



Performance and Innovation Unit

# British public attitudes and ethnic minorities

*Shamit Saggar  
Joanne Drear*

*July 2001*

**Contents**

Executive summary	3
Introduction	6
Definitions	6
Size of ethnic minority, immigrant and asylum seeker populations	7
Opinion polls on attitudes to ethnic minorities, immigrants, and asylum seekers	7
Media and attitudes to immigrants and asylum seekers	19
Conclusion	20
Possible ways forward	22
Bibliography	24

## **Executive Summary**

Public attitudes constrain the content of most new policy proposals. Despite knowing this, policy projects often start without possessing a detailed understanding of what public opinion actually is in relation to that policy. This results in guesses and estimates about the public reaction to policy proposals akin to shadow boxing; the opponent is definitely there but little else is known about them. When an opinion survey is taken toward the end of the project, the population often surprises policy makers by their enthusiasm or scorn for certain idea, at which point it is too late in the day to react.

It is therefore an early priority of the PIU Ethnic Minorities and Labour Markets (EMLM) team to develop a clear understanding of public attitudes concerning ethnic minorities, and what this means for a government keen to improve the situation for disadvantaged groups. It is especially important to have a clear view in the field of ethnic minorities, as feelings and beliefs tend to be strong and politically sensitive.

This is why it was agreed to write a paper summarising current British opinion concerning ethnic minorities and immigrants. The following is a collated summary of these findings, ordered broadly in terms of significance for policy makers.

1. **The UK still possesses a significant proportion of people who express intolerant attitudes to migrants and ethnic minorities.** Common majority sentiments identified in surveys are that “There are too many in Britain”, that “They get too much help”, that “Migration controls are insufficiently tight” and people polled “Fell less positive towards minority groups”.
2. **The British population has a highly erroneous impression concerning the number of ethnic minorities and migrants in the UK.** In one poll, the average estimate of the size of the ethnic minority population in the UK was 26% of the population, despite the correct figure being closer to 7%<sup>1</sup>. In another it was 20%. When asked to estimate the proportion of the population consisting of migrants and asylum seekers, the modal estimate was 51%+, despite the real situation being closer to 4%. **The British Population also tends to confuse ethnic minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers as one group.**
3. **People are significantly more likely to be hostile to migrants and minorities if they are:**
  - **Older**
  - **Poorer**
  - **Less well educated**
  - **Living in the North**<sup>2</sup>
4. **Groups that are more likely to be intolerant ( see 3. ) are also likely to have erroneous views of the size of minority populations.**<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Mori/Readers Digest Poll on Britain Today – Are we an Intolerant Nation? October 2000

<sup>2</sup> Guardian/ICM poll on Asylum and Migration (May 2001)

<sup>3</sup> This is an extrapolation from the data in the paper rather than a conclusion within it. Source - Guardian/ICM poll on Asylum and Migration (May 2001)

5. **A majority of the British population feels ‘less positive’ about at least one minority ( not ethnic minority ) group.** 64% of the population claims to feel ‘less positive’ about at least one ethnic group. **However, only 18% feels less positive towards at least one ethnic minority group.**<sup>4</sup>
6. **The rise in the number of asylum seekers has corresponded directly with significant rises in the indicators of intolerance.** The percentage of the population which thinks there are “too many immigrants in Britain” has risen by 11% between 1999 and 2000 after a decade of slight decline. The ranking of how important people think immigration is compared with other ‘problems’ has risen from 17<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>5</sup>
7. **Tolerance correlates positively with the proportion of ethnic minorities in an area.** 75% of those in the north-east felt that too much is done to help immigrants, compared with just 39% of Londoners.<sup>6</sup>
8. **The White population overwhelmingly believes that “Too much is done” to help ethnic minority and migrant minorities.** In one poll 72% of white respondents agree that “Ethnic Minority Communities receive too much advice and support from the government”. 66% think that “too much is done to help immigrants”.<sup>7</sup> In another poll 63% expressed the same sentiment.<sup>8</sup>
9. **A Significant minority – 38% of the population, think that “Immigrants should not maintain the culture/lifestyle they had at home”.<sup>9</sup>**
10. **Negative sentiments are not purely based along lines of colour.** Eastern European groups are thought badly of whilst being white. In one poll, every age group asked **disapproved of Romanians** coming to live in their neighbourhood, whilst every group (except over 65s) **approved of Chinese** people coming to live in their neighbourhood.<sup>10</sup>
11. **There is evidence that people are shy of admitting intolerant views in polls.** Whilst 18% of respondents said they felt ‘less positive’ about at least one ethnic minority group, 43% said they “knew someone who felt less positive”.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Mori Poll – Local And National Feeling 2001

<sup>5</sup> Gallup election surveys 1989-1999

<sup>6</sup> MORI /Readers Digest poll on Britain Today – Are we an Intolerant Nation? (October 2000)

<sup>7</sup> Readers Digest Survey October 2001

<sup>8</sup> Mori/Readers Digest Poll on Britain Today – Are we an Intolerant Nation? October 2000

<sup>9</sup> Mori/Readers Digest Poll on Britain Today – Are we an Intolerant Nation? October 2000

<sup>10</sup> Guardian/ICM poll on Asylum and Migration (May 2001)

<sup>11</sup> MORI Stonewall Citizenship Project on racial prejudice in Britain (May 2001)

### **Possible Ways Forward**

1. **Public attitudes may currently reflect misinformation and myths circulated by the press. These need to be identified and rebutted in a shared, consistent and coherent way, across government.**
2. **Negative attitudes** tend to be **clustered in social groups**. These groups need special targeting.
3. **'Acculturation' programs** like those seen in Holland may **help migrant groups avoid harmful prejudice.**
4. **Government should consider a long term quantitative survey** of views on ethnic minorities to see how they change over time.
5. This long term data gathering could be achieved by 'bolting on' to existing surveys, such as the people's panel and the Citizenship Survey.

