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Britain's New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes

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Summary

The British Raj might have exited the Indian subcontinent nearly seventy-five years ago, but the people-to-people connections between India and the United Kingdom have proven resilient.

The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom—now the largest immigrant group in the country—is young, fast-growing, and relatively well educated. It is one of the highest earning ethnic groups in the country.¹ As their numbers have grown, so too has the community’s political stature—two of the four most prestigious ministerial berths in the present government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson are held by persons of Indian origin.

The community’s growth has been accompanied by changes in its political leanings. Historically, the British Indian community has strongly supported the left-of-center Labour Party, but anecdotal evidence and limited survey data suggest that it has been slowly gravitating toward Labour’s principal rival, the right-of-center Conservative Party. Where do British Indians’ partisan leanings reside today? How does the diaspora view Britain’s political leadership? And what are the principal policy issues that undergird the community’s political preferences?

This study seeks to answer these questions by analyzing a new, nationally representative online survey of 792 British Indian eligible voters—the Survey of British Indian Attitudes (SBIA)—conducted between July 30 and August 16, 2021, in partnership with the research and analytics firm YouGov. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent.

The data show that while a plurality of British Indians self-identifies with the liberal end of the political spectrum and demonstrates a preference for the opposition Labour Party over the incumbent Conservative Party, their support for Labour appears to have eroded in recent years. This shift appears to be largely driven by Hindus and Christians, many of whom have drifted away from the Labour Party, even as their Muslim and Sikh counterparts have remained steadfast supporters. If a fresh general election were called, British Indians would likely be an important swing constituency. Their views on the country's future leadership are in flux. They have relatively dim opinions of the incumbent prime minister and generally disapprove of his performance in office. Contrary to the prevailing understanding, when it comes to matters of foreign policy, British Indians do not view UK-India relations as a pressing electoral concern and relatively few identify it as a key shaper of their party identification. However, the diaspora holds polarized views on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which likely reinforces domestic partisan divisions.

As the demographic weight and political influence of British Indians in the United Kingdom continue to increase, this study provides an empirically robust and analytically nuanced picture of the attitudes of this increasingly important demographic. The top-line findings are summarized below:

- **British Indians display relatively muted levels of civic and political engagement.** Compared to their diaspora counterparts in the United States, British Indians report low levels of civic engagement, such as participating in community meetings or performing voluntary service. A large share of British Indians report discussing political issues but, at least in a non-election year, have limited formal interaction with politics.
- **British Indians demonstrate a modest preference for the Labour Party, but the latter's historical advantage has eroded.** Around four in ten British Indians identify with the Labour Party, while three in ten support the Conservative Party and around one in ten identifies with smaller, third parties. However, related survey evidence suggests that there is a clear deterioration in British Indians' support for the Labour Party.
- **If a snap election were held tomorrow, British Indians could be important swing voters.** Among British Indians, Labour enjoys a 10-percentage-point advantage over the Conservatives in a hypothetical general election, but a significant minority (15 percent) is undecided. While Labour has lost ground over the last decade, the Conservatives have not consistently been the beneficiary. Data suggest support for the Conservative Party has plateaued and a rising share of respondents support third parties or are undecided.
- **British Indian voters are polarized on religious grounds.** A majority of Muslim and Sikh respondents, and a plurality of those with no religious affiliation, would support the Labour Party in the event of a snap election, lining up behind them in

large numbers. However, a plurality of Christians and Hindus reports a preference for the Conservative Party, albeit by smaller margins.

- **British Indians are dissatisfied with Johnson.** Just 37 percent of British Indians approve of Johnson’s performance as prime minister. In a hypothetical general election, Labour leader Keir Starmer emerges as the most popular prime ministerial choice. Close on his heels, however, is Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, a British Indian whose popularity outshines that of Johnson or fellow British Indian Cabinet minister Priti Patel.
- **British Indians are preoccupied with the state of the economy and healthcare.** Amid an unprecedented pandemic, British Indians are primarily motivated by kitchen table issues. The only other pressing issue that ranks highly is the environment/climate change.
- **Neither major party has a perceived clear advantage when it comes to representing British Indians.** Respondents give Labour a slight advantage in terms of representing the interests of British Indians, but they report that Conservatives do a better job of nominating diaspora members for parliamentary office. However, here too views are divided on religious lines. Hindus report that the Conservative Party is “closer” to the British Indian community, a view that is at odds with Muslim and Sikh responses.
- **UK-India ties are not a strong determinant of British Indians’ political preferences.** Although Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi enjoys limited support from the diaspora, Conservative Party supporters and Hindus are the most upbeat about his job performance. When it comes to foreign policy, few British Indians rate UK-India relations as a top political issue. Most do not have strong views on the Johnson government’s India policy, and do not perceive any party with an advantage in the stewardship of the UK-India relationship.

Introduction

According to the 2011 Census of England and Wales, there were 1.4 million people of Indian origin residing in the United Kingdom—accounting for 2.5 percent of the overall population. Six decades ago, India was the third most common country of birth for people born outside the United Kingdom; by 2011, it had become the most common.²

The influence of the British Indian community can be felt in myriad ways, both big and small.³ The 2019 British election saw fifteen Indian-origin members of parliament (MPs) take office, including two high-profile Cabinet ministers.⁴ Nine of the United Kingdom's top 100 entrepreneurs, and three of the twenty wealthiest UK residents, are Indian.⁵ Many Indian business magnates own second homes in the United Kingdom, and the country continues to be a prized destination for Indian students pursuing higher education abroad (students from India represent the second-largest contingent of foreign students in the United Kingdom after China).⁶

The growth of the Indian diaspora has both foreign and domestic policy implications for the United Kingdom. Since coming to power in 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made outreach to the Indian diaspora a central pillar of his foreign policy. He aims to leverage this group's financial, human, and political capital in support of Indian interests; develop closer ties with key international partners with large diaspora populations; and further the partisan interests of his political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).⁷ In 2015, to highlight the United Kingdom's place in this strategy, Modi addressed a crowd of 60,000 people of Indian origin in a packed Wembley Stadium in London alongside then UK prime minister David Cameron.⁸

Modi's outreach came at a time when the British Indian community was growing in stature and showing signs of political evolution. Historically, survey data have suggested that British Indians—like most other ethnic minorities—have been staunch supporters of the left-of-center Labour Party.⁹ According to a 2010 survey of ethnic minority voters in the United Kingdom, 68 percent of them favored the Labour Party. British Indian support for the party was slightly below average (for ethnic minorities) but stood at a robust 61 percent (24 percent supported the Conservative Party, Labour's key rival).¹⁰

In recent years, extant survey data (described below) as well as anecdotal evidence have indicated that the community's political leanings are shifting—with a greater share of British Indians switching their support from the Labour Party to the right-of-center Conservative Party.¹¹

Many commentators have suggested that foreign policy and UK domestic politics are becoming intertwined in ways that might be driving this underlying partisan shift in the voting preferences of British Indians. For example, the Labour Party has been accused of adopting policy positions that are critical of India's domestic policies and are perceived by some to be anti-India.¹² In response, a British diaspora group affiliated with India's ruling BJP conducted a high-level campaign in nearly fifty parliamentary constituencies on behalf of the Conservative Party.¹³ Indeed, one empirical analysis of voter behavior in the 2015 UK general election found that, among British Indians, it is Hindu voters specifically who have shifted their allegiance from Labour to Conservative.¹⁴

The study here seeks to harness new empirical data that can help characterize the political attitudes and preferences of British Indians. It is based on a new, nationally representative online survey of 792 British Indian eligible voters—the 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes (SBIA)—conducted between July 30 and August 16 in partnership with YouGov. The survey was conducted online using YouGov's proprietary panel of approximately 2.5 million British adults and has an overall margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent.

Specifically, this study addresses seven principal questions regarding the political attitudes of British Indians:

1. To what degree do British Indians engage in civic and political life in the United Kingdom?
2. What are the partisan preferences of British Indians, and how do they self-identify in terms of their political ideology?
3. If a snap election were called, how would the British Indian community vote?
4. How do British Indians assess the country's political leadership, including incumbent Prime Minister Boris Johnson?

5. What policy issues are animating the British Indian community, and how does the diaspora view the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union?
6. How do British Indians assess the United Kingdom's major parties' ability to effectively represent the interests of the community?
7. How much do UK-India relations shape the political preferences of British Indians?

This study is part of a larger project to collect and analyze survey data on the political preferences, social realities, and attitudes toward India of the Indian diaspora in three large, English-speaking countries—Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It builds on a series of empirical examinations of the Indian diaspora in the United States, published in 2020 and 2021.¹⁵

Survey Overview

The data for this study are based on an original online survey—the SBIA—of 792 British Indian residents of the United Kingdom. The polling firm YouGov conducted the survey between July 30 and August 16, 2021. The overall SBIA sample contains 800 respondents (both UK citizens and non-citizens), but this study focuses on the subset of UK respondents who are eligible to vote in the country.¹⁶

YouGov recruited respondents from its proprietary panel comprised of approximately 2.5 million British adults. For the SBIA, only adult respondents (ages eighteen and above) who identify as British Indian or a person of (Asian) Indian origin residing in the United Kingdom were able to participate in the survey. YouGov employs a sophisticated sample matching procedure to ensure that the respondent pool is representative of the British Indian community in the United Kingdom, using data from the 2016 UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) as a target sample frame. All the analyses in this study employ sampling weights to ensure representativeness.

The overall margin of error for the subsample of eligible British Indian voters in the SBIA is +/- 3.5 percent. This margin of error is calculated at the 95 percent confidence interval. Further methodological details can be found in Appendix A, along with a map of survey respondents.

The survey instrument contains more than 150 questions organized across six modules: basic demographics; immigration, citizenship, and family background; election campaigns and voting; UK politics and foreign policy; culture and social behavior; and Indian politics. Respondents were allowed to skip questions save for important demographic questions that

determined the nature of other survey items. For complete survey top-line results, please visit Appendix B online at https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Vaishnav_etal_Appendix_final_1.pdf.

Table 1 provides a demographic profile of the SBIA sample in comparison to the British Indian population, as captured by official demographic data.

Table 1. Representativeness of the Survey of British Indian Attitudes (SBIA)

	UK government data	2021 SBIA
Employment rate	76	78
Born in the United Kingdom	43	57
Household income above £52,000	42	36
Female	49	50
Ages 18-24	11	8

NOTE: All figures in percentages. The employment rate considers respondents below the age of 64. SBIA data on income considers respondents with a household income greater than £50,000.

SOURCE: Authors' analysis of data from the 2011 Census of England and Wales, 2018 Annual Population Survey (England, Scotland, and Wales), 2015-18 UK Family Resources Survey, and the SBIA.

Key Findings

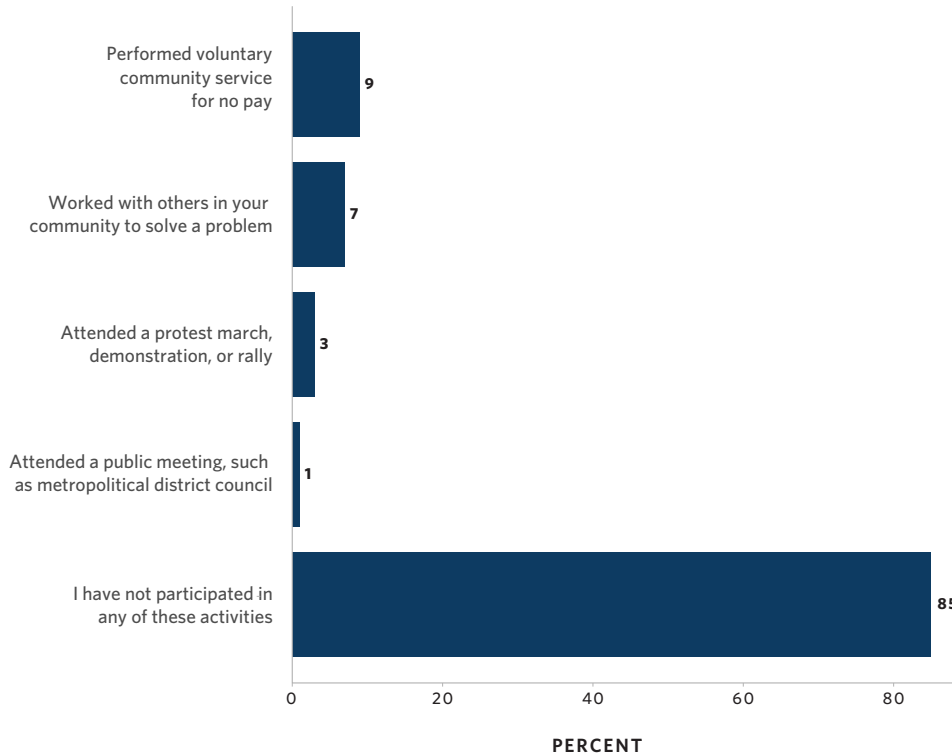
Civic and Political Engagement

The survey asks respondents whether—in the last twelve months—they participated in any of four common methods of civic engagement: performing voluntary community service without pay; working with others in their community to solve a problem; attending a protest march, demonstration, or rally; or attending a public meeting, such as for a school board or metropolitan district council.

