RUNNYMEDE POLLS:
Understanding Black and minority ethnic perspectives on protest rights and Palestine in 2024

January 2024
Runnymede Polls: Understanding Black and minority ethnic perspectives on protest rights and Palestine in 2024

Introduction
The 2024 General Election will come at a time of ongoing political and economic crisis. Over more than a decade we have witnessed growing inequality, poverty and an erosion of confidence in the political system. These problems are neither inevitable, nor beyond our control, and all too often they have been exacerbated by government choices that have failed to serve Black and minority ethnic communities.

Our parliamentary democracy needs to do more to represent the issues that Black and minority ethnic people face in their everyday lives. The number of eligible Black and minority ethnic voters in England, Wales, and Scotland is at least 4,348,204.2 Electoral Commission public opinion research after the 2019 UK General Election showed that (self-reported) turnout among Black and minority ethnic people was 55%, compared to 70% of white respondents. Alongside this, Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be missing from the electoral register than their white counterparts, leaving them out of a democratic system which should be serving them.

Despite these findings, there has been little research that seeks to meaningfully engage with the plurality of views of Black and minority ethnic groups on the political issues that matter to them most. Given this context, the Runnymede Trust has commissioned polling to highlight the priorities and political preferences of different Black and minority ethnic communities. We hope this will shape and add nuance to policy-making and election campaigning, and help to address the engagement gap and the worrying democratic deficit this creates. From housing and immigration policies, to ongoing events in Israel and Palestine, this briefing series offers insights on how different communities view and understand pressing issues that influence politics in Britain.

The Runnymede Trust is clear that communities of colour in the UK are by no means a homogenous group and that naturally they will have multiple and sometimes competing interests as well as areas of alignment and convergence. The insights we provide are often absent in other polling data which tends to either homogenise Black and minority ethnic people or to gather insufficient sample sizes to offer robust disaggregation or analyses.

---

2 This figure is derived by taking a subset of British population data from the 2011 Census, filtered by age and country of birth. For the data for England & Wales, see Office for National Statistics, “CT1181_2011 Census”, 11 March 2021. We accessed the data for Scotland through direct communication with the National Records of Scotland, and the table does not appear to be available online. As bespoke tables commissioned from the Census teams, this data does not yet appear to be available for the 2021 Census. We plan to commission these tables and update this figure to use data from the 2021 Census as soon as possible.
Starting with this first short briefing, we report on one of the most salient current issues - the perspectives of Black and minority ethnic people on ongoing events in Israel and Gaza, and relatedly the right to protest. The briefing offers a detailed account of how Black and minority ethnic communities view these questions of international consequence and domestic concern. This is critical since recent polling on the crisis has often failed to capture Black and minority ethnic people’s views, and to disaggregate available data by ethnicity.456

In line with the broader aims of our polling series, we call for closer attention to how Black and minority ethnic people relate to these issues and how this might influence voting preference and intention. Fundamentally, it is the responsibility of political parties to attend to and engage these communities, and ensure that policies and positions are sensitive to their priorities and needs.

Methodology
This survey sampled people in the UK aged 18+. The Runnymede Trust commissioned polling of 885 white individuals and 2,084 Black and minority ethnic individuals7. This data was collected between 8th and 23rd December 2023.

The survey was conducted via online interview. Invitations to complete the survey were sent out to members of the panel. Differential response rates from different demographic groups were taken into account. For certain groups, including Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish communities, the sample sizes were particularly small therefore we exercise further caution about drawing conclusions about their preferences.

Throughout the report, we use the term ‘Black and minority ethnic’ to reflect how the data has been collected and reported.

Calls for a Ceasefire
Our polling shows that the majority of Black and minority ethnic people in Britain are in favour of stronger calls for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Two thirds (66%) of Black and minority ethnic people we polled support stronger calls for a ceasefire, and more compassion for Palestinian people in UK politics. These findings are particularly strong amongst Muslim communities, 76% of whom are in support of more being done to advocate for a ceasefire. This is coupled with support from other faith groups, including 60% of Black and minority ethnic Christians. Alongside this, just 9% of Black and minority ethnic people oppose calls for a ceasefire and more compassion for Palestinian people, with 21% reporting that they ‘neither support nor oppose’, and 4% that they ‘don’t know’, with regards to those statements.

These views are evident amongst Black and minority ethnic people across the political spectrum. Indeed, three quarters (75%) of Black and minority ethnic people who voted Labour in the 2019 General Election, and approximately two thirds (66%) of Black and minority ethnic Conservative voters in 2019, support stronger calls for a ceasefire, and

---

4 YouGov (2023) ‘How do you think the UK should respond to Israel’s current military actions in Gaza?’, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2023/11/15/672bb/3
5 YouGov (2023) ‘From what you’ve read and heard, do you think there should or should not be an immediate ceasefire in Israel and Palestine?’, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/travel/survey-results/daily/2023/10/19/e363e/1
7 Given that only a sample of the full population was interviewed, all results are subject to margin of error, meaning that not all differences are statistically significant.
demonstrations of compassion for Palestinian people in UK politics. Of those intending to vote Labour in the upcoming General Election, almost three quarters (71%) of Black and minority ethnic people, and 59% of white people are in favour of more being done to call for a ceasefire. 62% of Black and minority ethnic people, and 41% of white people intending to vote Conservative in the next General Election support stronger calls for a ceasefire and demonstrations of compassion for the Palestinian people.

