



A question of identity and equality in multicultural Britain



What people
think, feel and do.



Executive summary

Multicultural Britain in the 21st Century

Seventy years ago in Britain issues of race and identity were unfamiliar to most, in a country that looked very different from today.

However, since then the face of the nation has changed rapidly. Within the lifetime of the baby boomer generation, the UK has gone from a country where almost all communities were single faith and mono-cultural, to a society where one in ten are ethnic minorities.

The prevailing view about the 1950s through to the 1980s is that we didn't handle this transition particularly well. Each new wave of immigration from another part of the Commonwealth sparked a reaction, often negative, that resulted in rushed legislation to extend restrictions on future entry into Britain. Those who had already arrived often felt targeted by politicians and the authorities – the stop and search powers from the the sus laws were particularly resented.

Yet, there is a feeling that since the 1990s the political landscape and social attitudes have changed. This process began slowly with John Major, who made the first tentative steps towards supporting gender, racial and sexual equality. But it was during the premiership of Tony Blair that Britain appeared to become far more at ease with the multicultural society it had become.

Our report looks into whether we truly have become comfortable with the multicultural society we've grown into, from both sides of the divide.

Our insight certainly suggests that we think we have become more tolerant as a country, and this appears to be reflected in the hopes and beliefs of ethnic minorities in the UK.

But these encouraging signs still don't change the fact that some still feel discriminated against. Our report tries to help improve our understanding of multi-ethnic Britain, by exploring our differences as well as our similarities.

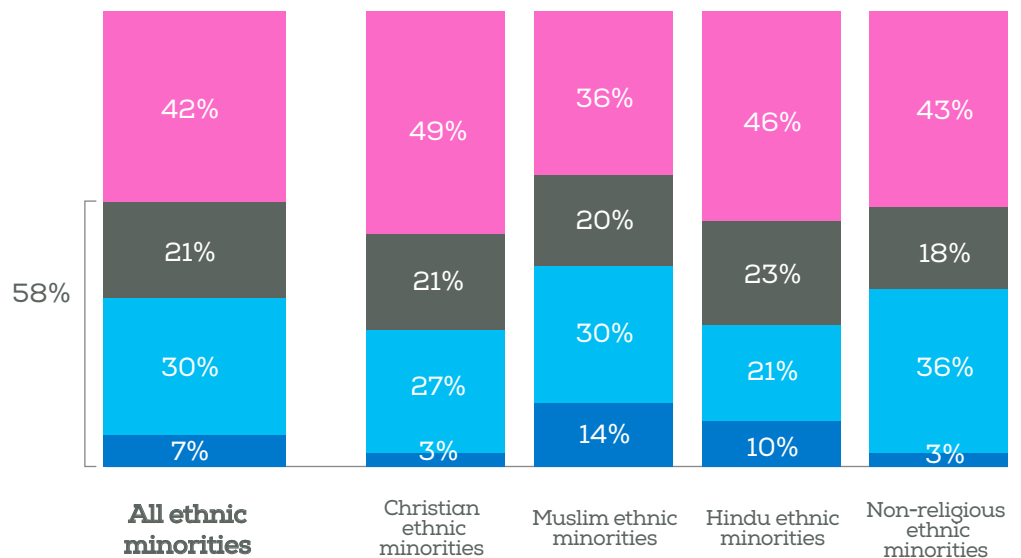
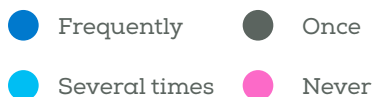
Minorities in Britain still suffer discrimination despite progress over the last twenty years

Twenty years ago earnest attempts to come to terms with Britain as a multiracial society were only just beginning. Just under half (48%) of UK adults think that the United Kingdom has become a less racist country in that time, with a similar proportion of ethnic minorities (46%) agreeing.

However, progress has been limited. Seven in ten (71%) ethnic minorities think that racist beliefs are still widely held in the UK but are not openly talked about, and 60% believe that racial discrimination is common in the UK. The message is that even if it is less socially acceptable, discrimination on grounds of race has not yet been consigned to the history books.

More than half (58%) of ethnic minorities say that they have been a victim of racial discrimination, while 47% say they have received racially motivated abuse.

