



# TESTING TIMES

## Messages to Reframe Race

Sanjiv Lingayah and Nina Kelly



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Reframing Race exists to change the public conversation on racism in order to build an anti-racist future.

We generate big ideas, fresh resources and groundbreaking research for anyone advocating for race equity.

Our knowledge and data powerfully illuminate the problem, and measurably grow demand for the solutions we need to create a world in which we can all be safe and live well.

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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, fill in your details [online](#). You can also reach the authors of the report through [reframe@reframingrace.org](mailto:reframe@reframingrace.org) or the email addresses below.

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Campaigners and advocates have long worked hard and thoughtfully to convey the realities of racism and to grow support for serious anti-racist action. However, to date, campaigners have had little evidence about whether or how their messages may be having the desired effect.

The Reframing Race message test, for the first time, shows in statistically robust detail what happens to public thinking when exposed to different messages on racism and race equity. This report contains important initial findings from the message test and implications for how campaigners for anti-racism might convey their ideas with impact.

The test process began with work with anti-racist campaigners to understand their priorities in shaping the public conversation on racism. These campaigners' goals were translated into messages using new qualitative insights on existing public thinking on 'race', racism and race equity. The messages that emerged from the design process were tested in Scotland and in England with a representative sample of 20,000 people, and message impact was evaluated against a range of measures in an online follow-on survey.

Some of the key points of the message test were:

- There were (unsurprisingly) no magic message formulations that moved the majority of aspects of public thinking in desirable directions – but we did identify productive messages with real potential for impact.
- 'Status quo' messages containing ideas and language used extensively in pre-existing messaging tested as largely ineffective. Their occasional positive impacts on people's thinking were cancelled out by other instances where they 'backfired' and stimulated unhelpful thinking on racism and race equity.
- It was easier to get audiences to accept racism as a real and pressing problem than to get them to support particular solutions for race equity, including the need for major changes in institutions and organisations. In part this was because articulations of the problems were better developed than those on solutions. This issue needs to be addressed by investing time in spelling out solutions.
- There were signs that racism and race equity were considered more of a pressing issue in England than in Scotland. We look forward to discussing the evidence with colleagues in Scotland to understand national context and the implications of this finding.
- In both Scotland and England, some deeply problematic ideas emerged about 'race' in public thinking. For example, in both nations around 40% of people believed that 'some races or ethnic groups are naturally harder working than others'. This mode of thinking can be challenged by well-framed messages, but it demonstrates the strong roots of bogus 'racial science' and the need for long-term narrative strategies to shift enduring and underlying thinking and create the right conditions for an anti-racist future.

## Introduction

This report shares key findings from Reframing Race's groundbreaking message-testing exercise in Scotland and England. The report provides selected evidence about what messages move the public towards, or away from, productive<sup>1</sup> ways of thinking about 'race', racism and racial justice.

The purpose of the test and of Reframing Race more generally is to help campaigners to better convey the realities of racism and to build deeper and wider understanding of and support for the solutions that society needs. This is especially important as campaigners are often operating in hostile conditions and on shoestring budgets.

More broadly, 'reframing' is also about stimulating a renewed and enriched conversation on 'race' and racism as part of a wider transformation process that society must go through to truly face and overcome racism.

In other words, new ways of talking about racism can lead to new types of listening, engagement and progress.

The starting point for this work is that it is self-evidently not enough for campaigners to be right about racism. That alone does not ensure racial equity or justice. The challenge, then, is to help to translate what campaigners see, know and understand into social change.

There is no single way of achieving transformation. However, for groups who don't already have a hold on formal levers of power, it is important to gain and grow other forms of power to find the wherewithal to drive forward their agendas.

One way of thinking about power is as a combination of strong ideas and supportive people to back and develop them. (Money helps too!)

Ideas and people are brought together in numerous ways – including organising and movement-building, street protest, and by developing blueprints for institutional and systemic redesign.

A complementary approach to power-building is through communications and advocacy. This is the work of conveying ideas to call more people to the cause of racial justice. In general terms, if sufficient people can be moved to support transformative action, then anti-racists become more powerful in effectively shaping the public conversation on 'race' and the related policy agenda.

## Who this work is for

This work is aimed at campaigners who seek to call a wider, more 'mainstream' audience to the cause of ending racism and ensuring race equity and justice.

Reframing Race supports these efforts by researchers, writers, journalists, policymakers, campaigners, activists and advocates through the informed and intentional use of framing. Framing refers to the various practices that determine how ideas are conveyed to an audience. It includes the wording, organising and structuring of messages to influence how people engage and understand issues and to move them towards accepting and supporting solutions that build an anti-racist future.

<sup>1</sup> In this research we define such productive ways of thinking, broadly speaking, as agreeing that racism is a problem in society; believing that racism is built into laws and how society at large works; and/or believing in the need for fundamental institutional change.

All communications are framed in some way or other. All communicators and campaigners frame their messages.

But more data-informed approaches to framing may not be – and perhaps should not be – for everyone. Maybe thinkers, artists and agitators need to simply ‘bear witness’ to racism and to ‘drop truth’, raw and unfiltered. Doing so has always been the heartbeat of racial justice. It is essential, and long may it continue.

The framing work that Reframing Race informs and supports is complementary to these efforts. We take the truth of racism and develop messages about it for wider audiences who may not experience or understand it. For campaigners and others seeking to reframe the conversation on ‘race’, racism and race equity, Reframing Race provides, for the first time, an evidence base to guide their efforts to better tell the truth, to inspire hope and to build demand for meaningful solutions.

## The Reframing Race process

Since 2019, Reframing Race, using well-established ‘re/framing’ approaches, has been generating a unique evidence base on the changes that anti-racists want, the landscape of public thinking, and how campaigners for race equity can become more powerful through impactful communication.

We’ve undertaken this work with our network of around 40 ‘Reframers’ – racial justice campaigners, advocates and activists from around the UK – to guide our efforts to speak more potently about ‘race’, racism and racial justice.

## Reframing Race report trilogy



This report is the second in a trilogy in the Reframing Race programme. The first report was [Common Ground | Contested Space](#), which draws on a specially commissioned study from social research experts ICM to compare public thinking on ‘race’ and racism with that of campaigners. After Testing Times, a third report with the working title Contains Strong Language is due in the first half of 2023. This will outline the Reframing Race research process, offer more detailed messaging guidance to campaigners and map out a future narrative strategy that can drive changes in the conversation on racism.



## The goal of the test

Ahead of the message test, and together with the Reframers, we decided that the focus should be to find messages capable of advancing three critical ideas in public thinking:

- that racism is in the design of our institutions and can therefore be designed out
- that systemic racism is real and its effects tangible
- that action on racism is a priority and we need grow support for anti-racist policies/actions

Prior [qualitative research](#) on public thinking published by Reframing Race tells us that these critical ideas – also known as framing goals – are ambitious. Although elements of these ideas are present in public thinking, on balance, they are not widely held in the public.

Instead, the Reframing Race report *Common Ground | Contested Space* identifies a strong strand in public thinking that views racism as a phenomenon of another time, or as an issue in other places (such as the United States). Campaigners, by contrast, think of racism as an issue here and now.

The weight of public thinking also tends to view racism as something that happens between people, i.e., as something that certain individuals do to other people. At Reframing Race and among race equity campaigners, racism is seen as systemic and political – in the sense that racist logic justifies (and even requires) that resources, freedoms and rewards be diverted from racially and ethnically minoritised<sup>2</sup> populations such as Black, East Asian and South Asian people to (some) elements of white society.

While there are gaps between public and campaigner thinking on ‘race’ and racism, it is important for campaigners and advocates not to pander to prejudices or to simply avoid contentious issues. That response does not achieve the kind of framing goals outlined above and does little to advance a future defined by race equity.

