

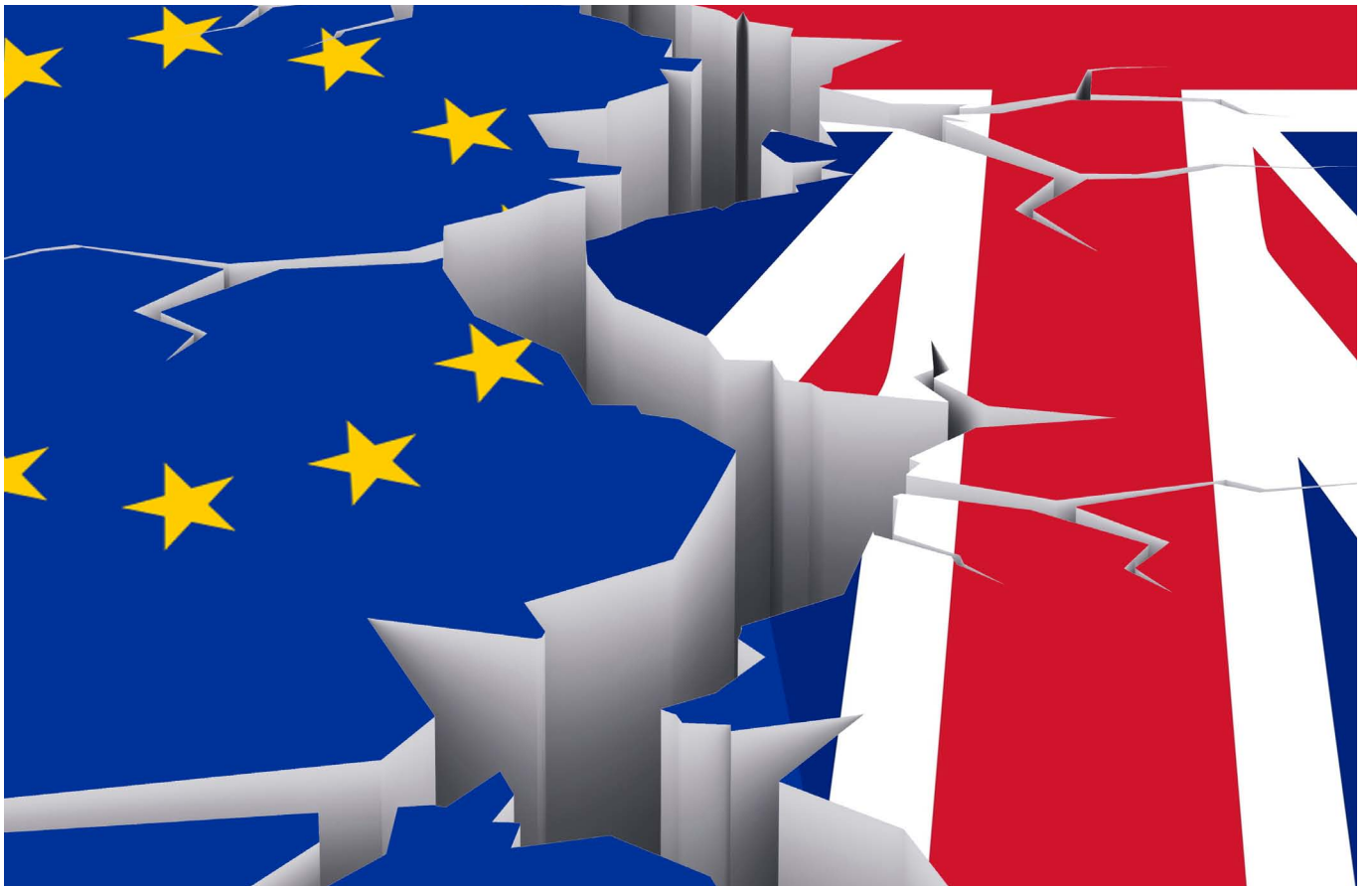
THE IMPACT OF BREXIT ON RACE AND  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS

OCTOBER 2019

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# HOPE

# THE IMPACT OF BREXIT AND A NO DEAL OUTCOME ON RACE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN BRITAIN



**Race relations in Britain are already fragile. Black and ethnic minority groups feel the brunt of inequalities in Britain, as well as facing institutional and societal racism. Brexit will compound all of these problems.**

HOPE not hate have stood against a hard Brexit that would damage our communities. A hard Brexit offers our communities a grim future – and that’s before we factor in the impact of free trade deals – which will likely make things worse. We believe that a hard Brexit is being used by the radical right, inside and outside the Conservative Party, to dramatically change British society – and change it for the worse.

A hard Brexit will make Britain poorer and much more unequal. The negative effects will hit those who have taken the greatest economic hits hardest during the last 20 years. All of this will fall hardest on those who are already most marginalised and discriminated against.

New HOPE not hate polling of BME people in Britain confirms that the impacts of Brexit are already being felt by Black and minority ethnic communities.

- Half of BME voters thinks that the state of race relations have gotten worse in the last five years

- A third of BME voters have witnessed or experienced violence or threats of violence in the last year
- Half of BME voters have witnessed or experienced racist comments being made in public in the last year
- Half of BME voters have witnessed or experienced racism on social media in the last year

Our research also shows how Brexit has energised those spreading hate, has enabled prejudice and has fuelled the threat of political violence.

The impact of Brexit on Black and minority ethnic people is going to be a huge challenge. Race on the Agenda have described BME people in Britain as in a “triple bind”. Not only are BME people more likely to be affected by austerity policies, they are also more likely to be already worse off economically or to be in insecure work, and are the main targets of resentment and hate crimes. Brexit is set to worsen all of these elements<sup>1</sup>.

This briefing outlines our research findings into how a hard Brexit will affect community and race relations in Britain and what needs to happen to limit the damage.



Photo: Ian Halsey

## RACE RELATIONS IN BREXIT BRITAIN

The impact of the Leave campaign charged concerns about immigration in Britain, and played on racist stereotypes using provocative imagery of the 2015 “refugee crisis” and amplifying a “threat” from Turkey, feeding anti-Muslim prejudice. In 2018, the UN’s special rapporteur on racism and xenophobia argued that the 2016 vote to leave the EU had left racial and ethnic minorities “more vulnerable to racial discrimination and intolerance”<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, Home Office data indicates there was a sharp increase in racially and religiously motivated hate crime during and following the EU referendum<sup>3</sup>, there were reports of huge increases in xenophobic bullying in schools<sup>4</sup>, and reports of racist abuse in football rose by 43% last season<sup>5</sup>. A poll by Opinion<sup>6</sup> from earlier this year found that overt ethnic abuse and discrimination reported by ethnic minorities has risen from 64 per cent at the beginning of 2016 to 76 per cent today.

