

If Other, please specify

Action for Race Equality Racial Terminology Report (UK Survey 2024-25)

Acknowledgements

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About Action for Race Equality

[Action for Race Equality](#) (ARE) was founded in 1991 and we work to champion fairness, challenge race inequality and pioneer innovative solutions to empower young people across education, employment, and criminal justice. We also lead programmes to strengthen and increase the sustainability of Black and Asian civil society and business organisations.

Our title, 'If Other, please specify' reflects language found in ethnicity collection forms, and in this report reflects the myriad different response we received to this question in our survey. The title reflects the inadequacy many participants felt in the options presented to them in standard ethnicity data collection, and their reliance and preference to document their own specific and individual identity terms. It also speaks to the discomfort participants felt in being referred to as 'Other' and not having their identities reflected or acknowledged by power structures.

Introduction

Language has been used to harm, exclude and 'other' certain people from opportunities. Terms that may once have been considered neutral can become culturally unacceptable. It is useful for everyone to be aware of how language and behaviours change; to consider different audiences and to use language in a way that is as inclusive as possible. Alongside race, appropriate language needs to be found to accurately represent people's gender; sexuality; disability or health conditions; religion, class, and other intersectional lenses.

In 2024-25, ARE conducted a UK wide racial terminology survey, five focus groups with young people through organisations across a range of locations in England, and consultations with other anti-racist voluntary sector organisations. ARE conducted this research to both understand which terms were now preferred by our communities and also to raise awareness and skills in the use of language or terms to describe ethnicity for anyone who needs to do this.

While the ARE racial terminology survey results cannot be considered representative of all ethnic minority people in the UK, they nevertheless provide a snapshot into the experiences, views, and concerns of Black, Asian, and Mixed ethnicity young people and adults in 2024-25.

Categorisation and ethnicity data collection were identified by participants as indispensable tools to identifying structural racism in policy making. Without ethnicity categories and data collection, understanding of inequities would be limited. Amongst by and for led organisations fighting for racial justice, it might be useful to see terminology as a tool; not separate from the fight for racial equity but an integral part of it.

“I think we need to explain the experience [of racialisation]. If this is your experience, you're with us, if this is not your experience, you're not with us. And then what it is we're willing to do about changing that experience.” - Focus Group Participant

Survey Respondents

There were 254 respondents to our UK wide survey. 51% were from regions of England outside London, 44% came from London, and only 5% were from Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. 18% were under 25 years of age, 38% were 25-34, 38% were 35-59, and 6% were Over 60.

Nearly 80% of respondents were from Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage backgrounds:

- **26% Black** (Black African, Black Caribbean, Any other Black background)
- **26 % Asian** (Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Any other Asian background)
- **23% Mixed** (Mixed White and Black African, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Mixed White and Asian, Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background)
- **20% White** (White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, White - Gypsy/Roma/Irish Traveller, White - Irish)
- **4% Other** (Arab, any other ethnic background)

The focus groups attempted to alleviate some of the anticipated London gravity, and engaged young Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage people in Leeds, Sheffield, and Walsall. We also held focus groups with voluntary sector organisations, racial justice organisations, and ARE staff and trustees.

Research Findings

Terminology is still an issue that deeply affects people in our communities. 89% of survey respondents have heard racial terms that have made them feel uncomfortable.

Respondents said they heard these terms in public spaces (63%), at work (52%), in Media (45%), on public transport (43%), at school (34%), and at home (7%).

When asked what racial terms respondents preferred to **use for themselves and their communities**, the top answers were:

- Black communities (16%)
- Global Majority (16%)
- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) (11%)
- People of Colour (9%)
- Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage (6%)

When asked what terms people use when talking about race, approximately 40% of respondents reported never using the following terms, 'GRT', 'Romani (Gypsy)', 'Racially minoritised', 'Non-white', 'Black and minoritised', 'BME', 'Racially minoritised'.