## **Introduction**

Whilst this paper ostensibly concerns general population opinion about ethnic minorities in British society, it also includes material on attitudes to immigrants and asylum seekers. This is because the British public appears to have little understanding of the differences between ethnic minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers. Particular confusion exists between the last two categories.

1. There are several opinion polls about attitudes to race relations and racism generally, rather than on specific attitudes to ethnic minorities. Increased media focus on the issue of immigrants and asylum seekers since 1999 also means that there are a considerable number of opinion polls on these issues.
2. By including all polls on racism and xenophobia as well as attitudes to immigration and asylum, this paper hopes to draw out the complexity, variation and, often, contradictions in British attitudes to ethnic minorities.
3. This paper will outline findings of several public opinion surveys including those by Eurobarometer, ICM, MORI and Gallup. It will consider the role of the media in shaping public attitudes to ethnic minorities and those who are considered 'other' in British society more generally (namely ethnic minority immigrants and asylum seekers).
4. The paper will show that whilst attitudes are confusing, some common themes emerge. These are:
  - There is a considerable degree of hostility towards ethnic minorities and ethnic minority immigrants or asylum seekers;
  - However, this tends to be concentrated within certain groups in society (namely those over 65 years of age, those in social classes DE, and those with a low level of education);
  - Positive attitudes are more likely to be found, conversely, among younger people, among those educated beyond A level, and among higher social classes;
  - Personal contact with people from ethnic minority communities makes a positive difference on people's general opinion of ethnic minorities
  - Areas with higher numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers generally have more positive attitudes to them than areas with low in-takes;
  - Most people feel that education would offer the most viable solution to racism;
  - Most people feel that race relations legislation is a 'good idea' but is ineffective;
  - Most people feel that no current political party can successfully deal with the issue of asylum seekers;
  - Most white people use TV and newspapers as the basis of their opinion of ethnic minority groups.

## **Definitions**

5. The issue of definitions is complex.
6. Most opinion polls do not offer definitions for the terms they use and many do not classify responses to surveys by ethnic group. When ethnic groups are identified, they are not the same as those used in the 1991 census or the Labour Force Survey

(LFS). Rather, broad categories, such as ‘Black’, ‘Asian’, ‘White’, are most commonly adopted.

7. The media tends to overlap the issues of ethnic minorities/immigrants and immigrants/asylum seekers. An image tends to be portrayed of immigrants and asylum seekers as being predominantly from ethnic minorities, which is not the case in reality.

### **Size of ethnic minority, immigrant and asylum seeker populations**

8. The LFS 2001 puts the proportion of ethnic minorities in Britain as 7.1% of the total population.
9. About 4% of the British population consists of first-generation immigrants.<sup>12</sup> But it is important to note that only about 50% of these immigrants are from ethnic minorities. The rest are not visible minorities, and enter Britain from Europe and countries such as Canada and Australia.
10. This would suggest that about 2% of the 7.1% ethnic minorities in Britain are first generation immigrants. The remaining 5.1% are British born.
11. There tends to be an image (often also communicated via the press) that most immigrants are asylum seekers. Actually only about 7% of legal immigrants have been accepted as refugees.
12. The total number of applicants for asylum in 2000 was 76,042. The ten most common nationalities of asylum seekers are presented in the table below<sup>13</sup>:

*Table 1: Main Nationalities of Asylum Seekers 2000<sup>14</sup>*

<b>Main Nationalities of Applicants</b>	<b>2000 Total</b>
Iraq	7081
Sri Lanka	6035
Fed Rep of Yugoslavia	5697
Afghanistan	5234
Iran	5169
Somalia	4800
Turkey	3927
China	3838
Pakistan	2826
Romania	2064

### **Opinion Polls on Attitudes to Ethnic Minorities, Immigrants, and Asylum Seekers**

13. The opinion polls surveyed for this paper are all recent (2000/2001) with the exception of one older European study (1989). They are:

<sup>12</sup> Here, we are using the Home Office definition of an immigrant, which is someone who is ‘non-UK born’.

<sup>13</sup> Statistics were obtained from Home Office Immigration Research and Statistics Service.

<sup>14</sup> Home Office Immigration Research and Statistics Service.

- Euorobarometer Special Report on Racism and Xenophobia in Europe (1989)
- Commission for Racial Equality poll on Racism at Work (April 2001)
- Guardian/ICM poll on Asylum and Migration (May 2001)
- ICM poll on Islamophobia (July 2001)
- MORI /Readers Digest poll on Britain Today – Are we an Intolerant Nation? (October 2000)
- MORI Stonewall Citizenship Project on racial prejudice in Britain (May 2001)
- Gallup Surveys 1989-1999 data on immigration as a cause of voting concern
- Gallup Election poll (May 2001)

14. The next section presents the key findings of each of these reports with some analysis and possible explanation of the trends.

**Eurobarometer Special Report: Racism and Xenophobia in Europe (1989)**

15. The study was based on an opinion poll survey of a representative sample of the adult population of the 12 countries of the European Community in 1988. An identical list of questions was submitted to 11,795 individuals who were visited in their homes by professional survey staff between 17 October and 21 November 1988.