Overall, levels of British Indian civic engagement are low (see figure 1). The most common form of civic participation—performing voluntary community service—was an activity only 9 percent of respondents engaged in. Seven percent of respondents report working with others in the community to solve a problem, 3 percent attended a protest march or demonstration, and just 1 percent attended a public meeting. Eighty-five percent of respondents report not partaking in any of the enumerated forms of civic action.

Figure 1. Civic Engagement

In the last twelve months, have you participated in any of the following activities? Select all that apply.



N = 792 UK adults

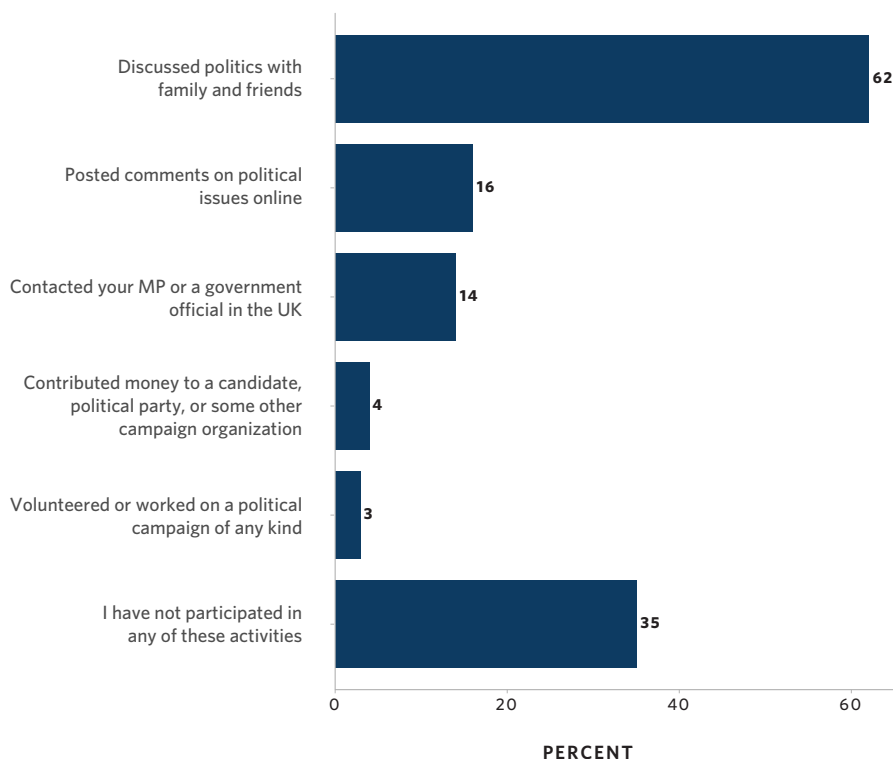
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Comparatively, using data collected in a related survey module fielded in late 2020, Indian Americans were significantly more likely to engage in each of these activities.¹⁷ Twice as many Indian Americans performed community service (20 percent) and worked with their community on common problems (15 percent). More than three times as many attended a protest march (11 percent) and significantly more Americans of Indian origin (13 percent versus 1 percent) attended a public meeting.

The survey also queries respondents about whether they participated in any of five political activities in the last year: discussing politics with friends and family; posting comments online about politics; contacting their elected representative or another government official; contributing money to a candidate, party, or campaign organization; or volunteering or working on a political campaign.

Figure 2. Political Engagement

In the last twelve months, have you participated in any of the following activities? Select all that apply.



N = 792 UK adults

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Nearly two-thirds of all respondents (62 percent) report discussing politics in the past year, easily the most common political activity (see figure 2). Sixteen percent report posting comments about political issues online and 14 percent report contacting an elected representative or government official. Relatively few British Indians either contributed financially to a political campaign (4 percent) or volunteered on a political campaign (3 percent). Thirty-five percent, or roughly one in three respondents, report not engaging in any of these political activities.

In some ways, these responses paint an interesting contrast with those on civic engagement. British Indians are more likely to report discussing politics with family and friends than their Indian American counterparts (45 percent of whom engaged in this activity in the past year).¹⁸ The two groups are roughly equally likely to contact an elected representative (12 percent of Indian Americans report doing this as compared to 14 percent of British Indians). However, Indian Americans are more inclined to post political comments online (21 versus 16 percent) and more likely to devote financial (14 percent) or human resources (9 percent) to a political campaign. The latter two responses are almost certainly biased upward given that the survey of Indian Americans took place in an election year (2020).

Partisan Attitudes

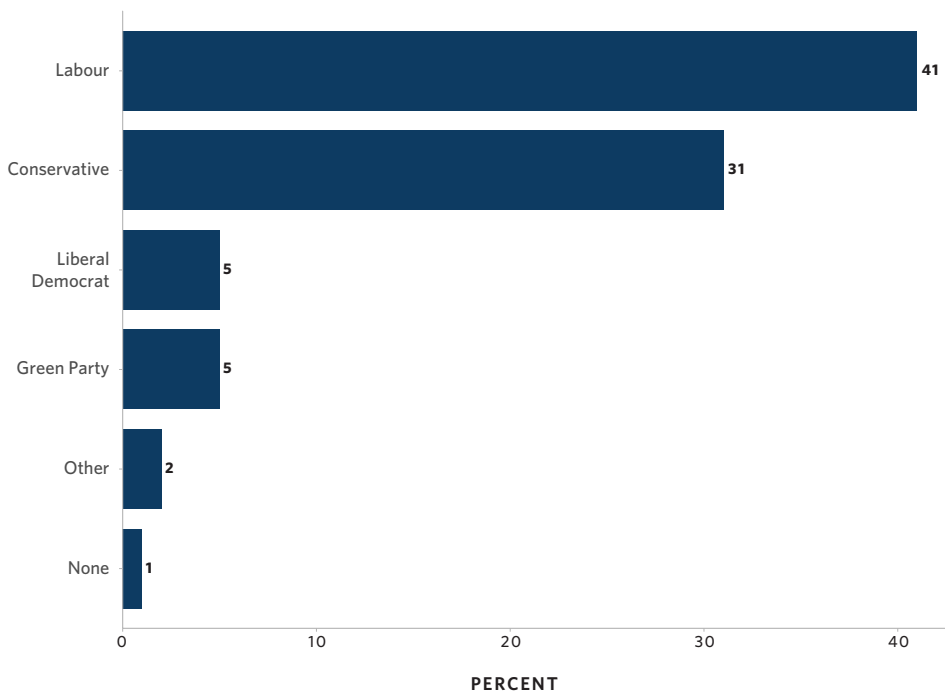
This section explores five aspects of British Indians' political preferences. It begins with three standard metrics: party identification, political ideology, and parliamentary vote choice. It then explores how demographics and perceptions of “party brands” influence the latter.

Party identification

The survey finds that a plurality of the British Indian community supports the Labour Party, although the Conservative Party does not lag far behind (see figure 3). Forty-one percent of British Indians report that they identify with the Labour Party compared to 31 percent for the Conservative Party. Five percent identify with the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party each, while 2 percent identify with another party and 1 percent profess no party affiliation.

Figure 3. Partisan Identity

Generally speaking, which political party, if any, do you identify with?



N = 785 UK adults

NOTE: Calculation excludes respondents who skipped the question. Figure excludes respondents who responded "Don't know."

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

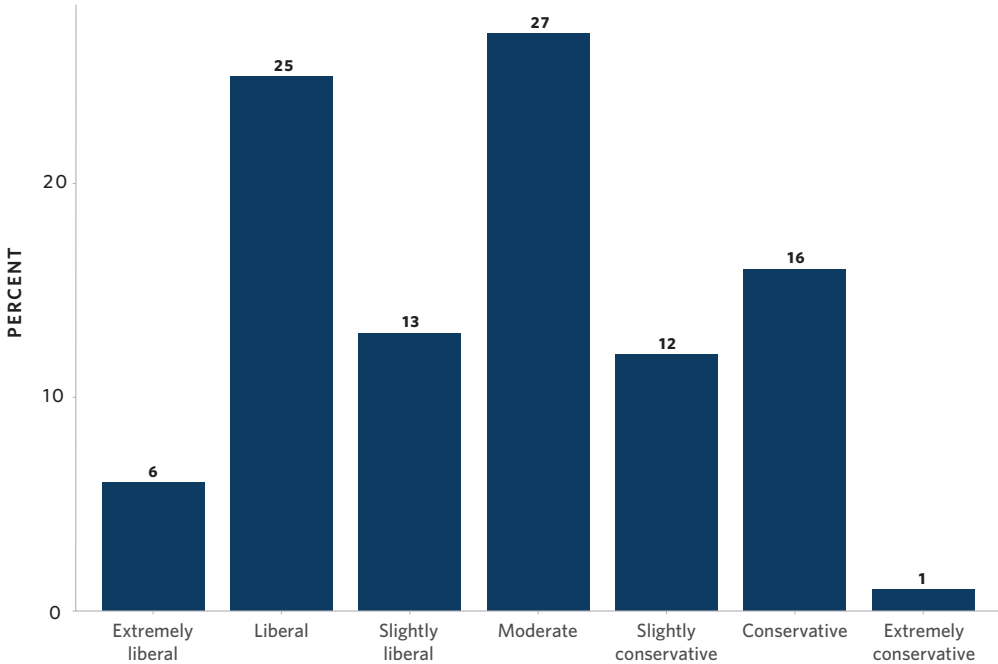
The United Kingdom’s multiparty system is largely dominated by the two principal national parties, Labour and Conservative. For respondents who did not report identifying with either major party, the survey asked whether—if forced to choose—they feel closer to either the Labour or Conservative Party. According to this measure of “partisan proximity,” the Labour Party enjoys a more sizable advantage. Fifty-one percent of respondents report feeling closer to the Labour Party, while 36 percent report feeling closer to the Conservative Party. Twelve percent of respondents report feeling closer to neither of the two principal political fronts. This metric is potentially important, as voters who might otherwise back a third party could strategically lend their support to one of the major parties in a close election.

Political ideology

In terms of political ideology, respondents were asked to place themselves on a standard, seven-point ideological scale derived from the American National Election Studies survey methodology—ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Because survey respondents often demonstrate a bias toward selecting the centrist position (identifying themselves as “moderate”), respondents who selected this option (or who said they have not thought much about this issue) were asked whether, if forced to choose, they would consider themselves to be liberal or conservative. For the purposes of this study, responses from these two questions were combined to array respondents on a single ideological spectrum.

Figure 4. Political Ideology

Where would you place yourself on this scale, from extremely liberal to extremely conservative?



N = 755 UK adult citizens
NOTE: Calculation excludes respondents who skipped the question.
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

The survey shows that British Indians possess a leftward tilt on a standard liberal-conservative ideological spectrum (see figure 4). Twenty-seven percent of respondents classify themselves as moderate, which is the modal response. But 44 percent place themselves on the liberal end of the spectrum: 13 percent identify as slightly liberal, 25 percent identify as liberal, and 6 percent identify as extremely liberal. The proportion of respondents situated on the right end of the ideological spectrum is smaller: 29 percent regard themselves to be conservative, with 12 percent identifying as slightly conservative, 16 percent as conservative, and 1 percent as extremely conservative.

