

# **Two-thirds of Britons back Boris Johnson's refusal to 'take the knee' because people should not be 'bullied' into making 'gestures'**

**Poll suggests that the public supports Boris Johnson's refusal to 'take the knee'**

**The PM insisted he was interested in 'substance' of change rather than 'gestures'**

**Sir Keir Starmer has said he is 'pleased and proud' he chose to show solidarity**

By James Tapsfield, Political Editor For Mailonline

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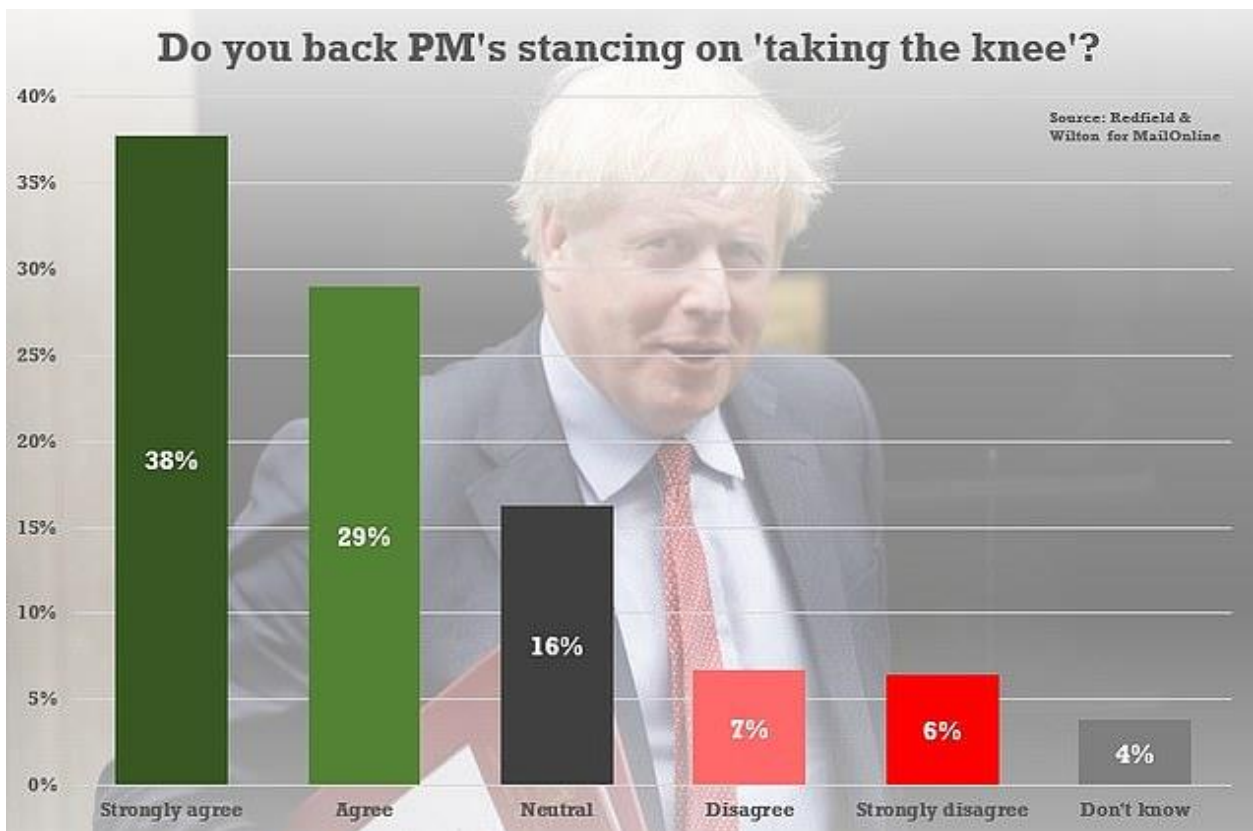
Two-third of Britons back Boris Johnson's refusal to 'take the knee' in solidarity with Black Lives Matter protests.

A poll for MailOnline found 67 per cent support the PM's view that he will not engage in 'gestures' and people should not be 'bullied' into it.

Just 13 per cent opposed Mr Johnson's stance, according to the research by Redfield & Wilton Strategies.

The premier made clear last week that he will not be 'taking the knee', despite the protest being adopted around the world since the death of George Floyd in the US.

