



COMMON GROUND CONTESTED SPACE

Public and campaigner thinking about racism and what this means for building public support for racial justice

Sanjiv Lingayah, Elena Blackmore and Bec Sanderson

Produced by



Supported by



The organisations

[The Runnymede Trust](#) is the UK's leading independent race equality think tank. We generate intelligence to challenge race inequality in Britain through research, network building, leading debate and policy engagement.

[Voice4Change England](#) is the only national membership organisation dedicated to the Black and Minority Ethnic voluntary and community sector. We speak to policymakers on the issues that matter to the sector, bring the sector together to share good practice and develop itself to better meet the needs of communities.

The programme

Reframing Race is a programme of work from Runnymede and Voice4Change England to strengthen communications on 'race' and racism and generate broad public engagement and support for serious action for racial justice. Using tried and tested 're/framing' approaches, Reframing Race is working with a network of racial justice campaigners, advocates and activists to develop a clear vision of racial justice; generating new research-based insights on deep public thinking on 'race'; and developing more effective ways of talking about racism and racial justice to change the conversation, call a wider audience to the cause, and build demand for change.

The authors

Dr Sanjiv Lingayah is an associate of Voice4Change England and an independent researcher, writer and consultant working on racial justice. He is a founder and programme lead of Reframing Race. Sanjiv can be contacted at mail@sanjivlingayah.com.

Elena Blackmore is training lead at the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) and is acting as a consultant on Reframing Race, advising on the research methodology and designing the participatory elements of the project.

Bec Sanderson is an associate of PIRC and an independent researcher and consultant working on frame development and testing. She authored the guide How to Test Your Comms for PIRC and ILGA-Europe, and is advising on the research method of the Reframing Race programme.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Hannah Kilshaw and her team at ICM Unlimited for their excellent research and report about public thinking on 'race'. The ICM work is the basis for this publication. Thank you to Halima Begum from Runnymede Trust and Kunle Olulode from Voice4Change England for their support and insights. Thanks also to Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) for specifically supporting this research on public thinking, and thanks to JRF, Barrow Cadbury Trust and the LankellyChase Foundation for funding the overall Reframing Race programme.

We would like to thank the FrameWorks Institute for its leading-edge work in the field of public thinking and cultural models. Specific thanks to Nat Kendall-Taylor, Nicky Hawkins and Tamsyn Hyatt at the FrameWorks Institute for their generosity in discussing ideas and helping to inform the approach we take in Reframing Race.

Finally, we are very grateful also to the advocates and activists participating in the Reframing Race programme; to Luke Finley for his copy-editing support; and to our special Runnymede Trust colleagues, past and present, including Omar Khan, Kimberly McIntosh, Rahul Verma, Lee Pinkerton, Nick Treloar and Nina Kelly.

CONTENTS

About	2
The organisations	2
The programme	2
The authors	3
Acknowledgements	3
Key points	5
Introduction	7
Cultural models and storylines	9
On the problem of ‘race’ and racism	11
Ideas in common	11
1. Racism matters	11
2. Racism is learned	11
3. Institutions carry racism	12
4. Racism runs deep	12
Ideas contested	13
1. ‘Race’: fiction versus some ‘truth’	13
2. Racism: a political tool versus personal prejudice	13
3. Racism: multiple versus one dimension	14
4. Racism: close to home versus socially distanced	14
On solutions to racism	15
Ideas in common	15
1. Living up to values	15
2. Education matters	15
3. Everyone needs to act	16
Ideas contested	17
1. ‘A long road ahead’ versus ‘We’re on the right track’	17
2. A big systemic fix versus tackling symptoms	17
3. Leadership by those affected versus adaptation and assimilation	17
4. Racial justice as a non-zero or zero-sum	18
5. ‘Change can happen’ versus ‘That’s the way it is’	18
Conclusion: early implications for campaigners communicating on racism and racial justice	19
Appendix: A note on method	20

Despite important efforts from campaigners to date, there is still much to do to cultivate broad public engagement and support for serious action on racism. But so far, campaigners have had few clues about how to build public demand for change.

New research carried out for Reframing Race – a partnership between the Runnymede Trust and Voice4Change England – provides a unique, in-depth insight into patterns of public thinking on ‘race’, racism and racial justice, as well as explaining what lies behind these beliefs, understandings and perceptions. This research is, we believe, richer and more reliable than traditional opinion poll data because, among other things, it is based on longform, semi-open interviews looking not only at what the public think, but how and why they think as they do.

