Culture clash or culture club?

The identity and attitudes of immigrants in Britain

Does Britain face a real threat from immigrants and minorities – particularly Muslims – who refuse to think of themselves as British? **Alan Manning** and **Sanchari Roy** have analysed data on the national identity and values of both immigrants and British-born people – and they conclude that fears of a 'culture clash' are seriously exaggerated.

Many people in Britain consider immigration to be one of the most important issues facing the country today. Their concerns seem to be as much about the social impact of immigration as its economic impact, which economists typically conclude are small. It is not entirely clear what social consequences of immigration are feared – sometimes it is simply the dilution of 'traditional' culture; sometimes it is a more melodramatic fear that Britain is becoming a mix of mutually incompatible cultures, whose irreconcilable differences could end in a serious 'culture clash'.

Of course, these concerns are not new. For example, in April 1990, Norman (now Lord) Tebbit cited his infamous 'cricket test'. The former cabinet minister told the *Los Angeles Times*: 'A large proportion of Britain's Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? It's an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?'

But the current concerns seem heightened, largely because of fears about the integration of Muslims into British culture. There is widespread belief that a growing fraction of Muslims who live (and in many cases were born) in Britain do not think of themselves as British, have no aspiration to do so and do not want their children to do so either. Instead, it is feared, they subscribe to some other identity, creating little enclaves that resemble, as far as is possible, the countries from which they came or a model of the good society very different from what is generally thought of as 'Britain'.

Such fears tend to be magnified by the statements by some British Muslims, which appear explicitly to reject a British identity and affirm another one. One of the July 7 bombers appeared in a video saying 'your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people and your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters'. The use of the words 'your' and 'my' clearly expressed the people with whom he identified.

The problem is that most British people know so little about Muslims that it is very hard to know how widespread these feelings are. Our research uses responses from the Labour Force Survey of almost one million individuals to the question 'What do you consider your national identity to be?' as well as data on people's views of their rights and responsibilities from Home Office Citizenship Surveys. The answers give little support to the idea of a serious culture clash within British society.

The British-born

Among those who were born in Britain, over 90% of all groups of whatever religion or ethnicity, think of themselves as British. In particular, there is no evidence that Muslims are less likely to think of themselves as British than other groups. Our interest in this topic began with the responses of Muslims, but we came to the conclusion that it was unfair to single them out for special attention as they do not stand out in any way.

Table 1 shows the proportions of British-born people of different religions, who think of themselves as British. Of those describing themselves as Christian, 99.1% report themselves as British. But of those describing themselves as Muslim, the proportion is slightly higher at 99.2%, exceeded only by those who are Jewish. Percentages reporting a British identity are lower for Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus, but are above 95% for all groups. It is hard to look at these figures and see grounds for concern. Of course, this does not mean that the Muslims see themselves as British and not Muslim – it is just that they see no conflict in being both.

Ethnicity has a somewhat larger effect on British identity than religion, as can be seen from Table 2. All non-white ethnic groups report lower levels of British identity, but this is probably because many of them are second-generation immigrants. If we look at young people, those from ethnic minorities whose parents are British-born report the same

Table 1:
Percentage of British-born people reporting British as their national identity, by **religion** (controlling for ethnicity)

Religion	Percentage reporting British identity
Christian	99.1%
Buddhist	95.7%
Hindu	96.1%
Jewish	99.6%
Muslim	99.2%
Sikh	95.6%
Any other religion	97.0%
No religion	98.8%
Total	**99.0%**

Table 2:
Percentage of British-born people reporting British as their national identity, by **ethnicity** (controlling for religion)

Ethnicity	Percentage reporting British identity
White	99.1%
Mixed: White/Black Caribbean	97.6%
Mixed: White/Black African	95.3%
Mixed: White/Asian	95.2%
Mixed: Other	91.8%
Indian	94.2%
Pakistani	93.4%
Bangladeshi	94.9%
Other Asian	90.5%
Black Caribbean	93.5%
Black African	94.2%
Other Black	95.3%
Chinese	91.9%
Other	79.4%

Contrary to what many people seem to believe, Britain is not riven by a large-scale culture clash

levels of British identity as the white population.

There is, however, one group that stands out as having an extremely low level of British identity – Catholics from Northern Ireland. From our research, it appears that any identity conflict among British-born Muslims is an order of magnitude smaller than that among Catholics from Northern Ireland.

Immigrants

So far, we have focused on people born in Britain, but what about immigrants? The fraction of immigrants who identify themselves as British varies a lot by country of birth. But there is a simple explanation for most of this variation – how long immigrants have been in the country?

Figure 1 shows that new immigrants almost never think of themselves as British, but the longer they remain in the country the more likely they are to do so. This process of assimilation is faster for some

immigrant groups than others, but not in the way that might be expected. For example, Muslims are not less likely to feel British than those from other backgrounds, and immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh assimilate into a British identity much faster than the average, while those from Western Europe and the United States do so more slowly, with Italians and Irish standing out as the groups that assimilate least into a British identity.

