

The Right Choice?

Exploring the Political Shift Among British Hindus

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Published February 2025

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About the Report

This report synthesises existing literature and 1-2-1 interviews with 5 Hindus in London to hypothesise about the key drivers of British Hindus' voting intentions and political preferences. In particular, the report looks at the growing move amongst British Hindus towards voting for the Conservative Party and holding increasingly anti-immigration views.

Although only 5 Hindus from London are interviewed, which limits the ability of the qualitative event to be generalised to the broader Hindu population, the sample encompasses a diverse range of political perspectives. Among the participants are Labour and Conservative voters, as well as one former Conservative supporter who shifted allegiance to the Green Party in the most recent election. This ideological variation strengthens the analysis by capturing a spectrum of political attitudes within the community.

Executive Summary

Key Hypothesis: British Hindus are being *pulled* towards voting Conservative and *pushed* away from voting Labour.

This report examines the evolving political and electoral attitudes of British Hindus in the UK. Drawing on both existing data and original interview findings, I argue that British Hindus growing political allegiance to the right is made up of two main intertwined factors: a pull towards the Conservatives based on British Hindus' right-wing economic views, facilitated by the group's greater levels of integration, and a push away from the Labour Party, brought on by perceptions amongst British Hindus that Labour panders to British Muslim voters.

Lastly, I demonstrate how both these economic factors that pull and social factors that push merge to inform British Hindus' views on policy issues, through the example of one of the most topical political issues: immigration. 41% of the general public cite immigration as one of the top issues facing the country.¹ British Indians consider immigration a key political issue, with 21% ranking it among the top three factors influencing their vote in the 2024 General Election.² This stands in sharp contrast to other ethnic groups, only 12% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Britons and 14% of Black Britons in the same poll prioritised immigration as a top political issue.³ The particular salience of immigration amongst the general population and British Hindus makes it an important example to consider, especially considering the little existing analysis on ethnic minorities' political shift towards a more anti-immigration stance.

Key takeaways

¹ YouGov, To what extent is immigration a top issue for Britons?, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/48056-to-what-extent-is-immigration-a-top-issue-for-britons> accessed 04 Feb 2025

² YouGov/Sky News Survey Results, https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/SkyNews_EthnicMinorityVI_Issues_240620.pdf accessed 04 Feb 2025

³ YouGov/Sky News Survey Results, https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/SkyNews_EthnicMinorityVI_Issues_240620.pdf accessed 04 Feb 2025

1. Ethnic minorities do not vote in a single block, or prioritise the same issues. There are differences and discrepancies between ethnic minorities.
2. Ethnic minorities have their own views and perceptions of other minorities in the UK and of white British people.
3. Some data focuses on British Indians as a wider group, whilst others disaggregate between British Hindus and British Sikhs. This causes complexities with the data. The British Indian category is primarily made up of British Hindus and British Sikhs, who have different political preferences.
4. Economic concerns and personal finances are the most salient issue for British Hindus, and they are increasingly voting for the Conservatives on this basis.
 - a. Considering this shift is fairly new, I argue that it has been facilitated by British Hindus' perceptions of greater levels of integration in British society.
 - b. This is further supported by interview evidence that suggests some older British Hindus refuse to vote Conservative based on memories of racism.
5. There is a growing unwillingness to vote Labour because British Hindus perceive the party as pandering to British Muslim voters.
6. Some preliminary data shows that whilst British Hindus are increasingly in support of stronger immigration controls, they are not persuaded by far-right narratives on immigration, despite attempts from Farage to be inclusive of what he calls "settled ethnic minorities."⁴
7. How integrated into British society Hindus feel is an integral component of understanding their political preferences and vote choice.

⁴ UKPOL, Nigel Farage - 2013 Speech to UKIP Conference, <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/nigel-farage-2013-speech-to-ukip-conference/>, accessed 04 Feb 2025

Introduction

When Priti Patel was appointed Home Secretary in 2019, I felt inspired that a brown woman, who looked like me, would take office. However, as she settled into her role, I was disappointed and surprised by her anti-immigration views and the policies she pursued - policies that raise difficult questions about whether her own family would have been welcomed under the system she championed.⁵

What struck me even more was witnessing a growing number of people in my local area of Harrow—many of whom were immigrants or the children of immigrants, including close family members—expressing similar views on immigration and showing increasing support for the Conservative Party. This shift became undeniably clear during the 2024 General Election, when my neighbouring constituency of Harrow East, home to one of the largest Hindu populations in the country, became the safest Conservative seat in percentage terms in the country.⁶

Recent polls demonstrate this political shift

Too often, analysis suggests that there is a monolithic BAME voting block. Polling data clearly indicates the opposite:

- According to the British Election Survey, British Indians were the only BAME Group that showed increased support for the Conservatives in 2015 and 2017.⁷

⁵ Woodcock, A, Home Secretary Priti Patel admits own parents might not have been allowed into UK under her new immigration laws, The Independent, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/priti-patel-immigration-laws-parents-home-office-brex-it-a9343571.html>, accessed 04 Feb 2025

⁶ Harrow Conservatives, Conservatives buck the trend across Harrow, <https://www.harrowconservatives.com/news/conservatives-buck-trend-across-harrow>, accessed 04 Feb 2025

⁷ Leidig, E, UK in a Changing Europe, Why are British Indians more likely than other ethnic minority group to support Brexit?, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-are-british-indians-more-likely-than-any-other-ethnic-minority-group-to-support-brex-it/>, 28 June 2019

- In 2019, British Indian respondents were the ethnic minority group most likely to have voted Conservative in 2019. Voting preferences of Bangladeshi and Pakistani-origin residents showed no sign of Labour having diminishing appeal amongst these groups.⁸
- 61% of British Indians believe immigration levels are too high, according to a June 2024 YouGov survey – with 25% saying that immigration levels are just about right and 4% saying that it is too low. In comparison, 31% of black Britons and 36% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi Britons believed that immigration was too high. 46% of Black Britons and 37% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi believe that immigration levels are about right.⁹
- 41% of British Indians supported the controversial Rwanda Bill, according to the same poll – with 37% saying they disagreed with the legislation.¹⁰
- The Minorities Report demonstrates that Indians – along with Caribbeans – are the ethnic group most likely to say that immigration has undermined British culture and society.¹¹
- Immigration is a more salient issue for British Indians than other minorities. Whilst 21% of British Indians say that immigration was amongst the top 3 most important issues for them in the 2024 election, this statistic is markedly lower amongst other minorities (15% mixed ethnicity respondents, 12% Pakistani/Bangladeshi respondents, 14% Black respondents).¹²
- During the Brexit referendum, British Indians were 'between 1.6 and 2 times more likely to support Leave compared to other minority groups.' Notably, some of these Leave voters expressed the desire not to be taken "for granted", especially on issues such as immigration.¹³

