

THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND'S CITIES: DIVERSITY AND COHESION

In the first part of a special feature, JOHN COURTHORPE looks at some of the problems starting to affect England's cities

One's first thought might be that it is unlikely that government reports would be a useful or reliable source of information about controversial topics in modern Britain. The award-winning journalist Anthony Browne argued in *The Retreat of Reason*, his well-known book on political correctness, that official publications monotonously produce predictable but false conclusions, as they are written under the influence of an ideology that stipulates that certain social groups must never be portrayed in a way that could be construed to be negative. The examples he cited were drawn from areas as diverse as economics, epidemiology and criminology. However, as Browne demonstrated, the conclusions of official reports are sometimes contradicted by the data contained within.¹ As a result of such paradoxes, some government documents can be illuminating sources of fact and opinion, even on contentious

issues such as the impact of mass immigration on England's economy and society, and the implications of the resulting increase in ethnic diversity for the social characteristics of its urban areas.

The most significant official document on this topic issued in recent months was *Our Shared Future*, the final report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion that was set up in the aftermath of the terrorist incidents of July 2005. This document itself contains few useful facts, as the bulk of its 173 pages consist of summaries of and commentaries upon written submissions that the Commission received from other public bodies. The principal focus of the report was the abstract concept of 'social cohesion', defined as "the process that must happen in all communities to ensure different groups of people get on well together".² There is little explicit discussion of why social cohesion is important or beneficial, other than the implication that high levels of social

cohesion make events such as the Tube bombings less likely. However, the report identifies social cohesion with the concept of 'social capital' that has been developed by Robert Putnam, Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University.³

Putnam defines social capital as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness", and in more than a decade of developing the concept, research by Putnam and others has suggested that high levels of social capital are correlated with better health, increased prosperity, lower crime, higher levels of political participation, longer life expectancy, and greater happiness. Given that the immigration policies of most Western countries will significantly increase their levels of ethnic diversity in the foreseeable future, Putnam points out that it thus "seems worthwhile to explore the implications of immigration and ethnic diversity for social capital".⁴ Indeed, in 2006 Putnam was awarded the Skytte Prize, the nearest equivalent to a Nobel Prize for Sociology, for doing just that. In an interview he gave to the *Financial Times*, he summarised the results as showing that "in the presence of diversity, we hunker down ... We act like turtles. The effect of diversity is worse than had been imagined. And it's not just that we don't trust people who are not like us. In diverse communities, we don't trust people who

do look like us ... They don't trust the local mayor, they don't trust the local paper, they don't trust other people and they don't trust institutions ... The only thing there's more of is protest marches and TV watching".⁵ The results of Professor Putnam's many years of research were finally published in June 2007, the same month that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion reported its findings.

Sadly, the treatment of this subject in *Our Shared Future* is not objective and systematic, given that the report could have been expected to concentrate on similar issues. The Commission relied on opinion surveys to measure social cohesion, with respondents being asked "to what extent do you agree or disagree that this local area (within 15/20 minutes walking distance) is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?" It was found that in those areas of England which were below the median level of ethnic diversity, approximately 81% of respondents answered 'yes' to this question, whereas in areas with more than average ethnic diversity, the proportion only fell to around 79%. The Commission thus felt able to declare that "there is no simple relationship between high levels of diversity and poor cohesion".⁶ This approach yields some interesting data, but ignores the possibility that in diverse areas, people may simply have become accustomed to a lower level of social cohesion.

Fortunately, many official reports possess a more objective basis. The Commission for Integration and Cohesion operated under the tutelage of the Department for Communities and Local Government, and in its former incarnation as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, this body sponsored a thorough investigation of urban life in England. The results were published in 2006 in a two-volume report titled *State of the English Cities*.⁷ Furthermore, the extensive data used in this document (known as the “State of the Cities Database”) can be downloaded from the website of the Department for Communities and Local Government in spreadsheet format, and analysed by anyone familiar with social statistics.⁸ A thorough exposition of this would be too long for this journal, but some preliminary observations can be made relating to the topic of diversity and cohesion.

