

COMPAS Breakfast Briefing Summary



What is the impact of new migration on cohesion and integration?

The government and the media regularly make the case that migration must be restricted in order to ensure community cohesion and encourage integration. To shed light on the relationship, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recently commissioned a major report on the impacts of migration on cohesion and integration. This briefing reflects on that research, and discusses implications for policy-makers.

What are integration and cohesion?

Integration and social cohesion are elusive concepts that are defined in different ways. Our approach has been to work backwards, from how the concepts are empirically measured. This inductive approach is imprecise but has allowed us to make three critical distinctions: migration may have impacts on national identity, on integration and on cohesion.

National identity

Measures related to national identity refer to perceptions of Britishness, measured by opinion polls. The trend over time, to the extent it can be discerned, is a move from an ancestral understanding of Britishness, couched in ethno-cultural fixtures, to one based more on civic values and responsibilities.

There is little evidence that immigration played a role in this, but the evidence suggests that people of immigrant heritage are likely to feel British in the civic sense more strongly, suggesting this trend may have been accelerated by immigration. The historical and sociological literature supports this view, suggesting religion, war, devolution and globalisation undergirds this shift, with migration specifically playing a limited role. However, debates around, and conceptions of, national identity are at least partially influenced by the political far right (the BNP in particular, and the mainstream political response). The animating feature of recent increased voter support for the BNP is immigration and its perceived negative effective on British culture.



Integration

Migration may also have impacts on integration, defined as group outcomes set against the societal average. Put differently, this is about understanding the trajectories of first (and second) generation immigrant performance in a range of economic and social spheres (employment, housing, health, social interaction, marriage and so on) and is measured in hard and soft ways.

Here migration's impact assumes a great deal of importance - especially if we understand this to be migrant groups, but also because migration (and policies that modulate it) has impacts on individual trajectories. Notwithstanding that the choice of measure is critical, it is clear that different immigrant groups perform very differently, with some exhibiting above average performance and others below average. In policy terms, it is important to develop a sober understanding of those factors that lie behind different performance records, and how far policy interventions can influence these factors.



Three factors make judgements on integration particularly difficult:

- The choice of measure is critical - for example whether we assess employment outcomes or the rates of intermarriage. The reason it is critical is that different immigrant groups perform differently depending on the measure. For example Indian men have low rates of intermarriage (a good social indicator) - around 1 in 20 Indian men marry a White partner - but high employment rates, above that of the UK-born. Black African men have much higher rates of intermarriage (1 in 7 marry a White partner) but a lower employment rate than the UK average.
- The societal average is an unreliable comparator - one is not comparing like with like, and more to the point, the societal average is not constant (it is a moving average) and is therefore dynamic. Integration does not stand still.
- Policy is a very important variable, whether this involves programmes to support integration, or regulations that inhibit, or at least alter, access to services and the labour market. Policy thus has a differential effect on the integration outcomes of migrants versus the average member of society, against whom they are being compared.

Cohesion

Finally, migration may have impacts on cohesion, defined by people's perceptions of how people get along with each other in their local area or neighbourhood. The current policy emphasis is most associated with the concept of cohesion and as a consequence we focused specifically on the impacts of migration on local areas. We measured this in two ways, first by perceived positive or negative changes in neighbourliness and in respect and interaction between social groups, and second by levels of trust in local institutions (such as the police).

Our analysis indicates that it is principally socio-economic deprivation - not migration - that best explains people's perceptions of their local area. However, existing diversity may partly explain differences in levels of cohesion. In other words, new migration does not notably affect cohesion but pre-existing diversity and high levels of poverty are predictors of lower social cohesion. Our findings are supported by the British literature.¹ For example, recent evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young

People in England confirms this, explicitly dismissing in-migration as a predictor of low cohesion.²

Our analysis also indicates that on soft measures of integration, such as trust in political institutions and a sense of belonging to Britain, migrants actually score more highly than native-born, native heritage Britons. Migrants to Britain have a high opinion of British political institutions and rapidly come to feel that they belong in the country. We looked also at values, and found consensus between migrants and natives on most measures. The exceptions were on measures where migrants may have special concerns - the value of distinct cultural traditions, the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for all groups and the negative effects of offensive speech.

Conclusions

There are complexities and caveats to the three distinctions noted here. For example, they may interact: cohesion perceptions may be nuanced by how immigrant groups perform (on integration) or by worries among citizens from the white majority over national identity. And national political debate over immigration - which is often fraught - may also create an anxious climate for local perceptions of cohesion.

Our headline finding - that new immigration has no significant impact on local neighbourhood cohesion - suggests it would be wise for policymakers to focus on deprivation rather than migration in setting policy on cohesion and integration.

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The briefing is based on the report 'The Impacts of Migration on Social Cohesion and Integration'. The report is available at:

- <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/workingwithus/mac/27-analysis-migration/02-research-projects/social-cohesion-integration?view=Binary>

¹ Letki, N. (2008). 'Does diversity erode social cohesion? Social capital and race in British neighbourhoods'. *Political Studies* 56(1): 99-126.

Laurence, J. (2009). The effect of ethnic diversity and community disadvantage on social cohesion: a multi-level analysis of social capital and interethnic relations in UK communities, *European Sociological Review*

² Demack, S, Platts-Fowler, D, Robinson, D, Stevens, A, & Wilson, I. (2010). *Young People and Community Cohesion: Analysis from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England*. London: Department of Education.

Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR033.pdf>



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