

**RACIAL  
VIOLENCE  
AND THE  
BREXIT  
STATE**

INSTITUTE OF  
**RACE**  
RELATIONS

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# FOREWORD

Whatever else Brexit means or does not mean, it certainly means racism. Born of fortuitous circumstances, lacking programme or policy, the government has had to find its 'mandate' in the twin Brexit themes: that immigration is unravelling of the nation, and anything foreign, except investment, is abhorrent to its ethos – thus giving a fillip to popular racism and elevating institutional racism to fully-fledged state racism.

Of course there were signs of state racism from the time of the first Immigration Act in 1962, but these were counterbalanced by anti-discrimination legislation and community programmes – and for a while the way was opened to a truly multicultural society, the foremost in Europe, and its exemplar. The difference today is that racism and xenophobia have become tied into the state itself, making nativism the state ideology and 'take back control' its political culture.

In the post-referendum period, racial violence and harassment, as this report graphically shows, became widespread and brazen. But in going along with the dominant narrative, the government reduced racial violence, a socially-based issue, to individualised 'hate crime'. In so siphoning off racism and racial violence to the terrain of law and order, the government conceals its complicity in the creation of state racism.

The struggle then is on two levels, both at once: against state racism and against 'hate crime'.

**A. Sivanandan**

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# RACIAL VIOLENCE AND THE BREXIT STATE

The explosion of racist violence that followed the announcement of the EU referendum result on 24 June 2016 has been well-documented. Though the political direction of travel in the UK on issues of immigration, race, religion and refugee policy has largely been disconnected from that violence, the sheer level of racist abuse and attacks could not be ignored. Home Secretary Amber Rudd, launching a hate crime strategy a few days after the referendum, declared that hate crimes were ‘utterly unacceptable’ and must be ‘stamped out’. Former Prime Minister David Cameron described the situation as ‘despicable’,<sup>1</sup> while the new one, Theresa May, said that hate ‘has no place in the UK’.<sup>2</sup> For Metropolitan police chief Bernard Hogan-Howe, the 2,300 (plus) racist incidents reported to the police in the thirty-eight days after the referendum, was a ‘horrible spike’.<sup>3</sup>

*The mobile Ad-van, part of the government's Operation Vaken in July 2013*



This briefing paper is an attempt to restore much needed context to the ‘hate crime’ debate.<sup>4</sup> Too many people in power, including those who supported the October 2016 Hate Crime Awareness Week, condemn racism because they pass it off as the actions of an insecure, badly-educated and thuggish minority. Verbal and physical abuse is treated almost like an act of nature or some inexplicable force – the explosive reaction of inadequate individuals. But when laws, policies and procedures are related back to explain the baseline for hateful acts, our legislators are not so keen to listen.

Racism always needs to be understood from the vantage-point of those who experience it, in the case of post-referendum violence, primarily Muslims and eastern European migrants, but also Black and Jewish communities who have also been harassed, as our data testifies.

Our examination of hate and racism, takes as its starting point data extracted from the IRR’s unique racial violence database (which we have maintained since 2010) through the use of an online news aggregator. Given the role that many newspapers in this country, particularly the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* have played in pandering to insecurity, Islamophobia and bigotry towards foreigners, it’s ironic that much of the print media, including the tabloids, was very active in reporting hate crimes post-referendum, in the immediate aftermath at least. Our research does not merely provide an account, as others have done, of an increase in violence, but seeks to examine, too, the nature of the relationship between the police, the media and the victims of attacks, whose voices were not sufficiently being heard in the period under review. It points also to the ease with which racial violence became divorced from social considerations and discussed only as a law-and-order problem.

Our thesis is that the spike in race hatred has had a direct impetus from the divisive approach to race, religion and migration which is now official policy. To put it simply, if a hostile environment is embedded politically, why should we be surprised when it takes root culturally? What do hate crimes tell us about the culture of the country we are living in, and is it possible to trace a relationship between ‘hate’, media frameworks, government policy and institutional practices? These are the questions we seek to answer in our examination of post-referendum racial violence.

## METHOD AND STRUCTURE

The paper is built around a consideration of 134 racist incidents that were reported in the media in the first month after the referendum: from 24 June to 23 July 2016. It draws on the database developed by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), which uses an online news aggregator which sources stories covered in local and national newspapers, as well as online news services. From the data we have been able to discern trends about geographic location, type of incident (eg abuse, physical assault, vandalism etc), the ethnicity and nationality of victims and perpetrators, and the response of the criminal justice system. Where necessary, the information that is inputted (with regard to the criminal justice system) has been supplemented through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Of course the IRR's database, which relies on media sources, is far from exhaustive. Incidents reported by the media make up only a fraction of the total number that actually take place, and the incidents documented in Appendix 1 are not representative of the actual number of incidents that occurred, reflecting only the extent of media-coverage.<sup>5</sup> What this methodology does provide, however, is a window onto the way a particular sub-section of the media interprets and depicts racial violence at a time when many incidents were being brought to public attention. It gives an indication of the agencies and bodies consulted as the 'primary definers'<sup>6</sup> of racial violence, and consequently of how it ought to be responded to.

Section 1 of the paper (The legitimisation of racial violence) provides an indication of the extent to which the violence and abuse documented has paralleled the immigration policies and agenda preceding it, as well as the stigmatisation of Muslims. Section 2 (The interpretation of racial violence) explores the relationship between the criminal justice system, the media and political elites. A concluding note highlights some of the ways people have responded. Solidarity actions such as these reflect the attitude of many, many people in the UK. Appendix 1 provides full details of incidents. Appendix 2 provides examples of incidents of solidarity. For the purposes of this report, we use the term 'racial violence' broadly, encompassing a range of phenomena including abuse, graffiti, vandalism, threats and attacks. Whilst this includes physical violence, it is not restricted to it.

## SECTION 1: THE LEGITIMATION OF RACIAL VIOLENCE

In the aftermath of the EU referendum, incidents of racist abuse began to be shared on social media almost immediately, with several online platforms being set up specifically to collate and document the extent. Long-established advocacy and campaigning organisations also noted sharp increases in the number of incidents being reported to them, as well as requests for support. A few weeks after the referendum, for example, The Monitoring Group brought hundreds of people together in London in order to ‘respond, address and move forward’ in a ‘hostile and racially charged Britain’.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the Bristol-based Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) revealed that more people were approaching it for advice, and Just West Yorkshire later called for an audit of ‘race hate crime arrangements’ because of concerns about the response to violence and abuse in the region.<sup>8</sup> The police, meanwhile, were producing regular statistics on hate crime, and there was an intense media focus on racist violence in the UK, with particularly brutal incidents receiving blanket coverage.