A better mindset for messaging is to go forward with eyes wide open and to recognise that we cannot reason with or simply ‘frame past’ racism and racist ideology. But it is possible to do much better in refining and conveying big ideas that help us to move towards racial justice and equity. And it is desirable to communicate the realities of racism and meaningful solutions in ways that can be more deeply and widely understood, accepted and acted on.

Furthermore, a renewed and reframed conversation on ‘race’ and racism is necessary as part of a wider process that society must go through collectively to truly face and solve racism.

<sup>2</sup> The use of ‘minoritised’ here (not ‘minority’) is intended to emphasise the active process to make certain populations seem and feel outside the norm. This is a (lower-case p) political process rather than a plain mathematical issue of one group being outnumbered by another. In the messages themselves, the term ‘Black and minority ethnic’ was used, as this was deemed more familiar to and generally understood by the public and therefore more appropriate for the test. However, it’s important to note that there are issues with the term, as it aggregates a disparate group of people, characteristics and experiences, and it has little support in race equity circles.

## Developing test messages

The Reframing Race project team and members of the Reframer network engaged in an intensive effort to design a set of messages capable of moving public thinking towards the identified framing goals.

Messages were approximately 75–175 words long.

Each message was led by one of three forms of articulation:

- 1 Problem/solution-based messages – foregrounding, in general terms, the problems, the impacts of the problems and/or solutions to racism
- 2 Example-based messages – specific illustrations of how racism and/or solutions work in practice
- 3 Metaphor based messages – to convey racism or race equity in vivid and evocative terms.

Each message was led by one of three forms of articulation:

- A life-affirming value, such as dignity, opportunity or safety
- An aspect of the problem of racism – either a driver, such as racialised laws or policies, or a negative impact, such as the harmful effects of policing on Black people;
- A solution or response to racism – such as a call for public safety strategies that are less reliant on policing, or for teaching fuller accounts of empire and the transatlantic slave trade.

## The message tests

Reframing Race commissioned research consultancy Savanta ComRes to carry out a rigorous quantitative test to identify the potential impact of the messages on public narratives about ‘race’, racism and race equity. The aim was to clearly identify what kinds of messages are capable of shifting a general audience towards ideas and beliefs consistent with our framing goals. We also wanted to pay attention to where messages can inadvertently ‘backfire’ and move people to think about the issues in less helpful ways.

The test exercise took place in two parts and included a total of 36 messages – 24 tested in England and 12 tested in Scotland. The first wave tested 12 messages in England between 31 March and 11 April 2022. The data from this initial test was used to inform message redesign for the second wave of testing in Scotland and England.

Twelve new, refined messages were tested in Scotland<sup>3</sup> and 12 in England between 14 June and 14 July 2022. These latter messages are the main focus of this report.

Each message was seen by a segment of a large sample of the population in England and Scotland. The total sample was 19,990 people – representative by age, gender, region, social grade and ethnicity – of which around 4,300 were in Scotland and around 15,600 in England.

<sup>3</sup> In Scotland there was only one wave of testing because pollster panels were not large enough to ensure a representative second wave of participants without including some participants from the first Scottish round, which could have distorted the test results. Instead, we opted for a single Scottish wave, informed by a first English wave of message testing.

Participants in Scotland and England either saw just one of the tested messages (the 'treatment' groups), or saw no message (the 'control' group). All participants then answered the same set of 18 follow-up questions to assess their thoughts and feelings about 'race', racism and race equity.

Among the follow-up questions were some 'core' ones closely connected to our framing goals. These asked whether and to what extent participants saw:

- racism as a problem in society
- racism as built into how society works
- the need for fundamental institutional change

Comparing the survey responses of the treatment groups who saw a message with the control group who did not is a common experimental design known as an AB test. It tells us whether those exposed to a particular message have different ways of thinking about the issues compared with those who have seen no message.

All of the results in this report are statistically significant (unless otherwise stated). This means that we can have a high degree of confidence that the difference in thinking between the treatment and control groups is attributable to the content of the message rather than down to chance or other factors.

In addition, a regression analysis that controls for demographic differences was used to identify which messages were most likely to shift thinking (for good or ill) on three core survey questions aligned to the framing goals. The regression (REG) produces an 'odds ratio' which reflects whether and to what extent being exposed to a message makes someone more likely to agree or disagree with a particular position statement on an issue. A score of 1.8 means that a 'typical' person exposed to a message is 1.8 times more likely to agree with a statement in the follow-on survey than someone who receives no message.<sup>4</sup> A score of this magnitude does not prove that seeing the message caused a change in thinking, but it is considered an important result.

<sup>4</sup> By contrast, a score of 0.6 means that a person exposed to a message is less likely to agree with a position statement. A score of 1.0 means that a person exposed to a message is no more or less likely to agree with a statement.

## A few 'good' messages

The message tests provide evidence that public thinking can be guided more productively in support of race equity.

The following messages show the most potential to advance public thinking:

- [Message 7, Wave 2 \(M7-W2\): Birdcage metaphor](#)  
(effective in Scotland and England)
- [Message 12, Wave 1 \(M12-W1\): CV discrimination](#)  
(tested in England Wave 1 only and effective)
- [Message 9, Wave 2 \(M9-W2\): CV discrimination and maternity deaths](#)  
(effective in Scotland and England)
- [Message 11, Wave 2 \(M11-W2\): Maternity deaths](#)  
(effective in England but not in Scotland)
- [Message 10, Wave 2 \(M10-W2\): CV discrimination and school exclusions](#)  
(effective in Scotland and England)
- [Message 3, Wave 2 \(M3-W2\): Problem and current solutions](#)  
(effective in Scotland but not in England)

Before discussing each of the messages in turn, it is worth noting that, overall, the productive messages listed above are better at shifting perceptions (as judged by post-message survey responses) towards understanding that racism is a significant problem. They are less successful at building support for serious actions on racism, such as the need for major changes in institutions and organisations.

This is an important reminder of how much of our public debate is centred on whether racism is or is not an issue, rather than on the merits of various solutions. In the concluding section of this report we discuss how campaigner messages and communications can focus more on alternative futures and ways to solve racism and racist harms.

The productive messages are laid out in more detail below.

## M7-W2. Birdcage Metaphor (Scotland and England)

### Message text

*Most of us, whatever our ethnicity, believe that everyone should be able to live free and fulfilling lives. But racism still shuts out Black and Minority Ethnic people from the rest of society.*

*Underlying racism is a system of ideas, laws and customary ways of doing things. Together this system is like a birdcage. Each wire of the cage represents how society limits key opportunities and freedoms – such as whether someone can leave school hopeful about the future, live in a decent home, or get a good job.*

*To break free from racism, we need decisive action from government and other powerful institutions to change how we run our society. We can act to deliver a labour market, schooling and public services that will provide freedoms to Black and Minority Ethnic people and make it possible for all of us to live well.*

## Selected impacts on key measures

### Scottish results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG, AB)<sup>5</sup>
- Addressing racism requires major changes in institutions and organisations. This may include transforming what they do, how they are run and who they serve. (REG)<sup>6</sup>
- It is possible to end racism (AB)<sup>7</sup>
- Compensation should be paid to those who have been victims of racism, such as people recently wrongfully deported from Britain to the Caribbean (AB)<sup>8</sup>

### English results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG)<sup>9</sup>
- All races and ethnic groups have equal worth (AB)<sup>10</sup>

#### Recipients less likely to agree/think that:

- A person's race tells you something about their character (AB)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Odds ratios: 1.8. AB: 25% vs 18% control. Q5a\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>6</sup> Odd ratios: 1.3. Q5b\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>7</sup> 52% vs 43% control. Q7\_1 To what extent do you think it is possible to end racism in our society?

<sup>8</sup> 68% vs 62% control. Q11\_2 To what extent would you support or oppose the following proposals to address racism in society?