This report compares and contrasts campaigner and public thinking about ‘race’, racism and racial justice. It identifies common ground and contested space between these two ‘camps’ and shows how and why these commonalities and clashes arise. Finally, the report points to how campaigners can:

- Communicate effectively to make more of common ground with public thinking; and
- Develop strategies and campaigning messages to engage more productively with public thinking in contentious areas on ‘race’ and racism.

Campaigners and the weight of public thinking back the idea that racism matters, that it is learned and that institutions play an important part in ‘delivering’ racism. There is also, broadly, a common understanding that racism is both ongoing and part and parcel of British history. The dominant strand of public thinking also espouses, as do campaigners, some values that can be a basis for action against racism and for racial justice, including fairness, community and acceptance of other people. Campaigner and most public thinking views education as important to dislodging and solving racism; and that individuals, institutions and the state all have a responsibility to act. But there are important disagreements in campaigner and prevailing public thinking.

Campaigners largely see racism as a system – a web of laws, institutional practices, customs and ideas – designed to divert resources from and direct punishment and control towards racially and ethnically minoritised populations. Public thinking mainly gravitates towards racism as being mostly about individuals: in terms of personal prejudice but also as an issue of personal responsibility, e.g. the need for racially and ethnically minoritised people to do more to assimilate.

Campaigners view racism as a major ongoing issue in this society. The larger part of public thinking sees that racism is a problem but also believes that progress is being made and that it is much worse in the United States.

Campaigners think about transforming systems to secure racial justice and build a better society. The weight of public thinking focuses on reforms that reduce the symptoms and disparities of racism and worries that action on racism may have negative impacts, e.g. by curtailing freedom of speech when talking about 'race'.

Campaigners understand that racism can be overcome. A strong strand of public thinking is that racism is and always has been part of human nature and will always be present to some extent. Armed with new knowledge about public thinking, the next phase of Reframing Race will work with campaigners to develop more effective advocacy language that can move the public further towards real commitment to action for racial justice.

That work is to come in the next six months, but initial implications for how campaigners talk about racism include the following:

- **Campaigners don't have to meet public thinking 'where it is at'.** On contested ground, campaigners can and should aim to expand public thinking rather than avoid hot topics.
- **Campaigners should be strategic on communications,** i.e. clear on the purpose and audience of each piece of advocacy communication. The aim is to create a complementary body of work, messages and language to advance public thinking.
- **Campaigners can build public commitment to change** on racism by illustrating systemic racism and justice in more tangible, relatable ways and by painting a vivid picture showing that another world is possible.
- **Campaigners should aim to trigger constructive values that already exist** in public thinking when talking about action on racism, e.g. by emphasising racial justice as a means of building togetherness and belonging and as a bedrock for a better society.

Covid-19 and the murder of George Floyd have forced us, as a society, to look long and hard at racism.

The year 2020 has seen renewed scrutiny on how our laws, institutional practices, customs and widely held beliefs combine to harm racially and ethnically minoritised populations in ways not experienced by their white counterparts.

But campaigners for racial justice know that the surge in coverage on racism is not enough, and that attention is not the same as action. Campaigners want to rally public support for serious action on racism and create irresistible momentum for change to which those in power must respond.

In order to do this work, we need to understand more about the weight of public thinking. We need to know where it is aligned with campaigner thinking and can be mobilised to support real change. And we also need to see where the balance of public thinking is at odds with campaigner ideas about racism, so that we can analyse why and develop strategies and ways of talking about the issues to engage more productively in areas of disagreement.

Reframing Race is a programme to strengthen advocacy and communication on racism and racial justice. It is based on the idea that how we talk about 'race', racism and racial justice matters if we want to call more of the public more powerfully to our cause and create demand for action. We need to access the range of public thinking on our issues and speak in a way that is mindful of this.

This does not mean that we pander to prejudices or simply avoid contentious issues. Far from it. But it does mean campaigning with eyes wide open and crafting effective strategies and messages to engage with public ideas and to expand and move them forward.

Of course, these efforts to enhance communication alone will not secure change. Rather, advocacy is intertwined with other change efforts, such as institutional reform, organising and movement-building, research and insights into social problems, and new policy formation.