16. Attitudes to those perceived as ‘others’ in society was researched using the criteria of nationality, race, religion, culture and social class. For each category the same question was put: ‘*When you hear about people of another \_\_\_\_\_ whom do you think of?*’

17. In interpreting the findings, there are a number of issues that we should be aware of:

- The percentage of the foreign population residing in different EC Member States varies considerably;
- There is a higher number of foreigners in Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK and Luxembourg than in Denmark, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. As a consequence, comparisons within both groups are relatively easier to make than comparisons between both groups;
- The origins of the foreign population or of ethnic groups residing in EC Member States is diverse and is linked to the colonial experience of that country;
- The proportion of EC citizens among the foreign population of Luxembourg, Belgium, Ireland and Spain was relatively high when the survey was carried out, while the majority of foreigners residing in the other Member States came from non-EC regions;
- Reasons for migration vary according to origin and professional qualification; and
- Immigrants’ ways of life vary according to their social status, religion, race, nationality and culture. Attitudes of indigenous residents to them vary accordingly.

*Summary of Results*

18. With regard to other races, in all European countries (with the exception of France and the UK), the association of foreigners with the black race is most common. In France it tends to be Arabs, whereas in the UK the answers usually refer to Indians.

19. At the national level, most concern as regards ‘foreigners’ is found in the case of foreigners belonging to the **largest immigrant group within a country**, having **migrated for economic reasons**, and **whose characteristics differ notably from the indigenous population**.
20. At Community level, the ‘other’ religion is clearly Islam. Islam is mentioned by more than half the respondents in Belgium and France, and by more than 7 out of 10 people in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.
21. Eight out of 10 Europeans disapprove of racist movements, but one European in 3 believes there are too many people of another nationality or race in their country.
22. A correlation can be found between a strong sense of national pride and a feeling that ‘there are too many foreigners around.’ Advancing age, a lower education level, a tendency towards ‘materialism’ and right wing tendencies are related to the feeling there are too many ‘others.’
23. The UK is the fourth most optimistic country in Europe (behind Denmark, France and the Netherlands) about multiculturalism. This means that the British population thinks that people from other countries benefit and strengthen the UK. However, there seems to be considerable inconsistency in poll findings on this issue. Between 1997 and 2000, the percentage of people in the UK who believe that diversity adds to a country’s strengths fell from 59% to 51%, whereas the European average rose by 1% from 44% to 45%. Yet the CRE survey (see below paragraph 37) suggests that most Britons believe that multiculturalism has enriched British society.
24. The British population has the fifth highest rate of agreement (among fifteen European countries) with the policy that legal immigrants should be repatriated. Between 1997 and 2000 there has been a significant increase in the percentage of Britons who agree with the policy that legal immigrants should be sent back to their homeland.
25. The UK population is less likely to be in favour of accepting refugees and immigrants than most of Europe. The only countries that are more in favour of placing restrictions on immigration are Greece and Belgium.

*Detailed Results for UK*

26. ‘When you hear about people of another nationality, whom do you think of?’ The highest result here linked to Asians (44%).

27. ‘When you hear about people of another race, whom do you think of?’

41% - Indians  
32% - blacks

28. ‘When you hear about people of another religion, whom do you think of?’

26% - Muslims  
25% - Catholics  
17% - Hindus

29. 'When you hear about people of another culture, whom do you think of?' The highest score here was Asians (40%).
30. 'Generally speaking, how do you feel about the number of people of another (nationality/race/religion/culture) living in our country: are there too many, many but not too many, or not many?'

Those who answered "too many"

Nationality	42%
Race	41%
Culture	30%
Religion	20%

31. So, although there is some conflicting and confusing evidence emerging from the polls, some consistent themes appear. It seems that the general population is most likely to be hostile to immigrant or ethnic minority groups that it perceives as most 'different' to the general norm, with cultural and religious differences being the most important variables. However, age, social class and education are also linked to views of ethnic minorities with younger people, those educated beyond A level, and those from higher social classes, having more positive attitudes.

#### **Commission for Racial Equality poll on Racism at Work (April 2001)**

32. This survey questioned 537 people about their views on race equality via a street survey carried out in Manchester, Blackburn, Liverpool and Bradford (thus it was not necessarily a representative sample). 23% of the sample was Black, 38% Asian, 25% White, and 15% were 'Other Ethnic Origin'. There were roughly equal numbers of men and women, and the sample was divided into different age group from under 25 to over 65.
33. The survey asked 15 questions most of which covered racism and attitudes to ethnic minorities, although the final two questions concerned views on asylum seekers.
34. All respondents agreed that racism is most likely to take place 'at work' than anywhere else.
35. Yet when asked about whether respondents had encountered discrimination at work, (broken down into age, sex, race, disability, discrimination; or none of these), interestingly, 'none of these' was the first choice of all groups. The second most likely response to this question for Blacks (34%) and Asians (40%) was race discrimination.
36. All respondents agreed with the statement 'Ethnic Minorities have enriched British culture.' (Which conflicts with other data suggesting that optimism towards multiculturalism in Britain has declined – see paragraph 24 above).
37. When asked what causes problems or tensions between racial groups (unemployment, cultural differences, religious differences, immigration policy, lack of knowledge, fear of change), there was considerable variation in answers across ethnic groups:
- Blacks – cultural differences