Whilst the majority of the 134 incidents examined were incidents of racist abuse, they also included physical assaults, arson attacks, death threats and stabbings. Several people were hospitalised. As Appendix I sets out in more detail, most of these incidents were in England; and whilst the most frequent ‘targets’ were European migrants (particularly eastern European migrants) and Muslims, these were not the only people targeted. There were incidents against black people. Jewish people were targeted. People were singled out for attack on the basis of speaking a foreign language, or presumptions about their ‘right’ to be here. Children were among those who received abuse, sometimes travelling to or from school.

### Figure 1

#### Examples of police announcements on referendum-related hate crime

- > In the first four days after the referendum, 85 hate crimes were reported to True Vision – a police-funded online reporting mechanism – compared to 57 in the same period four weeks earlier.
- > In the seven days after the referendum, the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), which runs the True Vision online reporting mechanism, received 331 allegations of hate crimes, compared with a weekly average of 63.<sup>9</sup>
- > In the fortnight after the result, British Transport Police (BTP) received 119 allegations of racist abuse or violence taking place on British railways.<sup>10</sup>
- > Between 24 June and 2 July, 599 racist incidents were reported to Scotland Yard: an average of 67 per day, compared to 44 per day prior to the referendum.<sup>11</sup>
- > Between 16 June and 30 June, more than 3,000 hate crimes were reported to the police across the UK: a 42% increase on the same period in 2015.<sup>12</sup>

Fifty-one of the incidents included references either explicitly to the EU referendum and its outcome, or the messages that it conveyed (such as ‘taking the country back’). And there has been a distinct intensification of particular forms of racist violence which link to it.

- > **The referendum result was taken by some as affirmation that the country was not only now ‘theirs’, but that it was theirs ‘again’.** In this way, there was a sense of history being corrected and of historical wrongs (immigration, primarily) being righted. One person for example, who racially abused a woman in London, referred to ‘this lot’ having lost the election, and that it was time for them to ‘go back’ out of ‘our country’. Another person was asked if he was from the EU and then told to ‘fuck off back to your country’ and to ‘get the fuck out of our country’. One person who was assaulted was chased by his attacker first, who also shouted ‘go back home you fucking immigrant’.
- > **The referendum was envisaged as a sign that a set of assumed legal and cultural ‘norms’ could be reasserted.** Thus, for example, in one incident a woman walking with her 9-year-old daughter was approached by a man who racially abused her, ripped off her niqab and reportedly told her ‘You’re in Britain, live by British rules’. In another, a threat of anti-Muslim violence was accompanied by the message that there is only ‘one law’ in the UK, and that the victim had to ‘abide by it’. An eastern European woman was reduced to tears by a man telling her to ‘Just go home. We voted you out. You will have to leave the country soon’. When she threatened to call the police, the man’s response was to tell her to call ‘whoever you want’ as this is ‘our country, our law’. What these and other incidents pointed to was the manner in which the referendum fostered a notion that a set of institutional norms, which had been subverted by the presence and management of ‘diversity’, could now be re-established.
- > **The racist violence that was legitimised was underpinned by a racism tied to ‘entitlement’.** The racist abuse of one person, mistakenly assumed to be a Polish national, who was told ‘we only tolerate you lot because of the income you bring in’, indicated a form of racism within which people were only accepted in the UK on the basis that they brought skills/capital. In another, a homeless migrant was deliberately picked out and assaulted, in part because he was homeless. Here was a very clear message: outsiders are acceptable only when profitable.
- > **Voting or visibly campaigning for the UK to remain in Europe was taken by some to be a form of betrayal.** In a few isolated cases, people from BAME communities were targeted after the referendum result seemingly because they had actively campaigned prior to it. One locally prominent ‘Remain’ campaigner found that the windows of his business had been smashed; another activist was accosted and told to ‘get out the country’.
- > **Anti-migrant and anti-Muslim racism, in particular, intersected in the context of the EU referendum.** The EU referendum, of course, did not create racism. Rather, the campaign drew on and fed into existing forms of racism, particularly Islamophobia, whilst underpinning forms of racism of its own. As our sample

illustrates, the range of people targeted was broad, and in around two-thirds of the incidents, the victims were Muslims or eastern European migrants. This should not be surprising. For in the context of a referendum which in many ways became a proxy for a debate about who should or should not be in the UK, and if so under what conditions, anti-Muslim racism and anti-migrant racism intersected. In both cases, the targets have been portrayed routinely as societal antibodies. In both cases, they are regarded as undermining and irreversibly transforming the cultural and political basis of the nation. For Muslim communities the debate, over the last few years, about British values in the context of counter radicalisation measures, has led to a situation in which Muslims as a whole are presented as holding values antithetical to Britishness.

