

# Trend Briefing #1

## Doubting Multiculturalism

May 2009

# Trend Briefing #1

## Doubting Multiculturalism

Attitudes towards multiculturalism and race relations reflect the concern about Britain's direction, sense of nostalgia and inclination to return to old certainties, which were among the most striking findings of Real Trends 2008. Does this mean that multiculturalism is dead?

Policies on multiculturalism, diversity and cohesion have been the subject of wide-ranging and often bitter debate in Britain in recent years. Milestones such as the Cattle report following riots in Oldham and Burnley in 2001, which identified minority communities leading 'parallel lives', and David Goodhart's argument in *Prospect* that cultural diversity makes it more challenging to achieve a society-wide sense of belonging, have shifted the terms of the debate. Other key contributions have included work by Robert Putnam which has sparked much discussion on both sides of the Atlantic with its thesis that diversity tends to weaken trust and active citizenship in communities – although this pattern is much more marked in the US than in Britain.

Analysis by Communities and Local Government<sup>1</sup> of the drivers of community cohesion in England presents a nuanced picture of the relationship between cohesion and diversity, where the nature of this relationship depends on the type of ethnic mix in an area, as well as the local context. For instance, in areas with a broad mix of residents from different ethnic groups, diversity is positively associated with cohesion. Indeed, in 2007 Dr Rowan Williams argued that another element of diversity - religious diversity - is not at odds with social unity and cohesion. A different emphasis has been recently seen from the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, who has suggested that there should be a greater focus on the 'common good' than on cultural diversity. This is reflected throughout the Government's strategy, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society*, which argues that to bring communities together people need a sense of common belonging and a shared British identity.

The arguments and qualification of views is set to continue – but our Real Trends findings from 2008 point to some very clear trends in public opinion. These show a clear weakening in support for multiculturalism, and a British public exhibiting increasingly tough attitudes towards migrants and minorities.

The 2008 study has many relevant findings for current debates around diversity and equalities – such as a significant rise in the number of people who now believe that there are too many immigrants in Britain. Furthermore, while the majority of people still advocate respect for other cultures and minority groups, there appears to be a growing desire for a return to shared values.

And we expect perceptions to have moved on when we repeat the study in 2009 – the economy is now by far the single most important concern for the public, and this can be expected to impact on public attitudes to immigration, for example by driving greater concern around immigration creating pressure on jobs and less support for the economic benefits of migration.

---

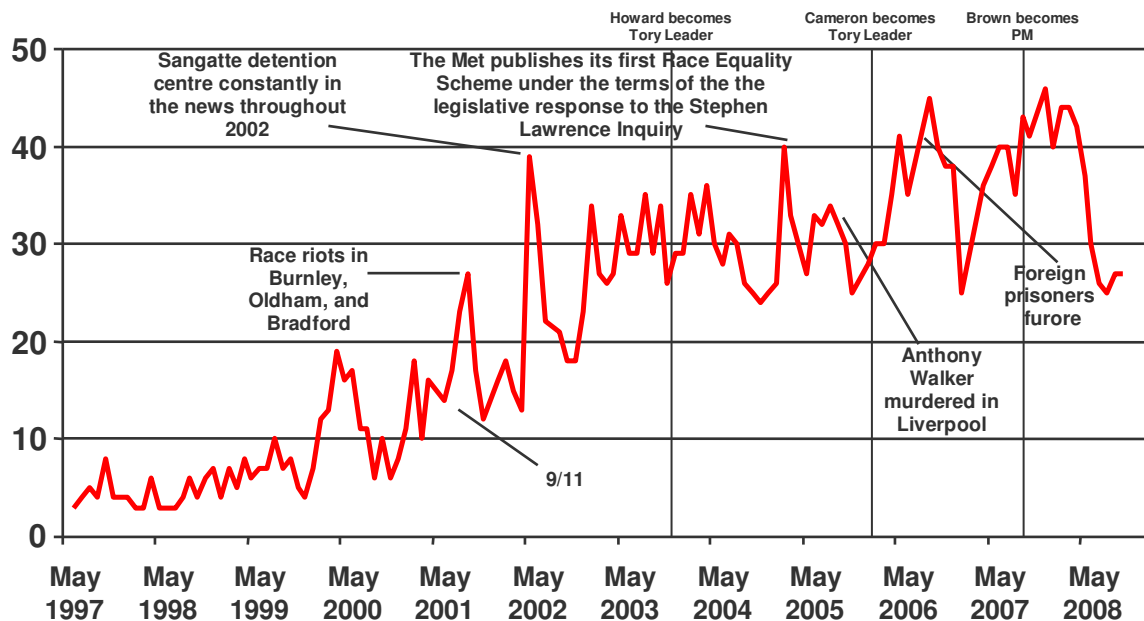
<sup>1</sup> 'Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey'. Communities and Local Government,

## Attitudes to immigration

Amid this current preoccupation with recession, it would be easy to forget the extent to which immigration has become an increasingly dominant concern for the British public in the past decade. Yet, in the decade up to 2008, the proportion of people who considered immigration to be an important issue facing the country grew hugely, reaching 46% at its peak in December 2007. When we plot this against actual numbers of migrants whose applications to settle in Britain have been accepted each year, it is clear that public concern has increased over a period when increased numbers of migrants have settled in the country.

