees and push for stricter immigration measures as a matter of safety. Commentators were quick to link acid attacks to Islamic culture supposedly ‘imported’ by immigrants.

Worryingly, this overlaps with Great Replacement Theory narratives. The Great Replacement Theory is the white nationalist, far-right conspiracy theory that ‘native’ white Brits are being deliberately replaced by non-white people through mass migration, demographic growth and a drop in the birth rate of white Europeans. Once confined to the fringes of the far right, this thinking has now infiltrated mainstream spaces. Ex-Home Secretary Suella Braverman, for example, used her speech at the American Enterprise Institute to warn that: “if cultural change is too rapid and too big, then what was already there is diluted. Eventually, it will disappear”.<sup>40</sup>

**3. Instigating violence**

For a small but active minority, the claim that multiculturalism is failing is used to justify calls for physical violence. They do not only believe that inherent cultural incompatibility means that coexistence will never occur, but that it is dragging us into some sort of civil war and that they have a duty to defend their country. This was a central narrative driving the far-right riots in August; in Hartlepool, for example, a police car was set on fire and an Asian man was punched in the face as crowds of young men chanted “we want our country back”.

**What Southport and the far-right riots tells us about multiculturalism**

The nationwide riots following the murder of three young girls in Southport exemplifies just how volatile attitudes towards multiculturalism have become.

Following the tragic attack, high profile far-right figures were quick to create, amplify and spread rumours about the attacker being a Muslim, ‘illegal’ migrant who had arrived on a small boat a year ago. Tommy Robinson posted a seven minute long video



onto X with the caption: “There’s more evidence to suggest Islam is a mental health issue rather than a religion of peace”. In this video he recklessly tells his 800,000 followers: “They’re replacing the British nation with hostile, violent, aggressive migrants ... Your children don’t matter to [the Labour government]”. Nigel Farage further stoked the flames by taking to X and asking “whether the truth is being withheld” about the identity and terror-status of the incident, further fuelling speculations that this was an Islamist attack.

The speed with which misinformation and disinformation was spread and how quickly people were not only willing to believe it, but act on it, is deeply concerning. The riots that followed have exposed the sheer volume of people across the UK who not only hold racist, anti-migrant and anti-Muslim views, but are also willing to engage in violence given the opportunity. Even after the police released the identity of the attacker with the explicit aim to “remove some of the misreporting” around it, misinformation continued to spread, and riots continued to be organised.

People went beyond legitimate forms of legal protest and freedom expression to incite violence and even encourage acts of terror. We witnessed senseless violence targeting Muslims, migrants and ethnic minority communities more broadly. This included mosques being vandalised, people being pulled out of cars and attacked, and hotels for people seeking asylum in Tamworth and Rotherham being set alight with people still inside. Across the country, chants of “we want our country back” accompanied acts of violence.

What should have been a period of mourning for the country to come together became hijacked by those pushing the narrative that the political programme of multiculturalism has failed, and the reality of



multiculturalism in the UK is a threat to white British children, as well as the idea of a white Britain as a whole.

The sheer volatility around multiculturalism has never been more apparent, as has the dangerous efficiency of far-right antagonism around it. Whilst the violence from this particular event has dissipated, it leaves the question of what the next trigger event will be that sparks the next bout of violence that further divides communities, and whether communities will be prepared to deal with it.

## Why is multiculturalism important for resilience?

Community resilience is crucial for sustainable and thriving communities, as it allows for the adaptation and growth of a community during and after periods of hardship that would otherwise make them vulnerable to far-right agitation. Here, we look at how attitudes towards multiculturalism affect the three main characteristics of resilience.

### *Social connectedness*

As we have shown, attitudes towards multiculturalism influence perceptions of Britishness which, in its most basic form, determines who people feel are part of their national community. When people are opposed to multiculturalism, this national community becomes increasingly exclusive as Muslims, migrants and ethnic minority communities are excluded from Britishness.

Crucially it is not just an absence of connectedness that has resulted from this, but a direct hostility to the groups mentioned above, rooted in a perception of them as not just external but a threat to the national community. As discussed, we saw this narrative play out in the far-right riots in August 2024; the country should have come together and collectively mourned, but low levels of social connectedness meant many were drawn into responding with Islamophobia, racism and violence.