In this regard, the ideological proclivities of British Indians closely align with those of their Indian American counterparts. In a September 2020 survey, 29 percent of Indian Americans identified as moderate, 47 percent placed themselves on the liberal end of the spectrum, and 23 percent identified with the conservative end of the spectrum. However, Indians in the United Kingdom and United States are far less liberal than their counterparts in Canada; in response to the same question, 73 percent of Indo-Canadians placed themselves on the liberal end of the scale.¹⁹

Parliamentary vote choice

British voters last went to the polls in December 2019, when they elected the current Conservative government led by Boris Johnson with 43.6 percent of the vote and a clear majority of 365 seats out of 650 in the House of Commons. The Labour Party, then led by Jeremy Corbyn, earned 32.1 percent of the vote and secured 202 seats.²⁰

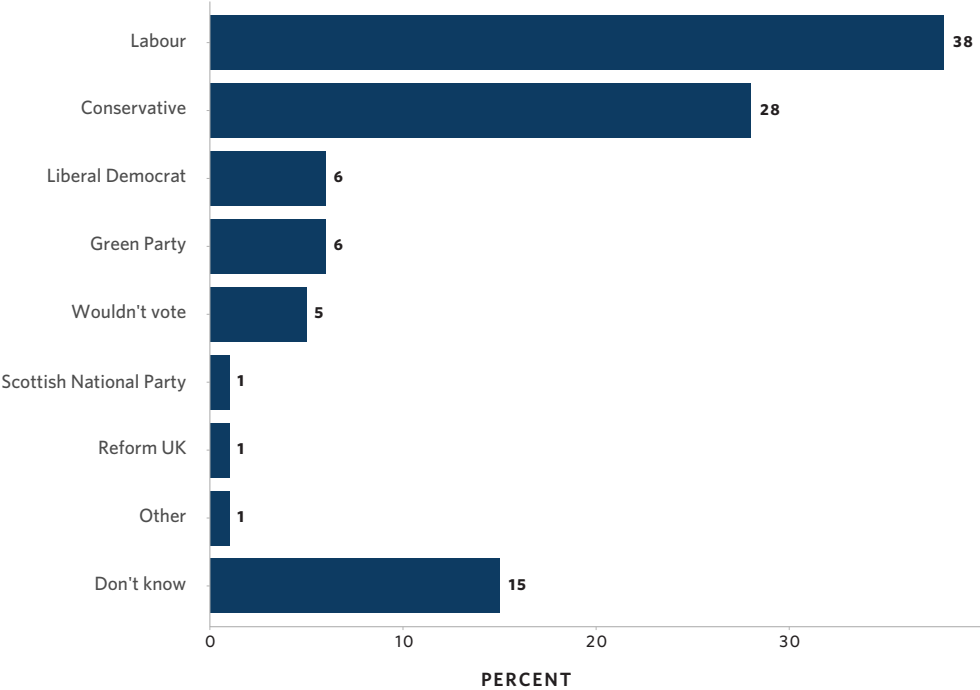
How would British Indians vote if a snap election were called tomorrow? The survey finds that the Labour Party enjoys a 10-percentage-point advantage over the Conservative Party (38 percent to 28 percent) (see figure 5). Six percent of British Indians would vote for the Liberal Democrats, another 6 percent would vote for the Green Party, and a small minority would vote for the Scottish National Party, Reform UK, or some other party. Five percent of citizens would choose not to vote in a hypothetical snap election.

While British Indians express a preference for the Labour Party over the Conservative Party in a hypothetical snap election, 15 percent of voters are undecided, suggesting that British Indians represent an important swing voting constituency in a future election. Quite simply, their votes cannot be taken for granted by either major party.

The voting intentions of British Indians stand in contrast to those of the British public at large. A survey of 1,700 British citizens conducted by YouGov and the *Times* (London) (at the same time this study's survey was being fielded) found that 27 percent of respondents would vote for the Conservative Party in a snap election, while 21 percent report they would back Labour. Six percent favored the Liberal Democrats, 5 percent favored the Green Party, and 8 percent backed another party. Twelve percent of respondents indicated they would not vote, and 18 percent were undecided.²¹

Figure 5. Parliamentary Vote Choice in a Snap Election

If there were a general election held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?



N = 708 UK adults
NOTE: Calculation excludes respondents who skipped the question.
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

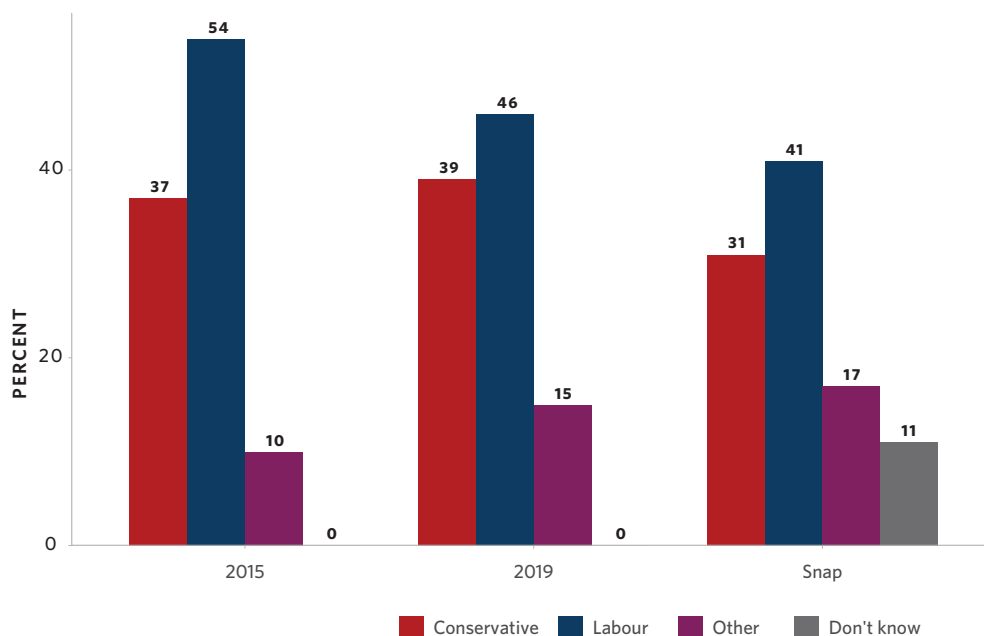
Therefore, the voting behavior of British Indians is somewhat at odds with the British public as a whole. How do the preferences of British Indians in a snap election compare to how they voted previously? Given the relative paucity of polling on British Indian political attitudes, this study identified three ways to answer this question.

First, the survey asked respondents how they voted in two prior general elections (in 2015 and 2019).²² The sample was then restricted to only those respondents who report voting in 2015 and 2019 and who would vote again in a snap election. These data show that there is a clear deterioration in support for the Labour Party among British Indians (see figure 6).

Whereas 54 percent of past voters report voting for Labour in 2015, that share dipped to 46 percent in 2019 and stands at 41 percent today. The Conservative Party, however, has not been the sole beneficiary of Labour’s tribulations. While support for the Conservatives grew from 37 percent in 2015 to 39 percent in 2019, it stands at 31 percent today. However, two other trends bear mentioning. First, the share of voters lending their support to third parties grew from 10 percent in 2015 to 15 percent in 2019. Second, results of the snap election

Figure 6. Parliamentary Vote Choice, 2015–Present

How does political behavior in a hypothetical snap election compare to voter choices in 2015 and 2019?



N = 483 UK adults

NOTE: Calculation includes respondents who voted in both 2015 and 2019, knew who they voted for, and indicated they would vote in a snap election.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

question indicate that third-party support is continuing to grow, while 11 percent of prior voters do not yet know how they might vote.

However, relying exclusively on respondents' answers to questions about past voting behavior is highly imperfect; doing so can introduce statistical noise insofar as responses are subject to recall or social desirability bias and, moreover, young voters who have not voted in a general election before are omitted. This latter fact is especially important, as younger voters in Britain tend to be more favorably inclined toward the Labour Party.

Therefore, to augment the results of the survey question, this study also examined previous surveys of the British Indian population's voting patterns.

An analysis of the British Indian community's voting patterns between 2010 and 2017 found that while support for Labour remained relatively flat during this period (hovering above 50 percent), the share of voters supporting the Conservative Party grew by 10 percentage points during this period (from 30 to 40 percent).²³

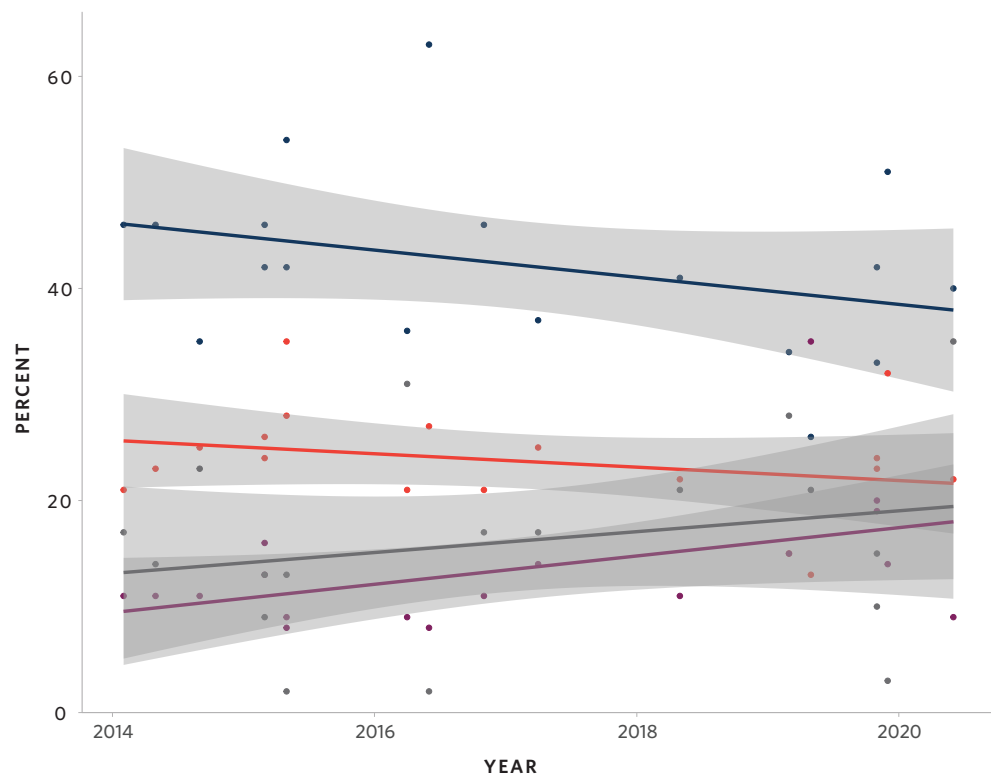
A more recent survey of British Indians, fielded on the eve of the 2019 general election, uncovered further evidence of a narrowing of Labour’s political advantage.²⁴ According to this study, 34 percent of respondents polled planned to vote Labour, while 24 percent indicated they would back the Conservatives. Support for the Liberal Democrats stood at 18 percent.

Finally, a third way of assessing variation in electoral support over time is to scrutinize data from the British Election Study (BES), one of the most respected election surveys in the world. Since 2014, the BES has conducted twenty periodic surveys to assess the evolution of the political preferences of British residents.²⁵

Figure 7 graphically plots the political behavior of British Indians over time, drawing on BES data. The individual dots indicate discrete survey observations, while the line and shaded area indicate the best linear fit of those observations—and the degree of uncertainty around that estimate (measured at the 95 percent confidence interval).

Figure 7. Parliamentary Vote Choice, Evidence From British Election Study Data

If there were a UK general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?



N = 181–405

NOTE: The x-axis uses the earliest date in the provided range for each survey wave. Figure excludes those who would not vote.

SOURCE: British Election Study, various years.

PARTY

- Labour
- Conservative
- Other
- Don't know

As the figure shows, according to BES data, there has been a modest but evident decline in British Indian support for the Labour Party—dropping from around 46 percent in 2014 to around 38 percent in 2020. However, notably, there has not been a clear, corresponding increase in the Conservative Party vote share over this period. If anything, its share has slightly declined from 25 percent to around 22 percent. Furthermore, in keeping with what other recent surveys have shown, the share of British Indian respondents indicating that they intend to vote for a third party or who are unsure of their voting decision has steadily risen.

One final question worth asking in relation to the changing voter preferences of the British Indian community is whether their relative shift away from the Labour Party is unique to the community or part of Labour's larger struggles to connect with British voters. BES data on the voting preferences of Bangladeshi and Pakistani-origin residents show no sign of Labour's diminishing appeal for these diaspora groups. In 2014, roughly sixty percent of these groups indicated they would vote for Labour and, if anything, a slightly higher percentage did so in 2020. In addition, the small share voting for the Conservatives seven years ago has grown smaller still.

In sum, extant data on the evolution in British Indian voting behavior are not uniformly consistent on the level of support British Indians offer the two principal parties in the United Kingdom. However, the data do provide clues as to the relative *change* over time. Labour support has declined, while Conservative support has plateaued. In turn, the ranks of undecided voters and those who prefer a third party have risen. Notably, this shift is not apparent among voters from other South Asian diaspora groups.

Demographics and parliamentary vote choice

The British Indian community is not a monolith, however, and there is significant variation in British Indians' voting preferences, based on standard demographic parameters (see table 2). Five merit particular mention.²⁶

First, younger respondents (those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine) are the strongest supporters of the Labour Party, preferring them over the Conservatives in a snap election by a more than a two-to-one margin (54 to 21 percent). However, this gap substantially narrows among those between thirty and forty-nine years old (36 to 30 percent) and nearly disappears among older respondents (those age fifty and older). Among this latter group, Labour's advantage is a mere 2 percentage points (37 to 35 percent).

Second, support for the two parties is highly polarized based on socioeconomic status. Respondents with no college degree are much more likely to favor the Labour Party over the Conservative Party compared to respondents with a college education. In terms of household income, respondents with an annual household income below 50,000 British pounds (\$68,800) favor Labour (38 to 19 percent). However, it is the reverse among respondents with a household income above 100,000 British pounds (\$137,600): 43 percent of the richest respondents support the Conservatives compared to 27 percent for Labour.