<sup>9</sup> 25% vs 18% control. Q5a\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>10</sup> 94% vs 91% control. Q8\_5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>11</sup> 19% vs 29% control. Q8\_2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

## Analysis

A central framing goal for Reframing Race is to convey the realities of systemic racism in more vivid and tangible terms. This matters for campaigners and advocates because it gets past the problem of blaming racism on a few 'bad apples' and provides a platform for talking about and making recommendations on how we organise society as a whole.

Other test messages on systemic racism that drew on design and computer programming metaphors largely failed. Perhaps the ideas were too complex or contrived. Alternatively, they may have been too direct or 'on the nose' for the recipients to accept.

The more indirect metaphor of the birdcage works better in both Scotland and England. In both nations it gets across the idea that racism is built into societal arrangements, and this in turn seems to trigger a range of other helpful patterns of thinking. In Scotland, this includes the need for major changes in institutions and organisations. And in England, exposure to the message encourages recipients to reject the idea that 'race' correlates to character.

This metaphor does have downsides. In particular, it may cast BME people in a passive role or as victims requiring saving. This risk could be mitigated by emphasising the strength in adversity of people subject to racism.

## M12-W1. CV discrimination (tested in England only)

### Message text

*We know through hard evidence that racism remains a significant issue today.*

*For example, Oxford University researchers applied for more than 3,000 real job openings in the name of fictitious job applicants. They randomly varied the ethnicity of the applicants but kept their skills, qualifications and work experience the same.*

*White British applicants had to make four job applications to receive one positive, interested response from an employer. However, equally well qualified, British Black and Minority Ethnic applicants had to make seven applications to receive one positive response.*

*This shows that old, discriminatory habits persist. We need decisive action from employers and the government to end racism in employment and to give Black and Minority Ethnic people the same chances as white people.*

## Selected impacts on key measures

### English results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is a problem in Britain (AB)<sup>12</sup>
- Racism does harm BME people in employment (AB)<sup>13</sup>
- Racism does harm BME people in treatment by judges and the courts (AB)<sup>14</sup>

#### Recipients less likely to agree/think that:

- Racism mainly takes the form of one person acting in a discriminatory way against someone else (AB)<sup>15</sup>
- Islam is a negative force in Britain (AB)<sup>16</sup>
- Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people have a criminal way of life (AB)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 29% vs 23% control. Q6+S1 To what extent do you think racism is a problem in Britain?

<sup>13</sup> 71% vs 57% control. Q12\_2 To what extent does racism harm Black and minority ethnic people in the following areas of life in Britain?

<sup>14</sup> 55% vs 50% control. Q12\_5 To what extent does racism harm Black and minority ethnic people in the following areas of life in Britain?

<sup>15</sup> 63% vs 70% control. Q5\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>16</sup> 26% vs 31% control. Q16\_4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>17</sup> 33% vs 38% control. Q16\_5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

## Analysis

Of the 12 messages tested in Wave 1 (which took place in England only), this message exhibited the most potential. It is an almost watertight piece of evidence about the existence of racism in hiring. For that reason, it was used as the foundation for story-based evidence of racism messages in England in Wave 2 and in Scotland.

The experiment 'catches racism red-handed'. Naming Oxford University gives the results further credibility. And, additionally, the way that the fake CV 'sting' is outlined gives the message the feel of a compelling story – with plot, characters and a powerful ending.

The message shows how racism can infiltrate not just a few employers but a whole employment system. It is the opposite of what one would expect in a merit-based society.

In terms of core desired impacts on thinking, the message drives agreement that racism is a problem. But it does not move thinking towards a systemic perspective or particularly to supporting anti-racist policies/actions.

But importantly, the message does cut across the idea that BME populations are somehow responsible for lesser outcomes. (For example, the message drives disagreement with racist stereotypes against Muslims and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people.) This doesn't necessarily help to build support for solutions, but the trope of blaming BME people is important in political and media circles and it acts as an excuse for inaction. Neutralising this argument is important to securing meaningful change.



## M9-W2. CV discrimination and maternity deaths (Scotland and England)

### Message text

*We know through hard evidence that racism remains a significant issue today.*

*We still see racism in the job market. In a UK-wide Oxford University study, researchers applied to more than 3,000 real job openings as fictitious applicants. White British candidates had to make four applications to receive one positive response. Meanwhile, equally well-qualified British Black and Minority Ethnic applicants had to make an average of seven applications to receive one interested response.*

*And this type of discrimination doesn't just happen in hiring. We also see racism in healthcare. For example, another report published by Oxford University shows that Black women are four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth in the UK than white women.*

*The evidence shows us that old, discriminatory habits persist. We need decisive action from government and institutions to treat Black and Minority Ethnic people with proper care and consideration.*

## Selected impacts on key measures

### Scottish results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG)<sup>18</sup>
- Addressing racism requires major changes in institutions and organisations. This may include transforming what they do, how they are run and who they serve. (REG)<sup>19</sup>

#### Recipients less likely to agree/think that:

- Making public bodies (e.g., local authorities and health authorities) legally responsible to investigate and take action where BME populations do less well than white people (AB)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Odds ratio: 1.4. Q5a\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>19</sup> Odds ratio: 1.6. Q5b\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>20</sup> 72% vs 64% control. Q11\_6 To what extent would you support or oppose the following proposals to address racism in society?

## English results

### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is a problem in Britain (REG)<sup>21</sup>
- Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG)<sup>22</sup>
- Racism does harm Black and Minority Ethnic people in healthcare (AB)<sup>23</sup>

## Analysis

This message, in the second English and first Scottish waves of testing, was an attempt to learn if it was possible to build on the impact in England of the 'story' of the CV discrimination experiment and get audiences to take other examples of racism seriously.

In both Scotland and England, the result looks promising – in some ways it is more systemically and institutionally focused than the CV-only message (M9-W2) above. There may be a 'halo effect' from the CV story which adds legitimacy to the evidence of Black maternity deaths, but also a 'multiplier effect' whereby the two sets of robust evidence reinforce one another, emphasising that there is a pattern at play.

This combined message moved thinking towards racism being understood as a systemic phenomenon (in Scotland and England) and one that requires real institutional change (in Scotland). These results suggest that it is hard to ignore factual data that isolates racism, explains how evidence is gathered and is quality-assured by trusted academic institutions.

The difficulty for wider practice is that the impact of this type of message relies on academics taking an initial and ongoing interest in these issues – something that cannot be guaranteed. If the studies are not renewed, that makes it easier to dismiss the evidence as outdated and for it to be said that these problems have largely been solved.

It is also the case in other arenas where racism is at work, e.g. stop and search, criminal sentencing or school exclusions, that it may be impossible to demonstrate so clearly that racism is a driving force in the disproportionality. As such, other examples of racism may be dismissed and not have the desired impact on thinking.

<sup>21</sup> Odds ratio: 1.3. Q6+S1 To what extent do you think racism is a problem in Britain?

<sup>22</sup> Odds ratio: 1.3. Q5a\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>23</sup> 46% vs 38% control. Q12\_1 To what extent does racism harm Black and minority ethnic people in the following areas of life in Britain?