- Asians – religious differences
  - Whites – religious differences
  - Other Ethnic Group – cultural differences
- However, the key variables chosen from the list were cultural or religious differences. Again, the things that are perceived as making someone ‘different’ to the general population. (Note that the question did not include ‘racial difference’ as a choice of response).
38. When asked what they thought of the statement ‘Ethnic minority communities receive too much advice and support from the government’, again, there was some variation across different ethnic groups in their answers, although **Whites were the only group to agree with the statement:**
- Blacks – disagree a little
  - Asian – disagree strongly
  - Whites – agree strongly
  - Other Ethnic Group – disagree a little and disagree strongly were equal
39. All groups felt that race relations will continue to improve over the next 10 years.
40. An interesting question asked from where respondents obtain their views of race and other social issues (family, friends, radio & TV, government, school, personal experience). All ethnic minority groups said from ‘personal experience’. Whereas whites said ‘from Radio & TV’.
41. Yet when asked about how ethnic minorities are portrayed in the media (stereotypically, accurately, as victims, generally misrepresented, like everyone else, drug dealers/criminals, as sports players), all groups, including Whites, chose ‘stereotypically’. This seems somewhat contradictory since Whites also said that they base their views of race and other social issues from radio and TV.
42. When asked whether discrimination law is effective, all groups agreed that it is a good idea but it is not effective. All groups felt that education would be the most effective way of eliminating or reducing racial discrimination.
43. Whilst the survey shows some conflicting views, overall it reinforces the conclusion that a considerable amount of discrimination exists towards ethnic minorities, and tends to be based on cultural and religious differences. It is also noteworthy that the White population obtains its views on ethnic minorities from TV and media, which can thus exert a powerful influence.

#### **Guardian/ICM poll on Asylum and Migration (May 2001)**

44. This opinion poll was based on interviews with a random sample of 1,022 adults aged over 18, by telephone. Interviews were conducted across England and results were weighted to the profile of all adults. Results were broken down by sex, age, social class and by region, but not by ethnic group.
45. Questions mainly concerned attitudes to immigration and to asylum seekers. Whilst this is not the explicit focus of this paper, such attitudes may be likely to reveal White attitudes towards ethnic minorities more generally because of the

widespread (and incorrect) opinion that most immigrants or asylum seekers are from ethnic minorities.

46. The ICM poll was reported by the *Guardian* as evidence of a decline in anti-immigrant sentiment. It shows, for example, a strong majority in favour of loosening controls for immigrants with valuable skills that are in short supply in UK, such as doctors, nurses and teachers. They also showed that 51% of voters would support allowing unskilled economic migrants into Britain as long as it is done on a quota basis. However, the poll also confirmed that the demand for the abolition of all immigration controls has little support among voters, with only 18% in favour and 76% against. A more detailed analysis of the survey findings does not necessarily give support to an optimistic assessment of a fall in anti-immigrant sentiment.
  47. The first series of questions concerned views on immigration policy. All groups supported the entry of qualified people such as doctors, teachers, nurses, who are in short supply in Britain,.
  48. All groups opposed entry to immigrants without skills, although everyone except the over 65's and social classes DE would support the entry of unskilled people on a quota system.
  49. All groups supported the view that only those with financial means to support themselves should be allowed into the UK if *unskilled*.
  50. Thus the findings showed that whilst people are willing to accept the entry of skilled and professionals in short supply in Britain, they do not support the entry of unskilled immigrants and those who cannot financially support themselves.
  51. The next series of questions asked respondents to estimate the proportion of the population that asylum seekers and immigrants comprise in Britain. The modal estimate was over 51%. Breaking this down by sex, age, social group and region, reveal interesting trends:
    - **Men** were most likely to put the figure at 1-5%
    - Age groups **18-44** put the figure at 1-5%
    - Social classes **AB** and **C1** estimated 1-5%
    - **The South** estimated 1-5%
- But
- **Women** were most likely to put the figure at over 51%;
  - Age group **45-over 65** put the figure at over 51%;
  - Social classes **C2** and **DE** estimated over 51%
  - The **North** and the **Midlands** estimated over 51%
52. What is interesting is that views diverged into either of these extreme groups of 1-5% and over 51% when there was a whole range of numbers in between that respondents could have chosen. Also, once again the poll confirmed that certain groups are more likely to have negative attitudes than others.
  53. The survey also asked respondents about how they would feel if asylum seekers from a range of different countries were to come and live in *their* neighbourhoods. Results to this question revealed very different attitudes to people of different

nationality, which could well be linked to issues of racism, as well as influence of the media.

54. Every group of respondents (except social class DE) said they would **approve** of **White South African** asylum seekers coming to live in their neighbourhood.
55. Every group of respondents **disapproved** of **Romanians** coming to live in their neighbourhood.
56. Every group (except age group 18-24) **disapproved** of **Afghan** asylum seekers coming to live in their neighbourhood.
57. Every group without exception **disapproved** of **Iraqi** asylum seekers coming to live in their neighbourhood.
58. Every group (except the over 65's and social class DE) **approved** of **Chinese** asylum seekers coming to live in their neighbourhood.
59. The most varied answers surrounded the question of Black African asylum seekers coming to live in the local neighbourhood. **Ages 18-44**, social classes **AB** and **C1**, and those in the **South approved of Black African asylum seekers** coming to live in their neighbourhood.
60. However, age groups **45-over 65**, social classes **C2** and **DE** and those in the **North** and the **Midlands disapproved of Black African asylum seekers** coming to live in their neighbourhoods, which once again highlights the tendencies of certain groups to have more negative attitudes than others towards ethnic minorities.