Mr Johnson insisted was focused on the 'substance' of changing social attitudes and improving opportunities for ethnic minorities.



A poll for MailOnline found 67 per cent support the PM's view that he will not engage in 'gestures' and people should not be 'bullied' into 'taking the knee'

The poll, carried out on Wednesday, found 38 per cent strongly backed Mr Johnson's position, while another 29 per cent agreed. Just 7 per cent disagreed and six per cent strongly disagreed. Another 16 per cent were neutral and four per cent did not know.

Interestingly, the split was less dramatic when people were asked whether Mr Johnson should 'take the knee'.

Some 26 per cent agreed he should - 11 per cent 'strongly' - against 40 per cent who disagreed - including 26 per cent who 'strongly' felt he should not.

Mr Johnson's comments, in a phone-in on LBC radio last week, came after Dominic Raab faced a backlash for saying the demonstration was like something out of 'Game of Thrones', and the only two people he knelt for were the Queen and his wife when he proposed.

Asked whether he would 'take the knee', Mr Johnson said: "I don't believe in gestures. I believe I substance. I believe in doing things that make a practical difference."

Mr Johnson said his concern was that he did not 'want people to be bullied into doing things that they don't necessarily want to do'.

'If you think what happened with those police officers standing at the Cenotaph. They were being really insulted in quite aggressive terms and being told to take the knee,' he said.

'Some of them did. It was very difficult then for the other who didn't... I think it is very very important that you don't do things that make life difficult or embarrassing.'

When it was pointed out some senior police had now instructed officers not to take the knee on duty, Mr Johnson 'I do agree with that.'

He cited his record as London mayor on improving diversity, saying there had been significant improvements in the past decade, and stressed he wanted to get more black representation in the Cabinet.

'That what I want to see,' Mr Johnson said. 'I would rather see a story of championing success and taking about the opportunities that we can open.'

The intervention was condemned by some on Twitter who argued that Mr Johnson was perfectly happy to engage in 'gestures' such as clap for carers during the coronavirus crisis.

But others agreed that kneeling 'adds no value', and the important thing was to change society.

Sir Keir said last week that he was 'pleased and proud' he had decided to 'take the knee'.

'I don't regret it at all. It was an expression of solidarity of recognition of the importance of the BLM movement and what they stand for across the world,' he said.

'It's got to be an individual choice. I made the choice to do it and I am pleased and proud about that.

'Others will choose otherwise.'

Guidance varies across the country, but the Met Police has told its officers they should not kneel at public order events for their own safety, although at other times it is down to personal choice.

It emerged this week that soldiers have been banned from 'taking the knee' because it is deemed too political.

Commanders warned personnel at HMS Sultan in Gosport, Hampshire, that when in uniform they could not partake in the action.

Defence officials are currently reviewing the policy to see if there's any leeway where they can show their respect in other ways.



Police (including Kent's chief constable, pictured last month) have previously 'taken the knee' in solidarity with BLM protests. However, many officers have now been advised not to

The 'taking the knee' protest was started in 2016 by American football player Colin Kaepernick.

He famously knelt for the US national anthem before playing for the San Francisco 49ers, to demonstrate against police brutality.

Kaepernick said at the time: 'I am not going to get up to show pride in a country that oppresses black people and people of colour.'

'To me, this is bigger than football, and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.'

The action was hugely controversial in the US, with critics saying it disrespected soldiers and the flag. It was banned by the NFL amid anger from Donald Trump, and many believe it destroyed Kaepernick's career.

It has been widely adopted around the world following George Floyd's death, and used by Premier League footballers before matches.

What are the origins of 'taking the knee'?

The 'taking the knee' protest was started in 2016 by American football player Colin Kaepernick.

He famously knelt for the US national anthem before playing for the San Francisco 49ers, to demonstrate against police brutality.

He is believed to have taken the idea from how the US military honour fallen comrades.

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However, it spread more widely across US sports over the following years.

It was initially tolerated by the NFL, before an edict was issued in 2018 insisting all players on the field during the national anthem must stand.

That ban was overturned earlier this month following outrage over George Floyd's death. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said: 'We were wrong for not listening to NFL players earlier and encourage all to speak out and peacefully protest.'

Many believe it destroyed Kaepernick's career - he has not played a game since his contract ended in 2017.

It has been widely adopted around the world following George Floyd's death, with police officers in the UK joining in with the action in public.