## M11-W2. Maternity deaths (England)

### Message text

*We know through hard evidence that racism remains a significant issue today.*

*Oxford University researchers examined maternal deaths (women who died during the first year after the end of pregnancy) across the UK over a three-year period. Full medical records were obtained for all the women and confidentially reviewed by a pathologist and a doctor to establish the cause of death. Expert reviewers assessed each woman's care against current healthcare guidelines and standards.*

*Even taking into account variables such as age, income levels, mental and physical health and Body Mass Index, researchers found that maternal mortality rates for Black women were more than four times that of white women.*

*This shows that old, discriminatory habits persist. We need decisive action from government to end racism in healthcare and to give Black and Minority Ethnic people the same chances as white people.*

## Selected impacts on key measures

### English results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is an extremely pressing problem in Britain (REG) (AB)<sup>24</sup>
- Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG)<sup>25</sup>
- Racism does harm Black and Minority Ethnic people in healthcare (AB)<sup>26</sup>
- They will do more reading and learning about historical and current issues of racism (AB)<sup>27</sup>

#### Recipients more likely to disagree/less likely to agree that:

- Prejudiced individuals are the main cause of racism when it occurs inside institutions and organisations (AB)<sup>28</sup>
- Worse outcomes for BME populations compared to white people are explained by defeatist attitudes of some BME people who think that they can't succeed because of discrimination (AB)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Odds ratio: 1.4. Q6+S1 To what extent do you think racism is a problem in Britain?

<sup>25</sup> Odds ratio: 1.4. Q5a\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>26</sup> 46% vs 38% control. Q12\_1 To what extent does racism harm Black and minority ethnic people in the following areas of life in Britain?

<sup>27</sup> 57% vs 52% control. Q13\_7 How likely or unlikely would you be to do each of the following?

<sup>28</sup> 17% vs 13% control. Q5\_3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>29</sup> 28% vs 23% control. Q14\_4 Official data shows that in certain aspects of life some Black and minority ethnic (BME) populations do less well than white people. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following explanations of why these group differences appear?

## Analysis

As well as coupling the evidence on black maternity deaths with that on CV discrimination (M9-W2), a message centred only on the story of evidence on black maternity deaths was also tested. This was important to understand whether the (robust and solid) evidence on Black maternity deaths would stand on its own and be accepted or, perhaps because of anti-Black racism and misogyny, be discounted.

A positive outcome was that in England this message was one of the most productive tested in its own right. However, in Scotland the message solely on Black maternal deaths largely failed to helpfully impact thinking.

This raises the question of why there was difference between the nations. There is no clear-cut answer. It could be in part down to the specifics of wording. It might be that a study published by the University of Glasgow or Edinburgh rather than an English university would have carried more weight. But it is also important to consider whether this result is in part due to particular anti-Black and/or misogynistic ideas in Scotland. And it is important to hear from Scottish colleagues about what might be driving these particular results before settling on a view.

## M10-W2. CV discrimination and school exclusions (Scotland and England)

### Message text

*We know through hard evidence that racism remains a significant issue today.*

*We still see racism in the job market. In a UK-wide Oxford University study, researchers applied to more than 3,000 real job openings as fictitious applicants. White British candidates had to make four applications to receive one positive response. Meanwhile, equally well-qualified British Black and Minority Ethnic applicants had to make an average of seven applications to receive one interested response.*

*And this type of discrimination doesn't just happen in hiring. We see it in education, where school leaders are more likely to exclude Gypsy Roma and Traveller children compared to their white British counterparts.*

*The evidence shows us that old, discriminatory habits persist. We need decisive action from government and institutions to treat Black and Minority Ethnic people with proper care and consideration.*

## Selected impacts on key measures

### Scottish results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG) (AB)<sup>30</sup>
- Addressing racism requires major changes in institutions and organisations. This may include transforming what they do, how they are run and who they serve (REG) (AB)<sup>31</sup>
- Government policies should be changed when these harm or are unfair to BME populations (AB)<sup>32</sup>
- Attempts to give equal opportunities to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have not gone far enough (AB)<sup>33</sup>

#### Recipients more likely to disagree that:

- Prejudiced individuals are the main cause of racism when it occurs inside institutions and organisations (AB)<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Odds ratio: 1.5 AB: 25% vs 18% control. Q5a\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>31</sup> Odds ratio: 1.4 AB: 34% vs 26% control). Q5b\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>32</sup> 81% vs 75% control. Q11\_7 To what extent would you support or oppose the following proposals to address racism in society?

<sup>33</sup> 45% vs 37% control. Q15\_1 We want to ask your personal opinion about some changes that have been happening in Britain over the years. Have attempts to give equal opportunities to each of the following groups gone too far, not far enough, or are about right?

<sup>34</sup> 16% vs 12% control. Q5\_3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

## English results (Wave 2)

### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Government policies should be changed when these harm or are unfair to BME populations (AB)<sup>35</sup>
- All races and ethnic groups have equal worth (AB)<sup>36</sup>
- Attempts to give equal opportunities to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have not gone far enough (AB)<sup>37</sup>
- Attempts to give equal opportunities to Jewish people have not gone far enough (AB)<sup>38</sup>

### Recipients more likely to disagree/less likely to agree that:

- Prejudiced individuals are the main cause of racism when it occurs inside institutions and organisations (AB)<sup>39</sup>
- Some races or ethnic groups are born less intelligent than others (AB)<sup>40</sup>

## Analysis

The message drove thinking away from the idea of racism as mainly down to individuals and towards it being institutionalised and perpetuated by laws and how society is organised. In Scotland, especially, the message moved recipients towards believing in the need for major changes in institutions and organisations. And the message showed potential as a means of building support for state/government anti-racist efforts, in schools – which are mentioned in the message – and potentially in other state-directed arenas, such as policing and criminal justice.

Another noteworthy feature is that the formulation centres Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. Message recipients seem to readily accept that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are negatively affected by racism and there is support for more to be done to secure equity and justice for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The same is true for Jewish people (based on the English test). And this suggests that the public can understand that racism can impact both ‘people of colour’ and ‘white-passing’ populations, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller or Jewish people.

<sup>35</sup> 74% vs 69% control. Q11\_7 To what extent would you support or oppose the following proposals to address racism in society?

<sup>36</sup> 95% vs 91% control. Q8\_5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>37</sup> 42% vs 29%. Q15\_1. We want to ask your personal opinion about some changes that have been happening in Britain over the years. Have attempts to give equal opportunities to each of the following groups gone too far, not far enough, or are about right?

<sup>38</sup> 31% vs 24%. Q15\_4. We want to ask your personal opinion about some changes that have been happening in Britain over the years. Have attempts to give equal opportunities to each of the following groups gone too far, not far enough, or are about right?

<sup>39</sup> 72% vs 77% control. Q5\_3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>40</sup> 79% vs 74% control. Q8\_3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

## M3-W2. Problem and current solutions (Scotland)

### Message text

*Most of us, whatever our ethnicity, believe that everyone should be treated with care and respect, but, today, racism is still common in society.*

*We see it in how judges disproportionately imprison Black people compared to other groups. We see it in education, where school leaders are more likely to exclude Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.*

*Ending racism is a big task, but many people and institutions are already working towards it. Schools across the UK, from South London to Glasgow, are reducing school exclusions, understanding that when a child acts out, they may be trying to communicate rather than deliberately being bad. And communities are finding ways to come together to keep each other safe. For example, when immigration officers attempted to remove two men from Kenmure Street, Glasgow, during Eid, they were prevented by hundreds of locals chanting 'let our neighbours go.'*

*Through people like us demanding change, and people in power making the right decisions, we can make progress across all levels of society – because change is inevitable, racism is not.*

## Selected impacts on key measures

### Scottish results

#### Recipients more likely to agree/think that:

- Addressing racism requires major changes in institutions and organisations. This may include transforming what they do, how they are run and who they serve. (REG)<sup>41</sup>
- It is possible to end racism (AB)<sup>42</sup>
- **Recipients more likely to disagree that:**
- All races and ethnic groups are equally capable as each other (AB)<sup>43</sup>

This example-based message emphasised that anti-racist efforts to overcome racialised outcomes were already underway. This message format was especially intended to balance out the fatalism that can arise when understanding that racism is spread by systems and culture. Such fatalism can dampen public engagement in and support for anti-racist ideas and initiatives, allowing the continuation of inequitable status quo practices.