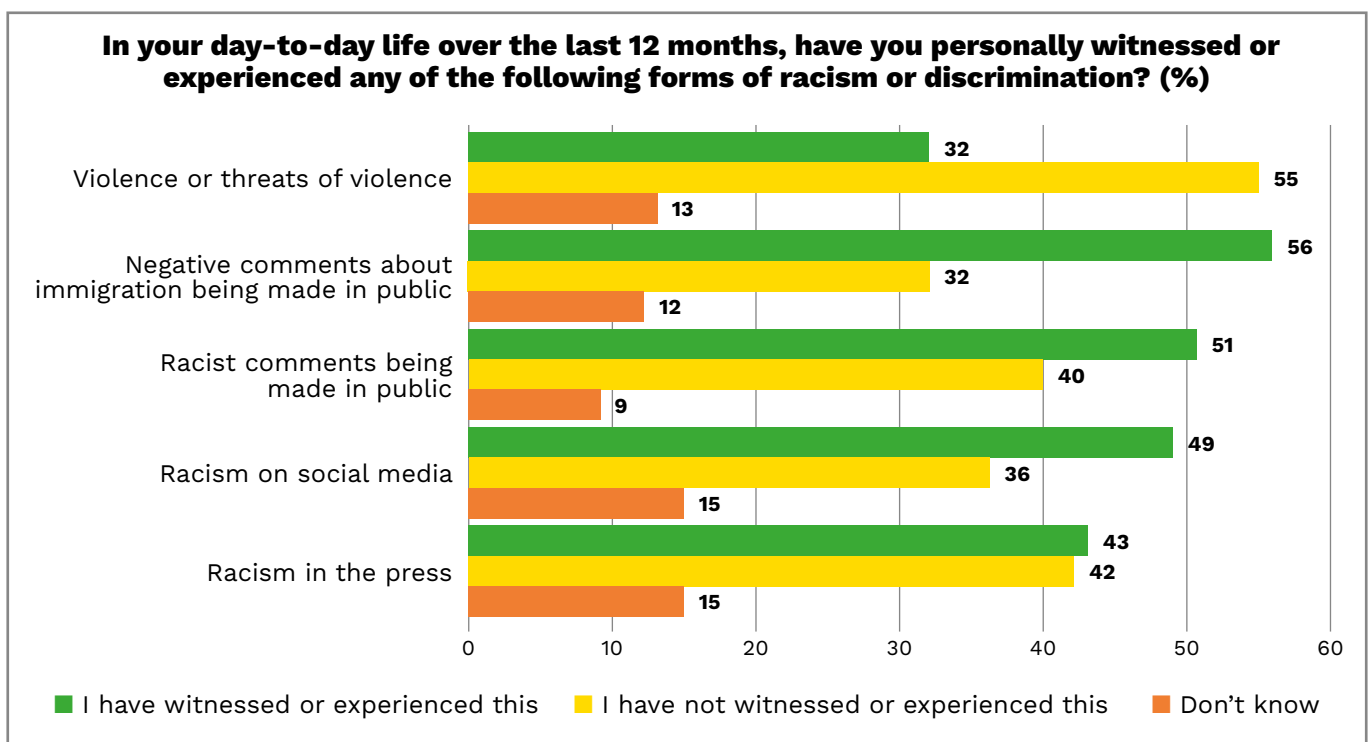
National Representative polling of 992 BME people in the UK, commissioned by HOPE not hate in late August, finds a dire state of race relations in Britain. The impacts of Brexit are already being felt by Black and minority ethnicity groups in Britain, who are seriously concerned about the impact a no deal Brexit could have in making things even worse.

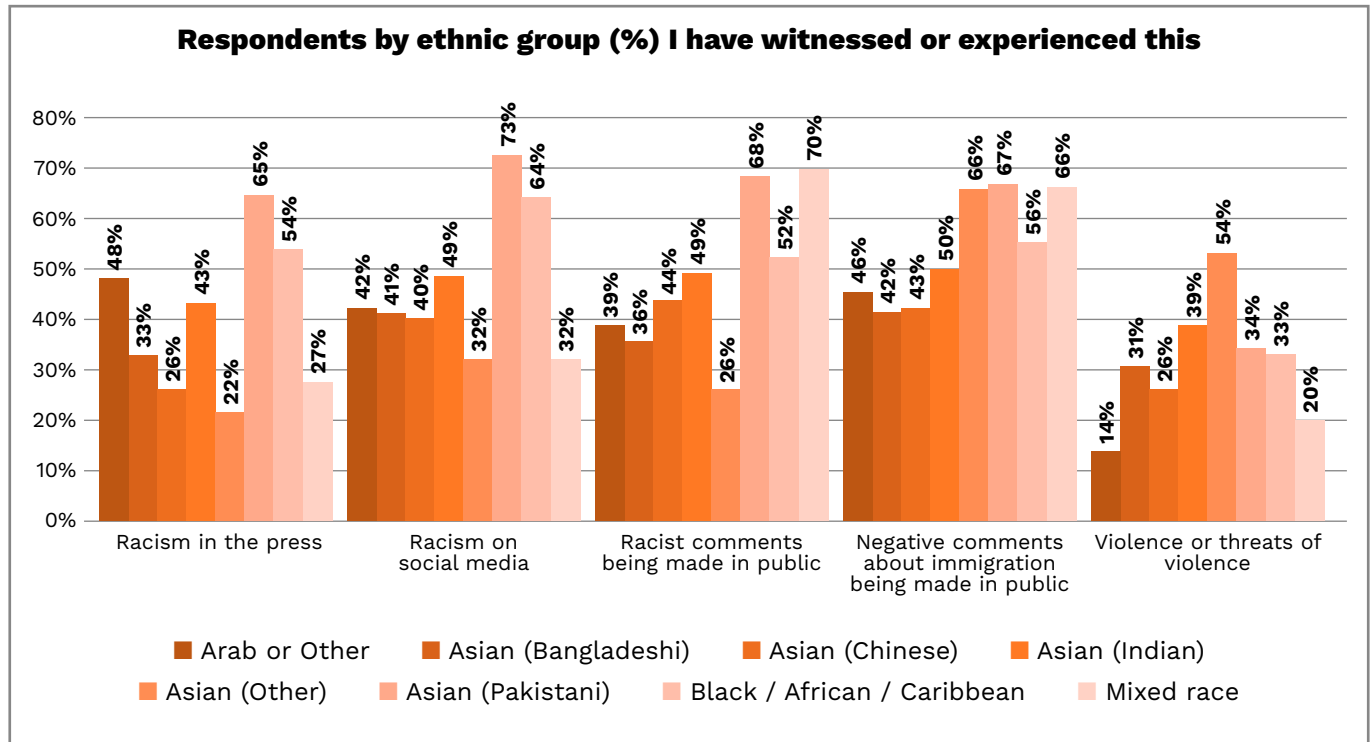
The vast majority of BME people (68%) are concerned that Brexit is feeding prejudice and division and taking our country backward- only 7% disagree. The majority of BME voters also felt the state of race relations in Britain had gotten worse over the last five years (49%), with just a small minority saying that things had gotten better (13%).

When asked about people’s individual experiences of racism in day-to-day life, the responses are shocking.

With the exception of violence or threats to violence, more BME people in Britain have witnessed or experienced various forms of discrimination in the past year than have not. In day-to-day life over the last 12 months, 43% of BME people in Britain have witnessed or experienced racism in the press. 49% of BME people have witnessed or experienced racism on social media, 51% of BME people have witnessed or experienced racist comments being made in public, and 56% have witnessed or experienced negative comments being made about immigration in public.

In terms of violence the statistics are shocking, with a third (32%) of BME people saying they had witnessed or experienced violence or threats of violence in the last 12 months. Among younger BME people, many more have witnessed or





experienced violence. Almost half of BME people under 35 (47% of 18-24s and 49% of 25-34s) have witnessed or experienced violence or threats of violence in their day to day lives over the last 12 months.

Younger people were also far more likely to have witnessed or experienced racism on social media. A staggering 70% of BME people aged 18-24 reported contact with racism on social media in the last 12 months.

We also found regional differences in people's experiences of racism. 72% of BME people in the East of England think that race relations have gotten worse since 2014 compared to 43% in the South East. Twice as many BME people in the West Midlands (84%) have seen or experienced racist comments being made in public than in London (42%).

There was a sizeable difference between the experiences of different ethnic groups. Mixed race (70%) and Pakistani people (69%) were most likely to report witnessing or experiencing racist comments being made in public- only 36% of Bangladeshi respondents claimed the same. Black, African and Caribbean (64%) and Pakistani respondents (73%) are all more likely to have seen or experienced racism on social media, while mixed raced respondents were the least likely ethnic group to report witnessing or experiencing racism online, around a third of mixed race respondents (32%).

Our polling reveals the dire state of race relations in Britain, where prejudice and discrimination have a huge impact on the day-to-day lives of BME people in Britain.

### **BREXIT AND ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED**

While Brexit itself is about membership of a European institution, not religious discrimination, Brexit has fuelled anti-Muslim hatred. The politicisation of immigration through the Leave campaign latched onto existing anti-Muslim prejudice to fuel anxieties about immigration and make links between this and EU membership.