The inflammatory rhetoric pushed by far-right actors was so successful at instigating violence because of the fact that attitudes towards multiculturalism and social connections were already so fractured and tense. Without a common identity or perceptions of a shared community, divisive actors are easily able to manipulate trigger points to further spread division during times of strain or crisis.

#### *Resource availability*

Public attitudes towards multiculturalism do not necessarily impact resource availability or distribution, but they do impact perceptions of it. Deserving versus undeserving tropes are frequently deployed when discussing who should benefit from Britishness and receive financial support from the state. As explored previously, immigrant scrounger narratives play a large role in anti-multiculturalism.

This impacts resilience as it gives ammunition for scapegoating in times of financial strain, particularly where it overlaps with anti-migrant narratives. Narratives of scarcity are able to be constructed in a way that places blame on non-white communities, pitting them against each other.

There is an urgent need to reframe conversations around resource availability, away from depictions of competition for finite resources and towards one that is solidarity-based. However, this must also come alongside genuine material change to people's finances and economic security.

#### *Agency and empowerment*

Opposition to multiculturalism is a product of anger at a rapidly changing world and feeling helpless and excluded from setting the direction of travel.

This is not to excuse or explain away the racism that often underlies this. But it is important to note that commonly used anti-multiculturalism slogans also denote perceptions of powerlessness and desire to have agency: “we need to take back control”, “enough is enough”.

Multiculturalism is therefore another item on the list of issues that many Britons feel they have no agency over, whether that be migration, cost of living or democracy more widely. They feel as though multiculturalism is happening to them, rather than something they are participating in.

These feelings of powerlessness hugely lower resilience to far-right agitation, as they are easily exploited into an anti-politics agenda that positions the far right as “defenders” against multiculturalism.

## **What's next for multiculturalism?**

Despite the poor attitudes towards multiculturalism and cohesion, there remains a sizable appetite for interventions that address this. 72% of respondents want to see the Government improve cohesion between different communities.

The Government cannot be a neutral actor in this issue. They have to be on the front foot, actively reframing conversations on multiculturalism and pursuing cohesive communities. Being ‘neutral’ is simply ignoring the problem and leaving a vacuum for far-right narratives to fill.

However, the solutions most popular for improving relations only further highlight the extent to which narratives of multiculturalism have been successfully co-opted by the far right.

The most popular solution people wanted to see to improve cohesion was tighter controls on immigration (31%). This not only shows how intimately tied together narratives on migration and multiculturalism are, but crucially also how multiculturalism and cohesion are still largely viewed through an integration lens and blamed on newcomers' failure to adapt rather than the hostility of those already there. Unsurprisingly, Reform voters are twice as likely to support this as a measure to improve cohesion (62%).

The second most popular cohesion intervention was being tough on those who stir up tensions between communities (25%). We've seen this particular approach play out in the post-riots landscape, with long sentences for those involved in the disorder. Whilst it is important that criminal offences are punished appropriately, wider rehabilitative and reeducation initiatives must go alongside this. A ‘law and order’ approach only works as a sticking plaster for a chronic wound.

The next most popular interventions were initiatives that bring communities together (21%) and better funded public services for all (21%). Although a smaller response, this does demonstrate support for resilience based interventions that approach multiculturalism and cohesion from a more holistic angle. Tensions around multiculturalism must be reframed as a shortcoming of resilience, rather than assimilation or integration. This will boost support for more holistic solutions that address structural conditions and give responsibilities to host communities, rather than simply interventions in immigrant communities.

Ultimately, there is an urgent need for a new story of multiculturalism – one that celebrates and promotes cultural plurality, rather than seeking to contain or control it.

# Decoupling ethnic and religious minorities

The segmentation factor analysis and segmentation both reveal that attitudes to Muslims differ to attitudes to non-Muslim minorities (e.g. Hindus, Sikhs, Jews). This might be surprising, as many generally tend to assume that the two would be correlated.

## Decoupling

The phenomenon of decoupling takes place when people’s attitudes on issues that seem related are independent from each other. It calls into question the notion that people’s beliefs are logical and consistent: if someone is supportive of asylum seekers, thinks immigration adds to British culture, agrees with the taking of the knee to challenge racism and has no negative beliefs about Hindus and Sikhs, we might expect that they would have no negative beliefs or even actively accept Muslims.