We also find evidence that immigrants

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> The longer immigrants remain in Britain, the more likely they are to think of themselves as British

Figure 1:
Immigrants' views of their national identity and years since arrival
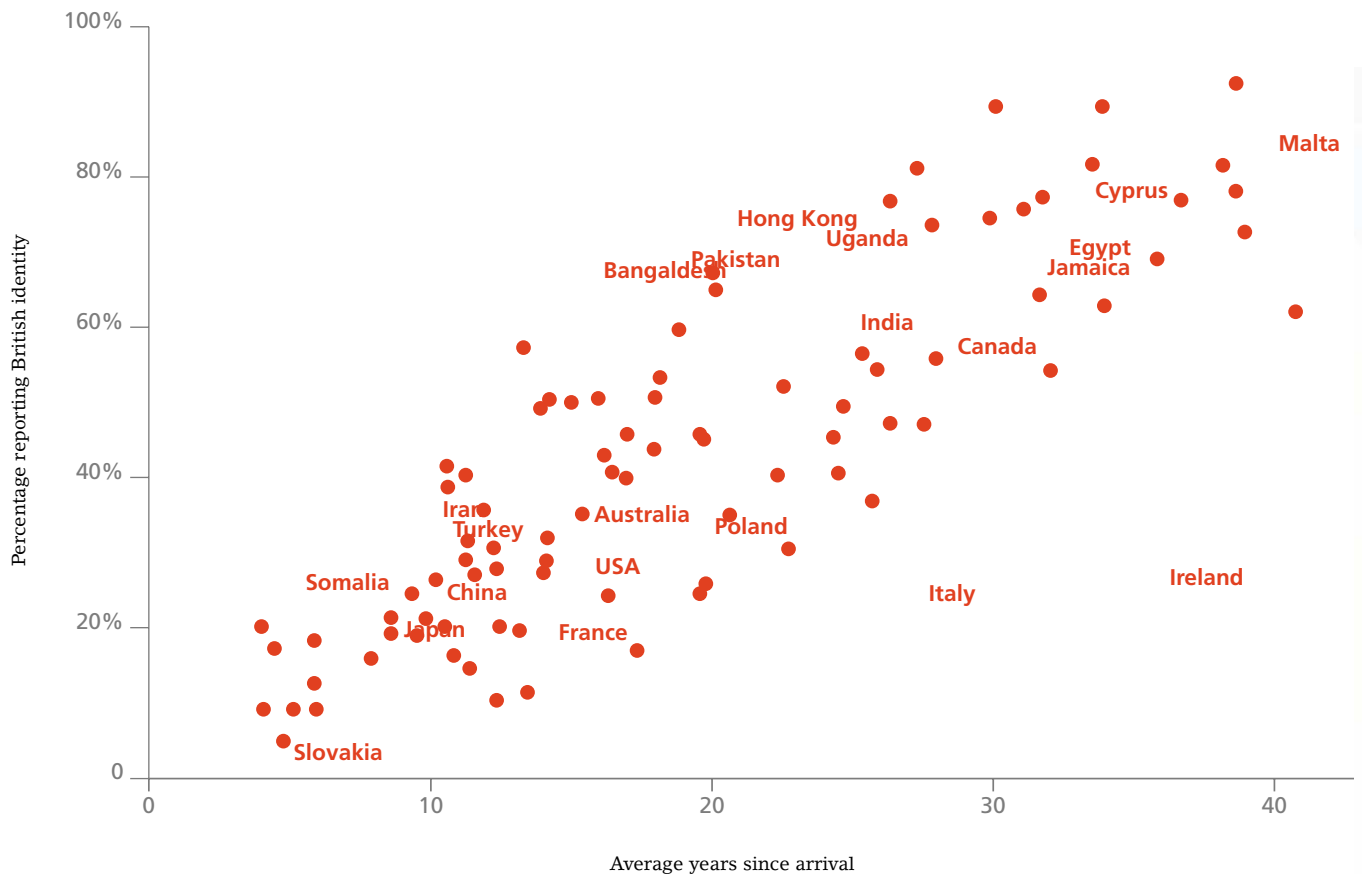
from poorer and less democratic countries assimilate faster into a British identity. Part but not all of this can be explained by a greater tendency to take up citizenship.

Rights and responsibilities

This last finding might lead one to argue that whether people think of themselves as British is not a meaningful indicator of whether they feel they belong, nor of their integration into British life and values. There is little concern about the fact that Italians rarely seem to come to think of themselves as British because it is felt that Italians have similar views on the way in which society should be run.

So it is conceivable that those born in Britain call themselves British because that is what their passports say they are but that they espouse a variety of diverse values. To examine the values that may lie behind notions of British identity, we also conducted an analysis of people's views on rights and responsibilities. Our findings

here are very similar to those on national identity: immigrants are very slightly less likely to have views on rights and responsibilities that the popular consensus holds to be 'desirable'.

But the differences are much smaller than the differences among the British-born population of different ages and with different levels of education. What's more, the immigrant groups who emerge as having different values from the British-born population are not the ones that have become the focus of most public concern. Muslims, for example, do not have significantly different values.

These findings strongly suggest that, contrary to what many people seem to believe, Britain is not riven by large-scale culture clash. This is not to deny the existence of some people who are prepared to use violence to further their agenda, but our evidence suggests that these are a tiny minority.

Our conclusion is supported by

evidence from the 2003 British Social Attitudes Survey, which asked respondents to say whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Muslims are more loyal to Muslims than to Britain'. Of the non-Muslim respondents, only 9% disagreed with a further 25% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. But among the Muslim respondents (who we might expect to be better-informed on the subject) 45% disagreed, a significant difference.

The survey also found that 62% of non-Muslim respondents thought that there was a fairly or very serious conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain, compared with 27% of Muslims. A broader question about conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims in the world as a whole found 85% of non-Muslims saying they thought that there was a fairly or very serious conflict, compared with only 67% of Muslims.

In presenting our research findings at various universities, we have been surprised by how many people react by saying our results are all wrong and that they 'know' that there is a serious culture clash. We should be seriously concerned that they maintain this stance even when faced with evidence against it. While there may not be much of a problem with immigrants and minorities in Britain not thinking of themselves as British, there may be a bigger problem in the refusal of the indigenous white population to see these groups as British.

Immigrants from poorer and less democratic countries assimilate faster into a British identity

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