The table below summarises this information:

Table 2: Attitudes to immigrants from different countries

	Sex		Age					Social Class				Region			
	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	North	Midlands	South
<b>White South African</b>															
Approve	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Disapprove												✓			
<b>Romanian</b>															
Approve			✓												
Disapprove	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Afghan</b>															
Approve			✓												
Disapprove	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Iraqi</b>															
Approve															
Disapprove	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Chinese</b>															
Approve	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Disapprove								✓				✓			
<b>Black African</b>															
Approve			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓					✓
Disapprove	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

61. What could account for these differences in attitudes? Clearly the issue is more complex than simply ‘racial’, ‘religious’, or ‘cultural’ issues since this does not explain why all groups should disapprove of Romanian immigrants entering their neighbourhood. Although attitudes to Black Africans would seem to suggest a degree of racial discrimination (although ‘African’ is obviously too wide a term from which to make assumptions). Perhaps the most compelling reason comes from media images. As will be demonstrated below, the media have been consistently negative in their reporting of Romanian, and Afghan asylum seekers, and since the Gulf war there are generally very negative attitudes to Iraqis.

62. When offered a choice of political parties and asked which had the best policies on asylum seekers, the majority answered ‘none of these’. The second most popular answer was ‘don’t know’, except for the age group 18-24 who thought that Labour had the best policies, and age groups 45-54 and over 65, who said the Conservatives.

**ICM poll on Islamophobia (July 2001)**

63. This poll was based on interviews with a random sample of 1,000 adults aged over 18, by telephone. Interviews were conducted across England and results were weighted to the profile of all adults. Answers were broken down by gender, age, social class, and by region, but not by ethnicity.

64. When asked how they would react if a member of their family converted to Islam, all groups of respondents said they would be supportive, except the over 65’s who said that they would be opposed.

65. When asked about the status of Muslim women compared to women in Western society, all groups said they have a lower status, except age group 18-24 who said there is no difference.

66. The final question asked respondents about whether they think Muslim beliefs condone or condemn terrorism, or have no influence one way or the other. Most

groups answered that it has no influence. Exceptions were age group 55-64 who were equally split over saying that Islam ‘condones’ and has ‘no influence’ and over 65’s and social class DE who answered, ‘don’t know’.

67. This survey, whilst far from conclusive, did appear to illustrate that older people (especially over 65’s) are more likely to have negative views of those of a ‘different’ (i.e. not a traditional European or British) religion.

**MORI /Readers Digest poll on Britain Today – Are we an Intolerant Nation? (October 2000)**

68. This survey was based on interviews with a representative quota sample of 2118 adults across Britain. Interviews were face-to-face and were conducted in respondents’ homes. Results were weighted to reflect the national profile. 1% of sample were Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African, Black Caribbean, or ‘any Other Ethnic Group’. 2% were Indian. 92% were White. The remaining 1% was made up of small numbers of Chinese, Black Other, and those who refused to answer. Responses were not broken down social or ethnic group.

*Summary*

69. The survey revealed somewhat negative attitudes to ethnic minorities and to immigrants:
- Respondents estimated that on average, 26% of the population belonged to an ethnic minority. The real figure is 7.1%;
  - 37% felt that there is more racial prejudice in Britain than five years ago and 38% thought it would grow worse in the next five years;
  - 66% felt that there are too many immigrants in Britain, representing an 11% increase in one year;
  - 63% felt that too much is done to help immigrants, but there were interesting variations depending on region. 75% of those in the north-east felt that too much is done to help immigrants, compared with just 39% of Londoners. In fact, London has absorbed more immigrants and asylum seekers than most other areas and yet is markedly more tolerant than areas with far fewer immigrants and asylum seekers, which confirms that a greater deal of contact with immigrants and asylum seekers (like personal contact with ethnic minorities) leads to more positive attitudes;
  - Respondents thought that on average, 20% of the population were immigrants. The real figure is just 4%;
  - 80% of adults agreed that refugees come to the UK because they regard Britain as a ‘soft touch’.

*Attitudes to Immigrants*

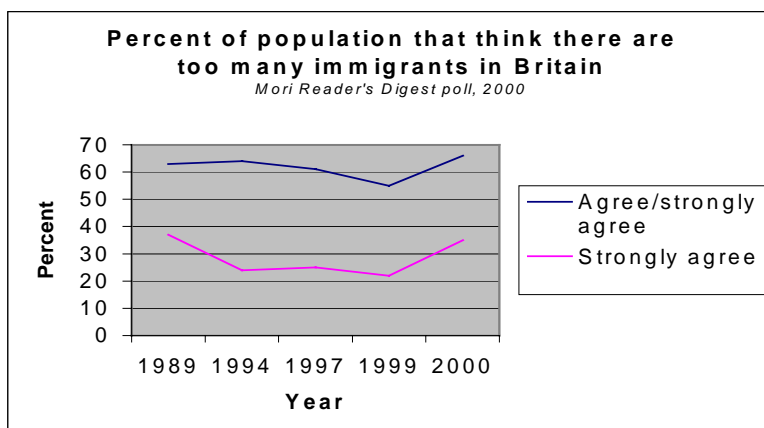
70. Traditionally, UK surveys have found that a slight majority have negative attitudes toward immigration. For example, ICM (February 1999) established that 56% of the sample thought that immigration controls should be tightened, and the British Social Attitudes Survey (1996) found support for a hard-line immigration policy. Eurobarometer (1989) found that 56% of Britons thought that there were too many immigrants in the UK.
71. The tendency towards negative attitudes has been relatively constant over the last two decades, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey (1996), although the table below implies that the trend has been towards a decline in negative attitudes.

Table3 :British Social Attitudes Survey on Attitudes to Immigration Control

	1983	1986	1990	1994
% in favour of stricter control on the families of immigrants	57	58	56	53

72. The MORI (2000) survey supported these findings. The majority of respondents **strongly agreed** that too much is done to help immigrants (32%) and 31% tended to agree that too much is done to help immigrants.
73. MORI found that the majority of respondents **strongly agree** that there are **too many immigrants in Britain**. This compared with the majority answering that they tend to agree with this view in 1994, 1997 and 1999. The majority of respondents strongly agree that refugees come to Britain because they see it as a ‘soft touch’.
74. Indeed, the survey showed that the percentage of people who answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘are there too many immigrants?’ has increased from 55% in 1999 to 66% in 2000.