Table 2. Demographics and Parliamentary Vote Choice

If there were a general election held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

		Conservative (%)	Labour (%)
Age	Overall	30	28
	18-29	21	54
	30-49	30	36
	50+	35	37
Education	College degree	29	36
	No college degree	31	46
Gender	Female	28	40
	Male	32	39
Religion	Hindu	42	28
	Muslim	19	56
	Sikh	26	54
	Christian	40	25
	None	20	39
Place of Birth	UK-born	26	42
	India-born	37	33
	Non-UK/India-born	37	39
Party Proximity	Labour	4	63
	Conservative	64	4
	Neither	4	3
Year of Arrival in the United Kingdom	Pre-2000	27	38
	2000 and after	19	20
Duration of Stay in the United Kingdom	Less than 15 years	14	8
	15-49 years	27	35
	50 or more years	27	45
Gross Household Income	Below £50,000	19	38
	£50,000 - £99,999	29	31
	Over £100,000	43	27

NOTE: Sample size varies by demographic indicator. Table excludes respondents who did not vote for the Labour or Conservative Party or who were undecided. Calculation excludes respondents who indicated they would not vote in a snap election.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Third, respondents who are born in the United Kingdom, arrived before the year 2000, or have lived in the United Kingdom for longer periods of time are more inclined to vote for the Labour Party. By contrast, British Indians who are newer arrivals, have lived in the country for a shorter period, or are naturalized citizens who were born in India are somewhat more inclined toward the Conservative Party.²⁷

Fourth, respondents' views are polarized on religious grounds. A majority of Muslim and Sikh respondents—and a plurality of those with no religious affiliation—intend to vote Labour, but a plurality of Christians and Hindus would vote for the Conservative Party in the next election. Those religious groups that back Labour do so by a substantial measure (at least two to one), while Hindus and Christians support the Conservative Party by smaller margins.

Finally, much like Indian American voters, the gender differences in partisan support are modest. Forty percent of females would vote for Labour in a snap election, while 28 percent of them would vote for the Conservatives. In turn, 39 percent of male respondents support Labour, while 32 percent of them back the Conservatives.

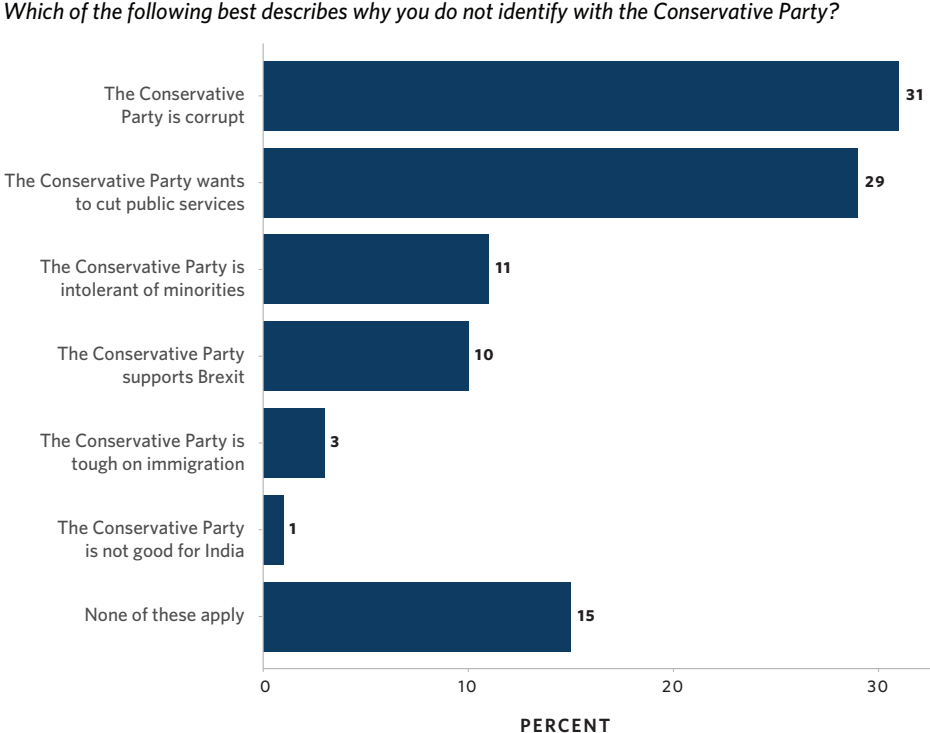
How important are these factors in a multivariate context? Additional statistical analyses (not shown here) confirm the primacy of two variables when thinking about vote choice: age and religion. Controlling for other demographic factors, age is negatively correlated with support for Labour. In other words, young voters below the age of thirty strongly support Labour, but this support significantly drops off among older cohorts. Second, religion is highly predictive of vote choice: Christians and Hindus demonstrate a significant preference for the Conservatives, while Muslims and Sikhs display a clear bias in favor of Labour.

Explaining partisan preferences

Perceptions about policy priorities reflected in “party brands” might also be driving underlying changes in partisan preferences. Because the SBIA is a cross-sectional survey, it cannot fully establish the underlying reasons for temporal changes in British Indian voting behavior or party identification. However, it can offer suggestive evidence as to respondents' underlying motivations. To unpack plausible reasons for shifting political preferences, the survey asked respondents who do not identify as Conservative Party supporters why they do not do so. Conversely, it posed the same question to respondents who do not identify with the Labour Party. Because there may be several reasons, respondents were asked to rank their top two reasons from a list of choices provided in the survey.

Of the 489 respondents who do not identify with the Conservative Party, 60 percent point to one of two factors for their decision (see figure 8). Thirty-one percent state that the Conservative Party is corrupt, while 29 percent believe that the party wants to cut public services. The other reasons—that the party is intolerant of minorities, supports Brexit, is

Figure 8. Reasons Respondents Do Not Identify With the Conservative Party



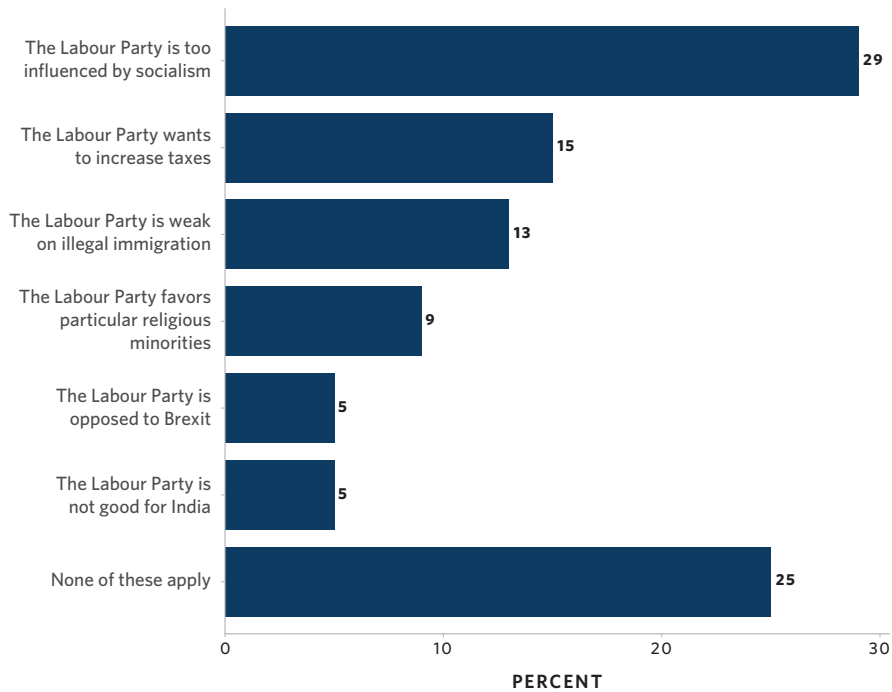
N = 489 UK adult citizens
NOTE: Figure only includes respondents who do not identify with the Conservative Party.
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

tough on immigration, or is not good for India—lag far behind. Fifteen percent of respondents identify another, unspecified reason for not supporting the Conservative Party.

By contrast, the most common reason that British Indians do not identify with the Labour Party is the perception that it is too influenced by socialism (29 percent) (see figure 9). This is, by far, the most popular reason of the six options provided to survey respondents. Interestingly, 25 percent—the second most common response—state that none of the enumerated options apply, suggesting there are other reasons at play for their decision not to support the Labour Party.²⁸

Figure 9. Reasons Respondents Do Not Identify With the Labour Party

Which of the following best describes why you do not identify with the Labour Party?



N = 453 UK adults

NOTE: Figure only includes respondents who do not identify with the Labour Party.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Assessment of Leadership

Prime ministerial preference

Unlike presidential systems in which voters directly cast a vote for their favored presidential candidate, in parliamentary systems the prime minister is selected by the political party or coalition of parties that manage to form the government. Nevertheless, polling citizens on prime ministerial preferences is still informative insofar as a party's leadership is an important factor shaping individuals' voting preferences.

The survey results show relatively low levels of popularity for all plausible prime minister candidates. In a hypothetical snap election, 24 percent of respondents would like to see Labour leader Keir Starmer as the UK's next prime minister (see figure 10). In terms of popularity, Starmer is closely followed by Rishi Sunak, a British Indian MP and the chancellor of the exchequer. Twenty-one percent of respondents would like to see Sunak, a rising Conservative star, as the next prime minister. In fact, nearly twice as many British Indians

would like to see him as the next prime minister compared to the Conservative incumbent Johnson (11 percent).

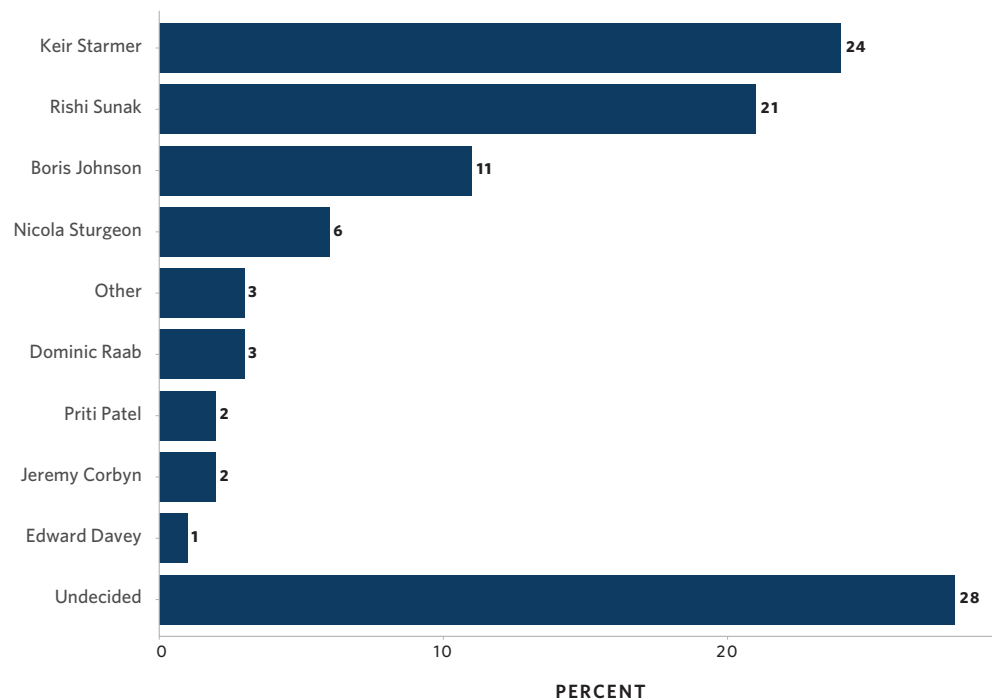
While support for Sunak could easily be explained away by co-ethnic voting, it is worth pointing out that another British Indian—Home Secretary Priti Patel—polls very poorly among British Indians: just 2 percent of respondents favor her as the next prime minister.²⁹

Finally, the fact that the highest share of respondents—28 percent—are undecided about their preferred prime ministerial choice further points to a large swing voter constituency among British Indians. This uncertainty is in line with the large share of respondents who are generally undecided about their party preference in a snap election (although nearly twice as many respondents profess uncertainty over their prime ministerial choice compared to their preferred party).

The survey evidence suggests that the preferences of British Indians have evolved in just two years. Of those British Indian respondents who voted in 2019 and intend to vote if a snap election were called, 32 percent hoped to see former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn emerge as prime minister after the 2019 general election, with 35 percent backing Johnson. Fast forward to today and Corbyn (along with Patel) stands next to last among choices presented to British Indian respondents in this sub-sample.

Figure 10. Prime Ministerial Preference in a Snap Election

If a fresh election were held tomorrow, who would you like to see as the next prime minister?