Proportion of ethnic minorities who have been victims of racial discrimination split by religion



One in seven (14%) Muslims and 10% of Hindus frequently face racial discrimination, compared to a handful of ethnic minorities who are Christians. This suggests that some groups are still targeted more than others, and the data at least, should lead us to re-examine the issue of Islamophobia in Britain.



Racial discrimination is still a problem facing many in Britain

Racial discrimination and abuse is mainly being perpetrated by strangers (64%) as opposed to others known directly to the victims. The most common forms of discrimination or abuse reported by victims support the notion that it is the invectives and prejudices of strangers that affect ethnic minorities the most:

- **Insulted directly – 47%**
- **Receiving end of racist jokes or insults – 40%**
- **Receiving end of racist stereotyping – 40%**
- **Treated differently in public places (e.g. shops / restaurants) – 38%**

Although the political weather has changed much in twenty years, the authorities are still seen by some as a source of prejudice. A fifth (20%) of all Black Britons report being viewed with suspicion by the police, and we've seen from earlier studies that their trust in the police is lower than amongst White Britons.

Many still feel their job prospects are affected by their race

More than a quarter (28%) of victims selected their colleagues as a source of racial prejudice, and 22% said the same about their management or their boss.

In total, 14% of all ethnic minorities report being denied a job or interview because of their race, and 13% report being turned down for a promotion.

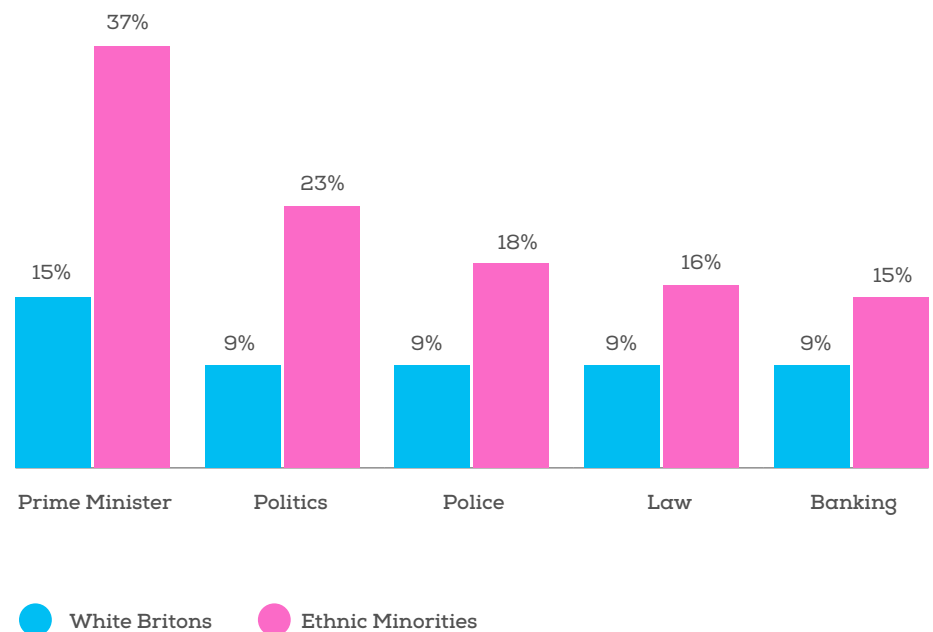


White Britons don't see the difficulties that ethnic minorities feel in securing jobs in the key professions or in politics

The problems that face minorities in the workplace extend to how they perceive many of the high profile professions in the UK. Many ethnic minorities feel there are several professions closed off to them including the police (18%), law (16%) and banking (15%).

This problem is particularly acute in politics. More than a third (37%) of ethnic minorities think that the role of prime minister is barred to them, while 23% think this about a career in politics more generally.

Which occupations or professions do you think are 'closed off' to ethnic minorities?



In total, two thirds (63%) of ethnic minorities think that there are occupations or professions closed off to them, rising to 71% amongst the younger generation (aged 18-34). However, white Britons as a whole do not share this pessimism, with only 28% believing that there are still professions closed off to ethnic minorities in the UK.