Our polling has consistently shown how attitudes to Muslims remain distinctly different, and more negative, than attitudes towards other ethnic or religious groups<sup>7</sup>. The Leave campaign weaponised images of refugee flows through Europe and linking EU membership to Turkey. Following the referendum, hate crime incidents targeting Muslims surged<sup>8</sup>.

Anti-Muslim politics has acted as a far-right springboard towards the mainstream, as modernising arms of the far right distanced themselves from biological racism to adopt a more 'palatable' platform that tapped into broader societal prejudice against Muslims<sup>9</sup>.

Far right figures have also been capitalising on Brexit and the sense of democratic betrayal that has accompanied the stalling process, to further an anti-Muslim agenda. Activists from

across the UK far right held a 'Brexit Betrayal' demonstration in December 2018, with a view to forcing the government to adopt a unilateral withdrawal from the European Union ahead of the Government's vote. Billed as a 'cross party' demonstration the event was organised by Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (Tommy Robinson) and UKIP's increasingly isolated leader Gerard Batten. The speeches pertained less to the political process of Brexit and its potential outcomes than to the 'threat' of Islam and Muslims 'taking over Britain'. In one of the speeches, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon openly claimed that Brexit wasn't really his area of interest before launching into a tirade of anti-Muslim bile.

It is not only that the EU referendum opened Pandora's Box on anti-immigrant rhetoric, and created a more hostile environment for 'othering'. The seeping of anti-Muslim politics into the mainstream, the conflation of migrant and refugee flows with Muslims, Islam, a decline in 'Western values' and global terrorism, are piggybacking on anger and frustration around Brexit. This shaping of prejudiced anti-Muslim narratives on the wider public are clearly being felt by Muslims in Britain.

Our polling finds a huge 70% of people of Pakistani ethnicity (the vast majority of whom identify as Muslim) think that the state of race relations in Britain has gotten worse over the last five years. People of Pakistani ethnicity are among the most likely of all BME groups to say they have witnessed or experienced all forms of racism. 73% say they have witnessed or experienced racism on social media, 68% have witnessed or experienced racist comments being made in public, and 34% have witnessed or experienced violence or threats of violence.

The feeling that the Brexit vote was feeding anti-Muslim hatred was experienced first-hand by HOPE not hate activists when they canvassed a predominantly white working class estate in Bradford. In what many of our activists, some with 15 years of history with HOPE not hate, claimed was their worst experiences of their anti-fascist lives, many residents vocalised their racist anger towards Muslims. In two instances on the same street, residents singled out their Muslim neighbours: "We voted Leave, but why are they still here?" shouted one woman, literally pointing at the Muslim family across the street.

A focus group we ran in another area of Bradford with a mixed aged group of men of Kashmiri origin spoke about a racist upsurge, with many saying they had experienced greater racial prejudice since the 2016 vote. A taxi driver spoke about young people coming back from nights out in the back of his taxi saying that they voted Leave as they thought this would mean all the Eastern European and Asian people in Bradford would 'go home', but that these people were even angrier now they realised this wasn't a reality.

The links between anti-Muslim hatred and EU membership may seem tenuous, but Brexit has set the conditions for anti-Muslim hatred to spread across the lines of acceptability, merging anxieties with frustration and creating space for conspiracies to spread through a process that many feel has not been transparent.

## THE IMPACT OF A HARD BREXIT ON RACE RELATIONS

While right-wing commentators dismiss the potential damage of a no deal Brexit as scaremongering, the evidence continues to suggest that a no deal Brexit would be catastrophic for the UK, especially for our communities.

### THE IMPACT OF A NO DEAL BREXIT ON BME PEOPLE

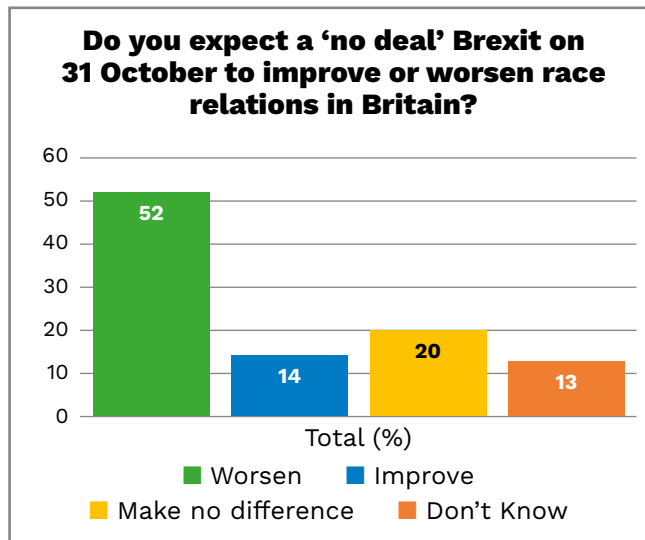
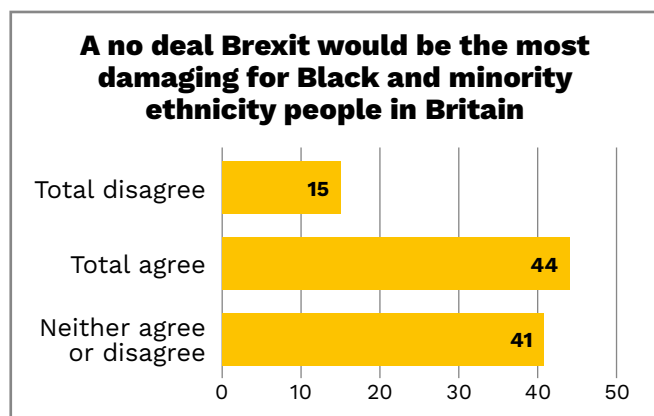
The threat of a no deal has receded, but not been entirely eradicated. While the impacts of a no deal outcome on trade and GDP are well have been well broadcast, the impact on community relations has been less well documented.

A briefing from Race on the Agenda<sup>10</sup> has shown how BME people are more likely to feel the direct impacts of a no deal Brexit. BME people in Britain face inequality across education, housing, employment and income, and reductions in public spending since 2010 have disproportionately affected BME families<sup>11</sup>.

The impact of a no deal Brexit on BME communities will be disproportionately damaging. Falls in sterling, a decline in GDP, and as looks likely, falling into a recession, will push up the cost of living and reduce real wages, which will most affect those already in precarious positions.

Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups are, on average, paid less than White groups and tend to have lower rates of employment, and the impact of a no deal Brexit on key industries, such as manufacturing or services are also more likely to affect BME people who are disproportionately employed in these sectors<sup>12</sup> and in precarious work<sup>13</sup>.

Our poll finds that 44% of BME people in Britain agree that a no deal Brexit would be the most damaging for Black and minority ethnicity people in Britain- just 15% disagree. People of Indian (66%) and Bangladeshi (61%) ethnicity



are most likely to think BME people will be disproportionately impacted.

Those who face intersecting inequalities are especially likely to feel that a no deal Brexit would affect BME people most. BME women are among those who feel BME people will be disproportionately impacted by a no deal Brexit (48% of women agree compared to 40% of men). 65% of low-income households (those earning £10-20,000 a year before tax) think BME people will be disproportionately impacted by a no deal Brexit. A no deal Brexit would widen the gaps on inequality even further.

Perhaps then it is no wonder that BME people in Britain are pessimistic about the future in a post-Brexit world. In our poll, 61% say they are pessimistic about the future- just 39% say that they feel optimistic about the future. Among young BME people (18-24), just 31% feel optimistic for the future, and just 8% of BME people who define themselves European feel optimistic for the future.