N = 785 UK adults

NOTE: Calculation excludes respondents who skipped the question.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Approval of the prime minister

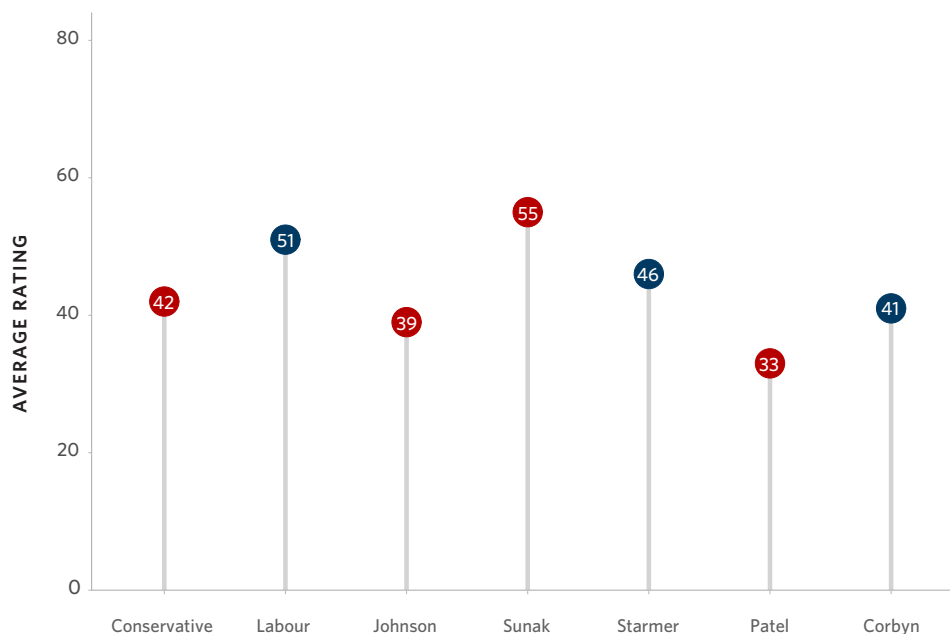
British Indians do not hold favorable views of the current prime minister. Just 37 percent approve of the way he is handling his job, and 66 percent of those who disapprove strongly disapprove of his performance. As one would expect, views on Johnson are polarized on partisan grounds. Seventy-eight percent of respondents who identify with the Labour Party disapprove of the job he is doing as prime minister, compared to 22 percent of those who identify with the Conservative Party.

Feeling thermometer

Furthermore, Johnson's general favorability rating pales in comparison to that of Sunak. One of the classic methods of measuring how individuals assess political figures is through a "feeling thermometer"—a method popularized by the American National Election Studies project—whereby respondents are asked to rate political parties or individual leaders on a scale from zero to one hundred. Ratings between zero and forty-nine mean that respondents do not feel favorable toward the person or do not care for the person or entity, a rating of fifty means that respondents are indifferent toward them, and ratings between fifty-one and one hundred mean that respondents feel favorable and warm toward them.

Figure 11. Assessment of Key British Political Parties and Leaders

Average feeling thermometer ratings



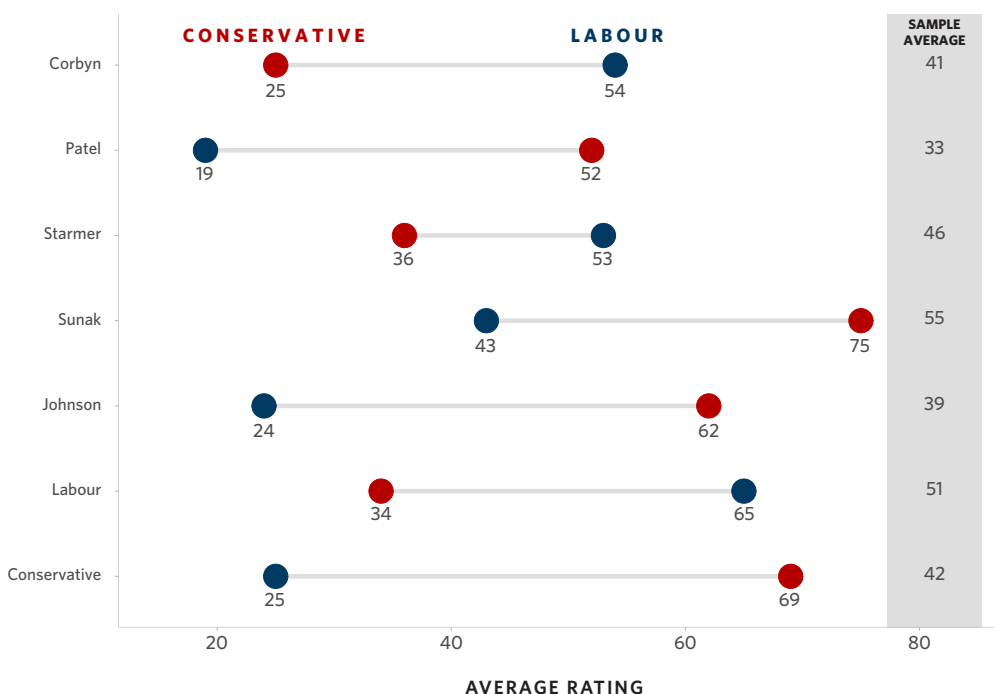
N = 792 UK adults

NOTE: Measured on a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 = least favorable, 100 = most favorable, and 50 = indifferent.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Figure 12. Polarization Among British Indians

Average feeling thermometer ratings, by party



N = 682 UK adults

NOTE: Respondents' partisan affiliation is determined by self-reported party proximity. Figure excludes respondents who do not feel close to either the Labour or Conservative Parties.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

British Indians give Sunak a mean rating of fifty-five, while Johnson receives a mean rating of thirty-nine (see figure 11). Although the Labour Party is rated higher than the Conservative Party (fifty-one versus forty-two), Sunak's personal rating of fifty-five is even higher than Starmer's (whose mean rating stands at forty-six). In fact, according to this measure, Sunak is the most popular British politician respondents were asked about. Corbyn stands at forty-one, while Patel again is the least popular, scoring a thirty-three.³⁰

At first glance, it might appear odd that survey respondents reserve their highest rating for Sunak but yet do not rate him as their most preferred prime ministerial candidate. One explanation for this discrepancy is simple partisanship: many British Indians might rate Sunak favorably but, when it comes to the country's highest job, still prefer a Labour politician.

Not surprisingly, the views of British Indians hold of their political leaders are highly polarized (see figure 12). For instance, Conservative supporters give their party a mean rating of sixty-nine, while Labour supporters grant it a mere twenty-five. Views of the Labour Party are only slightly less polarized: Labour supporters rate the party a sixty-five, while Conservative supporters give it a thirty-four.

When it comes to individual leaders, views of Johnson are the most polarized (thirty-eight points separates the ratings given to the prime minister by Labour and Conservative respondents). Interestingly, while Conservatives give Sunak a seventy-five (the single highest rating observed), Labour supporters give him a forty-three—their most favorable assessment of any Conservative leader. This is notable given that Labour supporters give their own party’s leader (Starmer) a mean rating of fifty-three and Corbyn a fifty-four.

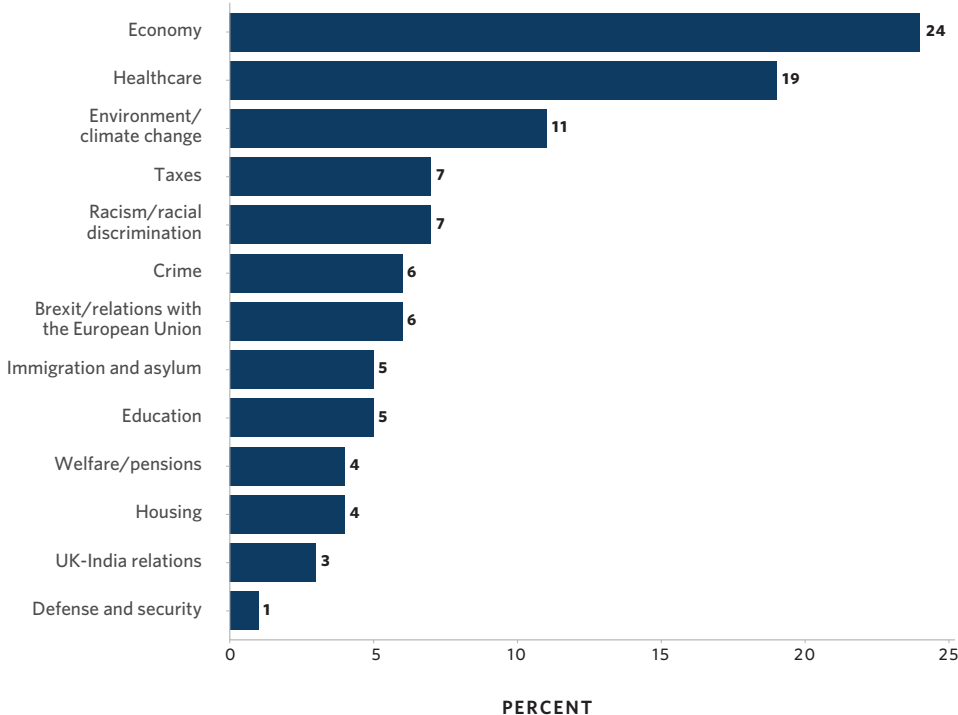
Policy Attitudes

Animating electoral issues

If a snap election were called, what issues might animate the voting decisions British Indians make? To shed light on this question, the survey asked respondents to rank their top three most important issues that will influence their vote choice in a presumptive early election (see figure 13).

Figure 13. Top Issues in UK Politics

Which of the following is the most important issue for you personally?



N = 792 adult UK citizens
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

When examining the issues respondents rated as their number one concern, the economy comes out on top with 24 percent of respondents selecting this option. The economy was followed closely by healthcare (19 percent). In the middle of a protracted pandemic, it makes sense that these two issues stand out above all others. The only other issue to crack double digits was the environment/climate change, an issue selected by 11 percent of respondents. Interestingly, British Indians do not view UK-India relations as a pressing electoral issue: only 3 percent ranked it as their foremost issue.

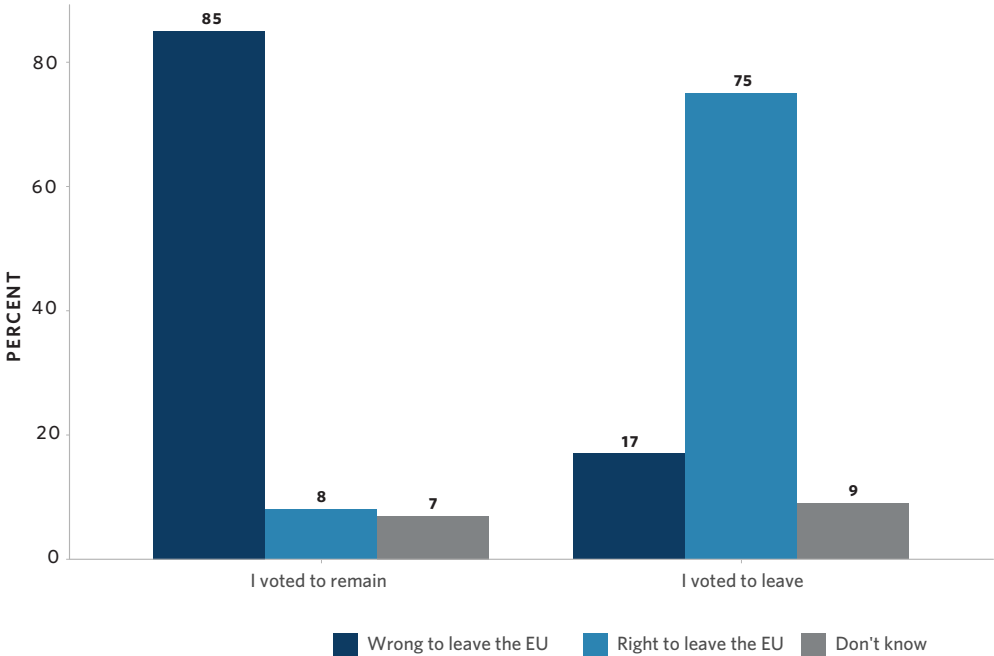
Views on Brexit

Although Brexit and the broader question of the United Kingdom’s future relationship with the European Union (EU) rated in the middle of the pack (with just 6 percent identifying it as their most important issue), the survey further probed respondents’ views on the subject.

Excluding respondents who did not vote in the 2016 Brexit referendum, who did not recall how they voted, or who skipped the question entirely, two-thirds of British Indian respondents report voting for the United Kingdom to remain in the EU.³¹ Given the narrow margin with which British voters decided to endorse the decision to leave the EU (fifty-two to forty-eight in favor of exiting the EU), the views of British Indians are significantly at odds with the views of the general voting public.³²

Figure 14. Revisiting the Brexit Vote

How has your support for Brexit changed since the 2016 referendum?