Reframing Race has also been working with around 40 'Reframers' – racial justice campaigners, advocates and activists from around the UK – to generate a shared set of campaigner positions on racial justice, and to direct the focus of our research and subsequent development of new ways of speaking about 'race', racism and racial justice.

In this report, when we talk about what campaigners think, we are describing positions developed in close discussion with our Reframers. The outlined campaigner positions also draw on the Reframing Race project team's extensive engagements with literature and other advocates and activists. We recognise that there will be campaigning positions beyond those we cite in our research here. We do, however, think that the campaigner perspectives laid out here represent some central views around which campaigners coalesce.

As part of the Reframing Race programme, social researchers ICM Unlimited were commissioned to conduct in-depth interviews with members of the public across England on 'race', racism and racial justice. ICM conducted in-depth interviews in order to provide real insight into how people think about the subject. This type of semi-structured, reflective interview generates a different, deeper, more 'lifelike' map of race thinking than, for example, the series of quickfire or closed questions more typical of opinion polling. ([See Appendix on method for more details](#)).

We do two things in order to analyse the spread of public thinking uncovered in the research. First, we distil a range of ‘cultural models’; and second, we highlight certain key ‘storylines’ on ‘race’ and racism.

Cultural models are the dominant, shared, enduring assumptions and patterns of thinking that sit behind the way that people process, conceptualise and rationalise their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. Cultural model theory comes from cognitive anthropology and sees the culture of a community as strongly informed by its prevailing ways of seeing the world. The FrameWorks Institute has led the way in using cultural models research to help campaigners to understand how their thinking overlaps with and/or diverges from that of their target audiences and to develop effective communications that work with or across these ‘gaps’. We are grateful to the FrameWorks Institute for its leadership in this field.

The cultural models in our research show the strongest patterns of thinking coming through on specific issues of ‘race’ and racism. The ‘storylines’ are slightly different. They are broad compilations of ideas on ‘race’ and racism that ‘go together’ according to our research on public thinking. Each storyline clusters together certain ideas.

Storyline one is that ‘racism is real’. There are subscribers to this story among both white and ‘Black and Minority Ethnic’¹ research participants. They see that racism is a big issue in today’s society that means that ‘Black and Minority Ethnic’ people definitely have to work harder to get on in life. Racism operates person to person but also systemically – ensured by the design and operation of our web of institutions, laws and prevailing customs and ideas.

Progress has been made, but the problem of racism has not been solved. And, in some ways, the situation has been getting worse, because Brexit and the far right have politicised and normalised more racist and anti-immigrant thinking.

¹ We sometimes use the language ‘Black and Minority Ethnic’ in this report as it is used by social researchers in the process of recruiting a ‘balanced’ sample of project participants for the ICM element of the project. We put the term in quotes here because we recognise the limits of the language in the way that it aggregates a disparate group of people, characteristics and experience. For the most part in this report we use the term ‘racially and ethnically minoritised’ to describe populations categorised ‘outside of whiteness’ who are exposed to and harmed by racism and the negative consequences of racist action based on race thinking.

Storyline two is that 'racism is about other people'. This is the 'go-to' narrative for some of our white research participants but is also sometimes referred to by 'Black and Minority Ethnic' participants. The thrust is that racism is a problem in society, but that we also have other problems and forms of inequality to deal with. For people who articulate this story, racism feels quite distant; it isn't something that comes up in their day-to-day life. Racism is bad and it should be addressed. It is mainly carried out by individuals who are deliberately racist. But a lot of racism is unintentional: the result of misunderstandings around language and ignorance on the part of people talking/behaving inappropriately.

The third and final storyline is that 'racism is wide of the mark'. It is predominantly articulated by some of our white research participants. According to this story, everyone thinks racism is a big problem in society today because that's all we hear about. The media makes it look much worse than it is. In fact, by talking about 'race' and racism we create division and difference between 'races'.

In this storyline, there is some sign-up to certain generalisations/stereotypes about racial and ethnic groups. Racism did exist in the past, but you hardly ever see it now except maybe in specific one-off events. We have made great strides around racism and everyone now is equal in society. But we're almost tipping the balance too much in favour of minority groups, and we've become too 'politically correct'.

This report outlines a range of public thinking about 'race', and identifies some key areas of commonality and contestation between public thinking and campaigner positions. The research shows that public thinking is often complex and blurry rather than neat and tidy. Individuals can hold multiple, inconsistent, even contradictory, ideas at the same time, and the same is true in public thinking as a whole. For example, it is possible to simultaneously think that racism is 'human nature' and things won't change, and that we are making progress; or that it is important to do something about racism, and that it is someone else's problem.