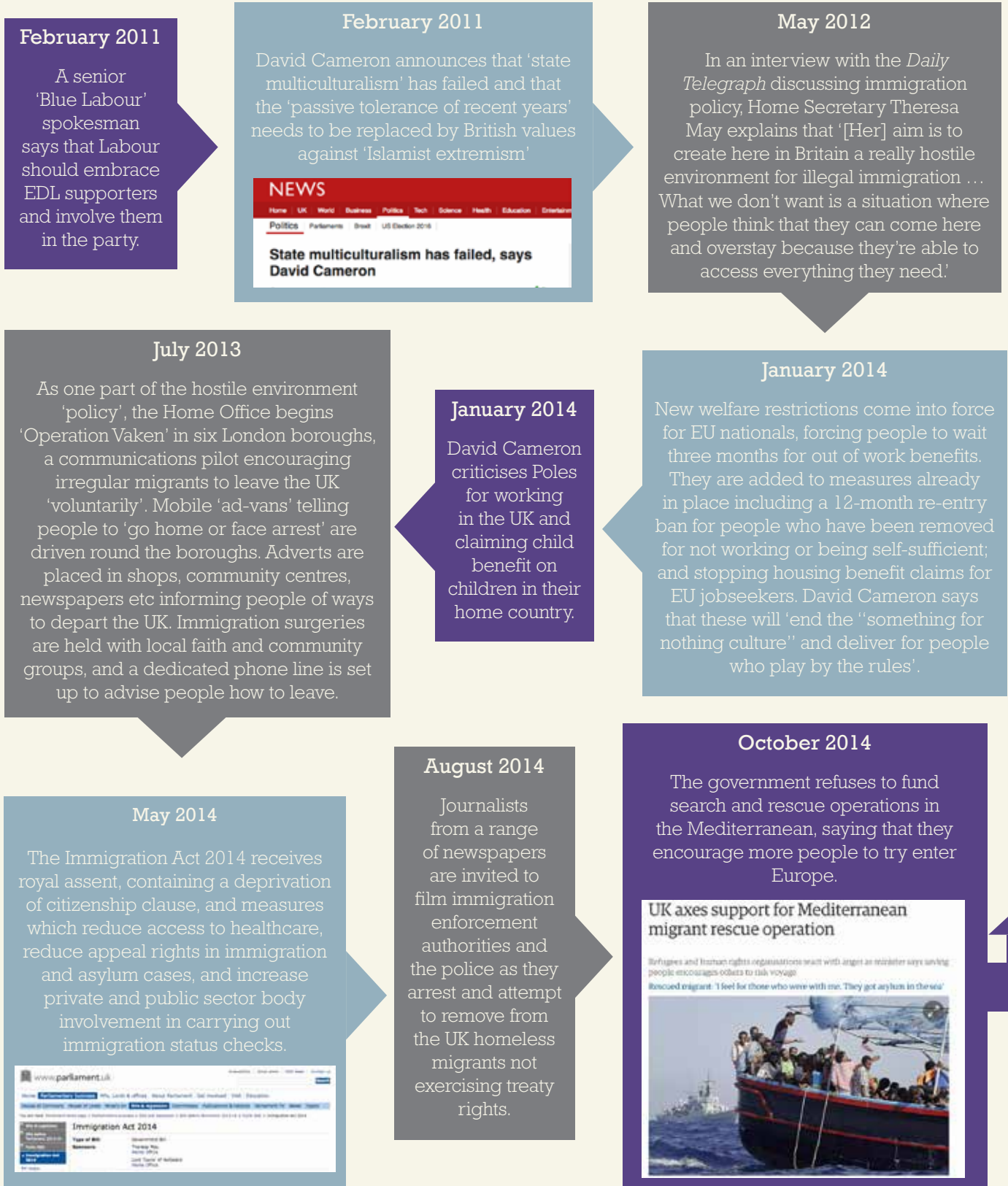
- > **The ‘newness’ of post-referendum racism is rooted in and sustained by the structural racism of ‘old’.** As the following section will discuss, there has been a significant upsurge of interest in racial violence after the referendum, with the implication that a previously ‘tolerant’ nation has been tipped over some precipice. But this is ahistorical. As we have emphasised elsewhere, the abuse that appeared to characterise much of the post-referendum racism that we have documented – ‘go home’, ‘taking our country back’ and so on – has historical echoes. The racism that has certainly intensified following the referendum is given legitimacy not just by the referendum itself, but by the forms of racism embedded as national policy in the decades leading up to it, for example in debates over immigrant numbers, media scares about ‘scroungers’, policies like Prevent which stigmatise whole communities. And in this context, it is indicative that certain messages previously belonging solely to the far Right are now found in dominant policy positions.
  
- > **The racial violence that has intensified following the referendum result is the fallout of policy.** In the above context, the racist violence that has followed the referendum is not a just a ‘spike’, a ‘jump’ or a ‘spate’, as the mainstream consensus has it. It is the literal manifestation of the political climate which sustains it. As a report published by three groups set up after the referendum has suggested – iStreetwatch, Worrying Signs and #postrefracism – the 645 racist incidents it collated on social media are indicative of the ‘increasing normalisation of xenoracist narratives and the manifestation of the “hostile environment principle”’.<sup>13</sup> And the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has warned that UK counter-terrorism policy has ‘created an atmosphere of suspicion towards members of Muslim communities’.<sup>14</sup> And this comes on the back of repeated criticisms, including a statement from the independent reviewer of terrorism laws that the Prevent strategy causes ‘mistrust’.<sup>15</sup>

We would go further. Almost every utterance shouted alongside a specific racist attack, is already a dominant ideological policy position. In other words, much of the racist abuse that has followed the referendum result has had its gestation within policy measures which express the same aim. There is a parallel, of course, between the ‘leave’ campaign’s unofficial slogan of ‘taking the country back’ and the racist abuse that urges the same. But there is also a parallel between the racist assault of a homeless migrant, who is not deemed to be economically productive, and the public spectacle of the police, immigration authorities and other agencies rounding up homeless migrants



and 'removing' them for the same reason. Likewise, there is a parallel between a racist violence that is practically carried out as some perverse form of public duty and state policies which place legal demands on a variety of agencies to racially profile 'service-users', and track down irregular migrants. And there is a parallel, too, between the abuse of Muslim communities on the basis that they need to live by 'British rules', and a policy framework which routinely demands the same and suggests that this is not the case. A review of some of the policy statements that have dominated the UK in the last five years (see previous pages) makes clear how many of these retrograde positions, far from emerging during the referendum debate, preceded it. They have for years been part of Britain's political landscape and, as the Prime Minister has made clear, are now going to intensify in the post-referendum context.

**Figure 2**  
**A broad sketch of Britain's policy debate on race and migration:**  
**2011 – summer 2016**



**July 2015**

David Cameron describes people in Calais as a 'swarm of migrants' trying to reach Britain.

PM blames Calais crisis on 'swarm' of migrants



The Prime Minister has insisted Calais is safe and secure despite a 'swarm' of migrants wanting to cross the Mediterranean and come to Britain.

**July 2015**

Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, a range of bodies are legally obliged to participate in the government's Prevent programme to identify potential extremists.

**August 2015**

Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond says that millions of 'marauding' African migrants pose a threat to the UK's infrastructure.

**October 2015**

The government amends the ministerial code to remove references to ministers' obligations to comply with international law when carrying out their duties.

**August 2015**

Home Secretary Theresa May says that the government intends to ban EU migrants from entering the UK unless they have a job.

**February 2016**

David Cameron says that one reason Britain should stay in the EU is to stop people in Calais coming to Britain and creating localised versions of the 'jungle'.

**February 2016**

Home secretary Theresa May announces a 'compassion quota' to limit numbers of refugees accepted outside official resettlement programmes. She moots the possibility of denying access to refugee determination procedures to overstaying students and foreign national offenders.

Theresa May criticised for 'compassion quota' in asylum strategy

Home secretary unveils plans to cut numbers leaving asylum in Britain and provide just temporary protection to all but the most deserving refugees



Theresa May is planning to introduce what critics have dubbed "a compassion quota" as part of a new asylum strategy, which offers only minimum protection to all but the most vulnerable refugees.

**March 2016**

The government announces that UK troops are to help intercept and return refugees trying to reach Europe from Turkey.

**May 2016**

The Immigration Act 2016 receives royal assent, containing 'right to rent' measures, measures obliging banks to carry out immigration checks, a criminal offence of undocumented working, an extension of 'deport first, appeal later' provisions, and measures whereby 'refused' asylum-seeking families no longer automatically receive support.