## Rising concern about immigration over the last decade

Q What do you see as the main/other important issues facing Britain today?



Base: representative sample of at least 1,000 British adults age 18+ each month, interviewed face-to-face in home

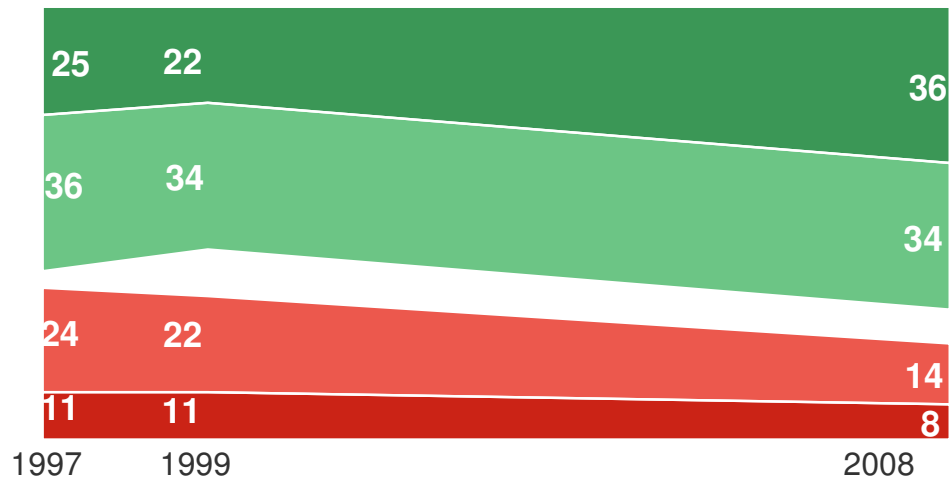
Source: Ipsos MORI

Seven in ten people (70%) agree that there are too many immigrants in Britain, and the proportion of people who strongly agree has jumped from 22% to 36% since 1999. As in the late 1990s, the groups most likely to agree are still the over 65s and lower social grades, but these patterns are far less marked than they were less than a decade ago: indeed, it appears that it is an increase in agreement among the under-30s and C1s (those in junior managerial and professional jobs) which is driving the unease about immigration.

## Large shift to strongly agreeing there are too many immigrants

There are too many immigrants in Britain

■ % Strongly disagree ■ % Tend to disagree ■ % Tend to agree ■ % Strongly agree



Base: 2,019 British adults 15+, 9 May-5 June 2008, self-completion and online.

Source: Ipsos MORI

The link between immigration and crime has also still not been severed in the mind of the public – over half (53%) of people still agree that immigration increases crime rates in Britain although a third (33%) disagree. Moreover, this unease about immigration is likely to be reinforced by the fact that the public is far from convinced by the economic case for immigration, with over half of those who participated in the Real Trends survey (54%) disagreeing that immigration is good for the British economy, including a quarter of people (24%) who strongly disagree. This may well be reinforced by the fact that two in five people (43%) already feel that other people get unfair priority for public services and state benefits (other Ipsos MORI research has shown that asylum seekers and refugees are the primary groups perceived to be given unfair priority). With the recession focusing everyone's mind on their own economic fortunes, and disputes already coming to a head over 'British jobs for British workers', it would not be surprising to see these attitudes hardening further in the coming year as increasing competition for scarcer resources sets in.

### Attitudes to ethnic minorities and multiculturalism

These trends in attitudes to immigration tie in with more general ambivalence about the merits of multiculturalism. When asked directly about multiculturalism, the British public is divided, but is more inclined to see multiculturalism as something which threatens the British way of life (38%) than something which makes Britain a better place to live (30%). Likewise, when forced to choose between developing a shared identity or celebrating diverse values and cultures, we are more in favour of the former (41%) than we are the latter (27%). However, a split is once again evident, with a third of people (30%) not able to choose either.

Hostility towards multiculturalism and immigration tend to go hand in hand, and it is those over 65 and in social grade C2 (skilled manual workers) who tend to be least in favour of multiculturalism and diverse values. People who vote Conservative are also more inclined to see multiculturalism as a threat than those who vote for the other two main parties.

Even the more positive elements of the story have a sting in their tail for the Government's equalities agenda. While a clear majority still believe that it is important to respect the wishes of minority groups, even this figure has dropped nineteen points in the last decade, with just under two thirds (64%) now agreeing - although this may be more indicative of a sense that progress has been made than a significant shift in values. However, it is telling that it is the youngest age group (those aged 15-29) where agreement has dropped the most. Similarly, although there is still significant interest in other cultures, with around half (49%) of people agreeing that we should do more to learn about the systems and cultures of other groups in this country, this still represents something of a decline since 1999, when 56% of people agreed with the same statement.