⁸ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain's New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 17

⁹ Abraham, T and Smith, M, YouGov, Ethnic minority Britons at the 2024 general election, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49877-ethnic-minority-britons-at-the-2024-general-election>, 28 June 2024

¹⁰ Abraham, T and Smith, M, YouGov, Ethnic minority Britons at the 2024 general election, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49877-ethnic-minority-britons-at-the-2024-general-election>, 28 June 2024

¹¹ Data from Sophie Stowers at UK in a Changing Europe, features in the Appendix

¹² YouGov/Sky News Survey Results, https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/SkyNews_EthnicMinorityVI_Issues_240620.pdf accessed 04 Feb 2025

¹³ Leidig, E, UK in a Changing Europe, Why are British Indians more likely than other ethnic minority group to support Brexit?, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-are-british-indians-more-likely-than-any-other-ethnic-minority-group-to-support-brexite/>, 28 June 2019

Labour have also begun to take note of this shift, with one party official suggesting that the party had “taken Indian voters for granted for years, but it’s becoming increasingly obvious they are going elsewhere and we need to do something about that.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Stacey, K, Labour trying to reconnect with British Indians amid fears support has slumped, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/01/labour-trying-reconnect-british-indians-fears-support-slumped>, 01 Feb 2024

Chapter 1: British Hindus vs British Indians?

Studies are inconsistent when measuring the political preferences of British Hindus. Some focus specifically on British Hindus, while others group them under the broader category of British Indians. This discrepancy creates difficulties around analysis, as the two groups are not identical. While all British Hindus are also likely to be British Indians, the broader British Indian category typically includes British Hindus, British Indian Muslims and British Sikhs.

It is critical to focus on British Hindus, rather than the wider category of British Indians as evidence suggests that the shift of British Indians toward the right is largely driven by the Hindus. Meanwhile, British Sikhs continue to overwhelmingly support Labour, demonstrating 'one of the strongest levels of support for Labour of any religious group' in 2019.¹⁵

There could be three potential hypotheses as to why British Hindus and British Sikhs are diverging so significantly in their voting preferences: economic class, representation or religious factors.

Economic class

Analysis of the 2021 Census Data finds that British Hindus are generally more affluent than British Sikhs.

When the 8 Socioeconomic Analytic Classes (or groups of occupations) are categorised into 4 different classes, based on NS-SEC's own categories of the three forms of employment regulation, British Hindus' largest occupational class is the service class (for example, director of major organisations, doctors or journalists). The proportion of British Hindus working in the service class (31.95%) is larger than both the Sikh population (22.77%) and the general population (26.89%).¹⁶ These jobs are typically better paid, supported by the

¹⁵ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 18

¹⁶ Data taken from Census 2021 and separated into 4 main classes - explained in the Appendix

evidence that British Hindus have the second highest median gross hourly pay of any other ethnic group.¹⁷

It follows then that the proportion of British Hindus in the intermediate class (13.67%) is lower than the proportion of British Sikhs (16.86%) and the proportion of the general population (17.92%) in the same class. Similarly, this is the case for British Hindus in the labour contract class (17.27%), in comparison to the percentage of British Sikhs in the labour contract class (22.47%) and the general population (23.49%).

Occupational Class	% Hindu	% Sikh	% General Population
Service Class	31.95%	22.77%	26.89%
Intermediate Class	13.67%	16.86%	17.92%
Labour Contract	17.27%	22.47%	23.49%
Not part in the labour force (full-time students and long term unemployed)	16.81%	17.42%	13.19%
Total	79.70%	79.53%	81.49%

Table 1: Proportion of British Hindus, British Sikhs and the general population in each occupational class

The difference in economic classes could impact the way in which these communities vote. Hindus being more affluent may therefore vote for the Conservatives in a higher proportion than Sikhs who are comparatively less affluent.

However, looking at British voters overall in the 2024 General Election, Labour did slightly better with ABCD1 voters (36%) than with C2DE voters (33%).¹⁸ This was similar to the Conservatives, who also only did marginally better with ABCD1 voters (25%) than they did with C2DE voters (23%).¹⁹ This perhaps limits the validity of this hypothesis.

¹⁷ Evans, T, and Welsby, M, Religion, education and work in England and Wales: February 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioneducationandworkinenglandandwales/february2020>, Feb 2020

¹⁸ McDonnell, A, YouGov, How Britain voted in the 2024 general election, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49978-how-britain-voted-in-the-2024-general-election>, 08 July 2024

¹⁹ Donnell, A, YouGov, How Britain voted in the 2024 general election, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49978-how-britain-voted-in-the-2024-general-election>, 08 July 2024

Representation

Another theory could be rooted in representation.

The Conservatives have more parliamentary representation of Hindus and Labour have greater representation of Sikhs in Parliament. Indeed, Labour was the party of the first Sikh MP, and the Conservatives were the party of the first Hindu MP. The Conservatives also had the first ethnic minority and first British Hindu Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak.

However, there is limited evidence for this hypothesis. When British Hindus were asked how important it is to have a British Indian MP representing their constituency in Parliament, a majority (54%) responded that it is not important.²⁰

Religion

Sikhs in the UK may have a stronger affinity for the Labour Party due to Labour's commitment to addressing injustices affecting the Sikh community. For instance, in 2022, Keir Starmer wrote a letter to Sikh organisations reaffirming the party's pledge to initiate a judge-led inquiry into the British Government's involvement in 1984 Operation Blue Star.²¹ This commitment resonated deeply with many Sikhs, who believe that the truth behind the 1984 attack on The Golden Temple has yet to be fully uncovered and that the Conservative government tried to cover this up.