There were many other terms that respondents listed that were not included in the survey options (see Appendix 1), though most did not come up more than once, indicating the highly individualised and specific terms people prefer to use to describe aspects of their racial identity.

Amongst all survey participants, '**Race**' and '**Ethnicity**' were used very frequently (c.70%). It is useful to know that these broad terms are still used in a widespread manner. However, throughout the focus groups, it became apparent that more could be done to increase anti-racist literacy.

"My use of racialised, for example; I had a parliamentarian respond to me is with is that an 'offense free term'? Conversations like this can be dominated or can give the perception of doing the work of White people who are afraid of getting it wrong. And I think acknowledging that is a really useful thing too." - Focus Group Participant

The racial terminology explored in this project used markers that were cultural, geographical, political, and colour based. **Race**, as historically used, is a flawed and discredited concept based on false biological hierarchies. There was a sense that '**Ethnicity**' is a more politically concrete category of definition, tied to nationality, heritage, and geography, with physical markers such as passports and birth certificates. Many survey respondents were aware of the double standard in which ethnicity is something that Black and Brown people have, but that is an unmarked category for the White majority population of the UK.

'**Black Communities**' was used very frequently or fairly often by 57.5% of survey respondents. Amongst respondents who listed a Black ethnicity, 67% use 'Black communities' very frequently or fairly often. Amongst respondents who listed an Asian ethnic identity, 56% use 'Black communities' very frequently or fairly often, showing a broad comfort with using the term, even if not to describe themselves. 28% of all participants used this term very frequently, the most used term after 'race' and 'ethnicity'.

There was a strong understanding of **'Black'** as a separate and independent socio-political identity, highlighting an awareness of the differences that anti-Blackness contains in comparison to racism in general.

Alongside the prevalence of the use of 'Black', many participants used **'Brown'** to refer to their skin colour as a way of identifying themselves, and as a marker of the shared experiences of racism people with Black and Brown skin might have.

'People of Colour' was used by a high proportion (c.40%) of respondents when talking about race, though only 9% of respondents use it to describe themselves. Despite this, respondents often had contradictory opinions about its use. Many respondents felt that it was an American term, and too close to 'colored people', which was historically a slur. Several raised issue with the ways in which it positions Whiteness as the norm or the centre, a criticism shared with the term 'non-White'.

"I don't understand why colour for a certain group of people would be considered appropriate, and then for another group of people, it's not appropriate?" - Focus Group Participant

Many respondents railed against the idea that only some people 'have colour' and expressed variations of the idea that all people have or are 'a colour'. The organisations who were involved in representing Traveller communities pushed back against the use of 'non-White', as a term which blocks the communities that they work with from anti-racism spaces, and precludes their experiences of racialisation from being heard.

'Ethnic Minority' was used very frequently or fairly often by 48% of survey respondents. **'Minoritised communities'** and **'Global majority'** were both used by a high proportion (c.40%) of respondents very frequently or fairly often. Some respondents felt that 'minority' was a derogatory and value laden term, though others felt that it correctly demonstrates the imbalance and the power and influence the White majority population in the UK have. Amongst survey respondents who listed a White ethnic identity, 62% used Global majority very frequently or fairly often, the most used term with this group.

"We're all human beings, and the experience of one minority is very similar to another minority at the end of the day. The fact that our race, our Brownness, we can't hide it, that people just see us and know it, this is not something we can get away with." - Focus Group Participant

Approximately 40% of respondents reported never using **'GRT'** or **'BME'**. **'BAME'** was used occasionally by 35%, and never by 34% of respondents. Acronyms were mainly described as dehumanising and unhelpful, centering Whiteness, and conflating diverse groups. A recurrent idea was that individuals would not self-identify as an acronym, and that it is in place for the convenience and expediency of dominant groups or organisations, rather than enabling agency and autonomy amongst the communities to which they refer.