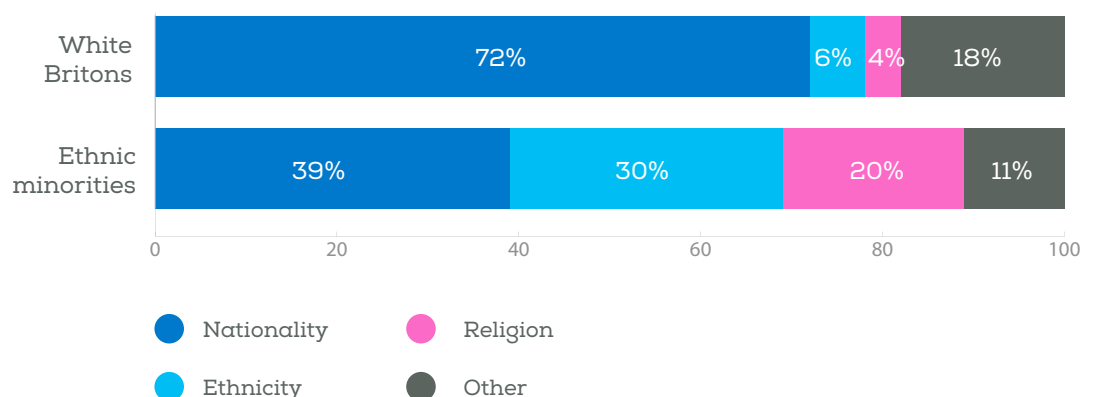
Identity can be complicated for ethnic minorities in modern Britain

Understanding the identity of various groups in society has become a precarious part of multicultural Britain, because our identity is often multifaceted.

Although most of us claim multiple elements to our identity, ranging from our religion to even the local community in which we live, for almost three quarters (72%) of White Britons the country in which they live in is the single most important part of their identity.

However, for many ethnic minorities there are other layers which affect their sense of identity. Although 39% identify most with the country they live in, half consider their religion or ethnicity as the most important part of their identity compared to only 10% of White Britons.

The most important part of their identity



Almost half (47%) of Muslims consider their Islamic faith to be the most important part of their identity, while 43% of Black Britons consider their ethnicity to be the key to describing themselves.

Competing identities impacts on integration and this doesn't show signs of going away

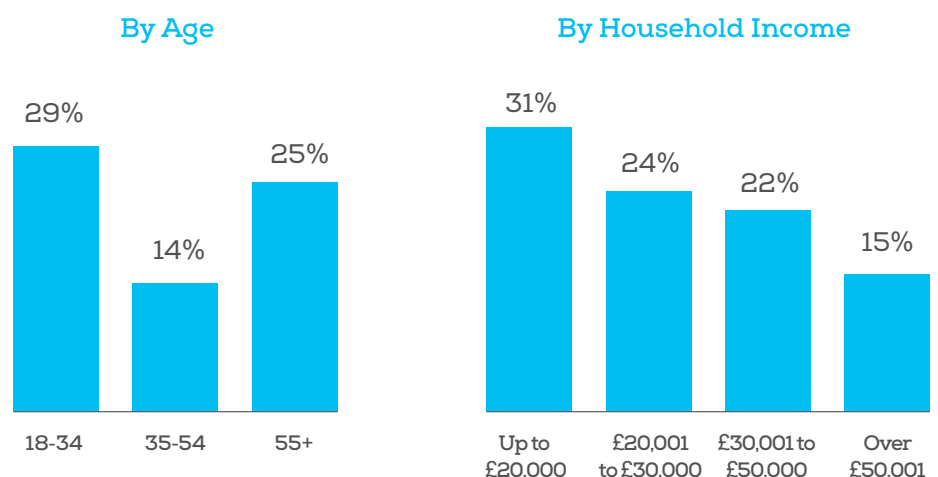
It's important to understand that these competing identities exist in order to begin to tackle many of the problems around integration.

Just over a third (35%) of minorities report feeling like they belong to a different culture, with a further 22% being excluded from society as a whole by explicitly agreeing that they don't feel like they are a part of British culture.

The identity factor plays some role in this. A third (33%) Muslims – the group most likely to identify with their religion – are most likely to say they do not feel a part of British culture, while only 19% of those with no faith feel the same.

However, fundamental issues such as identity are not the only factors in this disconnect from society. A range of socio-economic factors that might not be directly associated with identity come into play. Those with a household income of less than £20,000 a year are twice as likely as those with a household income of more than £50,000 to feel excluded from British culture.