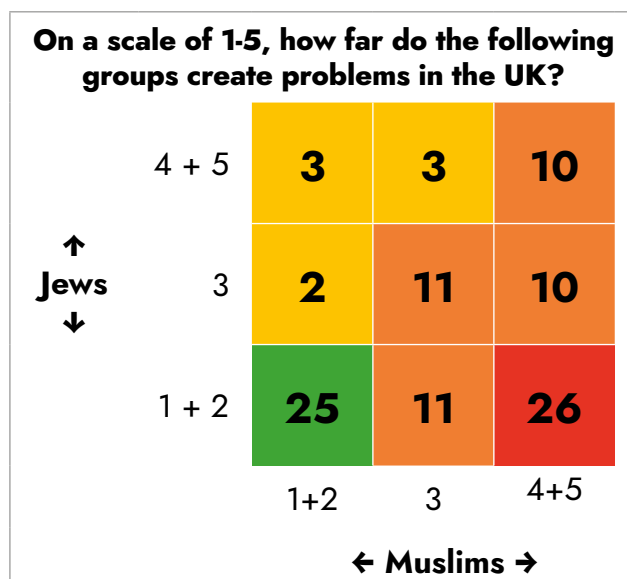
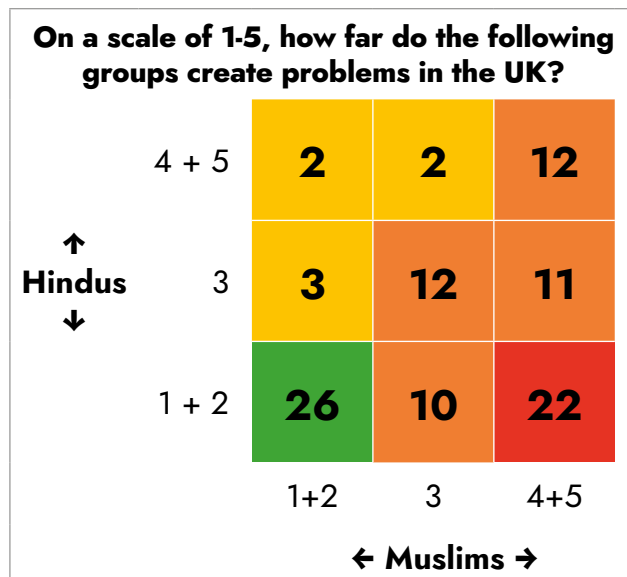
However, in this data, we do not find that to be the case. Our August 2024 polling shows that Muslims face uniquely negative views from many in society, including groups who are otherwise tolerant on other related issues, or towards other religious minorities.

This does not call into question the validity and reality of other forms of religious hatred or antisemitism in society, nor does it discredit the wider systems of racism and anti-migrant hatred which affect racialised people more broadly. Similarly it is important to note that anti-Muslim sentiment does not just impact Muslims; the first person to be killed in a hate crime post 9/11 was a Sikh man. Additionally, our polling focuses specifically on attitudes towards multiculturalism and not on racism more specifically, where we would expect negative societal attitudes towards Black people to also emerge.

The findings of this polling confirm the breakdown of the idea of a common experience of being “BAME”: whilst there is some overlap between experiences of ethnic minorities, we find that public attitudes are much more nuanced than this. Between individual ethnic minority groups there are complex and often historical or imported tensions, and between white people and different ethnic minority groups there can be distinctions made between “good” and “bad” cultures.

## Analysis of decoupling in the August 2024 data

Focaldata analysed the correlation of views on whether Jews, Muslims and Hindus cause problems in the UK. The question asks respondents to choose on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “cause no problems” and 5 is “cause a lot of problems”.





These tables show the overlap in attitudes between Muslims and other ethnic groups: the green boxes show that 25% of the sample think that both Muslims and Jews cause few problems, and 26% agree the same for both Hindus and Jews. In both cases there is a small proportion (highlighted in orange) who think that both groups in question cause a lot of problems, 10% for Jews and Muslims and 12% for Hindus and Muslims.