It is these unresolved tensions that perhaps explain why, in 2020, campaigners still have so much work to do.

At Reframing Race, we stand with campaigners and their thinking. We are not neutral where public thinking is problematic on 'race' and racism. We want to call more of the public towards campaigner perspectives. That work comes in the next phase of the project, as we develop messages that can change the shape of public thinking.

In what follows here, we compare and contrast public and campaigner thinking on 'race' in two main areas: first, on the nature of the problem of racism itself and second, on solutions for racism.

Ideas in common

There is common ground between public and campaigner thinking on the problem of racism. Four areas stand out.

1. Racism matters

The most critical aligned idea is that racism is seen as problem across societies and time and that racism is significant here and now. This salience means that there is, at least, a chance for campaigners to get a hearing and potentially build support for the necessary types of actions to advance racial justice and to end racism.

2. Racism is learned

As campaigners do, public thinking on balance sees that racism and antagonisms along racial lines are learned and transmitted.

'It's learnt when young. Peer pressure or passed down through families and bad experiences.'

- *White participant*

The quote above from a member of the public is based on the notion that people mimic what they see around them. One strand in public thinking is that racism is passed on because people don't 'know better' or don't know enough about racial disparities and racism. Parents are seen to play a key role in modelling something more positive to their children and breaking the chain of racist thinking. Similarly, more-formal education is viewed as critical in removing ignorance around racism.

This thinking is consistent with campaigner beliefs that racism becomes normalised in a variety of ways. It also fits with the idea that without further intentional efforts, racism will go on being reproduced.

3. Institutions carry racism

There is some recognition in public thinking that racism is an institutionalised problem, i.e. embedded into policies, procedures and operations, especially as seen in policing. But public thinking is more attuned to racism in terms of personal animosity, including name-calling and physical attacks. Campaigners think institutions are important. More than this, they tend to think of racism not simply as institutional but as systemic, i.e. delivered by the interactions of multiple institutions, laws, customs and ideas.

Though in public thinking there is little grasp of systemic racism, as there is among campaigners, there is recognition of how racism is transmitted through the realm of ideas. In public thinking there is concern that the media perpetuates stereotypes and/or feed racial antagonisms through its coverage of 'race'.

4. Racism runs deep

The balance of public thinking, along with campaigner thinking, is that racism has historical roots, including in Britain's colonial past. The main public reference points are the slave trade and the 'race riots' of the 1980s. The positive side of this is that it points to the deep-rooted nature of the problem and the ways in which historical ideas and ways of organising can live on here and now. The more negative side of this understanding is that it can feed the idea (among some parts of the public especially) that there has always been and always will be a 'race' problem.

Ideas contested

Having staked out some of the complementary areas in public and campaigner thinking about racism, we move on to areas in which thinking diverges. In particular, there are three different contested areas revealed by our research.

1. 'Race': fiction versus some 'truth'

Campaigners (and scientists) understand that the biological notion of 'race' is an invented and false way to differentiate and categorise people.² Even though people may have observable physical differences, such as skin colour and hair type, these are superficial and provide no insight into who people are, their characteristics or behaviours. And certainly 'race' provides no reason for unjust treatment.

According to our research, there is a strong element of public thinking that understands the flaws in race thinking. However, there are also strands in public thinking that give some credence to 'race' as a way to predict people's physical or perhaps intellectual traits. For example, there is some store set by certain racial stereotypes:

'There must be something. Certain racial backgrounds are better at things like running. There aren't West Indian gymnasts.'
- *White participant*

This sentiment sees correlations between what people can do and their racial category. It draws on the logic of race thinking. By extension it opens the door to treating groups differently and (un)favourably based on 'race', because it deems some groups to have greater propensity for certain things, such as running, intelligence or criminality.

2. Racism: a political tool versus personal prejudice

Campaigners for racial justice think of racism as a (small-p) political force – a strategic tool used historically, and today, to justify the domination and exploitation of groups deemed 'other' than white. 'Race' provides cover for the flow of resources, such as land, jobs and money, from racially and ethnically minoritised populations to (some) white people.

By contrast, the balance of public thinking is that racism largely stems from personal attitudes rather than any larger agenda. Furthermore, the weight of public thinking holds that aspects of 'race' – including origin, heritage, culture – are an instinctive, age-old basis for both affinity and antagonism between people.