Additionally, many Sikhs have been vocal critics of the Indian government's actions, particularly regarding human rights violations. One notable example is the arbitrary detention of Jagtar Singh Johal, a British Sikh activist, by Indian authorities. The perceived inaction of the Conservative government on this issue has fueled frustration within the community, further distancing them from the Tories.²²

²⁰ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain's New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 28

²¹ Singh, H, Religion Media Centre, General Election 2024: the Sikh vote, <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/general-election-2024-the-sikh-vote/> 11 June 2024

²² Singh, J, Baaz, UK Sikhs go to the polls with tough decisions to make, <https://www.baaznews.org/p/uk-elections-sikhs>, 03 July 2024

Furthermore, the Conservative Party's perceived alignment with the BJP-led Indian government could also contribute to the maintaining alliance between the Sikh community and the Labour Party. Reports of BJP-affiliated groups campaigning for Conservative candidates,²³ along with inflammatory remarks by Tory MP Bob Blackman—who labelled Sikh protestors as "terrorists"—have reinforced concerns that the Conservatives are sympathetic to nationalist Indian narratives that many Sikhs oppose.²⁴

As a result, Labour's stance—whether through its commitment to investigating the 1984 events or its relatively neutral approach to Indian government affairs—aligns more closely with Sikh political priorities. These factors could help understand the diverging political preferences between Hindus and Sikhs in the UK.

This analysis is inevitably constrained by a lack of specific data. Considering the divergence in political preferences within the British Indian category, there is a need for more granular data – separating this group into its two primary contingents: British Hindus and British Sikhs.

²³ Barrow, A, *Beyond India: Sangh International and Vernacular Hindutva Politics in the UK*, 2022, pg 4

²⁴ Canton, N, *Times of India*, Tory MP Bob Blackman....brands protestors as 'Khalistani terrorists', <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/tory-mp-bob-blackman-raises-emergency-in-uk-house/articleshow/117533681.cms>, 25 Jan 2025

Chapter 2: British Hindus are being pulled towards the Conservatives because it aligns with their values

British Hindus have long placed cultural and political importance on the economy and entrepreneurship. However, whereas these values did not previously translate into Conservative support, their growing sense of integration into British society has reshaped their voting behaviour. No longer voting primarily to protect their group interests or security, many now feel free to align their political choices with their economic and cultural values. Since the group see Conservatives as the party of business, economic growth and entrepreneurship, they increasingly view voting Conservative. Their sense of belonging within British society has, in effect, facilitated a shift from identity-based voting to preference-driven decision-making.

In comparison to other groups, personal finances and economics are central to British Hindus' political preferences, and are central to how this group conceptualises their politics and their identity. Notwithstanding data issues, studies repeatedly find the economy consistently ranks as British Indians' top political issue, superseding other issues that we might assume are incredibly important to British Indian voters such as UK-India relations.²⁵

²⁵ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain's New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 17

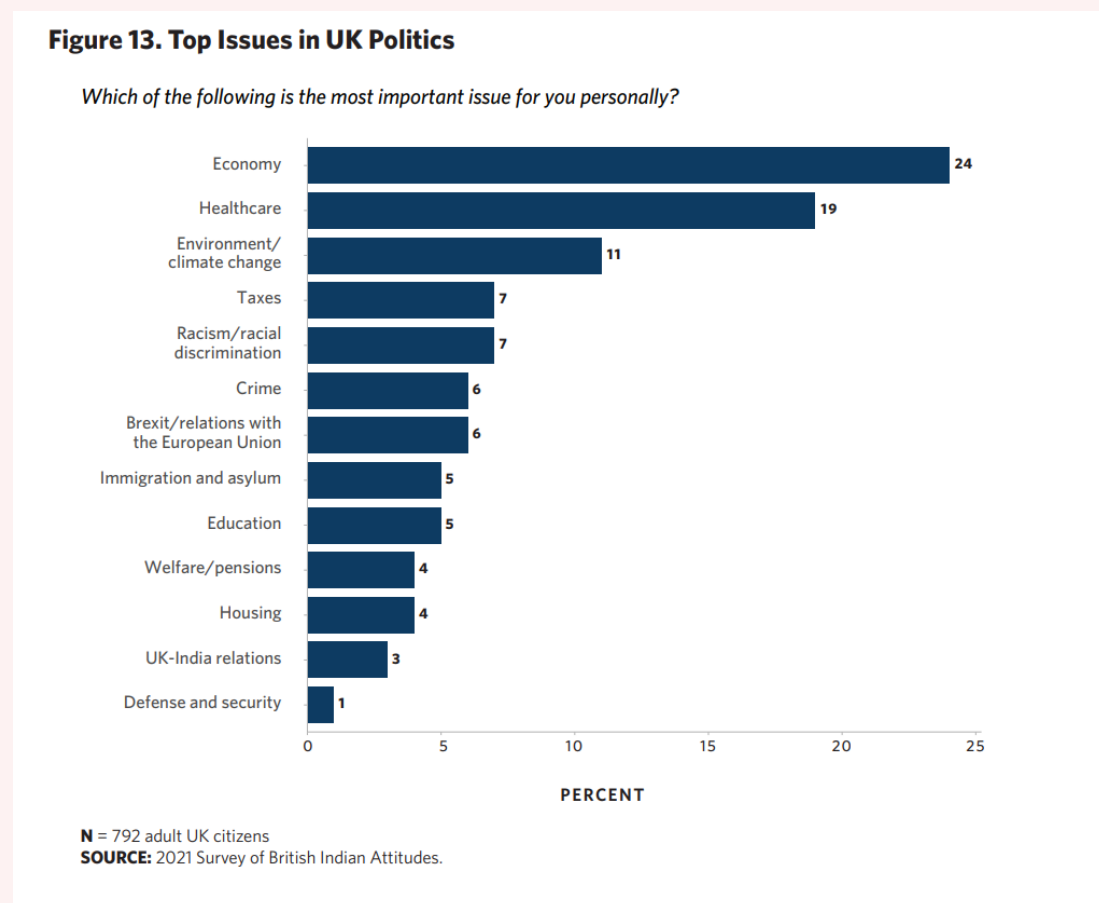


Figure 1: Top Political Issues for British Hindus²⁶

British Hindus' preoccupation with economics shapes how they conceptualise their identity. Unlike other ethnic groups, British Indians place the most importance on working and paying taxes as central to British identity.²⁷