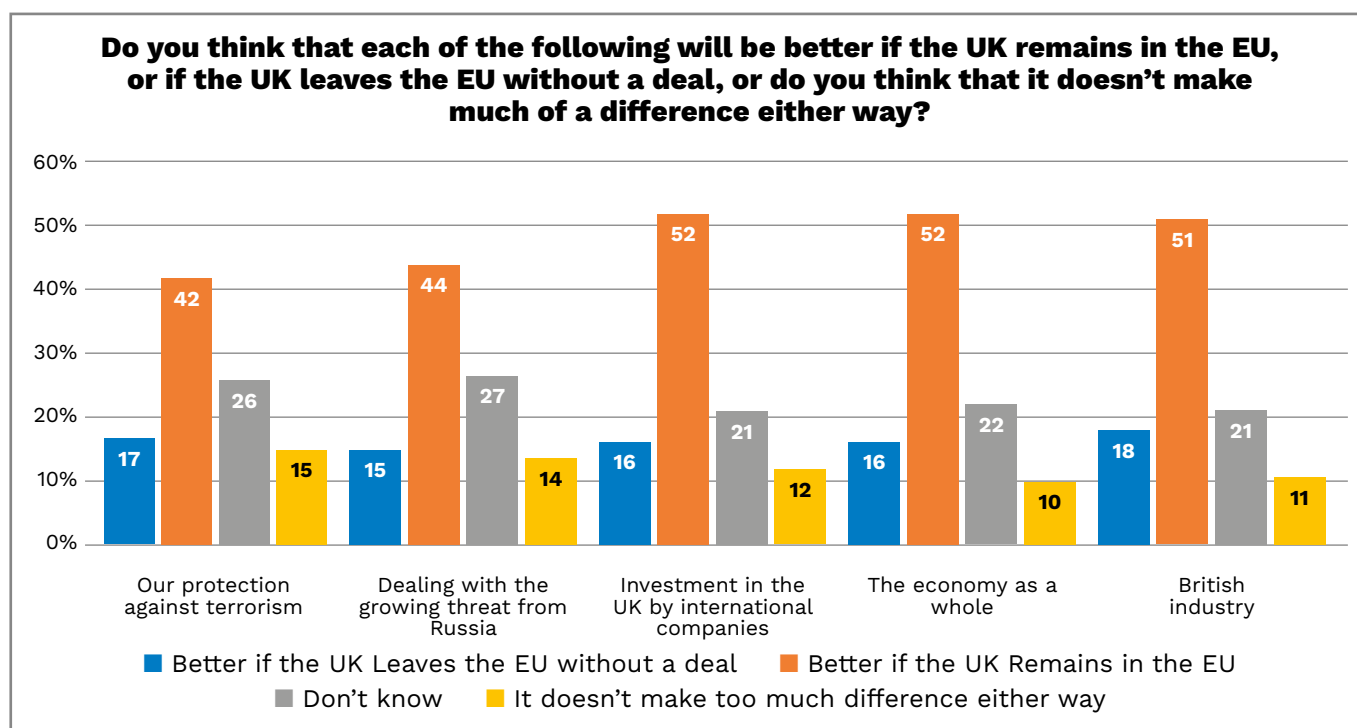
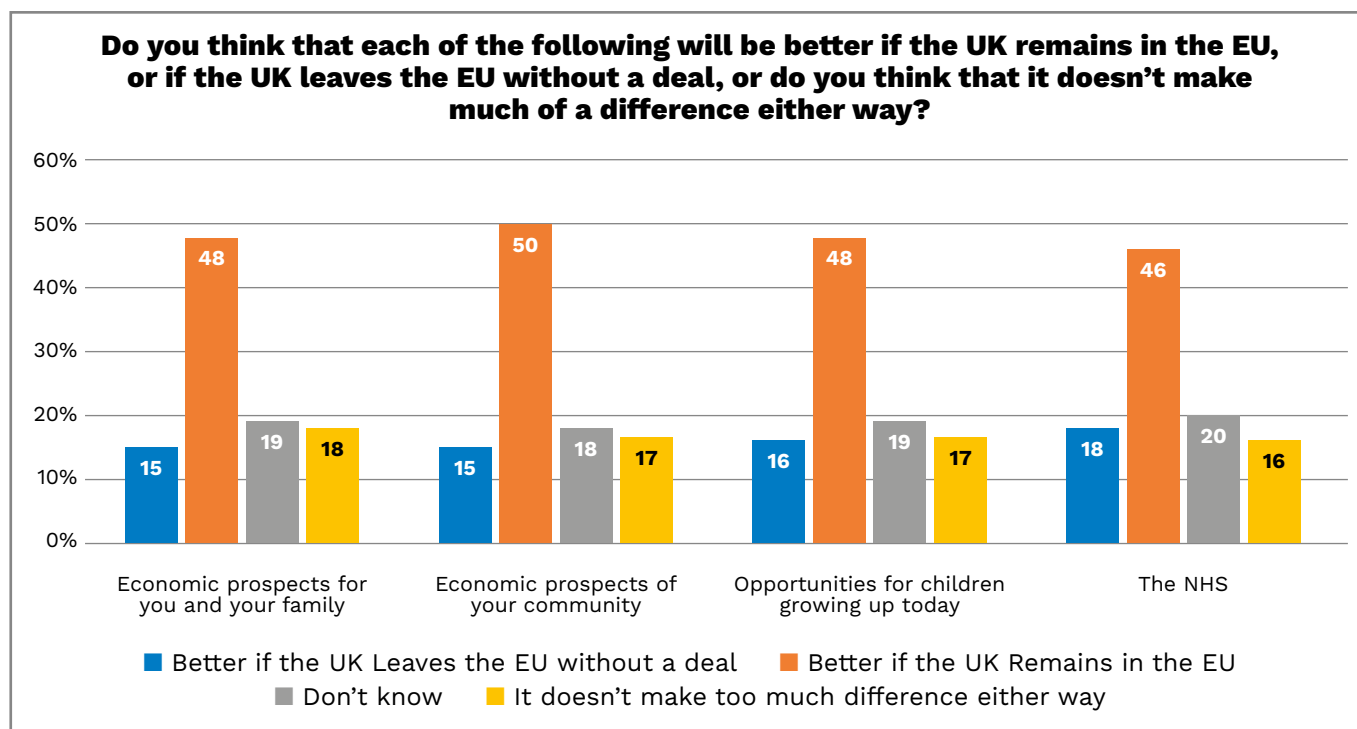
And it is not just the economic impacts which are most likely to be felt by BME communities. A huge 52% of BME people expect a no deal Brexit to worsen race relations in Britain.

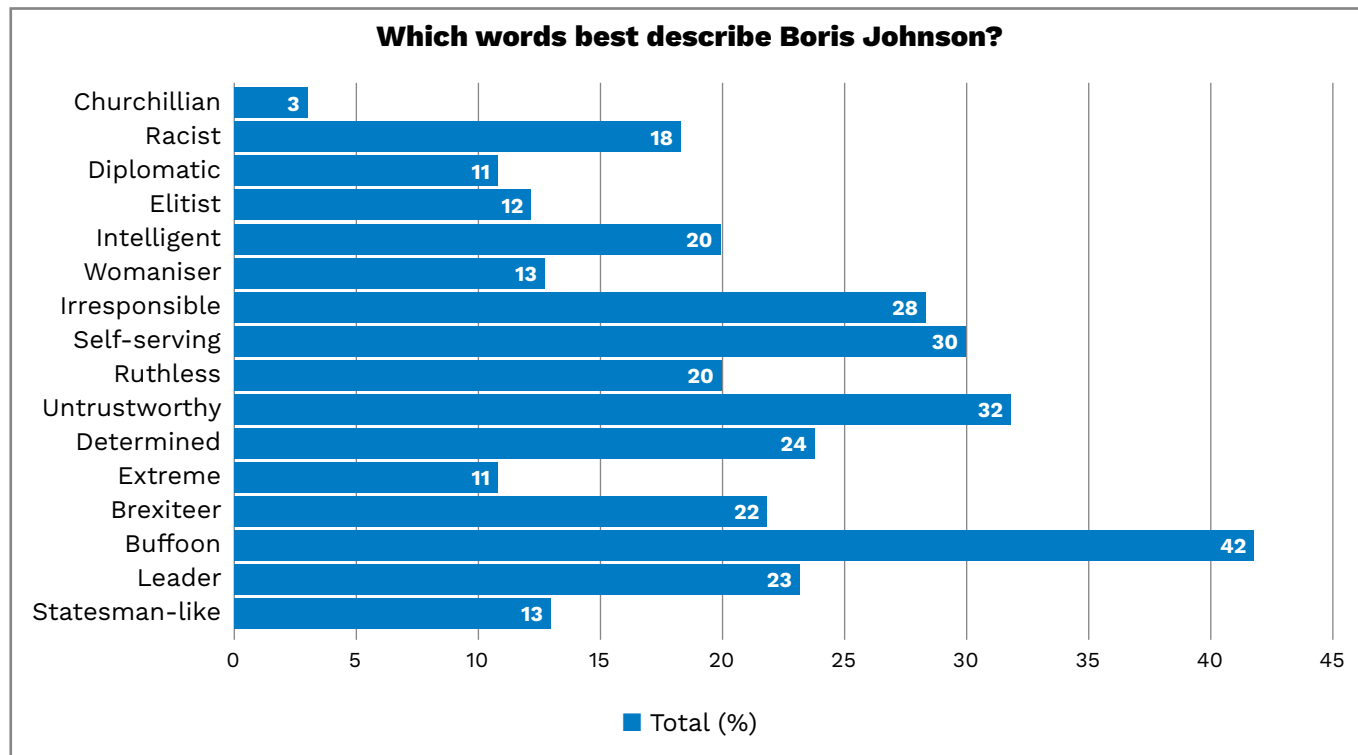
Among those who felt a no deal Brexit would worsen race relations, 53% felt that this would enable more negative comments about immigration to be made in public, 41% felt it would cause an increase in racist comments being made in public. 40% felt racism on social media would increase and the same proportion felt racism in the press would increase. 38% thought a no deal would see growing tension between communities, 34% felt there