Chart1: MORI Survey (2000), Proportion of the Population who think that there are too many immigrants in Britain



75. Confusingly, the majority of respondents **disagreed** that those settling in this country **should not** maintain the culture and lifestyle they had at home. Also, the majority of respondents strongly disagreed with the statements that they would be upset if their boss was Asian or Afro-Caribbean. They strongly disagreed that it would upset them if a close relative married a person of Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin and they strongly disagreed that it would upset them if their neighbour was Asian or Afro-Caribbean. All of which shows a degree of contradiction in people’s views.

**MORI Stonewall Citizenship Project on racial prejudice in Britain (May 2001)**

76. This survey was based on responses from 1,183 adults, interviewed by MORI face-to-face at home, using a confidential self-completion questionnaire. Data were weighted to the known national population profile.

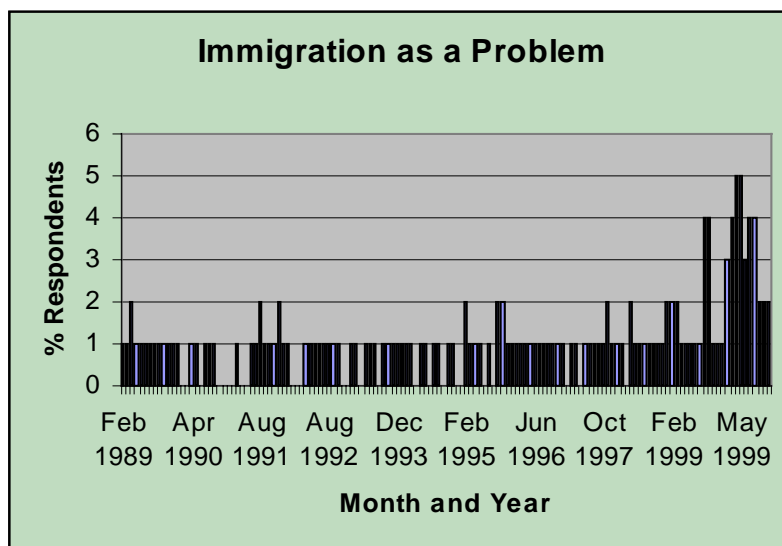
*Key Findings*

77. 64% of the sample named at least one minority group towards whom they felt less positive. The most frequently cited groups people feel less positive about were:
- Travellers/gypsies (35%)
  - Refugees and asylum seekers (34%)
  - People from a different ethnic group (18%)
  - Gay or lesbian people (17%)
- 43% of the sample said that they personally know someone who is prejudiced against people from a different ethnic group to their own.
78. Of those who felt **less positive to Asians**, 35% also felt less positive towards black people (compared with 9% in the population as a whole). They were also more likely to be less positive towards lesbians and gays (37%) than the population as a whole (17%).
79. Among those **less positive towards black people**, 51% also felt less positive towards Asians and 44% towards lesbians and gays.
80. 16% of people expressed less positive feelings towards 3 or more groups, suggesting that there may be a 'hard core' of prejudice consisting of a small minority with a strong antipathy to any group perceived to be different. 47% of this group expressed prejudice towards Asians (against an average of 13%), 43% expressed prejudice to black people (against an average of 9%) and 54% expressed prejudice to lesbians and gays (against an average of 17%). I.e. people who are prejudiced to one group are more likely than average to be prejudiced to other groups too.
81. The survey found a fairly substantial 'tolerant' minority – 36% - who do not feel less positive towards any group. This tolerant minority were more likely to:
- Be female
  - Be young
  - Have children
  - Vote Labour
  - Be educated to A level or above.
- All of which is supported by evidence from other surveys.
82. The survey found that knowing someone from a different ethnic group reduces by half the likelihood of being prejudiced against people from different ethnic groups. Personal contact also appears to widen people's opinions more generally. For example, 69% of those who personally know someone from a different ethnic background feel comfortable with a gay teacher, as against 44% of those who do not know anyone from a different group.
83. The media (both TV and newspapers) were confirmed by the survey as powerful influences of people's attitudes.
84. When asked which two or three groups of people are most likely to experience discrimination, the survey found that:
- 50% said asylum seekers
  - 49% said ethnic minorities
  - 38% said travellers/gypsies

**Gallup Election Surveys, 1989-1999**

- 85. Immigration/race has never been a determining issue at a general election. However, immigration and asylum was identified as one of the touchstone issues of the 2001 general election; and public attitudes toward migration may influence political attitudes.
- 86. In the historical Gallup surveys, respondents have tended not to rank immigration highly in relation to other national issues. However, migration seems to be steadily gaining importance. MORI, for example, has shifted concern over immigration/race relations from the 17<sup>th</sup> most important issue (in 1998) to the 6<sup>th</sup> most important issue (in 2000).
- 87. Increases in anti-immigrant sentiment tend to be linked to exogenous events, such as riots (Nottingham and Notting Hill, 1958; Brixton, and Toxteth, 1981; Broadwater Farm, 1985; and Bradford and Oldham, 2001). These changes in public opinion are normally relatively short-lived, and opinion returns to previous levels as the events fade from people’s minds.
- 88. This trend is clearly illustrated in the graph below. One can see a sharp rise in immigration/race relations as a cause of concern during 1999. This period saw riots in Dover over asylum seekers, negative press about immigrants and high profile debate amongst government ministers and MPs about asylum seekers as well as implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Bill. The debate had a negative tone, using terminology such as “floods” of “bogus” asylum seekers:

Chart 2: Gallup Surveys 1989-1999 showing public ranking of immigration as a major problem



- 89. Previous experience suggests that such attitudes tend to be a temporary reaction to current events. However, increasing instability in a number of countries and the development of criminal networks that allow more illegal immigrants to enter the UK and Europe with greater ease, imply that the issue of asylum seekers and refugees may be less temporary than past shocks.