²⁶ Graph taken from: Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain's New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 17

²⁷ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 41

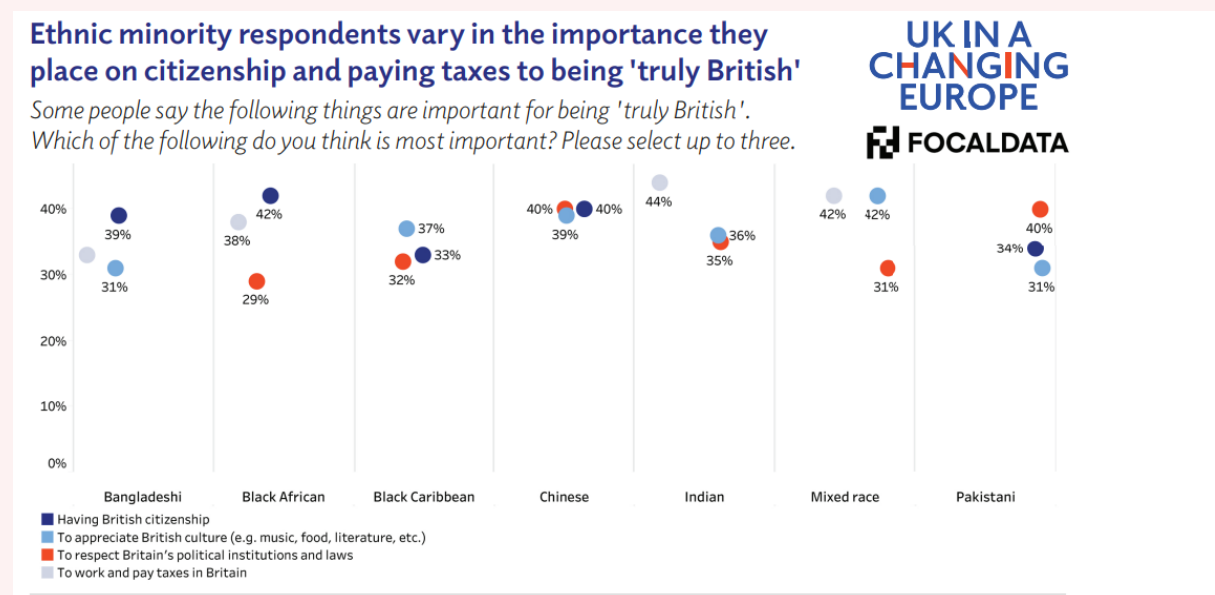


Figure 2: Ethnic minority respondents on the values they place on being 'truly British'²⁸

Alongside British Chinese voters, British Indian voters hold quite right-wing economic views in comparison to other ethnic minorities.²⁹ The Minorities Report argues that these views seemed to have influenced the vote choice of these groups in 2019.³⁰ Furthermore, analysis by Leidig identifies expanding opportunities for local business as promised by Priti Patel, as one of the four key drivers for British Hindus voting to leave the EU.³¹

Compared to other ethnic minorities, British Indian respondents are highly likely to agree that the government should not redistribute income – with 47% supporting this statement.³² They are the second most likely group to support this idea, after British Chinese respondents.

British Indians are also more likely to believe that a person's position in society is mostly the result of individual effort – with 62% supporting that argument,

²⁸ Taken from: Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 41

²⁹ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 5

³⁰ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 9

³¹ Leidig, E, UK in a Changing Europe, Why are British Indians more likely than other ethnic minority group to support Brexit?, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-are-british-indians-more-likely-than-any-other-ethnic-minority-group-to-support-brexit/>, 28 June 2019

³² Data from Sophie Stowers at UK in a Changing Europe, features in the appendix

compared to 53% of Bangladeshis or 53% of Caribbeans.³³ And British Hindus were ‘strongly in favour of growing the size of the UK’s economy over sharing out wealth more equally in comparison to those British Indians who identify as Sikhs or not religious.’³⁴

Interviews with British Hindu voters provide additional evidence for the centrality of economics to their political preferences. One respondent spoke about their perception of the Conservative Party as pro-business, adding “[business] this is what entirely drives my thoughts”. Even if economics is not cited as a defining political issue, one respondent did mention that having lived in the UK for 52 years, he has chosen “call Britain home” because the UK has given him and his family “entrepreneurship”. They suggested “If you are willing to work hard in the UK ... you can do well” – demonstrating the importance of economics and finances to these Hindu voters.

My interviews also indicate that British Hindus’ preoccupation with business and economics is largely cultural. One interviewee discussed his belief as a Hindu of “getting your head down and working hard to be successful”. Another respondent cited a cultural “aversion to taking benefits” in his Hindu community, paired with a “lust for doing economically better” and argued that many British Hindus around him “frown upon welfare spending”.

Economics preferences influence their growing support for the Conservatives, but this shift is facilitated by perceptions about integration

British Hindus’ right-wing economic views influence their vote choices. The Minorities Report found that for British Indians, ‘the most common barrier to voting Labour concerns the party’s competence, in particular its management of the economy’.³⁵ A poll before the 2024 General Election also showed that 33% of

³³Data from Sophie Stowers at UK in a Changing Europe, features in the appendix

³⁴ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 65

³⁵ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 20

British Indians trusted the Conservatives the most to make decisions on the economy, in comparison to only 28% of British Indians trusting Labour.³⁶

My analysis above may foster a more pessimistic outlook on regaining some of these lost voters. After all, in comparison to a more business-oriented, capitalist mindset, Labour may always appear somewhat too redistributive and ‘socialist’ due to its more equality-oriented measures, as can be seen in response data below. In comparison, perhaps ‘British Hindus find more resonance with the Conservative Party’s emphasis on individual responsibility, [and] entrepreneurship’³⁷.