Figure 1: Support for and opposition to stronger calls for a ceasefire in Gaza and more compassion for Palestinian people (%)\(^8\)

Right to Protest
The majority of Black and minority ethnic people (54%) who we polled supported the legitimacy of pro-Palestine protests. This rises to over two thirds (68%) of Black and minority ethnic people who voted Labour in the 2019 General Election, and 59% of Black and minority ethnic people intending to vote Labour in the next election. The support for expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity through protests amongst Black and minority ethnic communities drops to 44% of people who voted Conservative in 2019, and 47% of people who intend to vote Conservative in the next election.

When disaggregated further, 70% of British Bangladeshi and 71% of British Pakistani communities support the legitimacy of pro-Palestinian protests, with the figure rising to 72% of Black and minority ethnic Muslim people. This is higher than support suggested by other Black and minority ethnic religions, or those with no religion.

Our polling also found that 57% of Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK support a less restrictive approach to protest generally, and the protection of the right to protest. This number rises to 64% of Black and minority ethnic people who voted Labour in the 2019 General Election, and 60% of Black and minority ethnic people intending to vote Labour in

---

\(^8\) Some ethnic and religious groups have been emitted from the analysis due to low sample sizes (<100). These are: Other Black, Mixed White and Black African, Arab, Any other ethnic group, Black and minority ethnic Buddhist, Black and minority ethnic Jewish, Black and minority ethnic Sikh and Black and minority ethnic ‘other’ religion.
the next General Election. Support for a less restrictive approach to protest amongst Black and minority ethnic voters is not just evident amongst Labour supporters, with 54% of Black and minority ethnic people who voted Conservative in the 2019 General Election also supporting a more liberal approach to protest rights in the UK.

This data illustrates that the majority of Black and minority ethnic people in the UK share a concern about current restrictions on protest rights, with just 12% of these communities opposing a less restrictive approach to protest.

This follows restrictions on the right to protest brought forward in recent legislation, including the Public Order Act 2023. Amongst other things the Public Order Act 2023 contained enhanced suspicionless stop and search powers in relation to protest-level offences, as well as new criminal offences for protest. Given the disproportionate impact of increased police powers such as Stop and Search on Black and minority ethnic communities, and on Black men in particular, the Runnymede Trust has consistently expressed concern that Black and minority ethnic people will be amongst those most affected by this legislation.9

We also note that the views of the majority of Black and minority ethnic people we polled stand in opposition to recent interventions made by the former Home Secretary and other Cabinet Ministers, condemning recent pro-Palestine protests.10 11 This included a letter to Chief Constables in October 2023, which sought to direct police engagement with protestors.

---

Figure 2: Support for and opposition to giving legitimacy and showing support for pro-Palestine protests (%)\textsuperscript{12}

![Chart showing support and opposition percentages for pro-Palestine protests.]

Figure 3: Support for and opposition to a less restrictive approach to protest and the protection of the right to protest\textsuperscript{13}

![Chart showing support and opposition percentages for a less restrictive approach to protest.]

\textsuperscript{12} Some ethnic and religious groups have been emitted from the analysis due to low sample sizes (<100). These are: Other Black, Mixed White and Black African, Arab, Any other ethnic group, Black and minority ethnic Buddhist, Black and minority ethnic Jewish, Black and minority ethnic Sikh and Black and minority ethnic other religion.

\textsuperscript{13} Some ethnic and religious groups have been emitted from the analysis due to low sample sizes (<100). These are: Other Black, Mixed White and Black African, Arab, Any other ethnic group, Black and minority ethnic Buddhist, Black and minority ethnic Jewish, Black and minority ethnic Sikh and Black and minority ethnic other religion.
Conclusion
Political turmoil has shaped much of the past few years in Britain. Following the 2016 Brexit referendum, five Prime Ministers in six years, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing concern about the impact of the cost of living crisis, faith in our democratic system is at an all time low. For Black and minority ethnic people, who are already amongst those most likely to be locked out of engaging in politics, this is even more urgent.

What this analysis reveals is the perspectives of different Black and ethnic minority groups on a critical issue of both domestic and international importance. It reveals views that are widely held amongst British Black and minority ethnic communities, which are out of step with the positions of mainstream British politicians. Support for a ceasefire and more compassion for Palestinian people in UK politics is strong amongst Black and minority ethnic people, regardless of the political party that they are most aligned with.

This support is coupled with concern about restrictions on protest rights. A healthy and functioning democracy relies on space for dissent and protest, and our analysis shows that there are fears about a restrictive approach to protest from Black and minority ethnic groups. Given the vital importance of protest to the advancing issues of social and racial justice in the UK, we urge that politicians take heed of these findings and act to ensure that civil liberties, which are critical to the wellbeing of any functioning democracy, are allowed to be meaningfully exercised.

As a general election approaches and we step into campaigning season, politicians will be looking to appeal to as many voters as possible. At this time, it is critical that the perspectives of Black and ethnic minority groups are heard and understood. A healthy and functioning democracy depends on it.