What is most striking is the asymmetry between the yellow and red boxes: people are far more likely to believe Muslims cause a lot of problems and the other group (both Hindus and Jews) cause no problems, whereas only a small minority think that Hindus or Jews cause a lot of problems and Muslims do not.

### Who holds decoupled views?

To look at where some of this asymmetry comes from, Focaldata carried out a regression analysis which reveals the demographics which best predict results for the Muslims and Jews index. The demographics that best predict responding that both groups cause problems are being male, have below degree level qualifications and living in a publicly rented house. This ties in clearly with our wider finding that those who have had fewer opportunities and are experiencing financial difficulty are more likely to hold anti-Muslim, anti-migrant and anti-multiculturalist views.

Interestingly, the demographics which make someone most likely to view Muslims, but not Jews as causing problems are being older, Hindu or Buddhist. Intra-ethnic conflict, particularly long-standing tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities, continues to be an underexplored issue in the UK.

The demographics that are most predictive of viewing Jews as causing problems, but not Muslims are being younger, male, Muslim, Asian and having a degree. Israel's war in Palestine has likely had an impact on beliefs here, and work is needed to ensure that antisemitism has no place in wider political discourse around the conflict.

In our segmentation, we find three clusters with anti-Muslim and anti-immigration views: the Traditionalists, Islamosceptics and the Nativists. Although the Nativists also have negative views about other religious minorities including Jews, Hindus and Sikhs, the other two segments seem to have decoupled views. Conversely, we find that the Cherry-pickers have progressive views when it comes to immigration, multiculturalism and Islam, but do not extend this to Hindus and Sikhs, whereas the Hyper-progressives are broadly progressive whilst holding prejudiced views towards Jews.

### How the far right can exploit these tensions

The sources of these intra-ethnic tensions pre-date the anti-Muslim far right, but they can benefit from the decoupling of Muslim minorities from other ethnic minorities to further their own agenda if these issues are not addressed.

Just recently it was exposed by *The i* that Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) tried to engage in talks with Sikh, Jewish, Hindu and Black community groups with the aim of creating a coalition to discuss recent terrorist attacks and Jihad on the streets of the UK.<sup>41</sup> Robinson's media team also deliberately tries to look for non-white faces at demonstrations in order to highlight the "diversity" of his cause. Robinson claimed that the aim was not explicitly to target Muslims, but his aims suggest otherwise and the omission of Muslims from the coalition is conspicuous.

On one hand, this could be part of a deliberate plan by Robinson to exploit existing tensions for his own benefit. Cynically, he can use support from non-Muslim minorities as evidence of widespread support for his agenda or to attempt to demonstrate that he is not prejudiced. For example Guramit Singh Kalirai, a close associate of Robinson's who used to be a spokesperson for the English Defense League, is of Sikh heritage and often accompanied Robinson at events.

On the other hand, in some cases the far right works with these groups out of a genuine common interest: "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". Where Sikh or Hindutva organisations are also concerned with distinguishing themselves from Muslims or even so-called "counter-Jihad" and raising awareness around "grooming gangs", they are aligned with the anti-Muslim far right.

### Future directions

All of the above suggests that work on cohesion must go beyond looking at relations between white British and "non-white" communities. It must go into more detail into who holds these suspicious or prejudiced beliefs, and why. The politics of the Subcontinent are alive in the UK, as is anti-Black racism from South Asian and other migrant communities, including white migrants. Similarly, attitudes to LGBTQ+ rights continue to be shaped by religious beliefs. Building solidarity across ethnicities and experiences of migration is a crucial part to overcoming discrimination together, but religious and cultural differences can stand in the way.

# 4 Solutions

# Recommendations for community resilience

With the July General Election and August far-right riots in such recent memory, it is hard not to feel like 2024 could be a real turning point for the UK. Perceptions of multicultural Britain are negative, and although local identity is stronger than national identity, overall resilience is low.

*Fear and HOPE 2024* makes the case for a **programme of work based around community resilience** that builds on our findings across policy, research and communities. Crucially, this work must be approached collaboratively, across departments, sectors and with local government and stakeholders as key partners.

## Changing the narrative

**How can we tackle harmful and divisive rhetoric about marginalised groups?**

As well as tackling hatred at the community level, we must challenge the top-down construction of a 'permissive environment' which has normalised anti-multiculturalism, as well as anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hatred.