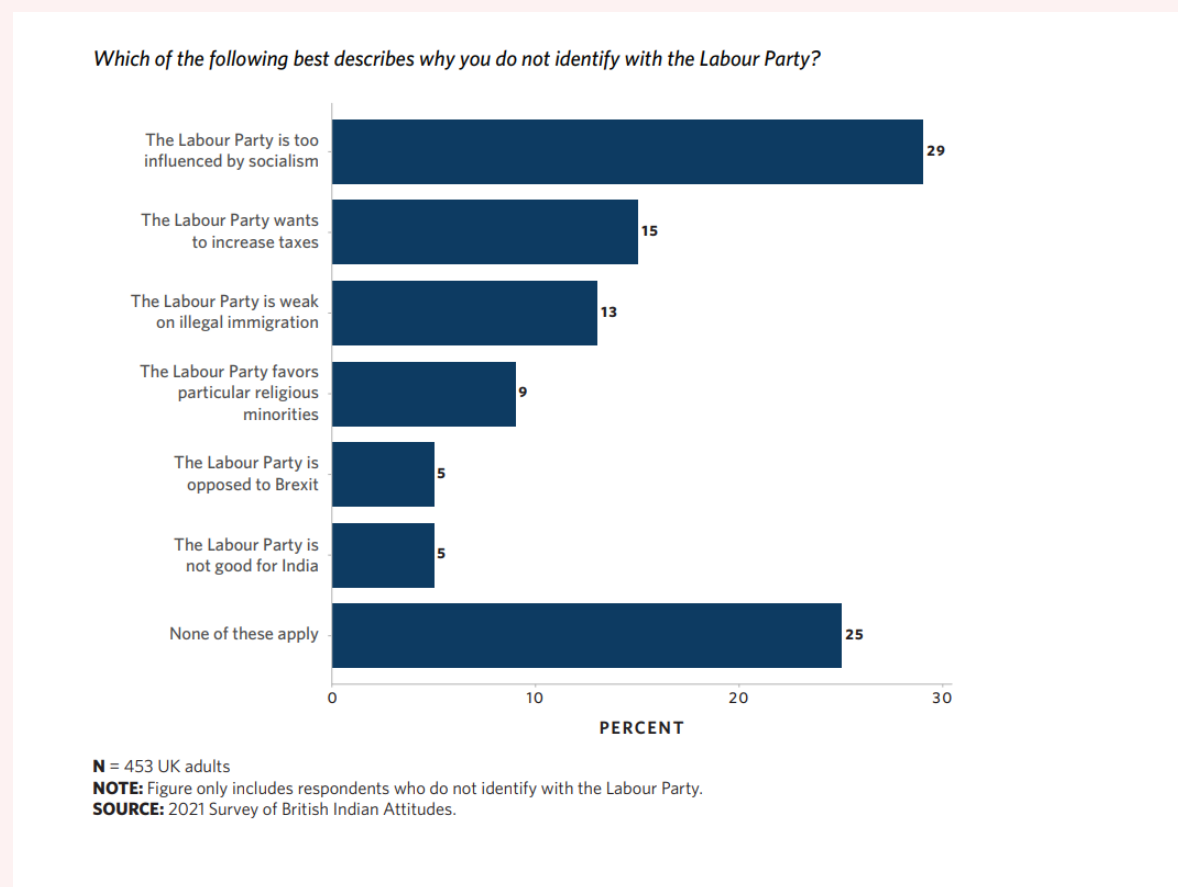


Figure 3: Reasons British Hindus do not Identify with the Labour Party³⁸

³⁶ YouGov/Sky News Survey Results, https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/SkyNews_EthnicMinorityVI_Issues_240620.pdf accessed 04 Feb 2025

³⁷ <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/general-election-2024-the-hindu-vo>

³⁸ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain’s New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 21

Although the evidence above could suggest that these voters are now completely lost to the Conservatives, because the Party aligns with their economic views and values of personal responsibilities, the picture is more complicated than this.

This shift to the Conservatives is recent, and it has been facilitated by perceptions of greater levels of integration into British society.

Bergh and Bjorklund's 2011 study on group voting found that immigrant voters tended to engage more in ethnic voting (voting for candidates of the same ethnicity as themselves) and consequently vote for left-wing parties more, in comparison to natives, who were motivated more by ideology of parties and candidates.³⁹ Based on this logic, it can be inferred that perhaps as immigrant groups *feel* more integrated, they might be more willing to vote for ideological reasons, rather than group voting. As British Hindus have felt more integrated, they have aligned their vote choice with right-wing economic views.

British Hindus view themselves as very well integrated into British society. Alongside the British Chinese community, 'they are the least likely to see themselves as part of an ethnic group'.⁴⁰ There is also prevalent media evidence for this, including a Times of India article, titled 'British Hindus are 'smart, rich and very well behaved' suggesting that they have been a productive addition to British society, and an 'immigration success story'.⁴¹ The pinnacle of this success resulted in the first Prime Minister of colour - a British Hindu - as the accompanying photo to the article. Barrow also argues that Hindu groups such as the Sangh Parivar UK have also 'consolidated British Hindus as socio-economically successful and politically unthreatening' and as something of a model minority.⁴²

My interviewees had very similar perceptions of British Hindu integration, with all agreeing that British Hindus have integrated very well. All interviewees

³⁹ Bergh, J, Bjorkluns, T, The Revival of Group Voting: Explaining the Voting Preferences of Immigrants in Norway, 2010

⁴⁰ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 32

⁴¹ Britain's Hindus are 'smart, rich and very well behaved': Report, Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/britains-hindus-are-smart-rich-and-very-well-behaved-report/articleshow/95208741.cms>, 31 Oct 2022

⁴² Barrow, A, Beyond India: Sangh International and Vernacular Hindutva Politics in the UK, 2022, pg 34

agreed that this group had integrated better than other immigrant groups. In fact, one interviewee cited “positive discrimination” towards Hindus.

Further, it seems that British Hindus care less about having a British Indian MP representing their constituency in Parliament ⁴³ - proving that British Hindus are engaging with group voting less and less, which could explain their shifting voting preferences.

British Hindus' economic preferences appear to be largely cultural, and the reason that the Conservative messaging has recently started to appeal to this group is because of how British Hindus' economic preferences have interacted with their feelings of integration.

A growing generational divide

This hypothesis is further supported by a growing generational divide amongst British Hindu voters, whereby some British Hindus who emigrated in the 1970s and 1980s are less inclined to vote Conservative due to memories of racism.

