



Culture clash or culture club?

LSE prides itself on the international mix of its students. Many go back to their home country after completing their studies but a fair few stay to make their career and life in Britain. For this latter group, this article contains a dire warning – you will, if you remain long enough, more likely than not, come to think of yourselves as British. **Alan Manning** and **Sanchari Roy** explain.

The research on which this article is based suggests that, while very few recent immigrants think of themselves as British, something like half of those who have been in the UK more than 40 years do.

This might strike you as a trivial bit of research but actually it goes to the heart of current concerns about the cultural identity of Britain. The UK has traditionally been quite relaxed about whether everyone in the country thinks of themselves as British but there is currently something of an air of panic around this issue. These issues are not new – for example in April 1990 Norman Tebbit (now Lord) 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 popular concerns are heightened and a bit different in kind, being concentrated often in fears about the integration (or not) of Muslims into Britain. 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 either; that they are subscribing instead to some other identity and 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 to explicitly reject a British identity and affirm another one. One of the 7 July bombers appeared in a video released after the London bombings and said: ‘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’, with the use of the words ‘my’ and ‘your’ clearly expressing the people with whom he did or did not identify. We wanted to find out how widespread this kind of identification is in the UK.

The research behind this article primarily uses responses from the UK Labour Force Survey of almost one million individuals to the question: ‘What do you consider your national identity to be?’ The answers give little support to the view of a serious culture clash within British society.

The British born

Among those who are born in Britain, over 90 per cent 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 started by an interest in the response of Muslims to the questions, but we came to the conclusion that it was unfair to single out Muslims for special attention as they do not stand out in any way.

The following table (A) shows the estimates for the fractions of the British born of different religions who think of themselves as British.

(A) Percentage of British born reporting British identity by religion (controlling for ethnicity)

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

Of those describing themselves as Christian 99.1 per cent report themselves as British. But of those describing themselves as Muslim the proportion is a slightly higher 99.2 per cent to report, exceeded only by those who identify as Jewish. Percentages reporting a British identity are lower for Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus, but are above 95 per cent for

(B) Percentage of British born reporting British identity by ethnicity (controlling for religion)

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

all groups. It is hard to look at these figures and see grounds for concern. Of course, this does not mean that 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 B.

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 levels of British identity as the white population.

There is, however, one group that stands out as reporting 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

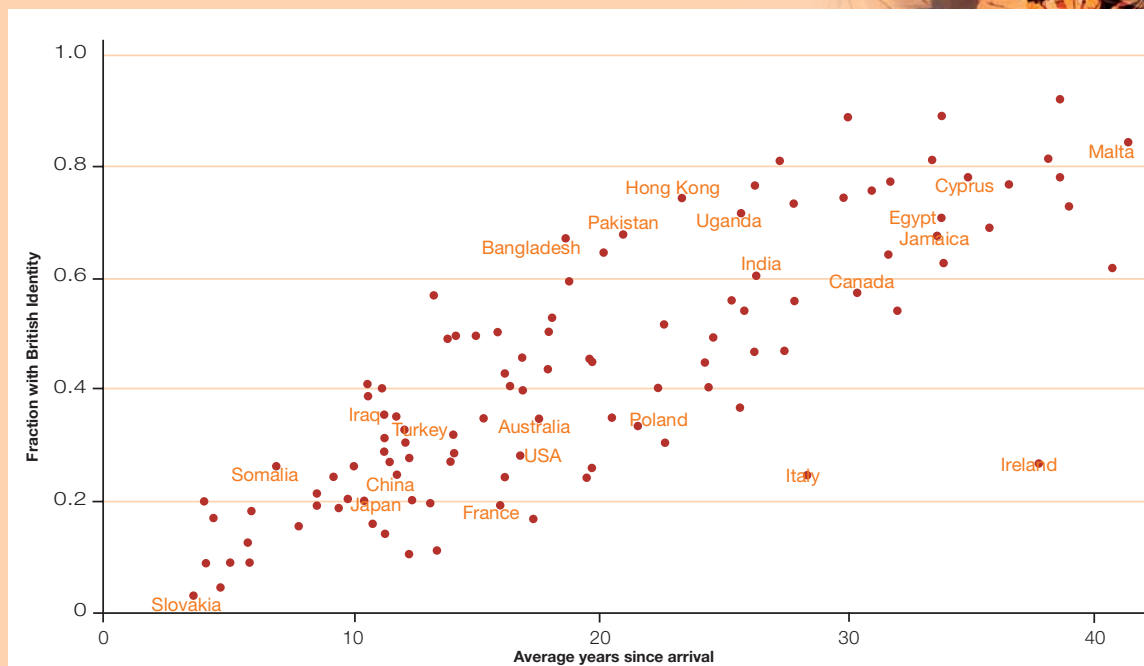
So far we have concerned ourselves with those born in Britain, but what about immigrants? The fraction of immigrants who identify themselves as British varies a lot by country of birth but there is a simple explanation for most of this variation – how long immigrants have been in the UK.

‘Any identity conflict among British born Muslims is an order of magnitude smaller than that among Catholics from Northern Ireland’

A group of six year old children in their primary school class in Leicester – one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Europe



‘There is no evidence that Muslims are less likely to think of themselves as British than other groups’



Each point represents a country of birth but only selected ones are labelled

The graph above shows that new immigrants almost never think of themselves as British, but the longer they remain in the UK 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 average, while those from Western Europe and the United States do so more slowly, with Italians standing out as the group which assimilates least into a British identity. We find evidence that immigrants 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 among the latter group 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 in 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 passport says they are) but they espouse a variety of diverse values. For some it might be that their country of birth means that they automatically think of themselves as British, while for others it might be the values (good or bad) that Britain represents to them which lead to their identifying themselves as British.

It was to examine the values that may lie behind notions of British identity that we also conducted an analysis of the determinants of views on rights and responsibilities. But, our findings here are very similar – immigrants are very slightly less likely to have views on rights and responsibilities that are generally held by popular consensus to be 'desirable', but the differences are much smaller than the differences among the UK born population of different ages and with different levels of education. It is also true that the immigrant groups who emerge as having different values from the UK born population are not the ones which have become the focus of the most public concern, for example, Muslims do not have significantly different values.

These findings strongly suggest that the UK is not riven by large scale culture clash, contrary to what many people seem to believe. 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. For example, the 2003 British Social Attitudes Survey asked the 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 per cent disagreed, with a further 25 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing. But, among the Muslim respondents (who we might expect to be better-informed on the subject) 45 per cent disagreed, a significant difference even though the survey only contained 20 Muslim respondents. And 62 per cent of non-Muslim respondents thought there was a fairly or very serious conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain, compared to 27 per cent of Muslims. Another question about conflicts in the

world as a whole between Muslims and non-Muslims had 85 per cent of non-Muslims saying they thought there was a fairly or very serious conflict, but only 67 per cent of Muslims saying so.

In presenting our research at various universities, we have been surprised by how many people react by saying our results are all wrong because they know there is a serious culture clash. But there is a serious concern that this 'knowledge' is simply wrong. There may not be much of a problem with immigrants and minorities in Britain thinking of themselves as British, but there may be a bigger problem in the refusal of the indigenous white population to see these groups as British. ■



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Download a copy of the discussion paper at
<http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/default.asp>