**June 2016**

A poster unveiled by Nigel Farage as part of the 'Leave' campaign, depicting a queue of migrants and the caption 'Breaking Point: Britain has failed us all', is likened by critics to Nazi propaganda.



## SECTION 2: THE INTERPRETATION OF RACIAL VIOLENCE

Smug political elites are disconnected from the problems of ordinary people struggling under the impact of market forces. And much post-referendum analysis has correctly interpreted the Leave vote as a protest vote against this, not just against immigration. But, ironically, when it comes to post-referendum hate crimes, the same analysts and media commentators shy away from any political analysis, and show scant awareness of the long history of racist violence in the UK. Liberals from the ‘Remain camp’, in particular, have clung to the belief that racist hate crimes are simply a by-product of Brexit, while Conservatives in the ‘Leave camp’ argue that racism is down to a minority who have misunderstood the legitimate demand to ‘take back control’ – a view reinforced by some tabloids which supported the Leave campaign. (see below). Either way, racism is represented as a failing located within a thuggish minority, to be punished, and dealt with solely under the rubric of law and order.

Within each narrative, it was accepted, in the immediate aftermath of the referendum at least, that there had been a surge in violence and that the most important thing was to deal with it quickly in order to preserve social cohesion and the social order. It was the increased level of media reporting in those initial days that framed such an acknowledgement. A closer examination of the stories reported, however, reveals the very narrow lens through which the media looks, which, in turn, reproduces very limited understandings about racism.

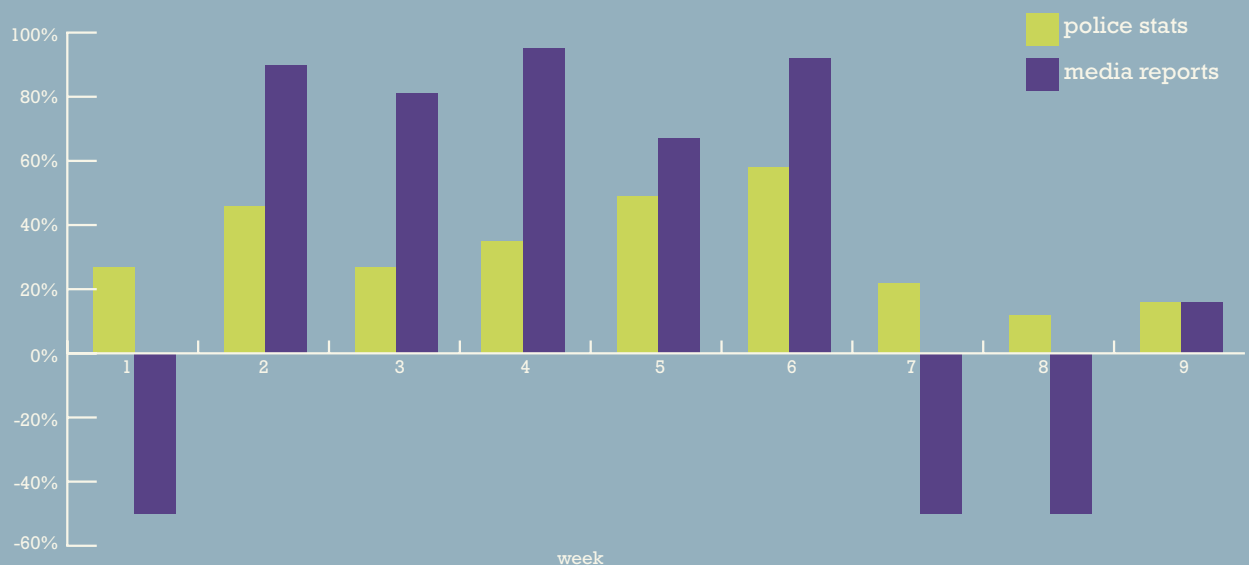
According to our data, the numerical upsurge is clear. There were almost seven-times more racist incidents reported on by the media in the month after the referendum (134) than in the same month in 2015 (21). A statistic that whilst reflecting an increase in incidents of racist violence on the one hand, indicates a heightened interest in racial violence on the other. But what this increased reporting of racial violence also reflects is the way in which the relationships, between the media, the criminal justice system and political authorities, were shaping notions of *how* post-referendum racism was to be understood.

### **Relying on the police for the story?**

Most people in the UK receive their knowledge about racial violence through the mass media. Our research indicates that the mainstream media reports on ‘hate crimes’ frequently when it becomes a cause of police concern. While in the immediate aftermath of the referendum this proved that the upsurge in racial violence was placed in the public sphere, once the police decided to stop publishing statistics, the media interest in racism abated, giving the view that the problem of racist violence had disappeared and ‘social order’ had been restored.

Following the referendum result, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) requested weekly 'returns' on reported hate from police forces. Eight weeks later, it decided to stop publicising the weekly returns, effectively sending out a signal that the 'surge' or 'spike' was now subsiding.<sup>16</sup> Figure 3 below, shows the proportion of hate crimes reported to the NPCC in the week before, and the eight weeks after the referendum (when 'returns' were no longer obligated) compared to the corresponding weeks in 2015. It also presents data from media-reported incidents on our database. And as it suggests, the *media* reporting of racial violence increased, initially, at a much higher rate before, eventually, falling roughly in line with police statistics.

**Figure 3**  
**Percentage change in police-reported hate crimes and media reports of racial violence: 17 June – 18 August 2015 and 2016**



Why is this significant? One reason is that it suggests that the media defers to the police when deciding when racial violence is newsworthy. In the month after the referendum, of the 134 incidents that we collated sixty-one (47 per cent) appeared to originate from the police, either from press releases appealing for information about an incident, or from otherwise police-initiated stories. This does not include a further 16 per cent of stories which appeared to originate from other criminal agencies and representatives. Or, in other words, following the referendum the criminal justice system was a dominant source of information on racist violence and *which* examples of racist attacks to highlight.

This, of course, is nothing new. That the police are positioned as the 'primary definers' of 'crime' is well established. And further, there has been a significant drive over recent decades to 'professionalise' police 'corporate communications' activities, with an increase in personnel dedicated to this purpose and financial resources to support these activities. (For example, in 2009 it was estimated that there were 408 communication professionals employed by the police, compared to 215 in 2001-2.)<sup>17</sup> This would

suggest that there is significant effort put in by the police to control narratives of crime and disorder – including hate crime.