- **Uphold standards and accountability for responsible language.** We need courage and leadership by political parties to call out hateful or inflammatory rhetoric, from both political figures and the mainstream media. Parties should establish standards and clear processes for taking action when MPs do not meet them.
- **Tackle harmful online spaces.** The implementation of the Online Safety Act should include scrutiny of social media platforms, including the amplification of online hate through recommendation algorithms, the spread of mis- and disinformation and the platforming of far-right actors who incite violence.
- **Media and digital literacy education.** The Department for Education plans to include digital literacy in an updated curriculum are crucial, but training for parents - and adults more broadly - on digital literacy should be a responsibility of mainstream tech platforms.

## Structural change

**How can policymakers and the third sector deliver meaningful change to boost resilience?**

Changing people's perspectives on their community will be more successful and sustainable if it is actually accompanied by material difference in their lives. Structural change is needed to better deliver for people and communities and tangibly meet their needs and address the current deficits across the broad range of issues this report has touched on - migration, multiculturalism, cohesion, democratic satisfaction, economic scarcity, and more. The Government's current approach to addressing these issues is in need of transformative change.

- **National strategy and accountability, local delivery.** Giving community-based partners the support and resources to deliver place-based solutions is essential.
- **Cross-departmental working in national and local government.** Education, healthcare, housing and technology should be feeding into the resilience conversation that is already happening in communities departments.

## National resilience strategy

**Who can lead a cross-sector, cross-governmental approach to tackling community resilience?**

Given the scale of community resilience work, someone who can provide cross-departmental oversight is needed. We call on the Government to make the short-term appointment of a **Community Resilience Czar** who has expertise in overseeing cross-departmental working. The appointed Czar will assist with the creation and implementation of the cross-sector and cross-departmental strategy, setting up processes and mechanisms through which collaborative planning, action, monitoring and reflection can occur.

- **Transparency and accountability.** Although government czars are not typically bound by the Ministerial Code, the Czar should opt in to their appointment being contingent on upholding these standards.
- **The community resilience strategy must be scrutinised.** The Czar should regularly report to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee. Government departments should include a review of work relating to community resilience in their Annual Reports.

## Cross-sector working

The following recommendations vary in their level of specificity and detail. Collaboration with experts across a number of sectors is required to get them off the ground, but with the right partnerships and cross-departmental government buy-in, transformation is well within reach.

## Social connectedness

### How can we create trust and mutual understanding across communities?

The Government urgently needs a community cohesion strategy that addresses both the short and long term threats to social cohesion. In the short term, the strategy should address community flare ups following trigger events. For the longer term, initiatives that proactively build up social connectedness should be pursued in order to strengthen resilience.

Within each of these timeframes there must be a two-pronged approach to engagement. Firstly, amplifying trusted, sensible voices to distribute narratives of inclusion, connection and tolerance will help keep the moderate middle united and strong. Simultaneously there must be efforts to target the extreme fringes with interventions that address the root cause of their hatred towards other groups.

- **Reconvene the cross-departmental cohesion working group.** This should include members with links across local and regional government, public bodies, civil society organisations, and faith groups, with proposals for activity at local, regional and national levels.
- **Funding and support for local authorities, especially in areas with higher risk.** Creating a dynamic measurement framework that identifies areas most in need and is able to respond with resources quickly will allow for effective preventative work.
- **Develop effective tension monitoring.** This will combine local authority and police, social media and national-level insights to proactively identify potential trigger points and allow for early intervention.
- **Cohesion between ethnic minority and religious groups.** Moving away from framing cohesion as only white and non-white relations will make our understanding of the problem more accurate.

## Economic scarcity

### How do we stop people feeling like they are competing for the same resources?

Developing a way of talking about difficulties with accessing resources that builds solidarity across struggling groups rather than pitting them against each other is essential: the cost of living can no longer be the elephant in the room when it comes to community resilience. Fixing the economy and lowering the cost of living are already central and local government priorities, but connecting the dots between treasury decisions and community resilience through messaging would be helpful.