would be increased violence and 32% anticipate a surge in support for the far right.

When given a selection of outcomes from Brexit, BME people think that leaving the EU on October the 31st would be the most damaging Brexit outcome for race relations in the UK (28%). Only 6% think that delaying Brexit beyond the 31st of October would be most damaging and only 9%

think that giving the British people a vote on the final Brexit outcome would be most damaging. 12% think that leaving with a deal will be most damaging for British race relations, and while there have been claims that not leaving the EU would be seen as betrayal and cause unleash riots and racial tension, just 25% think that remaining in the UK would be most damaging.





**Which of the following outcomes of Brexit do you think would have the most damaging impact on race/community relations in the UK? Total (%)**

Delaying Brexit beyond October 31st	6%
Don't know	20%
Giving the British people a vote on the final Brexit outcome	9%
Leaving the EU on 31st October with a deal agreed by Boris Johnson	12%
Leaving the EU on 31st October without a deal	28%
Remaining in the EU	25%

**VIEWS OF BME PEOPLE ON BREXIT**

Given the potential impacts of a no deal Brexit on BME communities and race relations in the UK, there is perhaps no surprise that BME voters reject a no deal Brexit. Our poll finds that 57% of BME people in Britain think a no deal Brexit would be a bad thing for Britain. The same proportion (57%) oppose Britain leaving the EU without a deal. Only 16% of BME people think a no deal Brexit would be a good thing for Britain, and 16% think it would make no difference.

If there was a public vote now on whether the UK should leave the European Union, or stay in the European Union, 61% of BME people in Britain would vote to remain in the EU, while

fewer than a quarter say they would vote to leave the EU (24%). Only 8% say they would not vote in a new vote on EU membership.

The vast majority of BME people are not confident that a no deal Brexit would make things better for themselves, their communities or the country as a whole and see negative impacts across a range of issues.

48% of BME people think their own economic prospects would be better if the UK remains in the EU- just 15% think they would be better in a no deal scenario. Half (50%) think the economic prospects of their community would be better if the UK remains in the EU- just 15% think they would be better in a no deal scenario. 46% of BME people think there would be greater opportunities for children growing up today if the UK remained in the EU, and the same proportion think that the NHS would be better if the UK remained in the EU. Only 18% think the NHS would be better off in a no deal outcome.

BME people are most likely to describe Boris Johnson as a Buffoon (42%), untrustworthy (32%), self-serving (30%), or irresponsible (28%), and do not feel that Johnson is working for them.

More than four times as many BME people (22%) are not confident that Boris Johnson will get a better deal with the EU than Theresa May as are confident that Boris will get a better deal (5%). More than four times as many BME people (21%) are not confident that Boris Johnson will



deliver a no deal Brexit without any negative consequences to the British economy as think he will (just 5%), and more than four times as many BME people (22%) are not confident that Boris Johnson will make life better for people like them as think he will (just 5%).

BME people have little faith that Boris Johnson will deliver on any of his promises, too. A tiny 6% of BME people in Britain have faith that Boris Johnson will deliver Brexit, honour his recent spending promises and improve the economy. Almost twice as many BME people believe that a number of companies will move their factories out of the UK if Britain leaves the EU without a deal (48%) as think this threat is exaggerated (29%).

Promises made by the leave campaign intended to attract support from BME voters, that after Brexit it would be easier to obtain non-EU visas, are also rebutted by BME voters. A tiny 24% of those polled believe that, in a post-Brexit Johnson led Britain, promises made at the time of the EU referendum in 2016, by the Leave campaign claiming that a post-Brexit Britain would mean greater immigration from Commonwealth countries and increased family reunions will be honoured. 45% think this is not going to happen.

## **BME EU CITIZENS IN BRITAIN**

The future for many EU citizens in Britain remains uncertain. While the roll out of settled and pre-settled status is attempting to provide a smooth route to remaining in the UK, the scheme had a rocky start and even now, just weeks from the UK's planned departure, fewer than half of those currently in the UK have applied for settled status<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, of those who are applying, many more are finding themselves in an even more precarious position, without the guaranteed permanent right to remain<sup>15</sup>. Levels of awareness of the settled status scheme remain low, particularly among more marginalised EU citizens, such as Roma people.

BME people born in the EU and living in the UK, who are expected to number around 250,000<sup>16</sup> people, have remained relatively invisible in the Brexit debate. As a population that are visibly different from the majority, this group face multiple forms of discrimination, all of which are compounded by uncertainty around their right to remain in the EU.

Our polling finds that BME residents who identify as European are most anxious about the implications of a no deal Brexit. 83% of this

group think the state of race relations in Britain has gotten worse over the last five years and 94% expect a no deal Brexit to worsen race relations in Britain. They are most likely to think that a no deal Brexit will damage all aspects of Britain's economy and society, and 81% think a no deal will be most damaging for BME people in Britain.

## **BME LEAVE VOTERS**

The stereotype of a white, uneducated, racist North being responsible for the 2016 decision to leave the EU hides much of the complexity behind the vote. There has been little discussion of how Britain's ethnic minorities voted, despite an estimated quarter of BME voters backing Leave in the referendum<sup>17</sup>. However, our polling suggests that BME Leave voters are among the most likely to have changed their minds on Brexit, spurred in part, as a result of unleashed racial and xenophobic prejudice.

In our July 2018 poll of 10,383 people, only 27% of those of Pakistani heritage who voted to leave the EU in 2016 said they would vote the same way if there was a referendum today.

In our latest poll, more BME Leave voters think that leaving the EU without a deal would be bad for Britain than think it would be a good thing. More Leave voters think that leaving under a deal (22%) or without a deal (22%) would have the most damaging impact on race/ community relations in Britain. Just 6% say delaying Brexit would have the worst impact, 10% say the most damaging scenario would be putting a final vote to the people, and 32% say remaining in the EU would be the most damaging outcome.

BME Leave voters are less likely than other BME groups to say that they have experienced or witnessed forms of racism or discrimination in the last 12 months, however, 71% of BME Leave voters are also concerned that Brexit is feeding prejudice and division and taking our country backwards.

BME Leave voters are also more pessimistic than those who voted to remain in the EU. 77% of BME Leave voters say they feel pessimistic about the future, compared to 64% of BME people who voted to remain in the EU. This sits in contrast to Leave voters in the population as a whole, who our research<sup>18</sup> shows moved from an overwhelmingly pessimistic group prior to the 2016 vote, to a group of optimists.