'It's intrinsic human nature ... we all have a fear of the unknown.'
- *'Black and Minority Ethnic' participant*

The quote above suggests that race-based antagonism is something that exists inside us all. But with this comes a fatalistic sense that we will never outrun racism.

² For this reason, in the report we use quotation marks around the term 'race'.

3. Racism: complexity versus simplicity

Campaigners focused on issues of 'race' and racial justice see the problem of racism as complex, system-wide and open. For campaigners, racism encompasses everything from who belongs in society, to our knowledge of history, to what kinds of people are considered capable of excellence. And racism is entangled with a range of other social problems, such as poverty, sexism, and questions of class and unjust economic arrangements. It is both about and extends beyond issues of 'black and white' people.

However, public thinking tends towards seeing racism in much more simple and specific terms – not as an interconnected phenomenon. Similarly, public thinking is drawn to seeing racism mainly in terms of anti-blackness. This latter point is perhaps understandable given that interviews took place around two months after the murder of George Floyd and after major Black Lives Matter mobilisations.

This attention on anti-black racism is critical and long overdue and must continue. But it also speaks to a reductive and over-simplifying tendency in public thinking, as if racism is just one thing.

Some members of the public make the connection between the multi-racial nature of society and immigration. And there is some concern that Brexit and the far right have made racism worse by normalising anti-immigrant thinking. However, neither of these was a strong theme that could be described as a prevalent cultural model; they were more peripheral than that.

Campaigners understand that racism can and does negatively impact black people as well as numerous other 'non-white' racialised and ethnically minoritised groups. In addition, racism can and does harm 'white-passing' populations, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and Jewish people, though these experiences may differ from racisms experienced by, for example, black and brown people.

Muslims are also subject to racism, but research participants did not mention anti-Muslim racism. We cannot say exactly why. It may in part be due to the focus on Black Lives Matter. But it may also be that Islam is seen as a religion and 'culture', not a 'race', and that members of the public (incorrectly) assume that 'suspicion' towards Muslim culture is something different to and separate from racism.

4. Racism: Close to home versus socially distanced

Finally, campaigners often live with and are negatively impacted by the realities of racism. But the strongest aspect of public thinking sees racism as meaning that the cards are 'stacked against' some people in society. There is little understanding of racism as a system that prizes and benefits (some) white people, and so there is a significant sense among those white people not affected by racism that it is someone else's problem.

This presents a challenge for campaigners who need a degree of public engagement, understanding and investment in solving racism.

The second aspect of the research looks at campaigner and public thinking about solutions to racism and ways to build racial justice. As above, there is shared thinking but there are also important differences.

Ideas in common

There are three main ways in which there is alignment between public thinking and campaigners in terms of solutions and responses to racism. They are as follows.

1. Living up to values

The public and campaigners share certain public-spirited values that justify action on racism. There is broad agreement that as a society we should live by values such as fairness, community and acceptance of other people.

These values are not simple. For example, public opinion can require that racially and ethnically minoritised people act in certain ways to earn acceptance into the community. Nonetheless, calling up these values of community and belonging may provide some help in advancing solutions for racism.

2. Education matters

Learning and education are important in ending racism. In particular, parents and the formal education system are seen as important in educating people towards anti-racism. For example, from one research participant:

‘Introduce school courses, at primary and secondary levels to educate on different types of religions and “races” and nationalities. Learn what racism is and the consequences. Teach them not to be.’

– *‘Black and Minority Ethnic’ participant*

Learning interventions are needed because of the understanding (see above) that racism is cultivated and made normal in our everyday lives and settings.

Campaigner and public emphasis may, however, differ. Campaigners focus on the need to transform the education system and to build a global curriculum that properly centres and values the contribution to the world's knowledge of those people and parts of the world that have been racially and ethnically minoritised and marginalised.

Public support for education results from a belief that racism mainly comes from and is passed on by individuals. Campaigners more typically tend not to see individuals as central to racism. Instead they consider anti-racist education and individual learning as part of the solution alongside changes in ways that our system of laws, institutional practices, customs and ideas operate.

3. Everyone needs to act

There is in both campaigner and public thinking recognition that solving racism requires responses from multiple different quarters and in numerous different ways.