- **Fair funding review.** Labour's commitment to reviewing how money is distributed to local authorities must include reviewing the ways in which relative needs and resources are assessed, as well as tangible reforms to local government financing that protects against income loss.
- **Invest in areas with low community resilience.** The August 2024 riots have laid bare the link between economic deprivation and low resilience to hateful narratives and far-right agitation. In addition to addressing cohesion, providing access to resources and quality of services in these areas will boost resilience.
- **Train people in frontline positions to intervene.** Equipping frontline support services and community leaders with the tools to have difficult conversations that challenge harmful views combines practical help with economic solidarity narratives.

## Democratic satisfaction

### How can we make people's voices heard?

The 2024 General Election turnout rate shows that deeper research is needed into the intricacies of people's dissatisfaction with voting and its political impact. Our research has shown that people feel stronger connections with their local than national community; repairing relationships and satisfaction with politics at the local level is the first step in addressing the wider anti-politics movement.

- **Introduce democratic reforms which increase voter turnout.** These should especially target marginalised voters who are underrepresented in local and general elections.
- **Repair trust in standards in government and public life.** This could include changes to ministerial standards, improving the right to protest, and greater accountability for the press and media.
- **Improve financing of local government.** Supporting local governments to deliver for their residents could help reframe the wider relationship between people, politics and power.

## Migration

### How do we take the sting out of migration and stop it from being exploited?

We need to take advantage of multi-tasking policy solutions which are already being developed by organisations in the migration sector, as they give migrants dignity and treat them with compassion but also contribute to community resilience.

- **Allowing new migrants to be part of Britain.** Policies that enable eligible new migrants to become involved in civic society, such as pathways to citizenship and the right to vote, will boost connectedness and empower these traditionally underrepresented groups. Reinstating and increasing funding for ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) is also crucial.
- **Allowing people seeking asylum the right to work.** Not only is this important for people seeking asylum, it sidesteps 'scrounger' narratives and helps embed people into their local community.
- **Identifying welcoming communities.** Dispersal and hotel accommodation might still need to be used, but areas should be risk assessed and areas more likely to participate in community welcoming schemes should be prioritised.
- **Cross-sector work on class solidarity.** Organisations across the progressive sector should develop a shared language around need. This is crucial to preventing a wedge from being driven between immigrants and British people.

# A new story of Britain

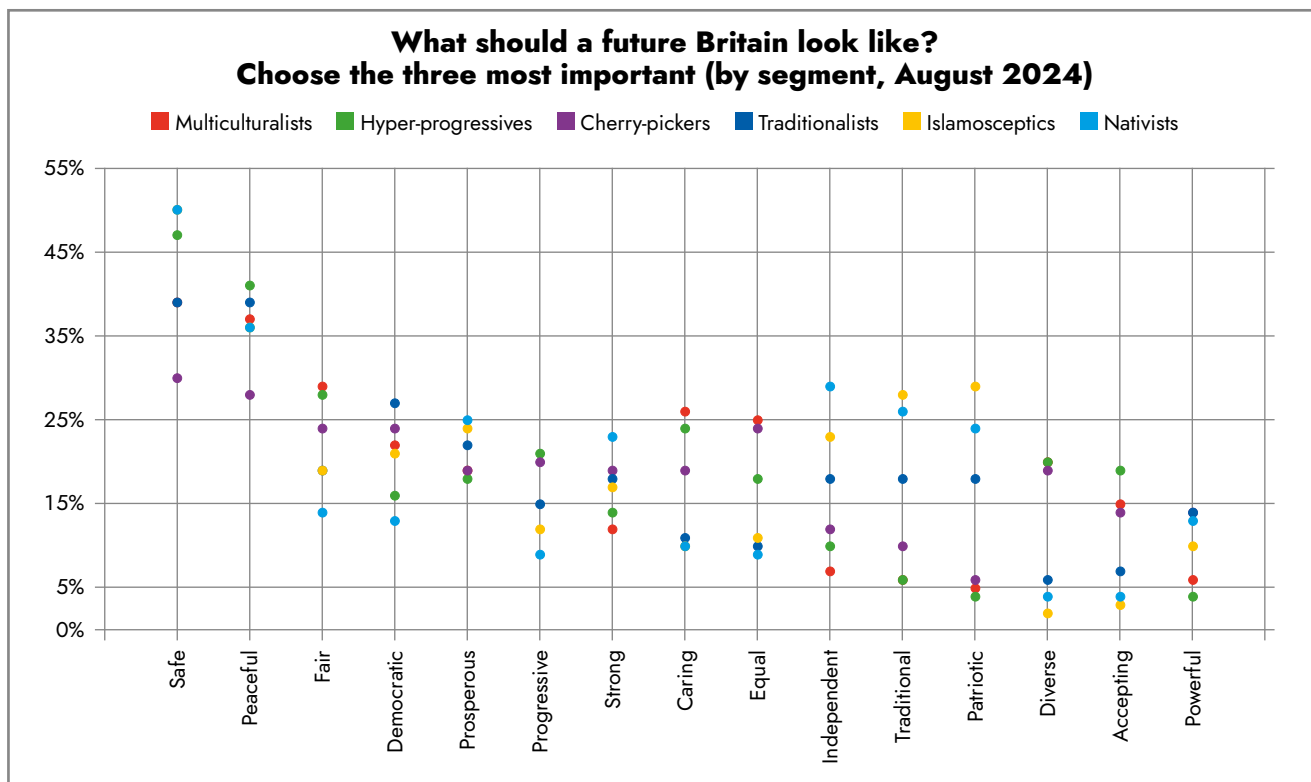
We urgently need a better story of multicultural Britain. This is clear from public attitudes towards multiculturalism, as well as the prevailing sense of pessimism and decline more broadly. This must be a holistic, inclusive story that not only accepts but celebrates and promotes diversity in a way that invites people to be part of the journey. It should confront the realities of inequality in the UK but in a productive way that does not generate shame around Britishness. It should provide optimism for a shared future that incorporates the individual, local and national.