Through the Freedom of Information Act we obtained data on the number of racist incidents recorded by each police force in the month after the referendum. (See figure 4, below, for the figures from the fifteen forces with the greatest number of incidents.)

**Figure 4**  
**The fifteen police forces with the highest number of racial incidents between 24 June and 23 July 2016.**



When compared to the media-reported incidents that we collated, this would indicate that police forces, on average, either released information publicly on, or the media reported on less than 2 per cent of this number. This is consistent with many other forms of interpersonal violence. But given the media’s apparent reliance on the police as ‘a source’, it does provide one indication of the extent to which a level of selectivity exists as to which racist attacks are brought to public attention, and in what context. Whilst the media focus on racial violence intensified, the number of incidents brought to public attention to frame this discussion were few. And one implication is that,

from our sample at least, information appears to be released on those incidents where policing appears to reside at the centre of the solution to racist violence. In a few, rare incidents, journalists punctured this narrative, and as Figure 5 indicates, the police control of information about racist violence can have devastating consequences. But this was only ever presented as an isolated case, or a ‘bad apple’.

### Figure 5

#### Delays in the release of information regarding a racist attack

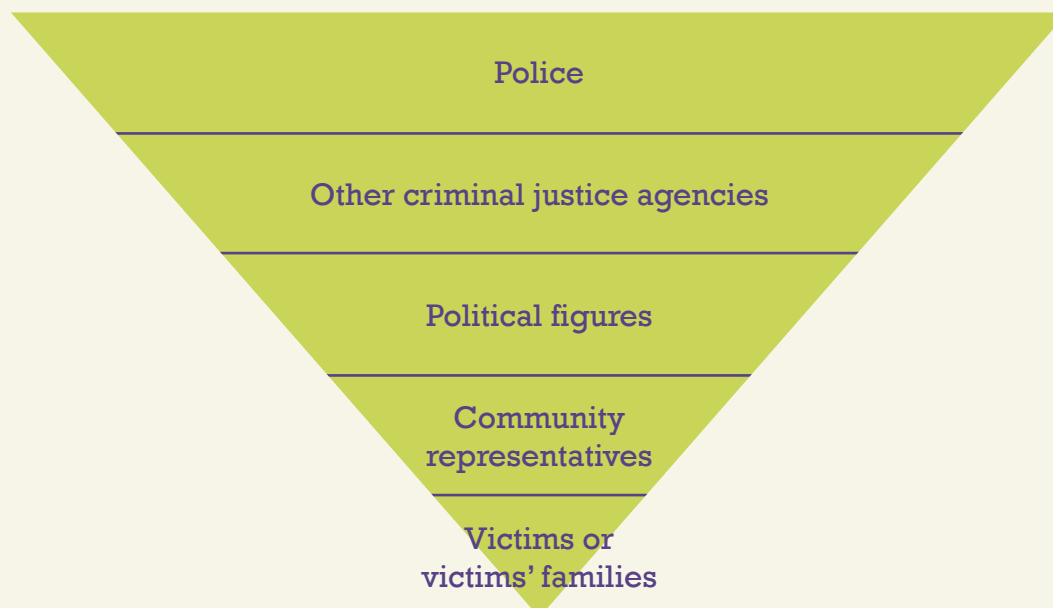
After a pregnant Somali woman was kicked in the stomach in Milton Keynes, in an incident reported as a racist attack, her unborn twins died. According to her husband, she pleaded with her attacker during the incident. At a rally of support for the family some time after, in September, their lawyer revealed that he was making a formal complaint against the police on the basis that it took them five weeks to make a public appeal for information and thus delayed an investigation. The police said that it has taken time to obtain CCTV footage of the incident. The case was not referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

## ‘Balance’ and the construction of consensus

The criminal justice system does not just have a role in providing information as to which incidents of racist violence to look at, our sample indicates that the media invariably looks to the police too, to *interpret* such violence. According to our data, there is a hierarchy of interpretation which, in practice, means that when the media seeks to give meaning to an incident it turns (respectively) to the police, other criminal justice agencies, political figures, ‘community representatives’ and, finally, victims or victims’ families.

### Figure 6

#### A hierarchy of interpretation in terms of racist/racial violence



The journalistic notion of ‘balance’ and ‘objectivity’ is central to this. For, according to our data, when stories originated from outside established sources of authority (from the public, for example) it was almost always left to the police, or some other accredited institution, to interpret them. (Conversely, this was less likely when a case originated from the criminal justice system itself, and its portrayal of events did not need to be ‘balanced’ by another.) Even when victims of racist violence *were* approached for comment about racist attacks (which was not always), it was generally only in terms of the emotional impact that an attack had had. That is, they were approached only as ‘victims’. What appeared *not* to be encouraged was for people to draw on their experience and offer any analysis of why it happened, or what should be done. This, in the majority of cases, was the job for the criminal justice system or other spokespeople speaking from an acknowledged position of authority. Thus ‘balance’ was maintained, consensus was constructed – acting as ‘a euphemism for the authorised wisdom of establishment authority in Britain’.<sup>18</sup>

There are a number of consequences to this police and elite-led framing of post-referendum racial violence.

- > **Policy solutions to racial violence are narrowed to its policing.** ‘The media’, of course, is not monolithic. And there have been a number of detailed and enquiring media investigations into racial violence and living under siege.<sup>19</sup> Further, there have been some intrepid journalists who have questioned policing following the referendum. But in the main, racial violence is understood as threatening the social order. It becomes a matter for crime-reporting not for social analysis. The police are depicted as a ‘thin blue line’ defending the nation against chaos, and the solution, therefore, resides in more powers and more resources for the criminal justice system. This was reflected, for example, in the uncritical championing of the government’s hate crime strategy after the referendum. That the response to racism resides largely in the bolstering of the criminal justice system, a smattering of educational projects and dealing with under-reporting is accepted as commonsense. Racial violence becomes defined narrowly as a law and order issue, without even a nod to all the policies and the climate which provide for its gestation.

### Figure 7

#### ‘Action against Hate’: The UK government’s plan for tackling hate crime

- > The government’s updated hate crime plans – ‘Action against hate’ (2016) – has ‘five areas for the next steps for Government and community partners to take to tackle hate crime’:
- > ‘Preventing hate crime by dealing with the beliefs and attitudes that can lead to hate crime;’
- > ‘Responding to hate crime in our communities with the aim of reducing the number of hate crime incidents;’
- > ‘Increasing the reporting of hate crime;’
- > ‘Improving support for the victims of hate crime;’
- > ‘Building our understanding of hate crime’.