One interviewee aged 52 told me about how she thought that amongst most British Hindus her age, “a significant majority now lean Conservative”, whereas “those above the age of 75 are very Labour leaning because they faced the wrath of the skinheads” and other forms of racism. This suggests that Labour’s history as a party that championed anti-racism and passed the Race Relations Act continues to influence vote choice.

This testimony is corroborated by the table below where amongst the 18-29 group, Labour can boast a 33 percentage point lead. However this narrows: amongst the 50+ demographic, Labour only holds a pitiful 2 percentage point advantage⁴⁴. This would suggest exactly what my interviewees mentioned about the older generation becoming increasingly Conservative. However, there is also evidence that amongst those British Indians who arrived in the UK before 2000, Labour holds a much larger lead: 11 percentage point lead in comparison to a 1

⁴³ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain’s New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 29

⁴⁴ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain’s New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 18

percentage point lead amongst those who arrived in 2000 and after. This may point to the historic tie some voters feel to the Labour Party who are traumatised by memories of racism.

This suggests that the Conservatives could gain popularity in the future and potentially overtake Labour as memories of pre-2000s racism fade. However, Labour currently holds a 33-point lead among 18-29-year-old British Indians, closely mirroring its lead in the general population—35 points among 18-24-year-olds and 31 points among 25-29-year-olds in the 2019 election.⁴⁵ Given the strong preference for Labour among young Hindu voters, this trend could counterbalance any broader shift of the demographic away from the party.

Regardless, the emerging evidence suggests a growing general divide in British Hindus' political and voting preferences, that should be explored further.

Voters do not decide their political preferences on a single issue. Whilst the British Hindu preoccupation with personal finances has influenced their vote choice towards the Conservative Party, as I will describe in the next section, there are also social factors that have deterred British Hindus away from the Labour Party. Understanding this pull towards the Conservatives and the push away from Labour will give us a fuller picture that explains the rightward shift of British Hindus political preferences, and perhaps an opportunity to recuperate some of these voters.

⁴⁵ McDonnell, A, YouGov, How Britain voted in the 2019 general election, <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/26925-how-britain-voted-2019-general-election>, 17th December 2019

Table 2. Demographics and Parliamentary Vote Choice*If there were a general election held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?*

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

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

SOURCE: 2021 Survey of British Indian Attitudes.

Table 2: Survey of British Indian Attitudes⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain's New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 18

Chapter 3: Hindus are being pushed away from Labour for social reasons

One of the biggest factors pushing British Hindus away from the Labour Party is a **perception** amongst the group that they are being taken for granted by Labour in favour of British Muslim voters. When asked if they thought that the Labour Party pandered to a specific group or ethnicity, many of my interviewees responded that Labour, as one interviewee put it “historically and now panders to the Muslim community.” This took the form of perceived bias on the handling of the issue of grooming gangs and geopolitical events such as Labour’s stance on Jammu and Kashmir.

These findings confirm Duckworth, Kapur, Vaishnav’s hypothesis that ‘British Indians - irrespective of religious affiliation - agree that Labour holds a clear advantage with British voters of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin’.⁴⁷

As one of my interviewees, who had been a Labour voter all his life said, “Labour’s handling of Kashmir really alienated many Hindus.” He was referring to the 2019 Labour Party Conference when the party passed an emergency motion on Kashmir, which supported “self-determination” in the region.⁴⁸ This motion caused backlash at the time, with ‘more than 100 Indian groups’ writing to Corbyn in protest,⁴⁹ and the ‘WhatsApp messages sent to Hindus across the country urging them to vote Conservatives’.⁵⁰

The reason why the 2019 emergency motion on Jammu and Kashmir particularly disappointed the British Hindu community is not only due to the cultural sensitivities between the two communities but also because it exacerbates a perception amongst British Hindus that their Muslim counterparts have been prioritised over their group and that the British Hindu vote bank has been taken for granted by Labour.

⁴⁷ Duckworth, C and Kapur, D, and Vaishnav, M, Britain’s New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes, 2021, pg 30

⁴⁸ Kaur, K, The Labour Party’s Kashmir Motion divides South Asians in the UK ahead of elections, The Caravan, <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/uk-elections-diaspora-vote-kashmir-labour-party>, 18 November 2019

⁴⁹ Wintour, P, Kashmir: Labour shifts policy after backlash by Indian-heritage voters, The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/12/kashmir-labour-shifts-policy-after-backlash-by-indian-heritage-voters>, 12 Nov 2019

⁵⁰ Kotecha, S, General election 2019: Labour seeks to calm Hindu voters’ anger, The BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50382791>, 12 Nov 2019

Leidig's article highlights a very similar sentiment; she quotes British Indians who voiced a desire not to be taken 'for granted'.⁵¹ This feeling has also been responded to by Labour politicians, such as MP Anneliese Dodds at a 'Political Hustings' event organised by City Sikhs and City Hindus Network, where she said "We would certainly never take any group of voters, wherever they're from, for granted; we're working hard for everyone's votes", in response to a question posed on winning back Indian diaspora voters'.⁵²

There is some evidence to show that the Labour Party has closer ties with British Muslims, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis; after all, they were among the most likely to say they voted Labour in 2019.⁵³ In addition, the Labour Party was also the party of the Commons' first Black, Muslim, Sikh, Arab, Bangladeshi and Pakistani MPs, whilst the Conservative Party produced the first British Hindu MP. This evidence however does not implicate that the Labour Party *pander* to the British Muslim community, simply that the Muslim community seems to have more political alignment to Labour.