N = 602 UK adults
NOTE: Calculation excludes respondents who skipped either question, did not vote in 2016, or did not remember how they voted in 2016.
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

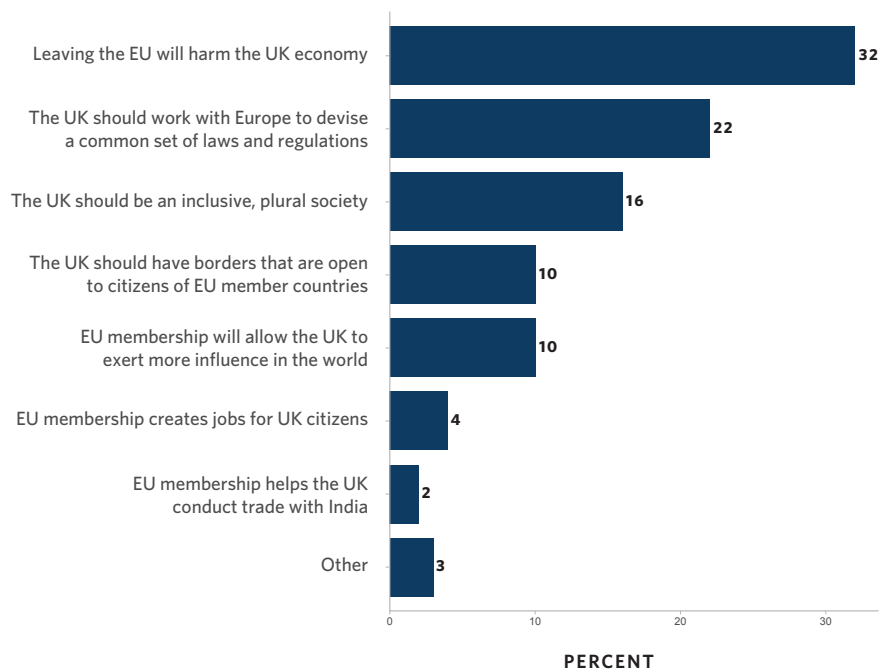
However, attitudes toward Brexit are not fixed in stone. The survey asked respondents whether their views on Brexit had evolved in the aftermath of the 2016 referendum (see figure 14). Of those who voted to remain in the EU, 8 percent now believe that Britain was right to leave the EU—effectively endorsing the decision; another 7 percent are undecided. However, supporters of the Leave movement appear to be experiencing even greater buyer’s remorse: 17 percent of British Indians who voted to leave now report that it was wrong to leave the EU, while 9 percent are not sure.³³

Given that the majority of British Indians opposed Brexit (and continue to do so more than five years later), what explains their position on Brexit? The survey provided respondents with a list of commonly held positions Brexit opponents proffer and asked them to select the one that *best* captures why they believe the United Kingdom was wrong to leave the EU (see figure 15).

The most popular response—endorsed by nearly one in three British Indians who voted to remain—is that leaving the EU would be harmful to the UK economy. Twenty-two percent report that the United Kingdom should have worked with Europe to devise a common set of laws and regulations, while 16 percent believe that the United Kingdom should have remained because the UK should aspire to be an inclusive, plural society. Notably, the

Figure 15. Reasons British Indians Oppose Brexit

Which of the following reasons best captures why you believe the UK was wrong to leave the EU?



N = 490 UK adults

NOTE: Figure includes respondents who do not support Brexit. Calculation excludes respondents who skipped the question.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

prospects of UK-India relations were not a major consideration: 2 percent of respondents voiced concern that EU membership would help the United Kingdom conduct trade with India.

Representation of British Indians

The survey explored whether either of the major parties has developed a better reputation for representing British Indians. For instance, the Conservative Party under Johnson's leadership has appointed two British Indians—Patel and Sunak—to two of the most powerful Cabinet positions (heading the Home Ministry and the Treasury, respectively). As a result, some commentators have suggested that Conservatives have elevated the status of British Indians—to the disadvantage of the Labour Party.³⁴

The survey asked respondents to rate parties, on a scale of zero to ten, as to how well the parties represent the interests of the British Indian community and how well they perform in terms of nominating British Indians as parliamentary candidates. Respondents gave the Conservatives a mean rating of 4.7 and Labour a mean rating of 5.2 on the question of representing British Indian interests—a difference that is just outside the bounds of statistical significance. On the issue of nominating British Indians to stand for parliamentary elections, the Conservatives retain a slight upper hand—garnering a rating of 5.7 compared to 4.9 for Labour, a statistically significant difference. The contrast between the two measures is interesting: Labour retains a small perception advantage in terms of representing British Indian interests, but the Conservative Party bests Labour when it comes to nominations.

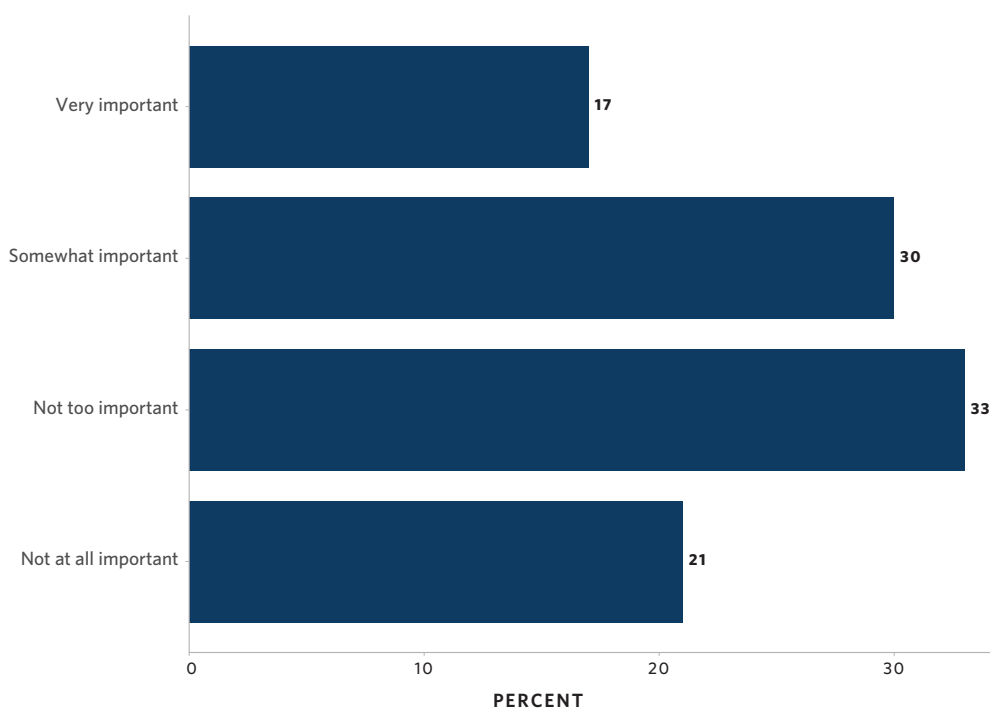
However, while the Conservative Party might be perceived as doing a slightly better job nominating British Indians to Parliament, overall, British Indians do not appear to place much emphasis on this type of descriptive representation (see figure 16).

When respondents were asked how important it is for them to have a British Indian MP representing their constituency in Parliament, a majority (54 percent) responded that it is not important. Furthermore, British Indians report large levels of indifference to Johnson's decision to give British Indians visible positions in his Cabinet. Two-thirds of respondents (63 percent) report that their inclusion has no impact on their views on the Conservative Party. Twenty-seven percent report that it makes them more likely to view the party in favorable terms, while just 4 percent say it makes them less likely to have a positive view of the Conservative Party.

One should be careful about drawing strong conclusions about the relatively muted views British Indian voters seem to hold regarding descriptive representation. Now that the Conservative Party has had British Indians in high-profile Cabinet positions, it is likely that the absence of any representation from the community in the future will be more noticeable.³⁵

Figure 16. Importance of Descriptive Representation

How important is it for you to have a British Indian MP representing your constituency in Parliament?



N = 792 UK adult citizens

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

The relatively similar ratings that British Indians award the two principal parties when it comes to representing the community's interests is further bolstered by their responses to a question about the perceived proximity of the major parties to major ethnic/racial groups. In particular, the survey asked respondents whether they perceive the Labour or Conservative party to be closer, roughly the same, or not particularly close to a list of six ethnic/racial groups: Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Asians, Whites, and Blacks.³⁶

As table 3 makes clear, no party possesses a marked "perception advantage" when it comes to its proximity to the British Indian community. Twenty-eight percent of respondents feel the community is closer to the Labour Party, 30 percent feel closer to the Conservative Party, and 27 percent believe "both are the same." Meanwhile, 15 percent believe neither of the two parties is especially close to the British Indian community.

In this respect, the British Indian community is something of an outlier. According to survey respondents, Labour is markedly closer to Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Blacks. In addition, Labour is seen as being closer to British Asians (of non-South Asian origin), although nearly one-third (31 percent) of respondents believe both parties are roughly the same when it comes to representing the Asian community. The Conservative Party, on

Table 3. Political Parties' Proximity to Racial/Ethnic Groups

Some people believe that certain political parties are “closer” to certain ethnic groups in the UK in terms of representing their interests. Which party would you say is closer to each of the following ethnic groups?

Race/Ethnicity	Labour (%)	Conservative (%)	Both are the same (%)	Neither (%)
Indians	28	30	27	15
Pakistanis	59	5	18	18
Bangladeshis	56	3	19	22
Asians	29	16	31	25
Whites	6	53	29	12
Blacks	56	3	18	23

N = 790-791

NOTE: Calculation excludes respondents who skipped the question.

the other hand, is seen to be decidedly closer to Whites (by a margin of 53 to 6 percent), although here too a substantial minority—29 percent—believe the Labour and Conservative parties are roughly on par.

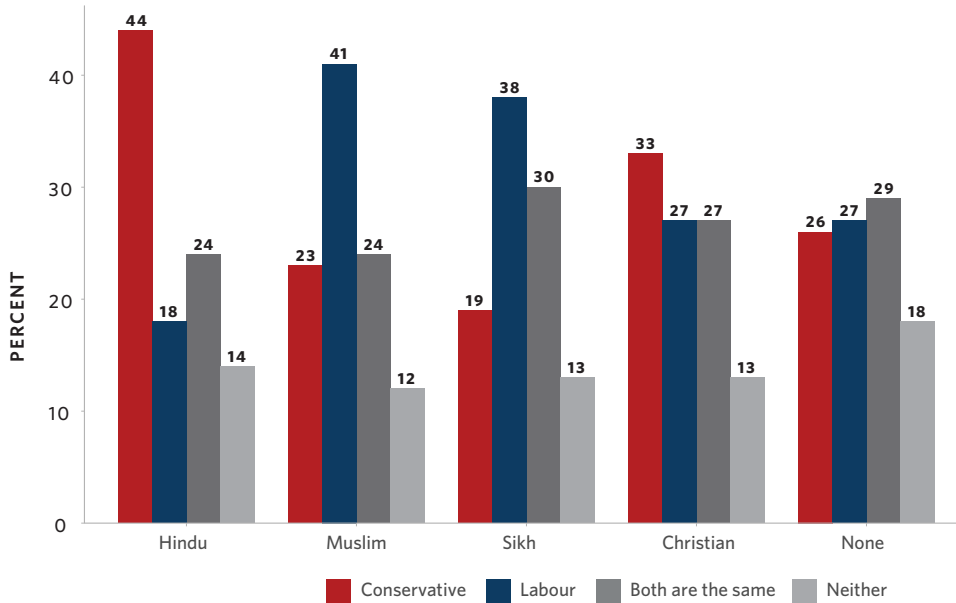
However, there is evidence of differing perceptions on the basis of religion. Forty-four percent of Hindus report that the Conservative Party is closer to British Indians, 18 percent state that the Labour Party is closer, while 24 percent believe both parties are the same, and 14 percent state that neither party is close to the community (see figure 17).

Muslims and Sikhs, both of which continue to back the Labour Party in large numbers, hold a different view. Forty-one percent of Muslim respondents report that the Labour Party is closer to British Indians while 23 percent report that the Conservative Party is more proximate to the community. Among Sikhs, 38 percent believe that Labour is closer to British Indians and 19 percent report that the community is closer to the Conservatives. Christian respondents and those professing no religion share more mixed views, with no one party perceived as being decisively closer to British Indians.

In contrast, British Indians—irrespective of religious affiliation—agree that Labour holds a clear advantage with British voters of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin. A majority or near-majority of British Indians across different faith groups report that the Labour Party is closer to British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. However, only a small share of respondents in every religion (in the single digits) claim that the Conservative Party is closer to these South Asian diaspora groups.

Figure 17. Perceived Party Proximity to British Indians, by Religion

Some people believe that certain political parties are "closer" to certain ethnic groups in the UK in terms of representing their interests. Which party would you say is closer to British Indians?