- > **The dominant narrative of racist violence following the referendum consequently becomes one of individualised ‘hate’, divorced from any political context. At best the context is the language of the referendum itself.** Racist violence was generally framed simply as part of a ‘spike’ following the referendum. This in turn portrayed racism as some kind of aberration in an otherwise tolerant country. According to the deputy commissioner of Scotland Yard Craig Mackey, for example, the referendum result had ‘unleashed something in people’.<sup>20</sup> It was a sentiment echoed again and again by political figures and criminal justice representatives, and reproduced in the media. Without in any way downplaying the level of racist abuse and violence following the referendum, its roots have to be sought in the way that a much broader political context (including the policies and practices of successive governments) had been its pump primer. But unable or unwilling to acknowledge this, political figures have articulated racist violence as the domain of isolated ‘thugs’ or ‘yobs’. The implications of this are that racism becomes defined as something rooted in the actions of a few, often already marginalised communities. In this framework, it is the responsibility of benevolent political figures and a neutral political process to intervene.
  
- > **The media itself is disassociated from the construction of popular racism.** The role of the media is almost entirely removed from any discussion about the creation of a climate which can lead to racial violence. Some of the newspapers and media outlets highlighting examples of racist violence after the referendum, and condemning it the loudest, have in fact been part of concerted long-term campaigns against all manner of ‘undeserving’ asylum seekers, migrants and BAME communities, not to speak of the demonising of ‘terrorist’ Muslims. Under the guise of having an ‘honest debate’ about race and immigration, they have regurgitated tropes of migrant threats/invaders, along with notions of a multicultural enemy within.

Tabloids like the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*, which consistently claim to speak for ‘the majority’ and have attacked migrants and Muslims, sometimes with the most scaremongering of front pages, were amongst the first to embrace a law and order stance for dealing with the perpetrators of violence and hate. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, could be accused of double standards, for condemning the ‘hate-filled’ ‘racist thugs’ who set fire to a Polish family’s property, when it had carried headlines such as ‘Migrants: how many more can we take?’. Likewise the *Sun*, which had carried headlines such as ‘we’re stuffed’, a ‘tide of refugees’ is ‘filling Europe’, now condemns the ‘horrific abuse’ painted on a refugee family’s door. Leader writers at the *Sun* opined, ‘we are appalled at reports of racist abuse in the wake of last week’s EU vote and utterly condemn attempts to provoke division in our society’, concluding that, ‘Anyone caught inciting racial hatred must feel the full force of the law’.

## Figure 8

### A few examples of strident headlines

**February 2013:** The *Daily Express* claims that Britain has been 'hit by a Romanian crimewave' in an article headed 'How Romanians terrorise our streets'.

**July 2013:** The *Daily Express* announces that 'foreign scroungers' are to be 'barred from free NHS treatment'.

**September 2013:** The *Sun* demands that teachers and nurses are banned from wearing the veil, and that they are banned in banks, airports and some other areas.

**October 2013:** The *Sun* says there are 600,000 'benefit tourists' in the UK.

**October 2013:** The *Sun* admits that there is no evidence to support its claim above.

**November 2013:** The *Daily Express* editor leads a delegation to Downing Street to deliver a petition, signed by 150,000 readers 'opposed to a flood of Bulgarians and Romanians working in Britain'.

**December 2013:** On International Migrants Day the *Sun* front page superimposes a big red line over a picture of Europe, telling the Prime Minister to 'stop the flood ... OR ELSE'.

**June 2015:** An article in the *Daily Mail* claims that the 'tidal wave of migrants could be the biggest threat to Europe since the war'.

**November 2015:** The *Daily Mail* runs a cartoon on 'Europe's open borders' which, in its depiction of Muslims, migrants and rats entering Europe, is likened to Nazi-era propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

**November 2015:** The *Sun* distorts its own polling data to produce a front-page headline saying '1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for Jihadis'.

**November 2015:** The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) finds a *Daily Star* Sunday headline 'UK mosques fundraising for terror' to be 'significantly misleading'.

**December 2015:** The *Times* claims on its front page that 'Muslims are silent on terror' on the basis of low referrals by Muslim communities to the government's Prevent programme.

**March 2016:** The *Daily Star* claims that Gypsies have 'invaded' a southern coastal town, saying it is 'under siege'.

**August 2016:** The *Daily Mail* discusses a 'migration ultimatum' which includes kicking out 'dodgy asylum seekers'.

**October 2016:** Channel 4 presenter Fatima Manji says that it is now 'open season' on Muslims after IPSO clears a former editor of the *Sun*, who in July wrote an article condemning her employers for allowing her to wear a headscarf whilst reporting on terrorist murders in Nice.

## Conclusion

It is an irony that just when sections of the state – the government, the police – as well as the media, claim to be taking conscience of racism, they simultaneously compound it again. The racial violence following the referendum, as this report shows, took its brief and even its slogans from the broader policies, practices and narratives of previous Labour and Conservative-led governments. But these are assiduously ignored when it comes to providing the official explanation of and remedy for racial violence. Racial violence is, on the one hand, abstracted from the conditions that create and sustain it and re-interpreted as a baseless manifestation of immoral individualised hatred, which, in a democratic society, has to be loudly and publicly condemned. On the other hand, the threat to social cohesion that racism risks, is not, in the official narrative, to be met with social solutions, but through policing. That this narrative is continuously reproduced by political figures, establishment spokespeople and media outlets is no coincidence. It emerges from the echo-chamber in which they operate.

But it has not all been going one way. The racial harassment and violence, the street abuse, the physical attacks on homes, businesses and meeting places have provoked a variety of reactions. Some ‘actions’ have been merely symbolic – wearing pins, giving out flowers, signing up to slogans, holding candlelight vigils. Others have been aimed at setting up platforms for reporting. Groups have been involved in protest marches against the racism, and just weeks after the result came the conference, ‘Brexit, Racism and Xenophobia’, hastily organised by seasoned anti-racist campaigners showing solidarity with new groups under fire, which was attended by over 400 activists to discuss the ‘Building of Communities of Resistance’ in the new climate.

