

# NORTH EAST

## **RACE EQUALITY FORUM**

### **RESEARCH BRIEFING**

#### **No.8**



### ***Who voted for leaving the EU?***

Much of course has been made of the vote to leave the EU being driven by a largely racist and ill-informed desire to ‘stop immigration’, ‘get our country back’ and make sure that jobs, housing, education and so on are not captured by ‘those migrants’ flocking to our shores either to not work and ‘take our benefits’ or work and ‘take our jobs’.

Local authority	% Remain	% Leave	% Ethnic minority population i.e. non-white British (rounded)
Northumberland	46	54	3
Newcastle upon Tyne	51	49	16
North Tyneside	47	53	7
South Tyneside	38	62	6
Gateshead	43	57	7
Durham	43	57	5
Sunderland	39	61	7
Darlington	44	56	6
Hartlepool	30	70	4
Middlesbrough	35	65	12
Redcar and Cleveland	34	66	6
Stockton on Tees	38	62	7

Much of the comment since the referendum result confirms that many of those

voting leave did so on a basis of complete ignorance as to the actual implications for migrants and minorities already resident in this country. The table above throws some interesting light on how the vote went in the North East region.



**North East Race Equality Forum**

Whilst the region as a whole voted overwhelmingly for leaving the EU, there were some significant variations as between local authority areas (and doubtless even bigger ones between wards within local authority areas).

The total non-White British population in the North East region is about 8%.

Across the country as a whole, as one commentator put it, 'considering how the Leave campaign adopted immigration as one of its key arguments [if not the key if subliminal argument], claiming that the current level of net migration is too high, it is unsurprising that the Remain campaign resonated more strongly with Britain's immigrant population.' Unfortunately, this appears not to have been the case in the North East where only Newcastle upon Tyne, with the highest regional non-White British population, voted marginally to remain. In general, regardless of the size of the migrant population, people voted very clearly, in some cases overwhelmingly (as in Sunderland with its modest minority population), to leave. This picture is of course complicated because for many there seems to be little distinction made between minorities who have been here for many years and indeed were born and raised in the UK (as are, currently, 48% of the minority ethnic population) – witness comments being made to Pakistani origin people who have been told already in many instances to 'go back to their own country' (even though that country has nothing to do with the EU) - migrant workers here on a temporary or semi-permanent basis, and other minorities. There seems little doubt that, in the region, as in the country as a whole, the vote Leave campaign, supported by the lies and half-truths of the tabloid press and unscrupulous politicians, have managed to take the cause of good race relations back twenty or more years. One BBC reporter of Pakistani origin has observed that she is hearing racist language directed at her which she had not heard for forty years.

What an analysis of the results show is that:

- Last year's UKIP vote overlaps perfectly with Brexit support – all ten regions/subregions (including the North East) with the highest Eurosceptic vote followed the eastern coastline;
- Levels of education and class overlap strongly in the UK and so the Brexit vote also matched up with areas of higher levels of DE social class, meaning people in semi-skilled or unskilled labour, those in casual labour and pensioners;
- The highest age-related level of support for Brexit came from older people. Just two of the thirty areas with the highest share of over 65s voted to remain. Every other older area voted for Brexit. Thus the future of this country has been decided by people who will not be around to see the political and economic carnage they have created in a few years time.
- Higher levels of Remain votes corresponded to areas with higher proportions of people with a university education – not that that made much if any difference to any of the five university areas in the North East Region.



What this analysis does not show is the unquantifiable factors which have driven people to vote Brexit, particularly the sense of abandonment that very many working class people feel from any involvement by politicians from the Westminster or indeed the Brussels bubbles. This is not to say that there are not some MPs in the region who have worked hard for their constituents but all over the post-industrial parts of this country and particularly in the Midlands and the North, the sense of disillusionment with the traditional political process is palpable, translated into support for right wing and fascist political and neo-political organisations, and to a rejection of the Remain case which was seen to be dominated by Westminster elites concerned only with their own political careers. A recent review of a book *Distress in the city* (about Stoke on Trent but applicable elsewhere) comments, 'this is a story about industrial decline and the failure of government-directed regeneration to make any significant impact on the social and economic penalties paid by local residents for that decline; about

the disintegration and then collapse of a traditional Labour Party, leaving a vacuum into which various right-wing and fascist tendencies have marched (which are taking us into an isolationist and chauvinist Little England); about the continuing poison of racism (encouraged by the public utterances of government Ministers of all stripes); and about the dismantling of one of the most important historical means of promoting social mobility (at least in the last century), workers' and adult education, whether in the community or in the realm of higher education, shunned now by universities as irrelevant at a time of mass higher education and deserted by the organisations of the workers themselves for both financial and ideological reasons. Sounds familiar?'



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*The North East Race Equality Forum is a Network of around 300 individuals and organisations in the North East Region committed to promoting racial equality in the context of social justice. No one organisation is necessarily committed to every idea published in the name of the Forum. The Forum is supported by the 'Race', Crime and Justice Regional Research Network, which includes researchers from each University in the region.*