Labour are not completely to blame for this perception

However, this hostility between the two communities is not a problem created by the Labour Party, rather this hostility primarily represents an off-shoot of a more deeply rooted cultural hostility amongst these groups, likely stemming from the experience of these groups in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh - for example the Partition, where these countries were divided on religious lines. These tensions in the UK have only been exacerbated by a variety of issues, such as media narratives, Labour policy (eg Kashmir) and Conservative alignment to the BJP and Hindu nationalist narratives.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Leidig, E, UK in a Changing Europe, Why are British Indians more likely than other ethnic minority group to support Brexit?, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-are-british-indians-more-likely-than-any-other-ethnic-minority-group-to-support-brexit/>, 28 June 2019

⁵² UK's Labour Party commits to stamping out anti-India sentiments, The Economic Times, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/uks-labour-party-commits-to-stamping-out-anti-india-sentiments/articleshow/111367246.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst, 29 Jun 2024

⁵³ Mohyuddin, Z, and Kanagasooriam, J, and Stowers, S, Minorities Report, October 2024, pg 35

⁵⁴ For more on Conservatives alignment to Hindu nationalist narratives, see Barrow, A, Beyond India: Sangh International and Vernacular Hindutva Politics in the UK, 2022,

Many academics have proved that there are wider cultural hostilities amongst South Asian communities between Hindus/Sikhs and Muslims, whereby British Hindus/Sikhs have the perception that they are prioritised less by the government and organisations. Weller argues that 'such tensions may partly be attributed to competition for resources and a perception among some Hindu and Sikh communities...that Muslims have more access to funds and resources as compared with other groups'.⁵⁵ In his fieldwork he found examples of this, such as a Hindu woman questioning why there were so many mosques in her area, whilst planning permission for a Hindu temple had been turned down multiple times.⁵⁶ One of my interviewees said similar, when they mentioned that halal dietary requirements were catered for, but jhakta food [nonhalal meat] was not.

It, therefore, follows that this belief has seeped into perceptions about Labour, not helped by right-wing media articles with titles such as, 'Labour bares its appeaser's teeth to unbending Muslims' (The Times) and 'Fanatics on the rise and Labour let it happen' (The Sun).⁵⁷

What could therefore be seen as a single policy issue, based on a motion calling for an autonomous Kashmir cuts a lot deeper due to the hostile relationship between these communities. Starmer changing Labour policy on Kashmir and 'clarifying that it would not take sides in the dispute'⁵⁸ is a step towards re-engaging with these voters, but it will not be enough to fully reconnect with these voters. Labour are not fully to blame for the perception that the party panders to British Muslims, but will need to work hard if it seeks to change this perception, without inadvertently alienating the Muslim community.

⁵⁵ Weller, P, et al. Religion or Belief, Discrimination and Equality: Britain in Global Contexts, 2015, pg 178

⁵⁶ Weller, P, et al. Religion or Belief, Discrimination and Equality: Britain in Global Contexts, 2015, pg 178

⁵⁷ Poole, E, The Case of Geert Wilders: Multiculturalism, Islam, and Identity in the UK, pg 13

⁵⁸ Stacey, K, Keir Starmer promises to ease tensions between Labour and India, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/26/keir-starmer-india-this-and-that-murder-a-cup-of-tea>, 26 June 2023

Chapter 4: British Hindus' views on immigration

The economic and social aspects of British Hindus' vote choice come together to inform their views on immigration. As mentioned previously, in comparison to other ethnic minorities, immigration is a salient issue for these voters and this group tends to have more conservative views on the topic. A greater proportion of British Hindus think that immigration levels are too high (61%), in comparison to other ethnic groups, such as British Pakistani/Bangladeshi respondents (36%) or Black respondents (32%). Similarly, Indians are comparatively least likely to support increasing the number of asylum applicants admitted to the UK (65% support increasing the number of asylum applicants), in comparison to Pakistani Britons (70%) and Black Africans (92%).⁵⁹

However, there appears little evidence to explain the British Hindus' decreasing support for immigration. From the factors I have laid out above, we can infer that their changing views on immigration stem from their economic views and their feelings of integration into British society.

My interviews with British Hindus suggest that their opinions on immigration derive from economic concerns. Interviewees discussed the need for the government to enforce checks and balances on immigration so that immigrants fill current skill gaps, such as care jobs. Two interviewees specifically discussed how there were certain jobs, (like care) that "British people don't want to do", or that "local populations don't want to do that immigrants want to do."

This finding corresponds to the Kirkby and Shorthouse Report that demonstrates that Indians are most likely to see skilled workers who contribute to the economy to be the biggest benefit of immigration (28%).⁶⁰ British Hindus care about the economy so they advocate for more stricter controls on immigration to ensure that any new immigrants are filling specific industry gaps in the workforce.

Their stance on immigration could be further supported by the fact that they feel well integrated in society, and therefore do not see anti-immigration political

⁵⁹ Shorthouse, R, and Kirkby, D, A balanced centre right agenda on immigration, 2015, pg 34

⁶⁰ Shorthouse, R, and Kirkby, D, A balanced centre right agenda on immigration, 2015, pg 30

preference as endangering their place in society. They don't feel like they have to confine themselves to more liberal viewpoints to protect their interests. This hypothesis elaborates and expands upon the work of Ford and Sobolewska in Brexitland, where they split voters into 3 ideal types: identity conservatives, conviction liberals and necessity liberals. This growing shift towards more conservative views on migration demonstrates that British Hindus are moving away from fitting into the 'necessity liberal' category.

A growing right shift on immigration

British Hindus support stricter immigration controls for reasons distinct from the ethnocentric views or narratives about benefits fraud often promoted by the right or far-right. In fact, some interviewees critiqued these inflammatory narratives, with one interviewee saying "I am not convinced by the media narrative on immigration - Nigel Farage and the like...I am not sure that the 'coming over and taking our jobs' narrative is true. The reason why we have so many immigrants is because no British people want to be nurses et cetera."

Although my interviewees were personally unconvinced by these narratives, when I asked about British Indians around them, they suggested that the older generation (60+) are buying into right-wing narratives.

One interviewee aged 36, born in the UK to immigrant parents, discussed how his dad's "generation are voting Brexit" because immigration levels are too high and saying negative things about Indians and other communities alike that "people like me don't understand". In particular, he mentioned that many of his dad's generation are "reading the Times and Telegraph and watch GB news" which makes them believe the "benefits fraud narrative." Another interviewee almost exactly corroborated him saying that instead of an economic argument, members of his generation (aged 60) and older are starting to have "disgust" for immigrants, saying that "they spit in the streets," as examples of the bad behaviour of immigrants as a reason for reducing immigration levels.

The growing resonance of right-wing narratives of immigration amongst British Hindus supports my hypothesis on integration. As these British Hindus feel better integrated into society than other groups, especially immigrants that have

come to the UK more recently, they find these toxic narratives on benefit fraud and unfair distribution of resources more palatable than we might expect.