Though this message influenced only certain aspects of thinking positively, it shows the value and potential of communicating that action is happening and that change is here already.

<sup>41</sup> Odds ratio: 1.4. Q5b\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>42</sup> 55% vs 43% control. Q7\_1 To what extent do you think it is possible to end racism in our society?

<sup>43</sup> 3% vs 8% control. Q8\_6 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Finding messages that can move thinking forward is a positive outcome – particularly because in public and policy debate, in the so-called ‘culture wars’ and ‘anti-wokeness’, there seems such pushback against some foundational ideas of race equity. Behind all of the shouting down of new ways of doing things, the messages show that there can be listening too, and that words can cut through, and are doing so already.

Apart from the birdcage metaphor, the most positively impactful messages appear to be example-based (i.e., evidentiary) ones which show how and where racism operates in practice.

This finding is somewhat at odds with framing literature and practice. This tends to emphasise that facts alone don’t rally people behind ideas because audiences tend to discount facts that don’t fit with their worldview and place a premium on those that do.

But the message test shows that some factual evidence is hard to discount and ignore, especially when it is backed by a story of evidence-gathering and is quality-assured by trusted academic institutions.

The difficulty for wider practice is that there is no guarantee that academics will go on producing and updating evidence. If, for example, studies are not relatively up to date then it is easier for the evidence to be dismissed as reflecting past problems that have largely been solved.

It is also the case in other situations where racism shapes outcomes, e.g., stop and search, criminal sentencing or school exclusions, that it may be impossible and even unhelpful to isolate the ‘race effect’ so precisely. In such cases, the role of racism in negative outcomes is more likely to be taken less seriously or ignored.

Elsewhere, the birdcage metaphor message offers a way to convey the idea of racism and its solutions as systemic. It helps to overcome the facile argument that racism is down to a few ‘bad apples’. But this metaphor must be used with care. It can make Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people seem like passive and helpless victims whose lives are only understood in terms of racism. A more nuanced, accurate and helpful story is that people subject to racism are constrained but at the same time also actively resist being held back. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that BME people – like all people – have textured lives that are a mix of highs and lows, joy and pain.

Message 3, Wave 2, which showed some potential in Scotland, is important because it switches focus towards specific solutions and actions for race equity already in use. Pointing out progress is important for building movements, keeping fatalism at bay and pushing against the idea that racism is inevitable. And it is perhaps a necessary way to lift spirits, given that the impacts of racial injustice are negative by nature – and, at times, can be a matter of life and death.



## Complexities in communications

The messages above show potential in terms of advancing framing goals. In addition to these promising signs are a number of other ambivalent results that are also worth reflecting as we consider a path to more powerful communications. These emerging themes provide pause for thought when considering the potential of reframing, as well as the complexities associated with it and its limits.

### Status quo messages fall flat

The data on the first wave of testing (England only) in March/April 2022 was primarily used to try to hone our message design skills for the second set of messages for testing in Scotland and England.

Two messages from the first wave in England were of particular interest. These messages can be called 'status quo' messages. They were distillations of 'typical' general messages used by what can be considered mainstream race equity organisations.

The first status quo message was about how the problem of 'racial inequality' manifests:

#### Status quo problem message, England<sup>45</sup>

*We all deserve to be given a fair chance to succeed.*

*Yet this country's Black and Minority Ethnic communities are still affected by racism and racial inequality. These groups suffer poorer outcomes across education, employment, health and in the criminal justice system. For example, Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white people.*

*We must work against institutional racism and towards an inclusive Britain.*

The second message was a 'typical' status quo problem/solution message that states how 'racial inequality' manifests but also points towards some features of a more positive future:

#### Status quo problem/solution message, England<sup>45</sup>

*We all deserve to be given a fair chance to succeed.*

*Yet this country's Black and Minority Ethnic communities still suffer poorer outcomes across education, employment, health and in the criminal justice system.*

*In order to achieve genuine racial equality, we must work towards an inclusive Britain in which we all feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities and share a common sense of belonging.*

<sup>45</sup> Message 1, Wave 1

<sup>46</sup> Message 2, Wave 1

Both messages use the rather loose term 'racial inequality'. Words such as 'inequality' and 'equality' have more recently been supplanted in anti-racist work, because equality, like fairness, can be defined as a rather limited form of non-discrimination or equal opportunities.

Instead, terms such as 'race equity' and 'justice' have become favoured because they highlight the need for more deep-seated and active correction of the impacts of historical and ongoing racism.

The messages also state that Black and Minority Ethnic people 'suffer' from worse outcomes. This is the language of illness. It may provoke empathy or sympathy, but it does also suggest BME victimhood rather than steadfastness and agency.

Test results for these two status quo messages show mixed effects. Overall, they appear largely ineffective at positively changing thinking and bringing people to anti-racist ideas.

The messages do move things forward in some directions. For example, the first (problem) message generates greater agreement that 'Racism is an extremely pressing problem'.<sup>47</sup> The second (problem/solution) message reduces levels of agreement with the statement that racism mainly takes the form of one person acting in a discriminatory way against someone else.<sup>48</sup>

But on other measures, both messages appear to backfire.

The problem/solution message leads to a smaller percentage (compared with the control group) agreeing that policies and culture are the main cause of racism when it occurs within institutions and organisations.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, people exposed to this message are moved away from a more systemic and structural understanding of racism.

The problem message similarly increases disagreement that racism causes harm to Black and Minority Ethnic people in healthcare<sup>50</sup> – even though the message identifies health as a site of race inequality.

And both status quo messages reduce people's inclination to 'donate to an organisation working to end racism',<sup>51</sup> compared with the control group. In other words, the test shows that those receiving no message were more inclined to give resources to race equity organisations than those exposed to the two status quo messages used in England.

It is impossible to be certain about exactly why these messages appear to drive these unintended negative impacts. However, there are possible explanations.

<sup>47</sup> AB: 28% vs 23% control group. Q6+S1 To what extent do you think racism is a problem in Britain?

<sup>48</sup> AB: 65% vs 70% control group. Q5\_1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>49</sup> Message 2 (AB: 57% vs 63% control group). Q5\_4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>50</sup> Message 2 (AB: 50% vs 44% control group). Q12\_1 To what extent does racism harm Black and minority ethnic people in the following areas of life in Britain?

<sup>51</sup> Status quo message 1 and 2 vs control (AB: 45% and 46% vs 52% respectively). Q13\_1 How likely or unlikely would you be to do each of the following?

The first message names racism only in passing and the second message doesn't name it at all, and this lack of precision may be a turn-off. The second message points to inclusion and belonging as desirable without any sense of how this might be achieved. Broadly speaking, being general in nature and 'heavy' on the problem and 'light' or unspecific on solutions could drive fatalism about the prospects for change.

Furthermore, these kinds of status quo messages may have lost potency in a context – in England at least – where discussions about 'race' are often febrile. This atmosphere demands that campaigners have more powerful and precise things to say about 'race' and racism.

At the same time, if messages hit their mark in shifting important aspects of thinking (unlike these status quo messages), then these backfire effects become less important. The reality is that questions of 'race' and racism are contested; some hostile responses are to be expected.

One Scottish status quo message was tested – similar to the problem/solution text tested in Wave 1 in England.