## **Role of the Media in Shaping Attitudes to Race Relations, Immigration and Asylum**

90. A perceived lack of government control over people entering the country is also a significant issue that is expressed by the media. The press conveys the impression that there is a large inflow of illegal immigrants, and that the Home Office cannot remove them or keep track of their movements. In 1997, the British Public Attitudes Survey and an IPPR survey on prejudice found that 75% of whites were concerned about illegal immigration.
91. Wasted resources are another source of anxiety for the British – a MORI poll shows that 63% of people feel that too much is done to help immigrants. The public tends to overestimate the amount immigrants receive in benefits.
92. Some newspapers are concerned that illegal immigrants might provide a source of cheap black market labour and that they will lower wages for low skilled jobs.
93. A few articles deal explicitly with the issue of immigrants diluting British culture. These articles support the view that immigration weakens the country’s national identity.

*Table 3: Summary of Press Articles*

<b>Negative Issue</b>	<b>Tabloid Articles</b>	<b>Broadsheet Articles</b>	<b>Total</b>
Failure to control	20	12	32
Too many	15	16	31
People smuggling	11	14	25
Wasted resources	13	9	21
Black market/Low wages	8	12	20
Crime	9	4	13
Appeals process	2	3	5
Not in need	2	3	5
Dilute British culture	1	1	2

94. Whilst these issues relate to immigration, some of the themes could also help explain negative public opinion of ethnic minorities more widely, especially given that there is so much media and public confusion over ‘ethnic minorities’ and ‘immigrant’ which are often seen as synonymous.
95. COI Communications has also recently carried out a media review of a random selection of national and local media coverage across England, Scotland and Wales’ concerning attitudes to immigrants and asylum seekers.<sup>15</sup>
96. Their study confirms that media coverage has not set a tone of public debate conducive to race relations, nor have they increased understanding of the asylum issue. Indeed, the report suggests that:
- Media focus tends to be on the danger of the UK being ‘swamped by refugees’;
  - A lack of trust in government’s ability to control the situation or reveal the ‘true’ numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers has been regularly expressed;

<sup>15</sup> COI Communications interim report, ‘Towards a communication strategy for asylum policy and programme’, July 2001.

- Local press coverage in particular has stoked an atmosphere of xenophobia and racism that has led to racial tension in towns such as Bradford, Dover, Folkestone and Margate.
  - These misconceptions, misinformation and rumours have not been satisfactorily rebutted.
97. Thus, COI suggest that a more coherent and proactive press handling policy is required in order to ensure that accurate and timely information is made available to the public, which should help improve negative public attitudes.

## **Conclusions**

### *Population Characteristics Determining Public Attitudes Toward Ethnic Minorities, Immigrants and Asylum Seekers*

98. Age is an important factor in determining attitudes, and older people seem to be more hostile toward ethnic minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers.
99. Researchers suggest that the relationship between age and attitudes may be so strong because of the following (Dustmann, 1999; Alibhai-Brown, 1999):
- Age is a direct measure of life experience, and life experience has a strong effect on attitudes.
  - Age captures cohort effects. Those belonging to earlier cohorts with small immigrant populations will have different attitudes from those belonging to later cohorts with larger immigrant populations.
  - Age reflects an individual's position in his economic life cycle. At different positions in the life cycle, attitudes will be shaped by different factors. For instance, near the beginning of the cycle, attitudes may be shaped by concerns about immigrants competing for jobs, whereas near the end of the cycle, attitudes may be influenced by concerns about the pension system.
100. Education has a strong effect on attitudes toward ethnic minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers. Individuals educated beyond age 18 have a strongly more favourable position toward immigrants and minorities. Those in the low education and intermediate education category have more negative attitudes. There are two reasons why education is likely to affect attitudes:
- Higher education may dispel prejudices toward immigrants from different backgrounds.
  - Education may pick up aspects of peoples' long term prospects.
101. Social class may also affect perceptions of minorities. Those who rank higher in social class scales tend to have more positive attitudes whereas lower classes tend to have negative attitudes.
102. Religious beliefs and practices may have an impact on attitudes toward immigrants. Catholics appear to be more tolerant than other religious groups, and Catholicism seems to exert a significant restraining effect on hostility (Dustmann, 1999).
103. Women seem to be less prejudiced against immigrants and ethnic minorities than men (although this is not consistently demonstrated by all opinion polls).

104. There is conflicting evidence on the effect of labour market status on attitudes toward minorities. While some studies show no significant relationship between labour market status and attitudes (Dustmann, 1999), others suggest that economic insecurity in certain areas of the labour market is changing attitudes toward ethnic minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers (Alibhai-Brown, 1999).
105. Contact with ethnic minorities and with immigrants or asylum seekers may have a significant correlation with attitudes toward immigrants – people who interact more with immigrants seem to have more positive attitudes. It is important to note that contact with immigrants is not the same as living in an area with a high concentration of immigrants. Those who have contact with immigrants do not necessarily live in the same area, but do communicate with and interact with immigrants. (Singer, 1997).