If successful, this new story will leave people more resilient to far-right scapegoating, divisive political narratives and online misinformation by creating a common purpose that everyone can commit to. It will give people who may be feeling dejected about the changing world around them a sense of agency to take a positive stand in their own communities, and those who are already working tirelessly to make things better a new language around which to frame this.

We asked our August 2024 polling respondents to choose their three most important adjectives to describe a future Britain. The graph below shows the overall popularity of each description with the range across the six segments. A larger range can be seen as an indication of divisiveness. The Multiculturalists, Nativists and Cherry-pickers were the segments most likely to be at either extreme for a value.

**Safe, peaceful** and **prosperous** emerge as the frontrunning candidates for having a combination of both overall high selection and low divisiveness. This suggests that they have the highest likelihood of being successful unifiers across the board. Further research into values that could provide the backbone for this positive story of multicultural Britain is needed. However, a starting point could be digging into why these three adjectives in particular resonated with so much of the public.

Given the timing of the polling around the Southport attacks and subsequent violent riots, it is clear why safety is a priority. The popularity of





“peaceful” implies a desire to coexist or at least a sense that the current level of tension and conflict is not acceptable. One on hand this is somewhat contradictory to the levels of hostility towards multiculturalism and migration and the worsening cohesion that many respondents identified. On the



other hand, people’s perception of local change compared to their experience of national politics could play a role.

There is a paradox of scale at play, whereby people seem to be more positive about their local communities than they are about the nation as a whole. 61% of people think there is an increasing amount of tension between different groups living in Britain, but 62% also think that their local community is peaceful and friendly. Finding ways to tap into the connections that people feel in and to their local community provides much opportunity. During times of strain or struggle, local resilience can encourage people to lean towards each other, not push each other away.

However, the popularity of “safe”, “peaceful” and “prosperous” detailed above will only hold if these descriptions are borne out in real life. People need to see genuine improvement to their lives and their communities, especially those who are experiencing the highest levels of rejection, resentment and deprivation. Community resilience has to function in deed as well as in word, and in the previous section we have laid out some recommendations for how this can be achieved.

These two streams of work will compliment each other to achieve the resilient Britain we are trying to build. Alongside tangible, positive changes to people’s lives, a new story of multicultural Britain provides a fresh vocabulary and framing through which people can engage and participate in a shared and hopeful vision for the future.

# Methodology

## 2024 poll

The main poll was conducted by Focaldata between 25 July and 5 August 2024 with a sample size of 3,053. The results were then weighted to be nationally representative. Focaldata is a member of the British Polling Council. The statistics reported here are all reported with “don’t know” and “prefer not to say” responses removed.