**Status quo problem/solution message, Scotland<sup>52</sup>**

*We all deserve to be given a fair chance to succeed.*

*Yet this country's Black and Minority Ethnic communities are still affected by racism and racial inequality. These groups suffer poorer outcomes across education, employment, health and in the criminal justice system. For example, Black and Minority Ethnic people in Scotland are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than white people.*

*In order to achieve genuine racial equality we must work against institutional racism. We must work towards an inclusive Scotland in which we all feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities and share a common sense of belonging.*

This status quo message draws on some specific 'race equality' messaging used in Scotland as well as wording used by UK-wide race equality organisations. It includes some recent data from Joseph Rowntree Foundation Scotland on Black and Minority Ethnic poverty rates compared with those of white populations.<sup>53</sup>

As with its English counterparts, the status quo message produced mixed results. Specifically, it backfires by reducing agreement that policies and culture are the main cause of racism when it occurs within institutions and organisations.<sup>54</sup> And it makes it more likely that participants will disagree that racism is much bigger than individuals, and built into laws and how society at large works.<sup>55</sup>

The critical point with the tests of the status quo messages is that these typical campaigning tools used in the public domain have at best not been effective at stimulating productive thinking, and at worst they have been counterproductive.

<sup>52</sup> Message 1, Wave 2.

<sup>53</sup> For more on this see Cebula, C. and Evans, J. (2021) Ethnicity, Poverty and the Data in Scotland, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [www.jrf.org.uk/report/ethnicity-poverty-and-data-scotland](http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/ethnicity-poverty-and-data-scotland)

<sup>54</sup> 56% vs 64% control group (AB testing). Q5\_4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>55</sup> 20% vs 32% control group (AB testing). Q5a To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

## Messages and underlying ideas about racism

Another important aspect of the test is that it reveals how public thinking about ‘race’ and racism can be at odds with some key ideas that race equity campaigners are trying to convey.

For example, control group results (where no message was seen) in Scotland show that 62% of respondents agree that ‘Racism mainly takes the form of one person acting in a discriminatory way against someone else’.<sup>56</sup> The comparable figure in the English control group in Wave 2 was 67%. Concomitantly, in both the Scottish and English control groups only 18% of people agreed that “Racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works’.<sup>57</sup>

Elsewhere, and more troublingly, the study shows that around 40% of control group participants in both nations think that ‘some races or ethnic groups are naturally harder working than others’.<sup>58</sup>

To a greater or lesser degree, these types of unhelpful and hostile ways of thinking about ‘race’ and racism can be considered part of the cultural models that shape society in England and Scotland. These cultural models are made up of shared, underlying and enduring assumptions and patterns of thinking and behaving. They help to perpetuate the conditions in which existing injustices occur. Well-reframed messages may help, over time, to change these models and ways of thinking and being. But at the same time, established thinking patterns also make it hard to successfully convey big ideas on racism and meaningful solutions.

One implication of the problematic aspects of underlying public thinking on these issues is that campaigners can’t meet people where they are. Campaigning message cannot legitimise racial and racist thinking. In other words, the focus of framing is not necessarily to secure agreement based on what people think today, but to use research insights and communications to move audiences towards what they are capable of thinking and supporting tomorrow.

## Racism and complexities in Scotland

Overall, five (out of twelve) messages in Scotland resulted in a decrease (i.e., a negative movement) in the percentage of people (AB test) who think that racism is an extremely pressing problem in Scotland. This means that these five messages have the opposite of the desired effect. By comparison, only one (out of twenty-four) test messages in England backfired in the same way when people were asked about the pressing nature (or otherwise) of racism in Britain.

It is not possible to definitively explain this difference between the two nations. But it is possible to contextualise these results.

Control group data shows that 22% in England think that racism is an extremely pressing problem, compared with 17% in Scotland<sup>59</sup> – a statistically significant difference. This suggests that racism is situated in its own particular way in each country.

<sup>58</sup> (AB) Q8\_4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The figure for the control group in Scotland 38% and the fieldwork figure for Wave 2 in England is 41% and Wave 1 is 39%.

<sup>59</sup> Q6 To what extent do you think racism is a problem in Britain/Scotland?

Certainly, in England racism is a high-profile, albeit contested, issue in public and policy discussion. Just as there is an English focus on racism, anti-racism and racial justice, there is a vibrant counterthrust against 'wokery'.

In Scotland, on the surface the debate on racism seems less acrimonious. For example, in 2021 the Scottish Government asked anti-racist organisation the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) to review past and current initiatives to tackle systemic racism in the country.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, around the same time in England the report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities was raising concerns in anti-racist and equalities circles.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the apparently calmer waters, advocates and campaigners in Scotland point out that racism is part and parcel of Scottish life<sup>62</sup> and that there is also resistance to change.<sup>63</sup>

With this context in mind, the backfires described could be in part a result of a disposition among the Scottish public to view racism as less of an issue than in other parts of the UK or the world. This could be down to a number of factors, including:

- the relative predominance of white populations and ethnic homogeneity compared with other parts of the UK
- a self-image as a socially progressive and enlightened nation
- an idea that racism is (mostly) an English problem

In addition, there may be something specific about the messages that backfires on this particular measure.

Four of the backfiring messages cite causes or manifestations of the problems, such as disproportionate imprisonment of Black people, school exclusions, salacious media coverage of 'race', and the malign influence of particular types of extremely wealthy individuals and politicians stirring up racial and ethnic division.<sup>64</sup> These elements may (reasonably or unreasonably) be seen as less relevant to the Scottish situation and more characteristic of England.

The fifth message which backfires on the pressing nature of racism in Scotland explicitly mentions Scotland's role in the British empire and the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>65</sup> Here, there are fewer grounds for message recipients to dispute the premise of the message. Instead, it could be (as is the case in England) that this is a sore subject that people and politicians alike find hard to face and acknowledge. This remains an area for further work, difficult though it may be.

<sup>60</sup> Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2021) 'Anti-racist policy making: Learning from the first 20 years of Scottish devolution', Scottish Government, [www.gov.scot/publications/crer-ant-racist-policy-making-scotland-review](http://www.gov.scot/publications/crer-ant-racist-policy-making-scotland-review)

<sup>61</sup> Allegretti, A. (2021) 'Equality watchdog raised concerns about UK race report, documents show', Guardian, 22 April, [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/22/equality-watchdog-raised-concerns-about-uk-race-report-documents-show](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/22/equality-watchdog-raised-concerns-about-uk-race-report-documents-show)

<sup>62</sup> Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, (undated) 'Ten things we need to say about racism', [www.crer.org.uk/ten-things-we-need-to-say-about-racism](http://www.crer.org.uk/ten-things-we-need-to-say-about-racism)

<sup>63</sup> For example, in 2021 a new plaque was created for the Henry Dundas statue in Edinburgh's St Andrew Square which spells out his instrumental role in delaying the abolition of the slave trade, resulting in 'more than half a million enslaved Africans crossing the Atlantic'. This triggered a backlash and a bid to have the new plaque taken down. See Turvill, D. (2022), 'Application to remove controversial slavery plaque on statue submitted', STV News, 28 September, <https://news.stv.tv/east-central/application-to-remove-controversial-dundas-statue-plaque-on-edinburgh-melville-monument-submitted>

<sup>64</sup> Messages 2, 5, 8, 12b.

<sup>65</sup> Message 12b, Wave 2, Scotland only.

Racism is different in Scotland and England. But Scottish or English or British 'exceptionalism' should offer no cover or excuse for inaction. The report authors look forward to discussing with Scottish colleagues some of specifics of the findings so that they can help to inform a specifically Scottish story about racism and a Scottish path to racial justice.

## Joining forces

Another intervention in the study that generated some mixed results was the message that tried to connect anti-racism with anti-poverty efforts and work against geographical exclusion.

The message was an effort to try to build solidarity and power by combining social justice causes. It was also an effort to disrupt 'divide and rule' discourses where, for example, the experiences of 'left-behind' communities and the 'white working class' are set up as if they inherently compete with the needs and claims of Black and Minority Ethnic populations. The message was a practical attempt to say that the choice is not between fighting racism and ending poverty. Instead, both must be prioritised, because that is the right thing to do and because the problems are interconnected.

The message to align these different interests was written and tested in Scotland and in England.