However, this does contradict earlier findings about some members of the older generation choosing to vote Labour due to memories of racism. This suggests that understanding British Hindus' feelings of integration into British society is integral to understanding their political preferences.

Recommendations

For political researchers and think tanks

1. Conduct greater research into the political shift of British Hindus

In particular, they should explore:

- The differences between British Sikh voters and British Hindu voters.
- The growing generational divide in the way British Hindus vote, between more recent British Hindu migrants and those who arrived in the 1970s.
 - This may give greater insight into how experiences of racism impact their allegiance to Labour.
- The influence of where British Hindus originally came from and how they came to the UK on British Hindus' vote choice.
 - Those who lived in Uganda or Kenya before they came to the UK may impact their political preferences in comparison to immigrants directly from India.
- How perceptions of integration impact vote choice and political preferences of this group.

For the Labour Party

2. Link messaging on economic growth to values of entrepreneurship and ambition

As discussed in the body of the report, economics and personal finances are one of the key drivers of British Hindus' vote choice. Consequently, they relate to Conservative messaging on entrepreneurship and individual responsibility. This reveals a gap in Labour messaging where the Party could do better to appeal to this group.

To re-engage these voters, Labour should work on communicating and emphasising the values of entrepreneurship and ambition. The Party should link these values to its growth mission. Not only would heightened messaging of this sort align with the mission of economic growth but it would also help businesses and entrepreneurs in general feel supported by the Labour Party. Ensuring that

Labour is perceived as a party of business, from small to large businesses is a vital component in winning back these voters.

There remains a social aspect in winning back some of these voters. As Chapter 3 mentions, there appears to be a perception amongst British Hindus that Labour panders to British Muslims. However, as also mentioned, this is in part due to deep-rooted cultural hostilities, rather than a Labour-specific problem.

Therefore, a solution to this problem for Labour is very complicated to navigate. Should the Party seek to emphasise its links with India, they may inadvertently alienate British Muslims and even British Sikhs - who are becoming increasingly critical of the Indian government. Further consideration on how to assuage British Hindus' doubts about Labour is needed.

Appendix

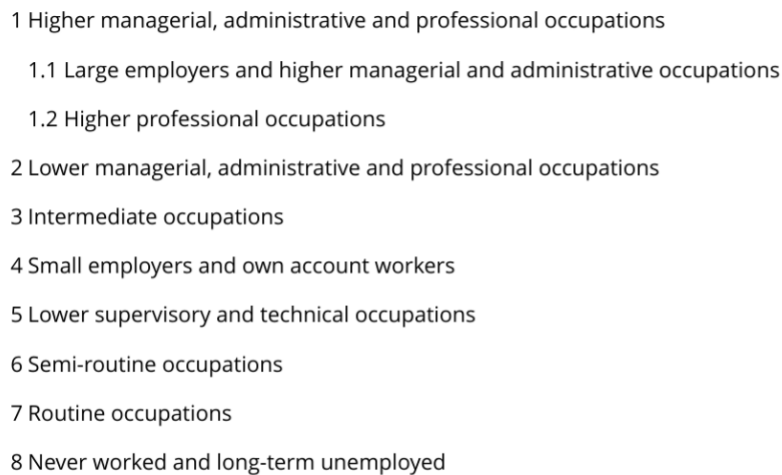
- 
- 1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations
 - 1.2 Higher professional occupations
 - 2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 3 Intermediate occupations
 - 4 Small employers and own account workers
 - 5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations
 - 6 Semi-routine occupations
 - 7 Routine occupations
 - 8 Never worked and long-term unemployed

Figure 1: The 8 NS-SEC Analytic Classes⁶¹

2.9 The NS-SEC distinguishes three forms of employment regulation:

- service relationship: the employee renders service to the employer in return for compensation, which can be both immediate rewards (for example, salary) and long-term or prospective benefits (for example, assurances of security and career opportunities). The service relationship typifies Class 1 and is present in a weaker form in Class 2
- labour contract: the employee gives discrete amounts of labour in return for a wage calculated on the amount of work done or time worked. The labour contract is typical in Class 7 and, in weaker forms, in Classes 5 and 6
- intermediate: these forms of employment regulation combine aspects from both the service relationship and labour contract, and are typical in Class 3

Figure 2: ONS Categorisation of the 8 classes⁶²

⁶¹ Office for National Statistics, Census 2021, The National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticsocioeconomicclassificationnssecbasedonsoc2010>, accessed 04 Feb 2025

⁶² Office for National Statistics, Census 2021, The National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticsocioeconomicclassificationnssecbasedonsoc2010>, accessed 04 Feb 2025

I used Figure 2 to categorise the 8 NS-SEC Analytic Classes into 4 classes for easier comparison. Whilst these classes give a good indication of how cash wealthy people are, there can be some discrepancy. For example, some self-employed people (category 4) may earn more than those in large organisations (category 1).

Extra Data from UK in a Changing Europe's Minorities Report

Sophie Stowers, one of the authors of the Minorities Report, provided me with the data collated by her and her team for the Minorities Report. These results informed my understanding of British Indians' political preference in comparison to other ethnic groups.

Below are the relevant data that were used.

The Right Choice? Exploring the Political Shift Among British Hindus

	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	African	Caribbean	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
<i>A person's position in society is mostly the result of elements outside their control</i>	32%	28%	28%	31%	31%	36%	39%
<i>A person's position in society is mostly the result of individual effort</i>	56%	60%	62%	59%	65%	53%	47%
<i>Don't know</i>	12%	11%	10%	9%	4%	11%	14%
	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	African	Caribbean	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
<i>Don't know</i>	11%	11%	10%	10%	6%	11%	11%
<i>The Government should not redistribute income as people have a right to decide what to do with their own money</i>	40%	54%	47%	40%	47%	30%	40%
<i>The Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well-off</i>	50%	35%	44%	50%	47%	59%	49%
	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	African	Caribbean	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
<i>Don't know</i>	12%	13%	9%	12%	5%	11%	13%
<i>Immigration has enriched British culture and society</i>	70%	69%	68%	70%	77%	66%	67%
<i>Immigration has undermined British culture and society</i>	18%	18%	23%	17%	18%	23%	20%