*Other Factors That May Influence Public Opinion*

106. The state of the economy may be a factor in determining public attitudes. The British population's concern that ethnic minorities and immigrants take jobs and use up benefits may be enhanced during periods of economic recession and assuaged during periods of growth. Little research has been done on this area, however (Alibhai-Brown, 1999).
107. Public attitudes may also be affected by ethnic minorities' and immigrants' degree of acculturation. Those who fit more easily into the British culture because they speak English and understand British traditions are likely to generate more positive attitudes with those with whom they come into contact (Singer, 1997).
108. The government's policies toward immigrants and debates on immigration control might have an influence on public attitudes. Public debates that focus on negative aspects of immigration, such as the debate on asylum seekers, may encourage negative opinions on immigrants (Eurobarometer 2000, Spencer, 1998).

**Possible Ways Forward**

*Policy*

109. Public attitudes may currently reflect misinformation and myths circulated by the press. These need to be identified and rebutted in a shared, consistent and coherent way, across government.
110. Other countries - for example, Canada - have implemented a multiculturalism policy that encourages acceptance of people from different cultures. Although the policy does not seem to have affected the amount of time it takes immigrants to assimilate, it might promote more positive public attitudes toward migrants. These schemes need to be looked into.
111. Greater understanding is required of the reasons for the prevalence of negative attitudes among certain groups. This will enable a more proactive information and educational approach to be taken to 'hostile' groups such as the elderly, those of low education and low social class and people in certain regions (namely the North and the Midlands).

112. Policy schemes that encourage greater interaction between ethnic groups would seem to be beneficial in reducing racism and discrimination.
113. It may also be beneficial to adopt the kind of ‘acculturation’ programme used in Holland, and the US, for example, where immigrants are, at the very least, given English language training. This could help alleviate negative public opinion based on ‘cultural’ differences, such as language.

#### *Research*

114. It is also important to research the reasons for diversity of opinion among white Britons with regard to immigration and multiculturalism, which could feed into policy-making. It might also be useful to research the attitudes of established ethnic minority migrant groups toward immigration, particularly as some research suggests that members of these groups might be intolerant of immigrants.

#### *Surveys*

115. There is little time series data about either public attitude toward immigration or about attitudes to different ethnic minority groups. A long-term quantitative survey on public perception of minorities would have two effects.
- It would provide a clearer picture of the levels of positive and/or negative attitudes toward minorities, and of how attitudes change over time.
  - It might be helpful in identifying factors that affect people’s attitudes toward minorities, and in analysing the effects of future policies.
116. Data about public attitudes toward ethnic minorities and immigrants could be gathered using government surveys already in place, such as the People’s Panel or the Citizenship Survey.
- The People’s Panel consists of 5,000 people across the UK who have agreed to be interviewed in group discussions on a regular basis. This might be an inappropriate source of data because the act of discussing attitudes may change them. Furthermore, as time passes, the sample will become less representative.
  - The Citizenship Survey will question 10,000 respondents plus additional 5,000 ethnic minority respondents, and will be conducted on a biennial basis. If questions about immigrants were included, they would have to be based on qualitative research that examined the breadth of issues affecting attitudes.
117. A better understanding of the ‘fictions’ that influence public attitude might be gained by exploratory qualitative work, which might take the form of focus groups.

## **Bibliography**

Alibhai-Brown, Y. *True Colours: Public Attitudes to Multiculturalism and the Role of the Government*, IPPR, 1999

British Social Attitudes Survey 1997

Commission for Racial Equality, 'Race Equality in the North of England: A Public Opinion Poll', April 2001

Dustmann, C. and Preston, I. *Attitudes to Ethnic Minorities, Ethnic Context and Location Decisions*, IPPR, 1999

Eurobarometer report, 'Racism and Xenophobia in Europe, Eurobarometer Opinion Poll no. 50.2' 2000

Eurobarometer report, 'Racism and Xenophobia in Europe, Eurobarometer Opinion Poll no. 47.1' December 1997

ICM for *The Guardian*, 'Asylum Seekers Survey', May 2001

ICM, 'Islamophobia,' July 2001

IPPR, 'Attitudes to race surveys: summary of surveys conducted by NOP and Opinion Leader Research', 1997

King, A. (ed.) *British Political Opinion 1937-2000: The Gallup Polls*, Politicos, 2000

Larkins, S. 'Towards a Communication Strategy for Asylum Policy and Programme', unpublished interim report, COI Communications, July 2001-08-31

MORI, 'England: One Nation?', April 2000

MORI on behalf of *Reader's Digest*, 'Britain Today – Are we an intolerant nation?', October 2000

MORI on behalf of *The Daily Mail*, 'Asylum Poll', 7<sup>th</sup> January 2001

MORI for Stonewall Citizenship 21 Project, 'Profiles of Prejudice', May 2001

Nimkar, R. 'Public Attitudes & Immigration', unpublished & restricted first draft of report, Economics and Resource Analysis Unit, Home Office, April 2001

Palmer, D. 'A detailed Regional Analysis of Perceptions of Immigration in Canada', Strategic Policy, Planning and Research; Citizenship and Immigration; Canada, 1998

Saggar, S. *Race and Representation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, esp. chap. 6, 'Issues and attitudes'

Singer, M.S. 'Socioeconomic impacts of New Asian Business Immigrants: A study of the expectations of European New Zealanders', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 21(4), 447-457, 1997

Spencer, S. 'Implications of Immigration Policy for Race Relations' in Blackstone T. et al (ed.), *Race Relations in Britain*, Routledge, 1998