N = 749 UK adults

NOTE: Figure includes respondents who identified as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian or belong to no religion. Calculation excludes respondents who skipped either question.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

The Role of UK-India relations

Assessment of bilateral ties

The survey responses described above suggest that UK-India ties do not figure prominently among the issues that animate British Indian voters, at least when it comes to their electoral choices. In fact, when asked how important a party's position on India is in terms of determining respondents' vote choice, only 37 percent state it is either somewhat or very important. Here again, survey responses should be viewed in context. The survey was conducted amid a pandemic in the United Kingdom and at a time when there were few publicly salient issues in UK-India ties to animate voters.

Interestingly, respondents do not perceive a clear partisan advantage when it comes to the stewardship of UK-India relations (see figure 18). Thirty-one percent of British Indians report that both parties do an equally good job of managing bilateral ties. While more respondents (24 percent) give the Conservatives the upper hand compared to the Labour

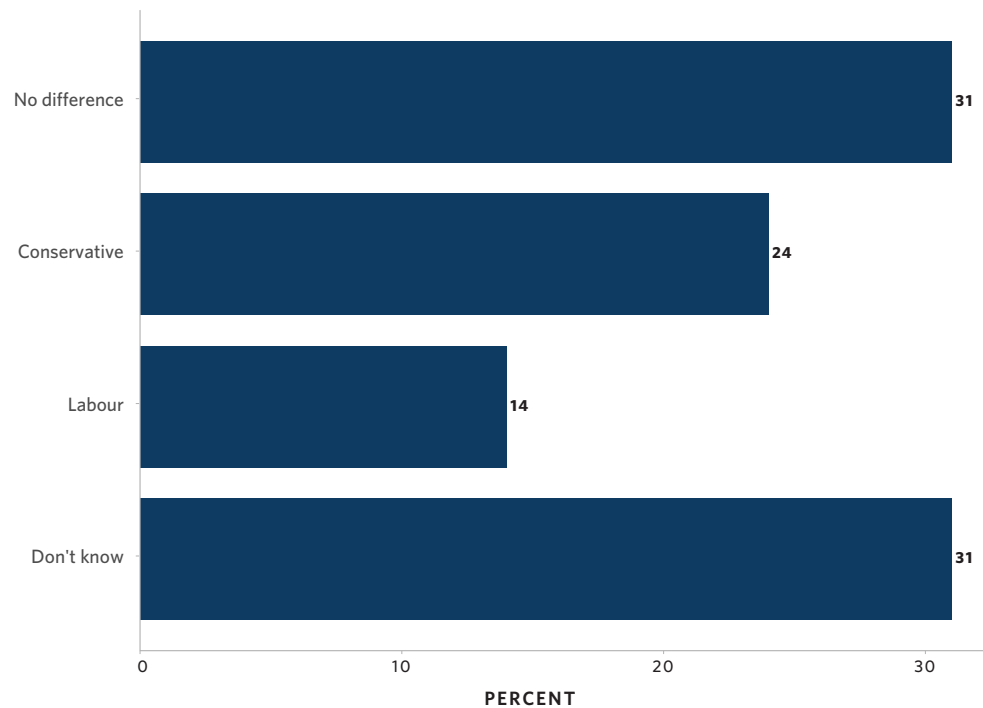
Party (14 percent), a plurality (31 percent) has no opinion on the matter. In terms of the Johnson administration's handling of relations with India, respondents are nearly evenly split. Fifty percent approve of the way the prime minister is handling relations with India, while 49 percent disapprove. Given British Indians' views of Johnson more generally, their assessment of his stewardship of UK-India ties exceeds that of his overall job performance.

One Conservative priority that has enjoyed widespread support in the community is the Johnson government's 2021 announcement that it is committed to negotiating a free trade agreement with India. Sixty-nine percent of respondents support this measure, and just 9 percent oppose it. Conversely, media accounts have speculated that the Labour Party's critical comments on the Modi government—including its August 2019 decision to unilaterally alter the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir—might have cost the party supporters.³⁷

On this point, the survey asked respondents whether they supported or opposed the Labour Party's 2019 decision to pass an emergency motion calling for international observers in Kashmir. Somewhat surprisingly, 42 percent of British Indian respondents supported this measure, while 24 percent opposed it (more than one-third of respondents did not express an opinion either way).

Figure 18. Partisan Handling of UK-India Relations

When it comes to managing UK-India relations, which party do you think does a better job?



N = 792 UK adult citizens

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

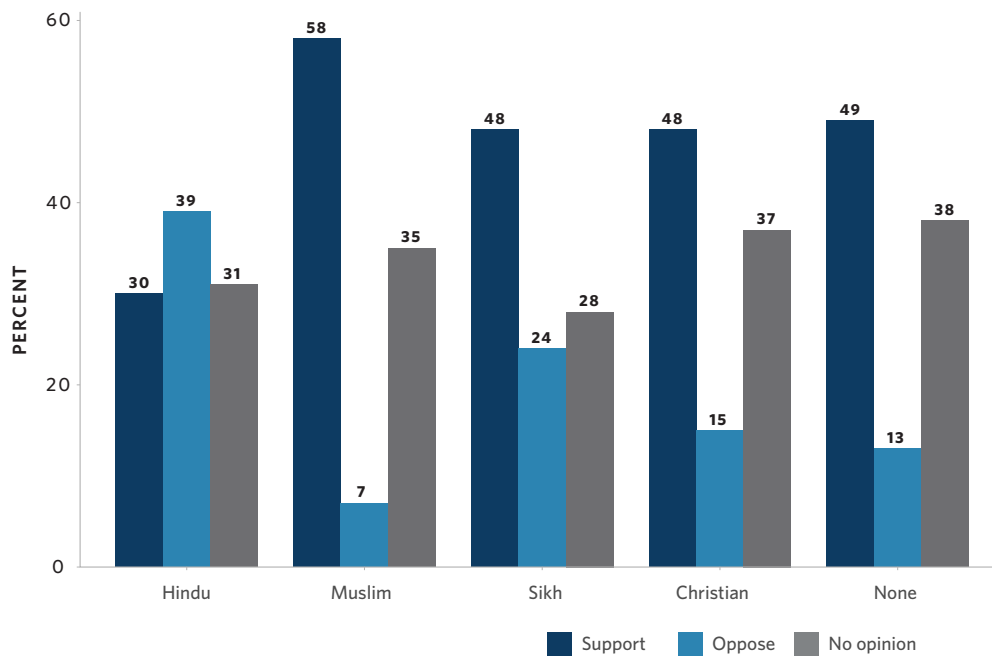
While the data suggest that Labour did not pay much of a price for its controversial 2019 motion, when one disaggregates the data by the religious identity of respondents, a more nuanced picture emerges (see figure 19). Hindus appear divided: a plurality of Hindus (39 percent) opposes the measure, while 30 percent support it and the remaining 31 percent hold no opinion.³⁸ In contrast, nearly six in ten (58 percent) British Indian Muslims support the measure, as do a plurality of Sikhs, Christians, and those without a religious affiliation.

It follows that respondents' views on Pakistan are likely to be similarly polarized—both on religious and partisan lines; indeed, the data show evidence of just that. Eighty percent of Conservative supporters hold an unfavorable opinion of Pakistan while 57 percent of Labour, other, or undecided voters share this opinion. Thus, while views on Pakistan appear uniformly negative, there is a difference in terms of intensity across party lines with Conservatives the most unfavorably inclined toward India's neighbor.

These views are similarly polarized across religious groups although they do not always map cleanly onto existing partisan divides. The share of Hindus who hold an unfavorable opinion of Pakistan (74 percent) nearly matches the proportion of Conservatives who feel similarly, while only 32 percent of Muslims hold Pakistan in a negative light (notably, 28 percent profess no opinion). Large majorities of Sikhs (68 percent) and Christians (63 percent) also view Pakistan negatively while 51 percent of unaffiliated respondents do so.³⁹

Figure 19. Support for Labour Party Motion on Kashmir, by Religion

Do you support or oppose the 2019 decision by the Labour Party to pass an emergency motion calling for international observers in Kashmir?



N = 750 UK adults

NOTE: Figure includes respondents who identified as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian or belong to no religion. Calculation excludes respondents who skipped either question.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Views on Narendra Modi

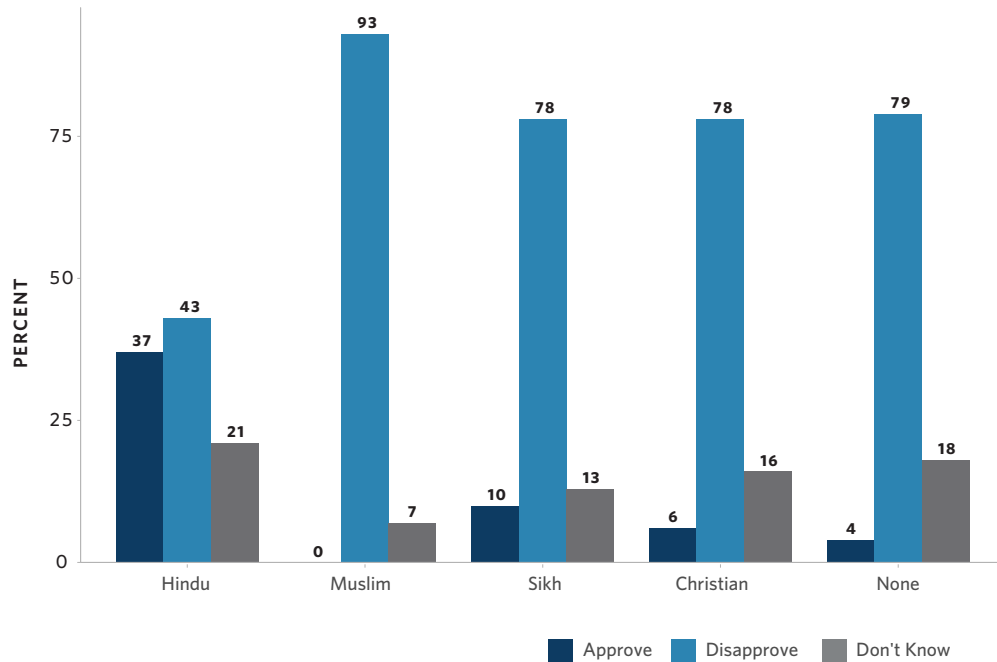
The religious patterns evident in British Indian voting preferences raise the question about the way in which different subgroups within the community view Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and whether these views largely mirror the religious divide.

Overall, just 19 percent of respondents approve of Modi's performance as prime minister, 65 percent disapprove, and 16 percent express no opinion. While Modi's overall approval rating is quite low—for comparison's sake, 48 percent of Indian Americans surveyed in September 2020 approve of Modi's performance—there are sharp differences along partisan lines in the United Kingdom.

Thirty-one percent of Conservative supporters approve of the job Modi is doing while 55 percent disapprove and 14 percent express no opinion. Modi's approval is significantly lower among Labour supporters (13 percent), those planning to vote for a third party (13 percent), and among the politically undecided (also 13 percent).

Figure 20. Approval for Modi, by Religion

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Narendra Modi is handling his job as prime minister?



N = 648 UK adults

NOTE: Figure includes respondents who identified as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian or belong to no religion, and were familiar with Modi. Calculation excludes respondents who skipped either question.

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Modi's feeling thermometer ratings (the same metric respondents used to rate British politicians and parties on a sliding scale of 0–100) roughly correspond with his approval ratings. Overall, Modi earns a rating of 32. However, Conservative supporters give Modi a 45 on this scale while Labour backers rate him a 22 (respondents who affiliate with neither major party rate Modi a 31). While all three scores place him on the “cold” end of the spectrum, the partisan divide is significant.

The divide is even clearer when disaggregating responses by the religious identity of respondents (see figure 20). Hindus are essentially divided on Modi: 37 percent approve of his performance as prime minister, 43 percent disapprove, and 21 percent have no opinion. Among Muslims, not a single respondent approves of Modi's job while 93 percent disapprove and 7 percent express no opinion. Modi's negatives are striking, though somewhat smaller, among Sikhs, Christians, and respondents with no religious affiliation.

Overall, it would be an exaggeration to state that views on Modi shape the voting behavior of British Indians. The survey provides no causal evidence of such a one-to-one relationship. At the same time, the data do suggest that views on Modi are highly polarized with Conservatives and Hindus demonstrating greater support for his job performance while supporters of Labour and/or other parties as well as non-Hindu respondents hold starkly negative views of his leadership.