There is no 'typical' Leave voter, and there is a lot of diversity among BME people who voted leave, who did so for many different reasons. However, it is clear that in the face of rising

racism, prejudice and discrimination enabled by the vote, many BME Leave voters have changed their minds.

## **BREXIT, FEAR AND LOSS**

The vote to leave the EU and the politicisation of immigration during the referendum campaigns normalised xenophobic rhetoric, emboldened racism and created fertile conditions for hate. A no deal Brexit would not only bolster these sentiments and add to inequalities between white British and BME people, but it would create conditions that would drive resentment and further anger among those who expected Brexit to bring them greater prosperity.

Hope not hate research<sup>19</sup> has shown how a sense of loss, a feeling of something being taken away, and of community decline, can feed anti-immigrant attitudes. Our research has found that when people share anxieties about immigration, they rarely do so in isolation from broader grievances in their lives.

Where opportunities are greater, and where people feel more in control of their own lives, and optimistic about their successes, where people are more educated, and where people have more meaningful contact with people of different backgrounds, these communities are more likely to become more resilient to hateful narratives and to political manifestations of hatred. Our data has found the greatest enmity towards migrants and minorities is likely to be held in places that shared a similar profile; coastal or post-industrial towns with almost homogenously white British populations, areas out of core cities, where industry and jobs had been lost, where levels of education and skills were poor, and where there were few opportunities.

Animosity towards migrants and minorities is often a manifestation of resentments and frustrations, which will be fed by a no deal Brexit. The damaging impact on poor white communities where people may already hold prejudice views and frustrations at the Brexit process, will fuel further anger.

This is likely to be amplified by the bursting of an optimism bubble, inflated by false promises from opportunistic politicians. Those who found a newfound sense of optimism that Brexit may improve their lot, open new opportunities and increase their prosperity will be hit with a very different reality.

Many of those who are most optimistic about Brexit also share some of the most negative attitudes towards multiculturalism and immigration, and expect immigration to fall sharply after Brexit. Their disappointment at decline in their own lives and the realisation that the majority of EU citizens in the UK will remain could see anger targeting migrants and minorities to boil over.

## **HEADING FOR CIVIL UNREST?**

### **A NO DEAL AND THE REACH OF THE FAR RIGHT**

The far right have adopted a no deal Brexit as part of their broader mission. Messages of breaking all ties with an 'oppressive' Europe and 'taking back control', framed through a narrative of nationalism and betrayal by a 'treacherous elite' and lined with anti-immigrant narratives and conspiracies about a Muslim takeover of Europe enabled by EU figures such as Merkel.

Groups such as the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) and Britain First have been organising around 'Brexit betrayal', with messages passed around online groups threatening rioting, civil unrest and violence<sup>20</sup>. In our December 2018 Populus poll<sup>21</sup>, 46% of people said that they were concerned that there would be public disorder if the decision to leave the EU were reversed, with just 28% refuting this.

Our most recent Fear and Hope report<sup>22</sup> found Brexit to be a key dividing line between those most likely to support or sympathise with the far right, people who share strongly negative attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism, to distrust 'the establishment', and hold aggressively anti-Muslim views.

However, these people split into two groups, whereby one half, motivated by Brexit, a group that were generally older and more economically comfortable, would be more likely to direct their anger over Brexit towards voting for the Brexit party than turn out on the streets. This group, who we termed 'hostile brexiters' share anti-establishment views but are still likely to turn out at the polls, identifying most closely with Nigel Farage as their political leader. As the Conservative party has drifted further and further towards the right, this group could also extend their support to the Tories.

But while the Brexit party may soak up some of the Brexit anger, we found another group who share very strongly anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalism, and while many voted to Leave the EU, this group are incredibly detached from the political system and therefore much less motivated by Brexit. Those who fit in this group, termed 'anti-establishment pessimists' are overwhelmingly pessimistic, are most unhappy about their lives so far, and are most likely to think things have got worse over the last 10 years. They are also most likely to support Tommy Robinson, and to advocate for violence.

A no deal Brexit will not deliver an answer for this group, nor will it resolve their concerns.

Instead, a no deal Brexit would worsen the conditions of their own lives, and add to a sense of pessimism and resentment which the far right will exploit.

### **HOW MUCH IS IT ABOUT IMMIGRATION, AND HOW MUCH IS IT ABOUT OPPORTUNITY?**

Immigration was a driving force behind the vote to leave the European Union. In our January 2018 YouGov poll, a massive 74% of Leave voters said that immigration was one of the three most important reasons for their decision, the most popular choice of all Leave voters.

That same poll found that the majority of people expected immigration to decline a bit after Britain leaves the EU, but few (22%) felt it would decline substantially. Focus group research Hope not hate conducted this summer would indicate that that figure would now much lower, as people spoke of their expectations of Brexit reducing immigration falling through.

At the same time, support for support for immigration grew incrementally from the time of the referendum, with the share of those who think that immigration has been more good than bad for the country up to 63% from 60% in July 2018, and 40% in February 2011. As immigration has fallen off the political agenda, concern has slowly faded.

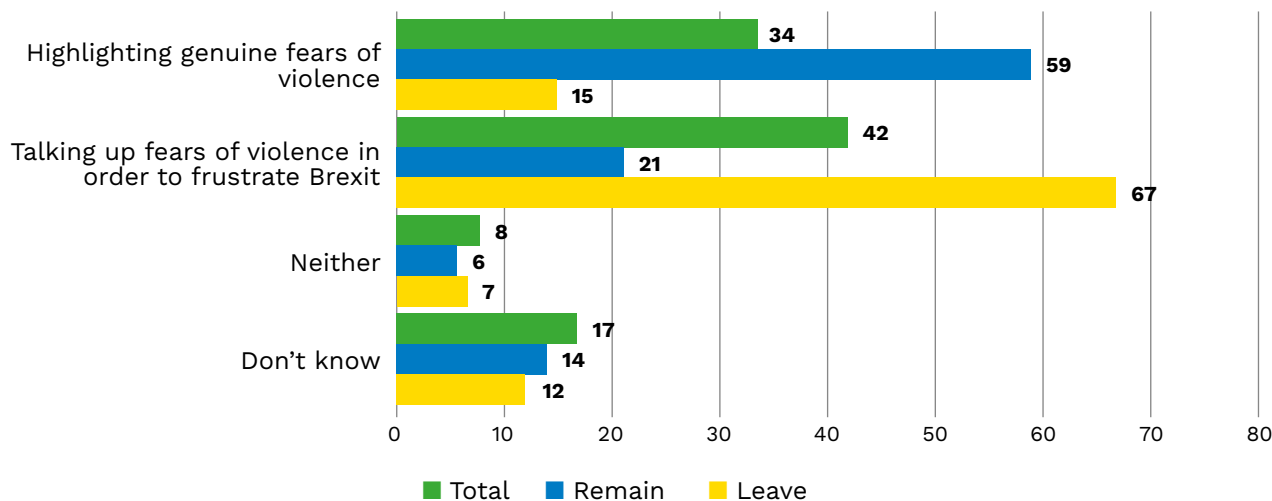
This is not to say there has been a revolutionary change in attitudes to immigration, and a significant proportion of the population remain opposed. However, in relation to Brexit, anger is less focussed on immigration and has shifted increasingly towards the Brexit process itself.

The potential for violence and civil unrest has far less to do with immigration specifically, but is more about opportunism for those who seek to divide.

### **THE THREAT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

In focus groups on Brexit run by Hope not hate in August 2019, participants openly, and casually, spoke about the potential assassination of politicians, to which others laughed and none challenged. This was not the first time these sentiments have emerged in focus groups that we have run, but this was the first occasion where participants seemed to see this as an unremarkable, or even inevitable, consequence of current affairs.

**Last week, in Parliament, several MPs warned that the increasingly aggressive language used in the Brexit debate was heightening tensions and could potentially lead to violence against them. Do you think they were...?**



A normalisation of political violence has not happened overnight. The Brexit process has slowly ebbed away at already fragile public trust in politicians and mainstream media, as far right agitators have pushed narratives of politicians as ‘traitors’.