The situation also galvanised people, many of whom have never before campaigned or been politically active, into taking action, to protect their community and their sense of neighbourhood. And they were mainly responding to acts of violence or hostility in their neighbourhoods: they intervened to stop incidents; they supported those

*Community representatives at  
‘Brexit, Racism and Xenophobia’  
conference on 9 July 2016.*



**Figure 9****Some post-Brexit policy proposals, October 2016**

- > October 2016: The government reveals that it plans to use the right of EU nationals to remain in the UK as a bargaining tool in Brexit negotiations with the EU.
- > October 2016: Under a pilot scheme by a London health trust, backed by the Home Office, it is revealed that pregnant women will have to hand over identification to hospitals before they give birth, in order to prove their 'right' to use the NHS.
- > October 2016: The Prime Minister orders the creation of a new 'targeted visa system', banning EU migrants from the UK unless they have employment, and bolstering enforcement activity in relation to irregular migrants.
- > October 2016: Peers pass a 'motion of regret' over the government's much criticised policy, introduced in September 2016, whereby schools and colleges in England are required by the Department of Education to ask parents if their children are foreign nationals and where they were born.
- > October 2016: It is reported that the government is proposing to send 'hit squads' of debt collectors into NHS hospitals to ensure foreign patients pay their bills, after a National Audit Office revealed that the NHS has recoup only half its debts, with medical staff arguing that it is not their job. Ministers are also drawing up plans to charge for emergency admissions, ambulances, maternity and primary (GP) care.

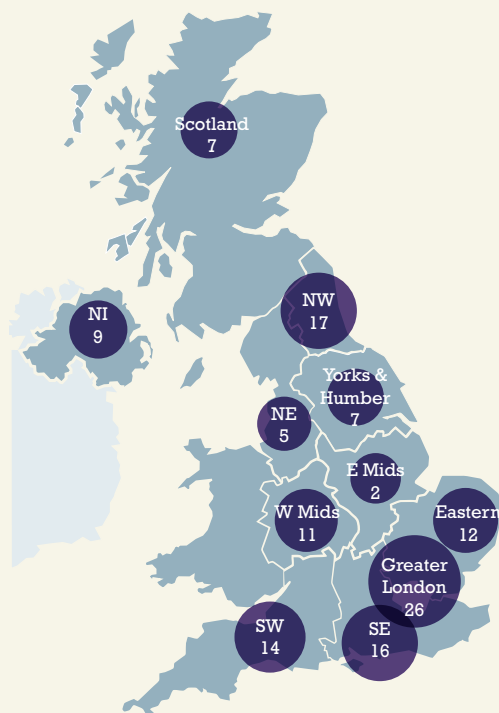
whose homes have been violated; they sent messages of support to victims; launched fundraising appeals to replace damaged businesses (see Appendix 2). But the awareness is still to grow that what we are now facing is full-blown state racism.

For if this report augurs anything it is the danger of what a nativist Brexit state will look like. 'Brexit means Brexit' is already being translated for BAME and migrant communities into 'Brexit means racism' – not just on the ground but also in the repressive proposals already emanating from politicians and government departments in October 2016 (see figure 9). A nation state, which is (in the globalised world of the twenty-first century) defined specifically to divide those who rightfully belong from those who do not, will by definition enshrine racism. The discourse we can expect in the run-up to the triggering of Article 50 could be even more pernicious than that of the referendum debate. The referendum may be over but the 'vote' as to what kind of multicultural society we remain is in the making.

## APPENDIX 1: OVERVIEW OF INCIDENTS

The racist incidents that have taken place following the EU referendum have been widely documented through myriad sources. From our data between 24 July and 23 June there were 134 separate racist incidents reported on by the mainstream media in the UK (many of which were reported multiple times by different papers/websites). The vast majority – 84 per cent – were reported in England, with nine (7 per cent) in Northern Ireland, eight (6 per cent) in Wales and four (3 per cent) in Scotland. And of these, the highest proportion was in the greater London area.

**Figure 10**  
**Incidents by region**



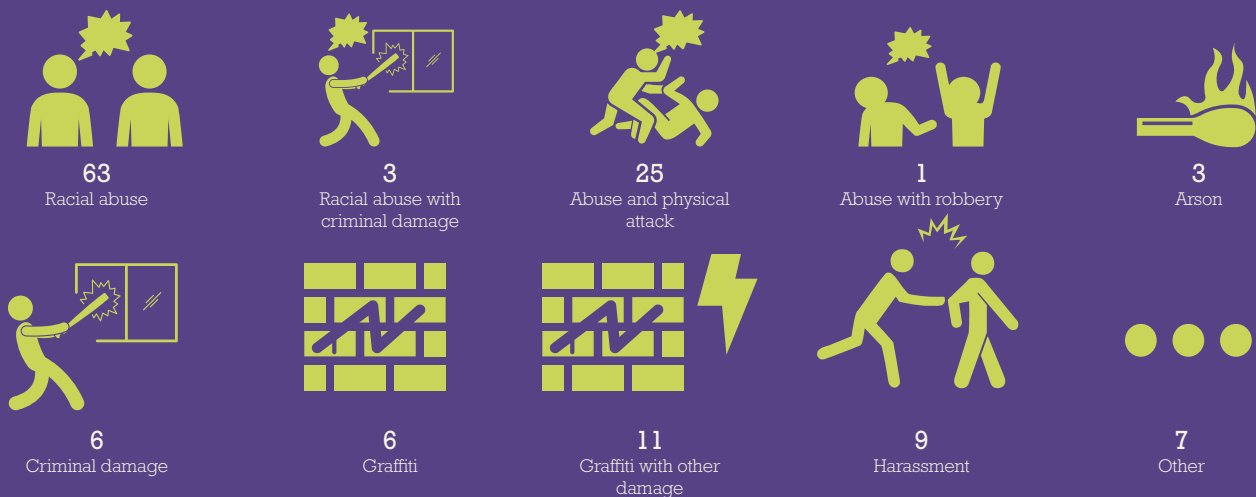
Of these incidents, 101 of the 134 ‘cases’ (75 per cent) involved interpersonal racial abuse, with fifty-one specifically mentioning the EU referendum or themes central to it. In twenty-five cases, people were physically attacked, and in some cases left with permanent injuries. One person was stabbed repeatedly. Another person – a Polish male – had his cheek fractured in an attack and left with ‘potentially life threatening injuries’. Other injuries included bruising, cuts, internal bleeding and broken bones. Nine of the total cases involved lengthy harassment, with multiple incidents happening over a given time period.

**Figure 11**  
Where incidents took place



In twenty-nine cases, the incidents involved attacks on property. And this ranged from graffiti to (in three examples) arson. In one high profile incident, a Polish family’s garden shed was destroyed in an arson attack, and they were left a note threatening worse if the family did not ‘go back to your fucking country’. Graffiti typically stated that people from the EU should ‘go home’.

**Figure 12**  
Types of incidents



As the above indicates some of these incidents involved attacks on people's homes, and in eight cases these were vandalised, or their windows/doors were smashed. There were also eight incidents where the target was a religious institution or community centre. In almost all of these cases, the attacks were against mosques. However, in one case, a community centre for elderly African-Caribbean people had to be evacuated after threats by an anonymous caller who said that somebody was going to be targeted. There were several death threats in this sample, always delivered anonymously.