Conclusion

The findings from this project show that the conversation around racial terminology must be specific, iterative, contextual, sensitive and responsive. Different terminology is more suitable for different contexts; tone changes from interpersonal conversation to discussions around power dynamics, to government data collection, and legislation. Individuals and organisations may choose to use different terms when speaking to different groups, including community groups, employers, and White majority society. The terms must be adaptive to different contextual needs, and conscious of different reactions, comfortability and legibility of terms. There is a pressing need to separate specific personal identity terms from broad umbrella categories that help identify trends and build solidarity amongst groups facing discrimination. The conversation must commit to being iterative; responding both to academic excavation of the histories and usage of terms, alongside communities breaking new ground about how they want to be defined. We cannot imagine that there will be a single authoritative and perpetual answer to what racial terminology is best.

Shared understanding and collective agreement on accepted terms need to be built. One focus group participant recounted how some organisations they have worked for conducted surveys for employees to vote on shared language.

Participants recognised the need to compromise on terms that do not reflect the complexity of racial and ethnic identities in service of data collection. With the caveat that data matters if it is used responsibly, for the purposes of identifying and addressing racial disparities.

Language around race has always been constructed to oppress certain people and privilege others, and it is important for communities to actively decide what kind of language they want to use to describe themselves; what parts of their identities are important, salient, and measurable.

“Actually, this language is so suffocating, like emotionally, to have to constantly tick box all these like categories when you go to the GP surgery or whatever. It's so suffocating to see the look in like White British society's eyes when you are telling them who you are answering this question. And actually, like pre colonial eras, cultures were giving names to each other based on, like rivers and based on, you know, locations and things and actually something in me feels very beautiful and nice when I recognize that. And I just, I'm so tired of centering this colonial Anglo language on us.” - Dr Aanka Batta - Focus Group Participant

Appendix 1: Other terms respondents listed in ARE's 2024 survey

- AAME (African, Asian, Minority Ethnic)
- African
- Asian
- Asians
- Bangladeshi
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour)
- Black and Brown
- Black and Ethnic Minority
- Black and racially minoritised communities
- British Asian
- British Indian
- British Pakistani
- British
- Caribbean
- Dalit
- Desi
- Diaspora
- Diverse Ethnic Communities
- European
- Global South
- Human being
- Human(s)
- I say 'my family is from [xyz]'
- Irish
- MENA (Middle Eastern and North African)
- Mixed
- Mixed-race/Mixed-heritage
- Of African heritage
- Racially/ethnically diverse
- South Asian
- South East Asian people
- Strategically underserved
- West African people
- White other
- White privileged
- White
- Whiteness

Appendix 2: Resources

There have been several similar and compelling studies in this area over the past few years. [British Future](#) conducted large-scale research around racial terminology in 2021, commissioned by the Cabinet Office to inform the Independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. The research was wide-ranging, polling thousands of respondents, and tracking attitudes towards many aspects of race and racial terminology amongst different

demographic groups. In 2023, the Office for National Statistics released the results from their own survey on 'ethnic identity terminology' under the Conservative government's '[Inclusive Britain](#)' project. The charity, [Business in the Community](#), conducted a 'Race at Work' survey in 2021 and updated its toolkit in 2023. The organisation Reframing Race released their powerful and comprehensive guide to framing '[Contains Strong Language: A Guide to Talking About Racism](#)' in 2023. In January 2025, [The Law Society](#) released a concise, lucid, and unapologetic 'guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language', which treads much of the same ground as our own inquiry, and offers some brief 'tips' on discussing these issues. Many organisations ([including ARE](#)), include terminology guides on their websites ([Inclusive Language, CIPR 2023](#)), or notes on terminology at the head of research reports ([Lit in Colour, Penguin and The Runnymede Trust 2021; Race and ethnic inequalities, Oxford Open Economics 2024](#)). These studies situate this report in the context of an ongoing national conversation on racial terminology and the awareness that many organisations deem it necessary to demonstrate they are engaged in this discourse.