### **Race and poverty, England and Scotland<sup>66</sup>**

*We all deserve to be given a fair chance to succeed.*

*Yet this country's Black and Minority Ethnic communities are still affected by racism and racial inequality. These groups suffer poorer outcomes across education, employment, health and in the criminal justice system. For example, Black and Minority Ethnic people in Scotland are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than white people.*

*In order to achieve genuine racial equality we must work against institutional racism. We must work towards an inclusive Scotland in which we all feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities and share a common sense of belonging.*

The message centres the values of care and respect as things to which all people are entitled. The text emphasises that different, overlapping groups are subject to discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, location and financial means. Crucially, it makes the point about the need for people to come together to address these related problems and put in place what all people need to live well, regardless of background.

In England and in Scotland, this message ranked first in terms of the percentage of recipients who agreed with the message (43% and 46%, respectively). This could reflect an appetite to see connections between forms of social injustice and an interest in shared struggle. It could also simply be down to the broader population written into the message compared to ones focussed mainly on Black and Minority Ethnic people.

There are other positive impacts with the message. For example, in Scotland it appeared to lead to helpful results, including:

- more agreement that the UK government has responsibility to end racism<sup>67</sup>
- less agreement that efforts to give Muslim people equal opportunities have gone too far<sup>68</sup>

In England, the message seemed to drive productive thinking, including:

- more agreement that government policies should be changed when these harm or are unfair to BME populations<sup>69</sup>
- less agreement that worse outcomes for BME populations compared with white people are explained by defeatist attitudes of some BME people who think that they can't succeed because of discrimination.<sup>70</sup>

These results were positive, but it was notable that the message did not in any significant way boost key test measures, such as seeing racism as pressing, the importance of ensuring that racism is built into laws and how society at large works, or the need for major changes in institutions and organisations.

In fact, in England, the message even led to less agreement that policies and culture were the main cause of racism when it occurs within institutions and organisations.<sup>71</sup> Here, it seems that the focus on poverty and exclusion diluted thinking about 'race' and more systemic views of racism.

With these ambivalent impacts, this message should be deployed with care. It may need more explicit additional focus on racism, even if that could make it resonate less with white populations not directly experiencing racism.

## The sayable and unsayable

As laid out earlier, the Reframing Race approach to (re)framing is not simply (or mostly) about securing agreement today – particularly given that ideas on 'race' are often so contested. It is also about laying the groundwork to expand conversations, ideas and possibilities for tomorrow.

The best example from the test was the message that stated that true safety required thinking beyond policing.<sup>72</sup> It borrows from 'abolitionist'<sup>73</sup> ideas that advocate for the dismantling of systems of racialised state violence – such as policing and prisons – and, crucially, an end to the conditions in which such harmful systems come to be seen as 'solutions' to social problems.

This is an important and rather divisive line of argument. But it is also a vibrant, imaginative and important strand of thinking worth formally testing with the public.

<sup>67</sup> AB: 98% vs 95% control. Q10\_3 UK government: How much responsibility do the following have to end racism?

<sup>68</sup> AB: 9% vs 17% control. Q15\_3 We want to ask your personal opinion about some changes that have been happening in Britain over the years. Have attempts to give equal opportunities to each of the following groups gone too far, not far enough, or are about right?

<sup>69</sup> AB: 78% vs 69% control. Q11\_7 To what extent would you support or oppose the following proposals to address racism in society?

<sup>70</sup> AB: 51% vs 57% control. Q14\_4 Official data shows that in certain aspects of life some Black and minority ethnic populations do less well than white people. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following explanations of why these group differences appear?

<sup>71</sup> AB: 58% vs 64% control. Q5\_4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>72</sup> Message 13. This message was tested only in England in Wave 2. It was not tested in Scotland because how policing operates is less clearly racialised in Scotland than in England (though that is not to say that policing in Scotland is free from institutionalised racism).

<sup>73</sup> For example, see Olufemi, L. (2020) "'We can enact the future we want now': A black feminist history of abolition", Guardian, 3 August, [www.theguardian.com/books/2020/aug/03/we-can-enact-the-future-we-want-now-a-black-feminist-history-of-abolition?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/aug/03/we-can-enact-the-future-we-want-now-a-black-feminist-history-of-abolition?CMP=share_btn_link); Kemp, T. and Duff, K. (2020) 'Would "defund the police" work in the UK?' Novara Media, 13 June, <https://novaramedia.com/2020/06/13/would-defund-the-police-work-in-the-uk>



### **Beyond policing message v2, England only**<sup>74</sup>

*Most of us, whatever our ethnicity, believe that everyone should be treated with care and respect.*

*But, if you are Black, you are much more likely than a white person to be stopped and searched by the police, or to die in police custody. The way that we police our society punishes Black people simply because of the colour of their skin.*

*We need to move on from depending on the police to solve all the problems people face. We wouldn't call an ambulance to put out a fire, so why do we call the police when people are experiencing a mental health crisis?*

*Not only does policing discriminate: it also does nothing to address the root causes of why people hurt others or break the law. Instead of punishing people, we should address the root causes by investing in good and affordable housing, mental health services, youth provision and community centres. If we support people in times of trouble, we will make a real difference in truly keeping Black people – and all people – safe.*

The message ranked joint fourth (out of twelve) with Message 7, the birdcage metaphor, in terms of the percentage of message recipients who agree with it, with 30% expressing agreement (compared with an average of 29%). And it ranked first (with 15%, compared with an average of 11%) in terms of recipients saying that it caused them to think in new ways about the issues.<sup>75</sup>

The message did have some backfire effects. Notably, message recipients were less likely to agree and more likely to disagree (AB test) that policies and culture were the main cause of racism when it occurs inside institutions and organisations.<sup>76</sup> However, the message also seemed to drive more agreement that racism is much bigger than individuals, because it is built into laws and how society at large works (REG).<sup>77</sup> In part, this apparent contradiction is because AB tests and regression analysis operate differently.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, as shown in findings from earlier [qualitative](#) work for Reframing Race, public thinking and responsiveness on sensitive subjects such as 'race' can be inconsistent and contradictory. It therefore can be the case that messages move forward one piece of thinking while triggering backward steps in other beliefs.

Such contradictions might be overcome through rewording messages. However, this is also the kind of complexity and tension that campaigners on anti-racism simply have to accept and work with and through.

<sup>74</sup> Message 13, Wave 2

<sup>75</sup> Q2\_1 How much did the message you just read make you think in new ways about the issues, if at all?

<sup>76</sup> AB: 57% vs 64% control. Q5\_4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<sup>77</sup> Odd ratios 1.2. Q5a To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

<sup>78</sup> The AB test compares intervention in one group with non-intervention in a control group while the regression provides an 'odds ratio' that subjects will agree or disagree with a particular position.



More generally, the message, despite only moving a few measures of thinking and belief in a positive direction, offers some wider lessons for campaigners. Although the ideas outlined in the message are (relatively) new in the public domain and carry potentially radical implications, it resulted in some positive response and did not produce anything out of the ordinary in the way of negative pushback. For example, 'beyond policing' did not tend to generate the vitriol seen in some quarters towards 'defund the police', even though the two strategies are interconnected.

The relatively benign response to the 'beyond policing' message suggests that framing can help to reduce knee-jerk responses to, and increase substantive engagement with and understanding of, serious proposals for making society safer.

It should also be said that there are times when disruptive and edgy messaging and slogans are needed. 'Defund the police' came to prominence in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and in the context of highly militarised US police forces. The framing goals of 'defund the police' are different to those targeted in Reframing Race. They include giving voice to legitimate and searing anger and saying 'enough is enough'.

The more gentle language of 'beyond policing' or even the subsequent 'Breathe Act'<sup>79</sup> phrasing used in the US was not right immediately after George Floyd's murder. In a context of fast-moving events, a frame and a message need to meet the moment. There is time afterwards for reframing as part of the graft of building wider understanding and acceptance of policy and practical measures.