Foreign involvement in British elections

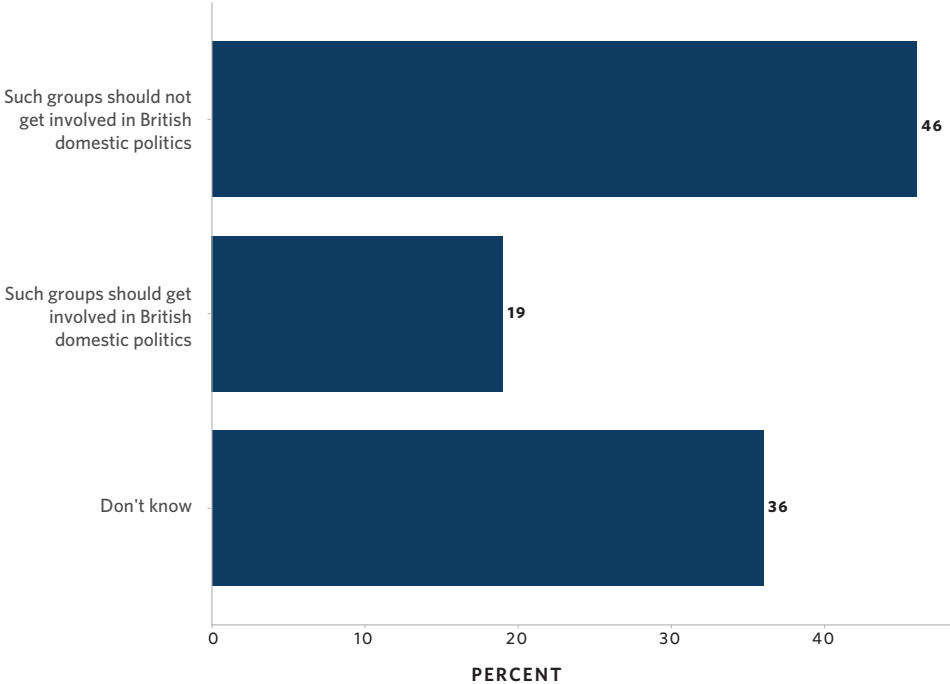
On the heels of growing concerns over Labour's perceived “anti-India” views, British Indian diaspora groups—including at least one affiliated with the ruling party in India, the BJP—actively campaigned on behalf of Conservative candidates in the 2019 UK general election.⁴⁰ These campaign activities earned significant media attention, opening a contentious debate about whether such actions on the part of external party affiliates constituted foreign interference in British elections.⁴¹

The survey asked respondents about their views of campaign activities conducted by British groups affiliated with Indian political parties (see figure 21). Forty-six percent of respondents state that such groups should not get involved in British domestic politics, while just 19 percent support such involvement. As with many questions on foreign policy, a large swath of respondents (36 percent) holds no opinion.

Of the 152 respondents who responded in the affirmative—that is, stated that such affiliates of foreign parties should get involved in British politics—49 percent stated that they would like to see the overseas affiliate of the Congress Party (the Indian Overseas Congress) play a more active role in British politics. At present, the Congress's diaspora organization is not perceived to be heavily active in British election campaigns. Forty-two percent, in turn, would like to see the Overseas Friends of the BJP—the group that earned headlines for its 2019 campaign activities—get more involved. This partisan breakdown should be interpreted with caution given the small sample size, but the pattern is notable.⁴²

Figure 21. Support for Indian Involvement in British Elections

In past years, British groups affiliated with Indian political parties have campaigned in British elections. Which statement best describes your opinion?



N = 792 UK adults
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Conclusion

If the next British general election is held on schedule, voters will go to the polls in May 2024 to select members of the next Parliament. Suffice to say that British Indian voters will be the subject of much political discussion as well as the target of significant electioneering. The British Indian population is growing in socioeconomic and demographic influence and this inevitably has political consequences.

Because the British Indian community has long been regarded as a core constituency of the left-of-center Labour Party, its evolving political preferences are relatively understudied and hence poorly understood. The data analyzed in this study demonstrate that while the diaspora continues to have a clear preference for Labour, the community in no way resembles a monolithic voting bloc. There has been a noticeable decline in support for Labour that has redounded to the benefit of the Conservative Party as well as other smaller political parties.

In political terms, the community is divided along generational and religious lines. To a certain extent, the defection of votes away from Labour is a result of Hindu voters switching allegiances, in part because of a perception that Labour is more beholden to its Muslim constituents from the region.

Looking ahead, British Indians are likely to emerge as a critical swing constituency, given the flux in their preferences toward both the country's political leadership as well as the major political parties. Two demographic trends in particular will determine how this shakes out: generational change and immigration. Given the clear leftward tilt of young British Indian voters, as their ranks swell, Labour's weakening position could reverse.⁴³ Clearly an important factor in this regard is the promotion of a Labour leadership that resonates with British Indians and is seen to represent their interests.

On the other hand, further immigration might counterintuitively hurt Labour's standing, as many newer arrivals from India and naturalized citizens lean more toward the Conservative Party. This shift has, to some degree, been wrapped up with the polarized political environment in India—further compounded by perceived controversial policy measures adopted by the Labour Party.

Appendix A: Methodology

Respondents for this survey were recruited from an existing panel administered by YouGov. YouGov maintains a proprietary, double opt-in survey panel comprised of approximately 2.5 million UK residents who have agreed to participate in YouGov’s surveys.

Online Panel Surveys

Online panels are not the same as traditional, probability-based surveys. However, thanks to the decline in response rates, the rise of the internet and smartphone penetration, and the evolution in statistical techniques, nonprobability panels—such as the one YouGov employs—have quickly become the norm in survey research.⁴⁴

Respondent Selection and Sampling Design

The data are based on a unique survey of 800 adults of Indian origin conducted between July 30 and August 16, 2021. To provide an accurate picture of the British Indian community as a whole, the full SBIA sample contains both UK citizens and non-UK citizens. The analysis contained here relies on data from 792 adult respondents who are eligible to vote in UK elections. This means they are either UK or qualified Commonwealth citizens.

Sample Matching

To produce the final dataset, respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the 2016 UK LFS East Asian sample. Matches were selected within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frames using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frames were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frames. The propensity score function included age, gender, and years of education. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frames and post-stratified according to these deciles.⁴⁵

Sampling weights were then post-stratified on a three-way stratification of gender, age (four categories), and education (four categories) to produce the final weight.

Data Analysis and Sources of Error

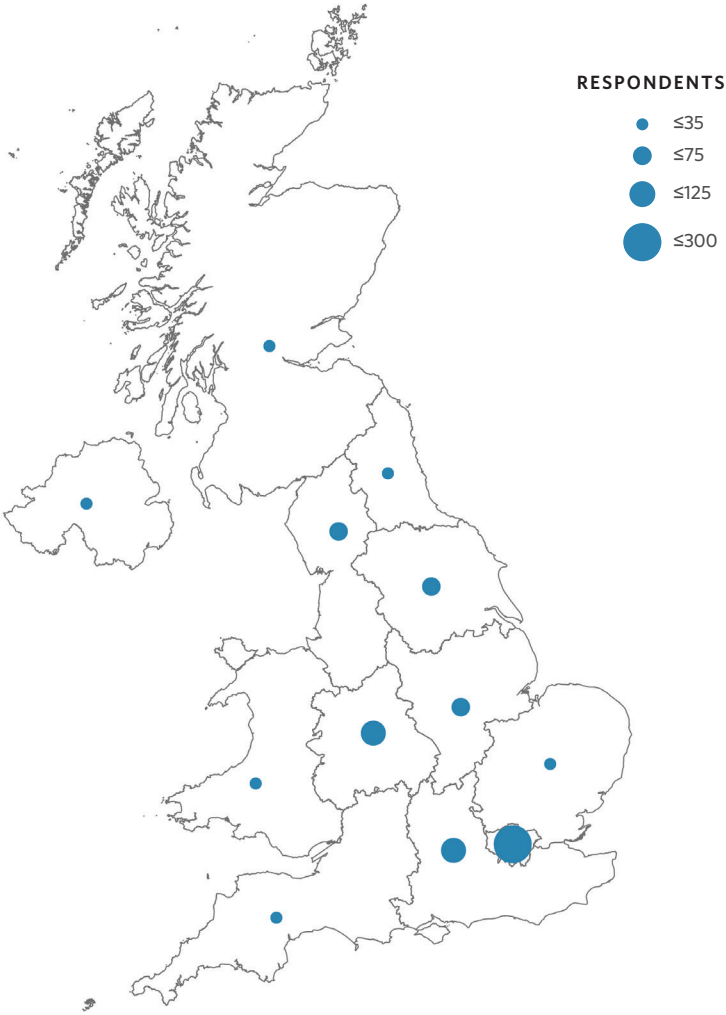
All the analyses in this study were conducted using the statistical software R and employ sample weights to ensure representativeness.

The margin of error for the full sample of 800 respondents is +/- 3.5 percent. The analyses in this study focus on the UK citizen subsample of the data (N=792), which also has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent.

All margins are calculated at the 95 percent confidence interval.

Figure 22 provides the distribution of survey respondents by geographic location in the United Kingdom.

Figure 22. Geographic Distribution of SBIA Respondents



NOTE: The size of the bubbles for each region corresponds to the sample size from that region.
SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Appendix B: Survey Top-line

For complete survey top-line results, please visit Appendix B online at https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Vaishnav_etal_Appendix_final_1.pdf.

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Notes

- 1 The large numbers of India-born respondents captured in the 1951 census likely reflect people of British origin born in India during the waning decades of British colonial rule. UK Government, “Ethnicity Facts and Figures: Household Income,” August 9, 2021, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/pay-and-income/household-income/latest>.
- 2 All data cited in this paragraph come from the 2011 Census of England and Wales. Northern Ireland and Scotland are home to very small numbers of Indian-origin residents (around 6,000 and 33,000, respectively). Data from the census can be found here: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/summaries/indian-ethnic-group>. Information on Northern Ireland can be found here: <https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx?themeNumber=136>. Data from Scotland are available here: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results/at-a-glance/ethnicity/>.
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- 25 The BES is technically a panel survey, meaning a consistent pool of respondents is resurveyed every wave. However, because of the small sample sizes of minority respondents and the rolling nature of the panel (in which some respondents are added or dropped over time), this study did not restrict the analysis to those respondents who were surveyed in all rounds. The resulting analysis can be thought of as a series of repeated snapshots of the community's voting patterns.
- 26 Preferences of respondents who intend to vote for a party other than Labour or Conservative or do not intend to vote at all are not shown. Hence, rows do not add up to 100 percent.
- 27 Fifty-three percent of British Indians who were either born or arrived in the United Kingdom after the year 2000 indicate they would vote for a third party in a snap election. Respondents who were born in East Africa, a subset of those neither born in the United Kingdom nor India, evenly split their support between the Conservative and Labour Parties (41 versus 40 percent, respectively).
- 28 In retrospect, allowing for a write-in option would have been beneficial in this case since such a large share of respondents had other (unspecified) reasons for not supporting the Labour Party.
- 29 Sunak's advantage over Patel holds even for British citizens as a whole. YouGov finds that 42 percent of survey respondents polled in the second quarter of 2021 had a favorable view of Sunak. Patel was the fourth most popular Conservative politician, with 28 percent viewing her in a favorable light. See "The Most Popular Conservative Politicians (Q2 2021)," YouGov, <https://yougov.co.uk/ratings/politics/popularity/conservative-politicians/all>.
- 30 Patel's parents are originally from the Indian state of Gujarat but emigrated to the United Kingdom by way of Uganda. While there is speculation that British Indians with East African roots might back Patel more strongly, survey data suggest she does not receive materially higher ratings from East African-born respondents in our sample.
- 31 This is identical to the two-thirds (67 percent) of those describing themselves as Asian who voted for the country to remain, according to other survey data. See Lord Ashcroft, "A Reminder of How Britain Voted in the EU Referendum—and Why," March 15, 2019, <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2019/03/a-reminder-of-how-britain-voted-in-the-eu-referendum-and-why/>.
- 32 Although British Indians voted overwhelmingly in favor of the United Kingdom remaining in the EU, research has found that the diaspora was relatively more pro-Brexit than other ethnic minority groups. See Nicole Martin, Maria Sobolewska, and Neema Begum, "Left Out of the Left Behind: Ethnic Minority Support for Brexit," Social Science Research Network Working Paper, October 12, 2021, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3320418.
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- 36 Ethnic/racial group labels were chosen to match language used by the UK Census and other leading public opinion surveys in order to ensure comparability. "Asian" in this context refers to people who belong to ethnic groups other than the three biggest South Asian groups (Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani).
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- 40 Canton, “BJP Support Group Bats for Tories in 48 Key UK Seats.”
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- 42 An interesting question that the survey did not include—but is worthy of greater exploration—is how British Indians view the involvement of the diaspora in political activities in India.
- 43 It is worth noting that while young British Indians (between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine) lean heavily toward the Labour Party, young Hindus favor Labour by a smaller margin.
- 44 For an accessible introduction to this survey method, see Courtney Kennedy, Andrew Mercer, Scott Keeter, Nick Hatley, Kyley McGeeney, and Alejandra Gimenez, “Evaluating Online Nonprobability Surveys,” Pew Research Center, May 2, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2016/05/02/evaluating-online-nonprobability-surveys/>.
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