Making multicultural policies effective

The UK has implemented a ‘light-touch’ form of multiculturalism, where some concessions are made to ethnic minorities. This contrasts with the French policy of assimilation, or the opposite policy of segregation.

However, there is a widespread belief that multiculturalism - defined as a programme for giving recognition to ethno-religious groups and their cultures - has failed, and is instead leading to the entrenchment of separate communities.

A working paper from the ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) by Professor Anthony Heath and Dr Neli Demireva has looked at the alleged ‘corrosive’ effects of multiculturalism on society, based on three indicators - having an ethnic identity rather than a British one, keeping social distance from white British people, and a willingness to contemplate violent protest.

They used data from the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Survey, which provides a representative sample of the major established ethnic minorities in Britain.

The findings show that ethnic minorities with strong internal bonds are moving towards social and cultural integration to the same degree as communities without such strong initial bonds.

The paper concludes that Britain’s multicultural policies have had little or no effect on the trajectories of any ethno-religious groups towards integration. The key drivers of integration are exposure to British ways of life at school and work, and the ways minorities are treated by white British people and institutions.

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**Key findings**

- All ethnic groups show major change across the generations towards a British identity and becoming socially closer to mainstream society.
- High levels of bonding within an ethnic community (through partners, friends and acquaintances) coexist with positive orientations towards integration, high levels of British identity and low levels of hostility to the indigenous white population.
- The evidence strongly suggests that multicultural policies have had little impact on integration, largely because they have been so ‘light touch’.
- The overwhelming majority show positive orientations both towards their own ethnic culture and towards integration into British society. Only a small minority take a separatist position, such as rejecting a British identity, supporting Shari’a law or supporting violence.
- There were no signs that groups who have asked for greater cultural recognition (particularly Sikhs and Muslims) were slower in integrating than other groups such as Hindus or non-Muslim blacks.

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The key drivers of integration are exposure to British ways of life at school and work, and the ways minorities are treated.
### Policy relevance and implications

- Policies and practices which avoid alienation and emphasize inclusiveness, a willingness to celebrate the diversity of British society, and a more welcoming attitude to minorities should be encouraged.

- Generational change (from first to second migrant generation) needs to be explicitly recognised in national statistics, to avoid skewed findings. It is also important not to equate minorities with migrants.

- Policies should be designed to reflect that the needs of recent migrants will often be very different from those of the second and later generations. For instance, while language classes should be mandatory for first generation migrants, this is not necessary for the second and later generations.

- More energetic policies designed to tackle discrimination (such as the fair employment policies successfully operated in Northern Ireland) should be pursued. However, these policies should avoid quotas or positive discrimination.

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### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Research from the ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) shows that ethnic minority groups overwhelmingly show positive orientations both towards their own ethnic culture and towards integration into British society – and that ‘light-touch’ multicultural policies have not hampered progress towards integration.

*Has multiculturalism utterly failed? Not really*

Web: www.sociology.ox.ac.uk/materials/embes/has_multiculturalism_utterly_failed.pdf

The research paper has been published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The ESRC-funded Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) is a four-year research programme concerned with understanding changing ethnic inequalities and identities.
Web: http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/

The Economic and Social Research Council is the UK’s leading agency for research funding and training in economic and social sciences.
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The views expressed in this evidence briefing are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the ESRC.