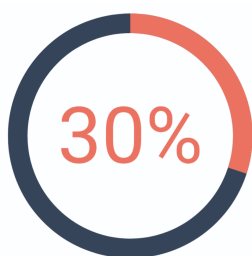
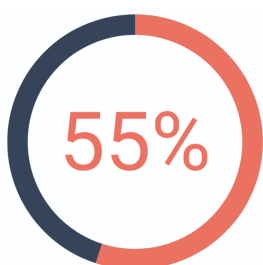


In the eye of the storm?

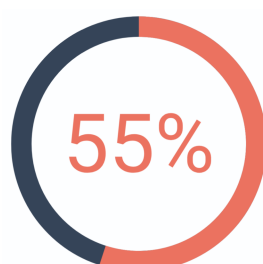
Our warning of rising risks to UK cohesion



30%* say immigrants from the EU are a threat to Britain's success and prosperity



55% say a 'No Deal' Brexit on 31st October would have a negative impact on social cohesion



55% say politicians are a threat to Britain's success and prosperity



10% say it can be acceptable to use violence to achieve your political aims in a democracy

Protection Approaches judges a No Deal Brexit to be a significant threat to the UK's community cohesion, the domestic prevention of hate crime, violent extremism, and all forms of identity-based violence.

The toxic social and political climate that has been allowed to thrive means that irrespective of how the Brexit question is resolved, these risks will remain high for the foreseeable future, unless immediate comprehensive efforts are made at nationwide reconciliation and community building.

Protection Approaches warned in March 2019 of "A Gathering Storm" – arguing that there were signs of worsening social disintegration, political polarisation, and rising prejudice. Those warnings fell on deaf ears. The country now faces the consequences. The politics of divisiveness, the use of dangerous speech by public figures including members of Parliament, and the raising of expectations on both sides about the impact of Britain's withdrawal has brought the UK to this critical juncture.

Protection Approaches endorses the recent efforts to encourage politicians on all sides to moderate their tone. But more must also be done to address both the causes and consequences of the current crisis in order to stem the trajectory of political rhetoric and public debate: prejudice of minorities and distrust of democratic institutions has already gone mainstream.

We urge forums for reasonable disagreement and dialogue to be created, for Government and Local Authorities to invest directly in local communities, and for the establishment of an independent commission into threats facing the UK's social cohesion.

Without timely and effective interventions, Protection Approaches judges that the UK is at serious and continued risk of identity-based violence.

Warning signs

The country feels more divided than ever before. Our polling shows that a majority of both Leave and Remain voters now see the 'other side' as a threat to the success and prosperity of the country. Warnings from Police commissioners about intemperate language, threats to national security, and forecasts of rising far right extremism seem to have been ignored. Councils are making preparations for civil unrest and increased community tensions in the case of a No Deal Brexit.

The standard of public discourse has fallen precipitously in the last months. Prominent individuals on both sides are deploying the language of "collaborators", "traitors", "coups" and "surrender". Cardboard guillotines and wooden gallows have appeared at demonstrations; protests have targeted MPs at their family homes. Protection Approaches sees this as both symptom and cause of the increasingly intemperate atmosphere.

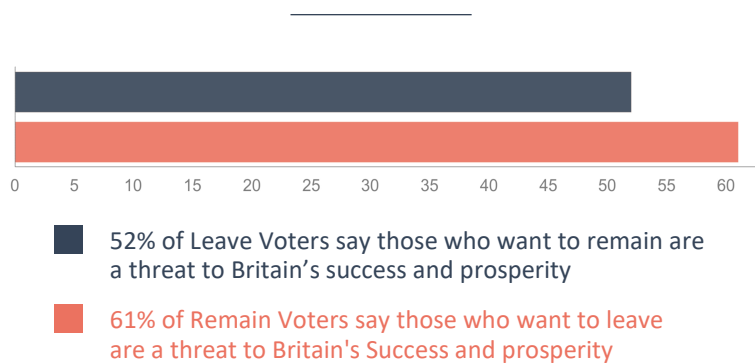
* Data from Protection Approaches / Attest social attitudes survey conducted 10/10/19, UK nationally representative sample (exc. N.I), 999 respondents

Projections

No community or country is immune to identity-based violence. In times of political, economic, or social crisis societies become more vulnerable. We have been assessing common global indicators of identity-based violence, through our work in communities, in schools, and public polling. We judge that many of these risk factors are worsening at a time when the country is approaching a unique period of political uncertainty and social anxiety.

Hate crime, public expressions of discrimination, and fears of prejudice across many communities have increased since the referendum. Minority groups have experienced spikes in hate crime around key Brexit debates.

Left unchecked, these trends will continue to gather momentum and lead to future rises in hate-based attacks and to long-term rises of hate crime and extremism in Britain.



Recommendations

- Everyone, particularly public figures, should take personal responsibility for improving standards of debate. The steps taken by the Jo Cox Foundation and the Committee on Standards in Public Life to create a charter of standards are welcomed by Protection Approaches.
- Immediate but comprehensive efforts are needed for nationwide reconciliation and community building, to create citizen forums for meaningful interactions between people who disagree. The forums must take place in, and be led by, the local community and be founded on principles of dialogue and reconciliation.
- Articulating a positive message of inclusivity is important, however investment of financial, human and political resource in upstream community building will be essential if the damage already done to society is to be reversed. Community building must once again be prioritised with far greater attention given to inclusive programmes that increase representation of marginalised communities, and to civic education.
- Establish an independent commission into threats facing the UK's social cohesion.

Northern Ireland

Tensions in Northern Ireland are running high. Disregard for the wishes of the majority of Northern Irish voters, as well as Brexit proposals that threaten the return of a hard border have increased frictions.

At least four attempted bomb attacks – in Craigavon, Creggan, Strabane, and east Belfast – have been narrowly averted in the last three months. Senior officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland have warned of concerted efforts towards violence. The Police Service of Northern Ireland has dealt with more potential threats since July than in the 12 months prior.

Northern Ireland has been without its assembly for 1000 days. The Westminster government has suggested placing the region under direct rule would be almost inevitable in the case of a no-deal Brexit, further increasing tensions between Unionists and Republicans.

Her Majesty's Government's own assessment, released in the Yellowhammer document, is that a hard border in Ireland would lead to increased smuggling, in turn fuelling and funding paramilitary violence.

The Three Million

At least three million EU citizens reside in the UK. The designated Leave campaign in 2016 promised that these citizens would see no change in their legal status when the UK left the EU.

This promise has not materialised. Prominent figures on the Leave side have called for an indefinite leave to remain; these calls have not been followed by legislation. This move has placed the lives of those 3 million citizens, who have been part of communities in the UK, working and contributing for years in many cases, on hold. It unpicks communities and begins a process of labelling and 'othering'. Our polling shows that this has had consequences - EU migrants are seen by 30% of people in Britain as a threat to its success and prosperity.

"Settled Status" and "pre-settled status" are not equal to citizenship or residence: they generate difference where previously none existed. Preventing identity-based violence begins by ensuring that all groups within society enjoy the rights and dignity of belonging as equal citizens.