Proportion of ethnic minorities who don't feel a part of British culture



The younger generation are the most likely to say they feel disconnected from British culture (29%), and this is something we should pay attention to if we hope to make progress over the next decade in unifying British citizens.

What Britain's achievements mean to us

Regardless of whether we primarily identify with the country we live in or not, almost everyone seems to be proud of something about Britain.

The NHS tops the list of things that make all UK adults proud to be British, followed by British history, the British sense of humour and the Monarchy.

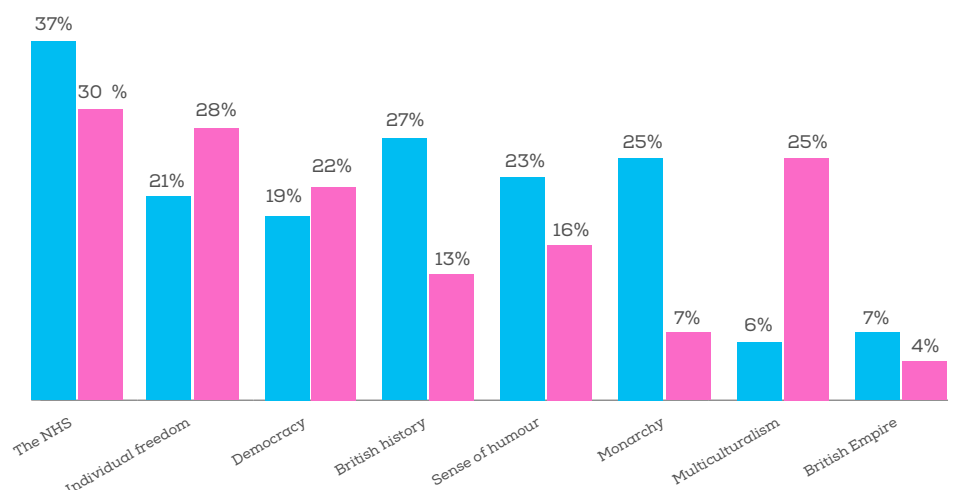
Best of British means something different to everyone in our multicultural society

What it means to be British and what makes them us differs in many of ways depending upon our background.

White Britons often concentrate on some of the more traditional aspects of being British – 27% are proud of British history and 25% selected the Monarchy. However, ethnic minorities were much more likely to focus on aspects of modern British society. A quarter (25%) say that Multiculturalism makes them proud of where they live compared to only 6% of White Britons. Minorities are also less likely than White Britons to say they are proud of British history (13%) and the Monarchy (7%).

What makes you proud to live in Britain

■ White Britons
■ Ethnic Minorities



However, all, regardless of their heritage, seem to share a pride in the individual freedom and democracy that remain the cornerstones of British society past and present.



But can we come together?

Perhaps it is around these shared values of freedom and democracy that we can build a lasting multicultural and multiracial society that feels at ease with itself.

Just over half (54%) of all UK adults think that there are a set of values that all nationalities and religions in Britain can agree on in future. The encouraging sign is that this is particularly high in London, where almost three quarters (72%) of the diverse population think that there are values that we can all agree on regardless of our background.

There is also a broad agreement that a lack of integration is considered problematic. Two thirds (64%) of ethnic minorities agree that those moving to the UK should make an effort to integrate and not establish their own separate communities, similar to the 70% of all UK adults that think this.

Fortunately there are favourable conditions in place for progress: most agree that cultural separation and exclusion is to be avoided, there is optimism about the possibility of a multi-ethnic society with shared values, and many believe that racism is on the decline. The groundwork seems to be in place for the decline in the feeling of isolation and discrimination that far too many in Britain still feel today.

About the authors



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James works across a variety of fields including our social research division and is a member of the Opinium political polling team. James' experience has primarily been amongst consumer and secondary research, delivering cutting edge insight into the key drivers behind our changing behaviour and attitudes for clients, ranging from academic institutions to media outlets and think tanks.



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Maria works for clients in a range of sectors to develop incisive thought leadership that raises their profile and breaks new ground. Maria's driving interest in cultural and social research has helped clients understand reactions and attitudes towards social institutions, new policies and current affairs.



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About Opinium

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