The impact of this has clearly been borne out in threats and violence towards politicians, in particular female MPs, but also staff in Westminster and journalists. However, evidence for this is being dismissed, most recently by the prime minister himself, who responded to Paula Sheriff’s emotional statement in parliament about the level of abuse she and other women MPs were receiving with the dismissive “Humbug”.

Polarisation that the 2016 referendum left in its wake means that these incidents have been used for political gain. Threats of violence and attacks by opportunists, that are very real, are being distorted as a partisan issue. Just as the detrimental economic projections of a no deal Brexit are dismissed by those who want to leave and build anxiety in those who want to remain, the very real concern of violence against politicians is being seen as an interpretation, not a reality.

A new poll of 1,600 people carried out by YouGov for HOPE not hate in early October found that the British public were split over their views on rising tensions. 34% of people thought that MPs warnings that the increasingly aggressive language used in the Brexit debate was heightening tensions were highlighting genuine concerns of violence, but 42% dismissed these

concerns as ‘talking up fears of violence in order to frustrate Brexit’.

Leave voters were far more likely to dismiss these concerns (67%) while Remain voters were much more likely to think this was a response to a genuine threat (59%). The angry political debate has moved from disagreement to dismissal, and has taken the public with it, manipulating genuine public anger and frustration over being kept in the dark on Brexit for political gain, opening up space for opportunists.

Because there is genuine anger. In this same poll, we asked people, on a scale of 0-10, where 0 means very relieved and 10 means very angry, how relieved or angry will you be if the UK does not leave the EU on 31 October? We found the response split straight down the middle, with around a quarter of people at either extreme, either very angry or very relieved at the prospect.

The Government has now made stark warnings about the potential for this anger to spill over into riots. But our polling finds that these threats too are being interpreted very differently by different groups.

In our October poll, we asked people about Government ministers’ warning to the media that there could be serious riots if Britain did not leave the EU on 31st October. Around a quarter of people (26%) thought that they were highlighting genuine concerns of riots but many more (47%) felt that they were talking up fears of riots in order to support Brexit.

Remain voters were far more likely to think that these threats were talked up in order to

support Brexit (61%) than think these threats were credible (20%), while Leave voters were split, with 39% believing threats were talked up and 34% believing that this was a genuine concern. Those who intend to vote for the Brexit party were more than three times as likely (46%) as people who intend to vote Lib Dem (14%) to think that this was highlighting genuine concerns of riots.

But the divides on these issues also show just how important the spokesperson is. If Johnson says something his supporters believe him, and opponents do not. If Labour MPs say something Remainers will believe them while Brexiteers don't. This threat is very real, and the political divides we see are masking this.

Our previous Fear and HOPE reports have all asked whether they would support a campaign against the construction of a mosque, and whether they would reconsider their views if things on either side became violent. In July 2018, 66% of people said that they felt violence from either side is unacceptable and would reconsider their view. Only 21% felt that the issues are so serious that you have to be prepared to support one side or the other, even if some people on your side sometimes take things too far.

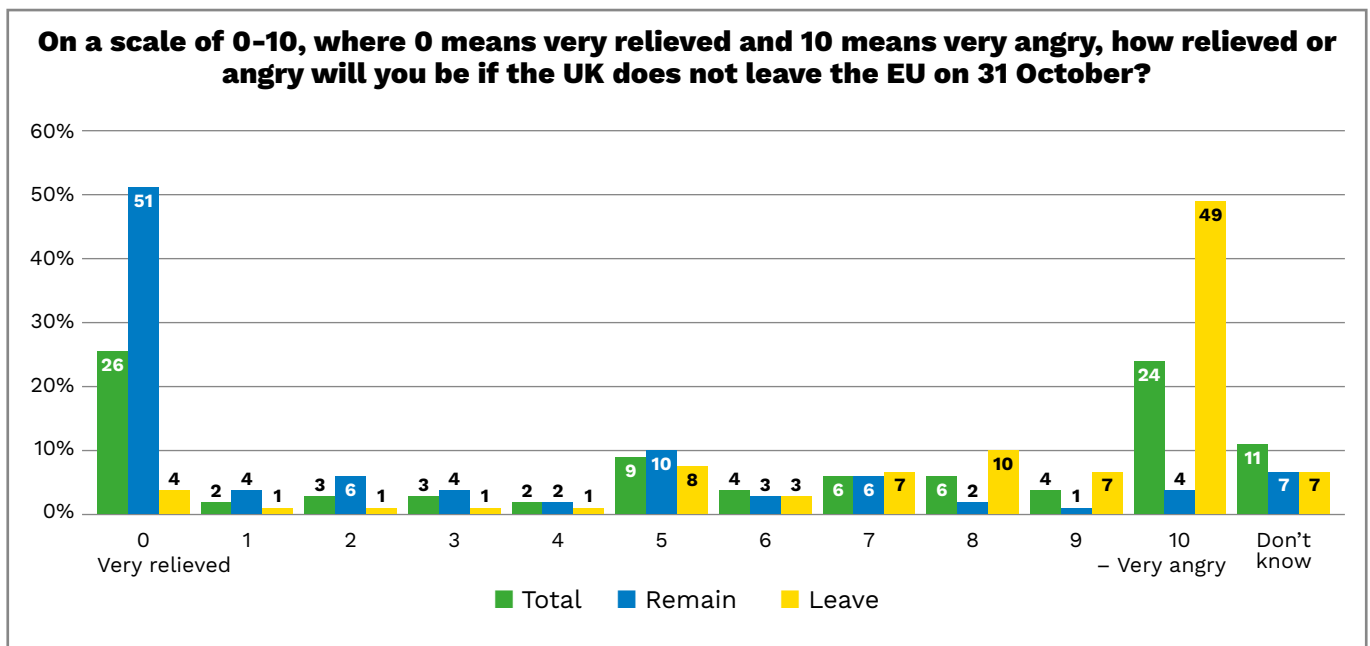
When we asked this question in light of a supporting a campaign to reverse Brexit, just 17% of people who would support such a campaign said that they would reconsider their view if there were protests that became violent or threatened violence. 64% of people said violence would not make them reconsider their view<sup>23</sup>.

It remains only a tiny minority of people who would enact violence, but the willingness of so many to overlook violence in relation to Brexit is terrifying. This ambivalence about violence is particularly concerning when placed against a backdrop of a chaotic no deal Brexit whereby dystopian predictions of shortages of food, medication and other supplies, come to fruition, all of which could well trigger rioting and looting.

The reality is that the Home Office has failed to keep up with this rapidly shifting public mood. While there have been efforts to respond to an anticipated surge in hate crime in the event of a no deal Brexit, following patterns seen after the 2016 vote, it is yet to be seen if these efforts are adequate, and less has been done to challenge the funnelling of this anger towards the political class.

The brutal murder of Jo Cox MP should have been a moment of change, but far right attacks on politicians, particularly of those on the left, have grown. Recent attacks saw left-wing journalist Owen Jones violently assaulted outside of a London pub, and Jeremy Corbyn attacked by members of a far right group at a rally with almost no police protection in place. These highlight just how dark things could get.

In these divided times, it is essential that these attacks are treated with the severity they need, rather than seen as a result of political turmoil and polarisation around a single issue. These attacks are not a normal response to a 'democratic deficit' over Brexit. When political violence becomes normalised, we have moved away from democracy all together.



## HATE CRIME DATA IN THE UK: INACCESSIBLE AND INCONSISTENT

The impact of Brexit on hate crime in England and Wales is well documented. Home Office data showed a spike in most kinds of hate crimes following the 2016 referendum and a year by year increase since 2011.

Understanding hate crime data is complex, reflecting both actual changes in committed hate crimes but also biases in recording incidents and likelihood to report. Rises in number of recorded hate crimes could therefore be an indication of positive change, since it might reflect improvements in identifying and responding to hate incidents. Despite the inadequacies, analysis of police records of hate crime is the most viable way of monitoring trends over time.