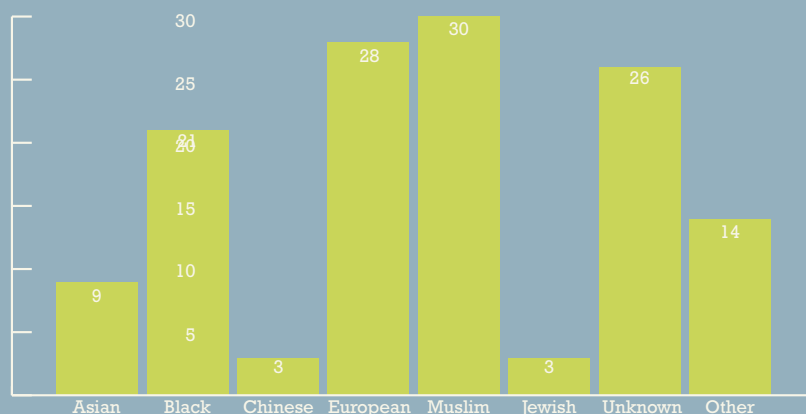
## Perpetrators and victims

In ninety-three of the incidents we documented, the perpetrator(s) were of a white British background; in two cases the perpetrators were black and in 39 cases (29 per cent of the total), the ethnicity of the perpetrator(s) were unknown. This high 'unknown' proportion is a consequence of the way information is gathered for the purposes of this report. It is somewhat replicated in terms of the ethnicity of those targeted, which is not known in 26 cases (19 per cent of the total) of the incidents collated. As Figure 13 shows, in thirty cases (22 per cent), the victims were Muslim, and in twenty-eight cases (21 per cent) cases, the victims were either southern or eastern European (in most cases, east European). It should be noted that in fourteen cases (10 per cent), the victims were classified for the purposes of coding as 'other'. In these cases, the abuse or violence was directed at multiple 'groups' (for example, racist abuse against Muslims and migrants).

As mentioned above, not all of the incidents collated were targeted at specific individuals (for example, graffiti saying 'EU rats go home'). However, forty of the cases we collated were of attacks or harassment of *single* victims, often as they were travelling or working alone and often by groups of people. Twenty of these cases involved the targeting of single females; twenty the targeting of single males.

In eighteen of the incidents we recorded (14 per cent of the total), families with young children, or children and teenagers were the victims, and in one case a 5-year-old child

**Figure 13**  
**Who was targeted?**



*Tributes laid at the place where Arkadiusz Jóźwik was stabbed to death in Harlow on 27 August 2016.*



Guy Corbisley/Alamy Photos

was among a group of people targeted. This included school children being threatened or abused by adults as they travelled to/from school. The oldest person targeted of the incidents we collated was a woman in her 80s.

## Far-right groups

Eleven of the incidents recorded by the IRR involved the far Right. In two cases, these were in the context of demonstrations after the referendum. There were several examples of far-right imagery being daubed on buildings and cars.

## Violence against workers

That the risk of racist attack is heightened in particular industries is well established. Those working in the night-time economy – taxi-drivers, takeaway workers and so on – face particular risk, and this is heightened by the fact that workers are frequently un-unionised and often work alone or in small teams. In a study published by the IRR in 2014, for example, analysing racist killings or deaths from physical violence with a known or suspected racial element between 1999 and 2013,<sup>22</sup> twenty-six of a sample of ninety-three ‘cases’ (28 per cent of the total) involved attacks on people whilst at work.

This risk was reflected in the examples of the attacks reported here. Twenty-nine cases (22 per cent of the total) involved racial violence where the victim was at work, or where their workplace was attacked. Examples included graffiti being daubed on BAME/migrant owned businesses (such as ‘Polish fuck off home’), and violence against individuals as they carried out their work.



## APPENDIX 2: A SAMPLE OF ACTS OF SOLIDARITY IN THE MONTH AFTER THE REFERENDUM

- > A Polish family, whose shed was burnt down in Efford, Plymouth, were assisted by one neighbour who tried to put out the flames with his hose. A local firm rebuilt the shed, with the owner saying: 'We're a family and friends firm and I wanted this family to know that not everybody is racist and antisocial.' Over £7,000 was also raised in a fundraising appeal. (*Plymouth Herald*, 14 July 2016)<sup>23</sup>
- > The staff of a Polish Social and Cultural Association in Hammersmith were invited to attend the first football match of the season at Queen's Park Rangers FC in a gesture of solidarity after the centre was targeted with racist graffiti. The centre was also given gifts and messages of support by the local community, including a local school whose pupils turned up en masse to express solidarity. (Get WestLondon, 26 June 2016,<sup>24</sup> *Evening Standard*, 28 June 2016)<sup>25</sup>
- > People posted pictures of themselves on social media saying 'Polish people welcome here' after postcards were found at schools and the home of a Polish family saying 'No more vermin' in Huntingdon. An anti-racist march was also organised by local people who said they were 'unwilling to let racist abuse gain any further foothold in the district'. A 'community cake' event was also held to welcome local migrants. (*Cambridge News*, 17 July 2016)
- > An American ex-serviceman abused on a Manchester tram received worldwide support after video of the incident was widely circulated. (BBC News, 29 June 2016)<sup>26</sup>
- > After swastikas and fascist symbols were daubed on a memorial to the former Labour Party leader Michael Foot, an artist responded by drawing words in chalk around the memorial using one of Foot's quotes. The work, called 'A Beautiful Counter Action to the Disrespectful Actions', was described by locals as the 'perfect response'. (*Plymouth Herald*, 5 July 2016)<sup>27</sup>
- > A fundraising appeal for an eastern European food shop in Norwich targeted in an arson attack raised nearly £30,000 in 72 hours. The shop was also covered in post-it notes with supportive messages. (*Huffington Post*, 10 July 2016)<sup>28</sup>
- > The owners of a Polish shop in Hoddesdon reported receiving a postcard from a local elderly man which is 'sitting by the till and everyone who comes in is reading it. It's quite nice.' (*Hertfordshire Mercury*, 15 July 2016)<sup>29</sup>
- > A 'Peace Party' was held in Knowle West, south Bristol after homes were targeted in four separate attacks. (*Bristol Post*, 29 July 2016)<sup>30</sup>
- > The customers of a Harrogate ice cream parlour intervened to stop the Asian owner being racially abused. (*Harrogate Advertiser*, 28 July 2016)
- > The Polish Mutual Association in Llanelli had a poster (appreciating the contribution of Poles in the war) pinned to its door. (BBC News, 27 June 2016)<sup>31</sup>

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