Across the sample of the public as a whole, there is a broad consensus that everyone can play their part in tackling racism, and that responsibility should be shared among everyone. One focus was on individuals listening, learning, taking personal responsibility and standing up for one another.

The public, like campaigners, also see the role for institutions and the government:

‘It comes down to the government, ultimately. Top down. They pass the laws. They’d change the education systems, change the laws around prosecuting racism.’

– White participant

This shows potential support for policy changes and the role of the state in moving us towards racial justice. That recognition is something for campaigners to build on.

Ideas contested

There are also considerable gaps between public and campaigner thinking about solutions to racism. There are five main areas of disagreement.

1. 'A long road ahead' versus 'We're on the right track'

The first area of divergence is that, though public thinking still regards racism a problem, the public lean towards the idea that our society has made and is making progress on it. In particular, there is a significant part of public thinking which holds that things here are better than they are in the United States, that the situation here is a lot better than it used to be, and that the natural march of progress will make racism less of a problem over time. Campaigners tend to think that things are different but not necessarily better here compared with the United States because no amount of racism is acceptable.

Campaigners acknowledge that some aspects of life for racially and ethnically minoritised people have improved – and that some particular racialised populations have seemingly done better, e.g. in the jobs market. But campaigners understand that even where this is the case it does not mean that, for example, Indian heritage people live unimpeded by racism. Rather, they may have hyper-invested in education as one workaround for racism. Critically, campaigners understand that such workarounds are not available for all racially and ethnically minoritised populations (as seen in data on racial disparities) and that our society cannot be said to have moved fundamentally away from racism and towards racial justice.

2. A big systemic fix versus tackling symptoms

In keeping with their understanding of the scale and scope of the problem, campaigners think about necessary change as big and systemic. That means that our systems need to be fundamentally redesigned. A big systemic fix means replacing prevailing 'mental models' of racial hierarchy and their associated laws, customs and institutional policies that tend to 'lock in' racial dis/advantages.

The public generally think in much narrower terms about the solution for racism. The focus is on dealing with individual racists and the symptoms of racism rather than with the underlying causes. The emphasis is on reforming rather than transforming.

3. Leadership by those affected versus adaptation and assimilation

Campaigner and public thinking is rather different on the role of racially and ethnically minoritised people in racism. Campaigners think that people who experience racism should direct and lead anti-racism work. In part this is to bring to bear their knowledge and insight; but it is also because racial justice should be marked by different leadership and power structures to the current status quo.

The public often see people who experience racism in more passive terms, perhaps just as 'victims'. Furthermore, public thinking tends towards the idea that racially and ethnically minoritised people can be partly culpable for their experiences of racism, for example because they too easily 'take offence' and because they may be self-segregating and not 'integrating' more.

4. Racial justice as non-zero or zero-sum

White members of the public tend to think that though racism is an issue, there are other problems too – with the implication that dealing with racism detracts from efforts to address other priorities. In addition, there is an important strand of public concern that the gains of dealing with racism could be outweighed by the losses, and that efforts can go too ‘far’, replacing one type of unfairness with another. For example, there is public concern that ‘policing’ racism would somehow curtail ‘free speech’. The public also cite positive discrimination (currently illegal in the UK) as unfair and likely to exacerbate division and difference in society. This points to concern that action on racism is zero-sum, ‘taking’ from (some) white people and ‘giving’ to racially and ethnically minoritised populations. This thinking decouples the interests of white people from those of racially and ethnically minoritised people, rather than recognising the interdependent nature of our lives.

Campaigners see that some white people may lose advantages as racist arrangements are replaced. But ultimately, the emphasis is on transforming and making more equitable how we as a society generate and share wealth, rather than simply reallocating ‘prizes’. This transformation has potentially profound and liberating effects for multiple groups, including working-class people, migrants and women in addition to racially and ethnically minoritised populations.

5. ‘Change can happen’ versus ‘That’s the way it is’

The final line of contested thinking is perhaps the most fundamental. It is about the prospects for change.

There is a strong strand in public thinking that there has always been a ‘race line’ used to mark affinity and antagonism between people and that this will always be the case. The public also think that ‘race’ provides some ‘truth’ and insight about different groups and that this means ‘race’ and racism will not fade away. Ultimately, race thinking and racism is ‘human nature’.

By way of contrast, campaigners (have to) see the possibility of changing race thinking and moving to a system that centres racial justice – even if there is considerable work still to do.