The publication of a study from the University of Manchester which, using data collected through a Freedom of Information request (FOI) submitted to Greater Manchester Police found a dramatic spike in religious and racial hate crimes in June 2017 - immediately following the Manchester arena attack and around the time of the 2017 general election.

This encouraged HOPE not hate to attempt a systematic collection of hate crime data from police forces across the UK in order to better understand patterns in hate incidents and to align this with HOPE not hate's attitudinal data to find potential linkages. In January 2019, we sent FOI requests to all police forces in the UK requesting data on recorded hate crime incidents. We requested information on:

1. Date of the incident (or month if exact date is not available)
2. Location or district
3. Target of hate crime (typically categorised as Race, Religion, Sexuality, Transgender, Disability or Subculture but there are regional variations)

Unfortunately, our requests were only answered by slightly more than half of all police forces, and the data that we did manage to collect was patchy, not uniformly collated, very difficult to interpret and oftentimes did not match our request.

Nine months after making our FOI requests 26 out of 48 police forces in the UK has responded with data, most of which greatly exceeded the 20 day limit that FOI requests should be processed within. Some forces apologise ahead of time and informed us that they wouldn't be able to meet this limit while we are yet to hear from others.

The data we received varied greatly in quality. Of the forces that returned data, about half was

not the data we were looking for. For example giving us summary counts of number of hate incidents of all types for the entire year instead of breakdowns per month and target group. Resulting in data that is both incomparable to other regions but also not granular enough to draw any conclusions. Only the London Metropolitan Police continuously make detailed data on hate crime available to the public on their website.

You don't have the right to demand the exact format of the data when making an FOI request. However, the data returned to us were many times in formats that made it almost impossible to process it in any other way than manually re-entering it, although it was clearly available as digitally readable information from the beginning. In one case the data was provided to us in what was clearly screenshots of an Excel document (which contained the exact data we asked for) rather than the document itself, although we had asked for a spreadsheet if possible. A dedicated intern at HOPE not hate ended up spending several days per FOI to re-enter the data in spreadsheets to make it comparable, but in the three months they were working at HOPE not hate were unable to complete this compilation.

Lastly, there are issues with the collection of hate crime incidents itself. There is no uniform way of categorising hate crimes in the UK, different forces use different categories, making comparisons difficult. This issue includes variations in levels of granularity (some has specific categories for islamophobia and antisemitism while others count these under religious hate crime). Then there are categories not included by all forces, such as ageism and ableism.

In the end, this attempt to better understand hate crime has rather become a case study in the inadequacy of hate crime statistics. The issue of access to hate crime data is a large barrier to both academic as well as journalistic research, but presents a far greater issue in the ability of police to understand and appropriately respond to the problem. Moreover, the great variation in ways hate incidents are recorded makes further analysis and comparisons between forces very difficult.

It also suggests a lack of training among police in recognising and categorising hate crime. We believe there is a need for greater training among police forces to identify and respond to various forms of hate crime, and for a standardisation of data collection on hate crime, to be developed and resourced by national government.

## KEEPING OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE

It's stating the obvious to say Brexit has divided the UK, but this briefing highlights just how damaging these divides are. Community and race relations in Britain are already fragile, and the 2016 referendum has further tested the tolerant and open Britain we celebrate, and firmly disproved the myth of a post-racial Britain.

The responses of our latest poll show how prejudice blights the daily lives of BME people, and how Brexit has affected this before we have even left the EU. In just the last year over half of BME voters have experienced or witnessed racist comments made in public, a third have experienced violence or threats of violence, and half have witnessed or experienced racism on social media. Concerns from BME respondents to questions around what would happen in a no deal scenario show just how high anxieties are that things are about to get even worse.

A no deal Brexit not only jeopardises the economy, trade, travel, and our security and standing, but would deteriorate race and community relations.

So, what can be done?

### **Avoid a hard Brexit at all costs.**

A hard Brexit would be a seriously damaging outcome for our community and race relations. For that reason, parliament needs to avoid hard Brexit, and absolutely avoid leaving the EU with no deal at all costs.

### **Recognising and responding to fears and concerns of BME Brits**

Our polling has laid bare the scale of fears and concerns among BME people in Britain, who have experienced an increasingly hostile atmosphere following the 2016 vote. There is a real need for decision makers across the Government, devolved and local authorities to respond to these concerns.

Responding to these fears will take more than tokenistic campaigns that send a message of tolerance. While positive messages that stand against hate and to promote a positive inclusive identity, real leadership is needed to ensure these are matched by action. Serious action is needed to improve the recording and addressing of hate crime, to tackle hate in the press and online and to address systematic inequalities.

### **Acknowledging and responding to the link between Brexit and anti-Muslim prejudice**

The link between Brexit and anti-Muslim prejudice has not been made pronounced, but our polling suggests that Muslims in Britain are

already feeling the community impacts of the 2016 referendum. This needs to be taken seriously by authorities.

Hope not hate research has consistently shown how anti-Muslim prejudice has spread to the mainstream and how the far right have whipped up and manipulated anti-Muslim hatred. Yet there remain huge gaps in how authorities are responding. In response to Britain's departure from the EU, Muslims in Britain will need more support.

For example, the Government's attempts to increase funding and improve access to the £1.6 million Places of Worship scheme which offers grants to places of worship from all major religions for additional protection and security measures are good. Yet this remains a drop in the ocean, especially when funds are spread thinly across all religions, compared to the £14m provided by a separate government fund for assisting the Jewish community. Moreover there remain obstacles in mosques accessing these funds, with only 22 mosques accessing these funds last year<sup>24</sup>.

The potential for a no deal Brexit to unleash an even greater threat on Muslim communities requires the true threat to be assessed and responded to, rather than a tokenistic pot of money that most won't be able to put to use.

### **There is a need for greater training among police forces to identify and respond to various forms of hate crime, and for a standardisation of data collection on hate crime, to be developed and resourced by national government.**

Inconsistencies and inaccessibility of hate crime data limits the ability of authorities to understand and appropriately respond to the challenge of hate crime.

### **Greater police action to the growing threat of political violence**

Behaviour which encourages or incites political violence, such as mock hangings of politicians or abusing politicians with accusations of treachery, need to be taken more seriously by police. The growing threat of political violence, and especially the normalisation of political violence, must be tackled head on.

### **Greater protection for serving politicians**

Complaints from politicians who have received abuse or been targeted by individuals and organised groups must be taken more seriously, and with a more consistent approach from force to force across the country. As the Brexit deadline draws even nearer, it is essential

that police respond to these threats with the seriousness they deserve. Politicians should also see a step up in police protection as threats of violence swell. As Britain enters a General election period, no politician should be left an open target for opportunistic attackers.

**Rapid response to secure the right to remain for EU citizens currently in the UK, and ensure widespread awareness of this**

The precarity faced by EU citizens in the UK has not been assured by the Government's settled status scheme. Moreover, there is not enough awareness of the settled status scheme as it stands, and huge numbers of EU citizens are falling through gaps in the application process.

With the 31<sup>st</sup> October deadline hanging overhead, and a no deal Brexit a real and unpredictable threat, the government need rapid and considerable action to ensure that EU citizens currently in the UK know their rights, including vulnerable groups of EU citizens, and have their status guaranteed after Britain leaves the EU.

**Overcoming Brexit divisions: a project beyond October 31<sup>st</sup>**

The reality is that the 2016 referendum opened up a can of worms that cannot be closed again. There is no Brexit outcome that will please everyone in Britain. What we need is a solution that can begin the process of healing our divided nation, that can start to rebuild public trust and that can tackle some of the root causes of resentment and hate. We cannot afford to fudge together an outcome from Brexit that will eventually rupture society even further.

**Poll of BME Britons**

Fieldwork dates: 26/08/19 – 29/08/19

This survey of 992 BME people, commissioned by HOPE not hate, was conducted using an online interviews administered by Focaldata. This has been weighted to be nationally representative. FocalData's platform collects data from partners, e.g. traditional online panels and numerous programmatic sampling platforms, that collect survey data from users in native content environments in real-time across mobile, desktop, and tablet devices.

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