Finally, a note of caution. Despite some of the work being done by the 'beyond policing' message, it is important not to be naïve. The idea of going beyond policing may not 'bring the shutters down' with audiences in the same way as 'defund the police' can, and this may help the ideas to be better understood and heard. But despite this, these ideas, however they are expressed, are likely to meet resistance, and there are many steps between getting a hearing and moving towards even partially dismantling prevailing systems of punishment and replacing them with life-affirming ones.

## Conclusions

This final section contains some initial thoughts which may help race equity campaigners looking to build a critical mass of people to support their cause.

While these suggestions may be helpful, there are limits to what framing can do in the short run because of unhelpful underlying beliefs about ‘race’, such as the idea that ‘some races or ethnic groups are naturally harder working than others’.

There is still a role for reframing, in part because the majority of people don’t appear to be wedded to the type of ‘race’ thinking that produces ideas like the one above. In addition, reframed messages may be part of larger and slower narrative strategies aimed at shifting cultural models – those shared, enduring assumptions and patterns of underlying thinking – that act as a brake on meaningful change.

Reframing, and other interventions in the public conversation, matter because the narrative environment doesn’t just happen – it is constructed. And if it isn’t constructed by campaigners for change, those who favour the status quo, with all its attendant inequities, have a free run.

There will be further reflections on framing and these larger narrative strategies from Reframing Race in a follow-up report – due in the first half of 2023. That report will also provide more on the programme’s research process and more specific guidance on how campaigners and advocates can use the test message results in real-world situations.

For now, here are some reflections that may help campaigners to take insights from the message testing into their communications practice in the short term.

### For all campaigners

It is critical to be clear on framing goals and the purpose of communications interventions. Reframing Race has its framing goals, but others seeking to advance race equity might have different ones. But meaningful and ambitious goals are vital, because they help to ensure that campaigners don’t simply chase public support and agreement but are instead guided by purpose and what they want audiences to think, feel and believe.

### For the factually inclined

Some facts work. But the formulation of evidence matters.

In the test, the type of evidence that carries weight is robust, carefully explained, and produced and published by prestigious universities. The examples that work demonstrate negative outcomes for Black and Minority Ethnic people that can only be explained by differential and discriminatory treatment – in other words, by racism.

This evidence is extremely helpful for campaigners – but it does privilege academic knowledge over more situated lived experience. And while academic specialism has long been an important site for anti-racism, this raises questions about its relationship to knowledge and wisdom beyond the university.

<sup>80</sup> This guide from the United States is helpful in laying out how messaging can play a part in a wider narrative strategy aimed at shifting cultural models that organise how we think, feel and (re)organise the world: Chang, J., Sen, N., Treibitz, J., Abdullah, S. and Hammon, K. (2022) A Future For All of Us: A Report on Phase 1 of the Butterfly Lab for Immigrant Narrative Strategy + A Narrative Design Toolkit, New York: Race Forward, [www.raceforward.org/research/reports/future-all-us-report-phase-1-butterfly-lab-immigrant-narrative-strategy](http://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/future-all-us-report-phase-1-butterfly-lab-immigrant-narrative-strategy)

It is also important to acknowledge that the effects of racism often cannot be pinpointed as precisely and irrefutably as in the examples of CV discrimination and Black maternal deaths cited in this report. For example, differential outcomes for Black people on stop and search will be viewed by campaigners as driven by racism, However, this same data will be interpreted by some others as evidence not of institutionalised police racism but of ‘Black criminality’.

Therefore, unfortunately, facts do not speak for themselves.

## **For universities and funders of knowledge production**

University-generated evidence relies on a pipeline of programmed studies. But the flow of evidence is largely determined by academics and funding rather than the needs of campaigners and advocates.

To make the most of evidence, therefore, it would be beneficial for campaigners, funding bodies (such as the Economic and Social Research Council) and universities to convene to discuss types of data collected, when it is coming (a release calendar), and strategies to disseminate and use evidence powerfully in the outside world.

## **For those looking to dismantle and replace systems**

Evidence from the message testing confirms that there is relatively little grasp among the public of the systemic nature of racism. But the results also show – most directly – through the metaphor of the birdcage<sup>81</sup> but also through other messages that we can move the discussion of racism away from individual ‘bad apple’ perpetrators and on to a focus on systems and culture.

One caveat about this is that efforts to talk about systems through metaphors of design and computer programming did not cut through. Therefore, finding an alternative form of words that will resonate more effectively is particularly critical on this topic.

The possibilities of focusing on systems mean that campaigners can and should talk about systemic- and cultural-level problems. But this should be balanced with a focus on solutions – and efforts already underway – to avoid overwhelm and fatalism about the scope and scale of the work to be done.

## **For ‘mainstream’ justice-focused campaigners and organisations**

Since the murder of George Floyd, in particular, a number of ‘mainstream’ justice-focused organisations have sought to do and say more on ‘race’, racism and race equity.

Message testing data shows that a blended message, talking about tackling racism alongside the general problem of poverty, does well in terms of securing audience agreement on the need to come together to make progress. But the focus on poverty and exclusion seems to divert attention away from the problem of racism.

Therefore, mainstream organisations wanting to support efforts for racial justice could talk about the racialised nature of poverty, the climate crisis and other issues. Another way forward, when talking about racism and other struggles, is to bring the ‘race’ angle more to the fore than it was in the message used in the Reframing Race test.

## **For those with big, audacious ideas**

The test shows the need to talk about big ideas and bold solutions. The response to the ‘beyond policing’ message shows that while radical ideas might meet resistance, it is possible to normalise some of them and build a basis for understanding.

This might not secure all of the transformation that campaigners desire in the short term, but it may progress the agenda. For example, one element of the ‘beyond policing’ message tested in England<sup>82</sup> was on the inappropriateness of sending police to intercept people in mental health crisis. Campaigners could credibly, and with some public support, campaign that instead of the Home Office plan to hire 10,000 more police officers<sup>83</sup> there should be a recruitment drive for the same number of mental health first-aid responders.

## **For a future with better solutions**

Many of the messages that influenced thinking productively in the testing are centred around problems. That may be because both campaigners and the public find it easier to talk in terms of deficits. But in order to step decisively into an anti-racist future, we also need campaigners to foreground solutions.

This is a critical but underdeveloped area of endeavour. It is vital to avoid fatalism and the idea that what we have is all that we can have. But in the research process ahead of message development, it was clear that there were insufficient existing campaigning materials on solutions or articulations of what change looks like.

This is an area for further investment for campaigners, as well as funders that support racial justice. Doing so will help people to imagine and normalise what is required to achieve racial equity and bring to life the idea of solving racism. Indeed, by citing more existing efforts and initiatives, it is possible to make the case that change is here already and more is to come.

<sup>82</sup> Message 13, Beyond Policing V2 Wave 2.

<sup>83</sup> Home Office (2021) ‘Government nearly half-way to recruiting 20,000 more officers’, 28 July, [www.gov.uk/government/news/government-nearly-half-way-to-recruiting-20000-more-officers](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-nearly-half-way-to-recruiting-20000-more-officers)

The aim of Reframing Race is not to tell campaigners, researchers, writers and others what to say or to think. This is an invitation, not an edict. Progress does not require that all campaigners say the same things. But there is benefit for those engaged in the work of saying that racism is real, systemic and solvable in framing their ideas in informed and intentional ways.

Deep-seated racist ideology cannot be reasoned with or simply bypassed by reframing. However, campaigners can do much more to clarify and convey big ideas for racial justice and equity and build their power to bring about change.

In doing so, it is possible to transform the conversation on 'race', racism and racial justice and move beyond debating whether racism is real and significant, on to what we can do to ensure race equity so that all of us can live well.