We see clear patterns in which public thinking is both aligned and at odds with campaigner beliefs. Campaigners have always known this to some extent but can now see the contours of public thinking and use this to inform how they talk about 'race', racism and racial justice.

The next phase of Reframing Race will use this new intelligence about what is held in common and what is contested in campaigner and public thinking to develop and test with the public new messages on 'race', racism and racial justice. This will lead to the identification of new, more effective ways for campaigners to speak with members of the public on these issues. These messages, metaphors and values will then become the basis for new, more productive conversations on 'race'.

But already we can see some emerging implications for campaigners and their communications.

1. Campaigners don't have to meet public thinking 'where it is at'.

Campaigners should not try to brush over hot topics, where public thinking differs to their own and is problematic on 'race' and racism. Thinking on 'race' has always moved and changed shape, and with good interventions it can change again for the better.

2. Be clear about the audience and the goal of each piece of communication.

Campaigners should be strategic on communications, i.e. clear on the purpose of and audience for each piece of communication. Drawing on understandings of common and contested ground can help campaigners to intervene precisely in the conversation on race and create an ecosystem of messages and language to advance public thinking.

3. Campaigners can build public commitment by showing that real change is possible, and is happening already.

Campaigners can illustrate that another world, built on racial justice, is possible by citing real-life efforts and initiatives that make a meaningful difference. Campaigners also need to note that talk of 'crisis' may convey the urgency of a situation but can feed public fatalism and disengagement.

4. Connect specific instances of racism to the bigger, systemic picture.

Campaigners need to join the dots between specific instances of racism and the bigger, systemic picture. This means learning to illustrate systemic racism in more tangible, relatable ways. And campaigners need to also understand that across the public there is little grasp of systemic or structural racism. Presenting the concept to unprimed audiences without proper explanation is likely to cause confusion and/or disengagement.

5. Trigger helpful public beliefs when talking about action on racism.

Campaigners can talk about the importance of action on racism in terms of building togetherness and belonging and as a foundation stone for a better society.

The complex landscape of public thinking presents numerous communications challenges for campaigners. But we can do much more, through thoughtfully designed messages, to call more of the public to the cause of racial justice and to create demand for action.

In its next phase, Reframing Race we will be developing and testing messages that can help in this goal. If you want to be kept up to date on our progress and/ or want to help us to share the messages that emerge in our process please email: reframe@runnymedetrust.org.

Reframing Race commissioned ICM Unlimited to conduct in-depth interviews with 60 members of the public across England to understand how they think about 'race', racism, and racial justice and equality. The primary focus of the interviews was to understand deeper patterns, enduring and shared understandings and assumptions that give shape to how and why public thinking is as it is on these topics.

The fieldwork took place in July and August 2020. The interviews were semistructured and lasted two hours in total and were conducted online, using video-conference technology.

The approach, based on long-form semi-open interviews, looked not only at what the public thinks but at how and why they make sense of the issues and come to their conclusions. The aim is to get to something approaching the 'core' of enduring public patterns of thinking on 'race', racism and racial justice.

Therefore, this research is about thinking, rather than the 'opinion' or 'attitudes' that may emerge from more traditional forms of polling. These types of polls can provide useful insights about what ideas people have 'top of mind' when prompted. However, for the purposes of developing ways to engage the public long term on issues and to change the shape of public thinking, we need to access deeper 'bottom-of-mind' thinking and thought processes. This means that although we invite people to talk about particular issues around 'race', the approach taken tries to avoid imposing pre-set categories of responses on participants; to give participants time to respond, think through and talk about ambiguities and ambivalent thinking; and to access longer, more enduring, underlying patterns of thought and thought processes rather than unduly focusing on responses to immediate events.³

Interviewees were a 'balanced' sample of the general population, ensuring a good spread of factors including geography, gender and ethnicity – with two-thirds self-defining as white and one-third self-identifying as 'Black and Minority Ethnic'. We 'oversampled' people identifying as 'Black and Minority Ethnic' to have better insight into whether and how thinking about 'race' differed within this group, compared with people identifying as white.

From understanding how people think about 'race', ICM developed a set of cultural models and 'storylines' to encapsulate this thinking.

The full ICM findings and methodology reports are available on the website of [the Runnymede Trust](#).

³ For more on this see: Bourne, J (2011). Polling with pride. Institute of Race Relations. Available at: www.irr.org.uk/news/polling-with-pride