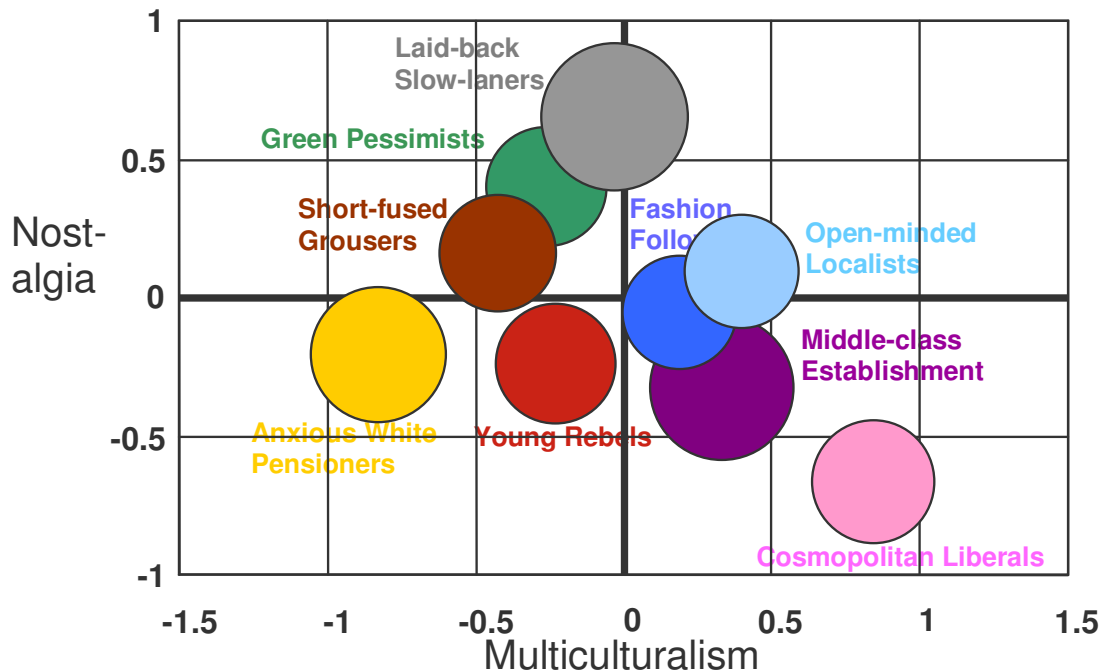
Interestingly, when asked more explicitly about religion, a significant proportion of the public seem to feel equally strongly. Thus, around three fifths (62%) of those who participated in the Real Trends study agree that Britain should retain its Christian culture, even though many people in Britain these days are not Christian, and only a third (35%) agree that children at UK schools should be allowed to wear Islamic dress such as head-scarves.

Finally, though, it does appear that the debate is for the most part not about skin colour, with more than three quarters (77%) of people disagreeing that 'to be truly British you have to be white' - although this does leave 18% who agree.

### **How different groups in society view multiculturalism and nostalgia**

Ipsos MORI has identified nine 'clusters' of people within the population who tend to share similar attitudes, values and behaviours on a range of issues, and immigration is one of the issues on which attitudinal differences between these groups tend to be most clearly marked. In addition, our analysis points to strong links between attitudes towards multiculturalism among these groups and a sense of nostalgia for Britain as it used to be, and this is highlighted in the chart below.

## Attitudes to nostalgia and multiculturalism



Base: 2,019 British adults 15+, 9 May-5 June 2008, self-completion and online.

Source: Ipsos MORI

As this shows, there is above-average hostility towards immigration, multiculturalism and diversity among our so-called 'anxious white pensioners' – people aged 55 and over from lower social grades, who are also characterised by their sense of family mindedness and suspicion of change. Likewise, such hostility is particularly strong among the 'short-fused grouzers' – a group of working, middle-aged, stressed-out white people, many of whom have children, and whose attitude tends to be one of discontentedness and fatalism about their own prospects. Perhaps more surprisingly, those we have identified as 'young rebels' – who are overwhelmingly aged between 15 and 24, tend towards rule-breaking and risk-taking, and come from lower social grades - also tend to have little respect for the wishes of minority groups or interest in other cultures, and are much more likely than average (40%) to think that to be truly British you have to be white.

At the other end of the spectrum, as their name would suggest, our 'cosmopolitan liberals' are the group most likely to be positive about the benefits of multiculturalism and immigration. Likewise, the 'middle class establishment', highly-educated, traditionalist and largely contented members of the middle class also tend to welcome multiculturalism, though there is an interesting tension in evidence here, as this group is also particularly keen that Britain should remain a Christian culture.

We will examine how these patterns have shifted when we run Real Trends again in mid-2009, as the recession continues to make its impact felt, and particularly as the middle-classes start feeling the pinch as their own jobs start to go. Will the experience of recession turn people increasingly against each other as they fight for their own economic position, or will our more immediate economic problems relegate concerns about multiculturalism further down our list of priorities?

For more information on Real Trends, please get in touch with Emily Gray or Julia Clark: email [emily.gray@ipsos.com](mailto:emily.gray@ipsos.com) / [julia.clark@ipsos.com](mailto:julia.clark@ipsos.com), or telephone 020 7347 3000.