## Polls used in *Fear and HOPE 2024*

In this report, we look back at the results of multiple polls we have conducted since 2011. All polls have been weighted to be nationally representative and the polling companies used are members of the British Polling Council. Some polls were conducted across different constituent nations in the UK, these are specified in the table below.

Throughout the report, they are referred to by month and year, with the month used being the month in which data collection was completed.

Poll name	Dates	Locations covered	Company	Sample
Jan 2011	28-31 January 2011	England	Populus	5,054
Feb 2016	1-9 February 2016	England	Populus	4,015
Jul 2016	Week after referendum	England	Populus	4,035
Dec 2016	16-19 December 2016	England, Wales, Scotland	YouGov	1,679
Jul 2017	30 June - 4 July 2017	England	Populus	4,015
Jan 2018	26-31 January 2018	England, Wales, Scotland	YouGov	5,144
Jul 2018	28 June - 6 July 2018	England, Wales, Scotland	YouGov	10,383
Jan 2019	2-3 January 2019	England, Wales, Scotland	YouGov	1,765
Apr 2019	1-2 April 2019	England, Wales, Scotland	YouGov	2,244
May 2019	26 April - 1 May 2019	England, Wales, Scotland	YouGov	6,118
Oct 2021	8-14 October 2021	England	Stack Data	3,000
Dec 2022	11-27 December 2022	England, Wales, Scotland	Focaldata	10,278
Dec 2023	30 November - 1 December 2023	England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland	Focaldata	1,589
Jan 2023	13 December 2022 - 27 January 2023	England, Wales, Scotland	Focaldata	9,311
Apr 2023	5-6 April 2023	England	Focaldata	1,550
Jan 2024	19 December - 16 January 2024	England, Wales, Scotland	Focaldata	24,952
Jun 2024	7-10 June 2024	England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland	Focaldata	1,106
Aug 2024	25 July - 5 August 2024	England, Wales, Scotland	Focaldata	3,053



## Segmentation

### 2011-2021 Methodology

In the original 2011 report, the polling and data company Populus created a segmentation based on a subset of questions which covered the following key issues: attitudes and exposure to race, multiculturalism, immigration, religious minorities and their impact on British communities, participants' perceptions of their own racial, religious and cultural identities and perceptions of what makes somebody British.

A segmentation was created from these using a technique called Dfactor Modelling, an exploratory technique that creates four factors (known as Dfactors) which summarise the responses across questions. Each factor cuts the data into two groups: those Low on a dimension and those High on the same dimension.

From the four factors, Populus was able to produce a Latent Class Analysis (a statistical method used to identify hidden groups or "classes" based on patterns in response to the survey). The four factors emerge in such a way that in combination they maximise our ability to explain different response patterns across the underlying questions. On this basis Populus created six different segments based on people's attitudes.

### 2024 Methodology

The same Dfactor modelling technique was used on all of the 2024 polling questions. This technique aims to identify underlying patterns in the data by grouping correlated variables together. Having all the questions loaded into the analysis failed to create a robust model, so the questions used were narrowed to include only the variables with the strongest factor loadings. These were questions with factor loading greater than or equal to 0.4 (positive impact) and less than or equal to -0.4 (negative impact). Populus did not need to do this in their 2011 report, given that there were a smaller number of questions used in the original report.

A second Dfactor analysis was then run on this refined set of variables. Different numbers of Dfactors (3, 4, 5 and 6) were tested, and it was found that three factors were more appropriate to use than four (the number used in the Populus analysis). This is because attitudes to Islam and attitudes to multiculturalism/migration yielded results which were too similar to justify being separated.

The segmentation was created by using Latent Class Analysis, the same technique Populus used. This method identifies groups within the data by showing how different factors combine. In this analysis, we found six distinct segments, such that each group shares similar characteristics based on the factors previously identified.

The segmentation results in an even split between people who are negative about multiculturalism (percentage of the population: 22 + 14 + 14) and those who are positive (24 + 14 + 13), suggesting a high degree of polarisation within the public. For trust/optimism, 40% have low levels (14 + 14 + 12) and 35% have high levels (22 + 13), with an additional 24% with middling levels. For beliefs about non-Muslim minorities, 39% are negative (14 + 13 + 12) and 38% (24 + 14) are positive, with 22% having middling support.

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