As with most sociological investigations, the first step is to identify any relationships between data measuring the phenomena in which we are interested. Table 1 shows some such data, as it illustrates the relationships between several features of 56 cities in England, known to government statisticians as Primary Urban Areas (PUAs). The areas chosen emerged from an attempt to arrive at a consistent definition of what constitutes the core area of a city, and in terms of population (in 2001) ranged from 83,437 for Hastings to 8,075,324 for London.

The attributes along the top of Table 1 mainly relate to indicators that Putnam’s theory would suggest are measures of social capital, such as crime rates, levels of educational attainment by schoolchildren, and participation in local politics.⁹ These are what statisticians would refer to as “response variables” in this theory. Meanwhile, the attributes down the left-hand side are those features that might be root causes of varying levels of social cohesion. As we are mainly interested in ethnicity here, I have included the proportions of the population formed by the eight ethnic groups identified in the State of the Cities Database. I have also included six other characteristics of these cities which may be putatively thought to be ‘explanatory variables’ for the level of social cohesion, including a measure of the size of the city (logarithm to base 10 of the population), a measure of adult educational achievement, and three indicators of prosperity.

In order to measure ethnic diversity itself, I have copied the method used by Alberto Alesina, Professor of Political Economy at Harvard, in his numerous studies of the social and political impact of size and diversity.¹⁰ This technique involves calculating an index of ethnic diversity, which is simply the percentage probability that any two randomly selected individuals will belong to different ethnic groups. For the 56 urban areas used in this study, this index ranges from 1.83 for Barnsley to

Table 1: Some Correlations for 56 Primary Urban Areas in England

	2004-05	2004-05	2000-03	2004-05	2005	2002	2001
Log _e population (2001)	0.595	0.232	0.043	0.124	0.059	0.273	
% of population of pensionable age (2001)	-0.269	-0.219	0.039	-0.009	-0.096	0.123	-0.031
% of working-age population with a degree or equivalent qualification (2001)	0.197	-0.105	0.116	0.249	0.259	-0.519	0.096
Average gross weekly pay (incident full-time workers) (2002)	0.121	-0.259	-0.016	0.527	0.244	-0.591	0.248
% of economically active population who are unemployed (2001)	0.202	0.511	0.006	-0.287	-0.526	0.922	0.278
% of the working-age population claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance Credit (2002)	0.278	0.473	-0.002	-0.425	-0.590		0.273
Proportion of population by ethnic group (2001)							
African	0.618	0.110	-0.071	0.061	0.521	-0.019	0.492
Caribbean	0.259	0.296	-0.150	0.043	0.256	0.004	0.421
Black (Indus)	0.252	0.235	-0.132	0.054	0.381	0.026	0.489
Bangladeshi	0.563	0.295	-0.130	-0.030	0.189	0.116	0.194
Indian	0.220	0.126	0.046	-0.052	0.000	0.137	0.153
Pakistani	0.198	0.196	0.065	-0.183	-0.217	0.260	0.090
South Asian (OTH)	0.398	0.214	0.050	-0.140	-0.101	0.245	0.167
Chinese	0.228	0.019	-0.129	0.095	0.584	-0.296	0.047
White	-0.572	-0.239	0.013	0.081	-0.127	-0.161	-0.287
Other	0.893	0.156	-0.092	0.050	0.529	-0.060	0.327
Index of ethnic diversity (2001)	0.591	0.245	-0.014	-0.074	0.139	0.140	0.287

Source: State of the Cities Database (Primary Urban Areas)

46.73 for Luton. The drawback of using this method with data such as the State of the Cities Database is that all whites are grouped in to one ethnic category, so it would not be possible to analyse the diversity arising from recent East European migration in this way. However, the ethnicity data used here relates to the 2001 census, thus antedating the most recent influx.

The figures in Table 1 are correlation coefficients, which measure the closeness of the relationship between sets of two variables. A perfect positive relationship, where as one variable rose the other rose exactly proportionately, would yield a score of plus 1. The closest that any two variables shown here come to this is the coefficient of 0.922 between the percentage of the economically active population who were unemployed in 2001, and the percentage of the working-age population claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance Credit in 2005. As these are partly measuring the same quantity, this might be expected. No relationship at all would produce a correlation coefficient of zero, as seems to be the case here between the proportion of the population which was Indian in 2001, and the average price of a semi-detached house in 2005. Meanwhile, a negative figure indicates an inverse relationship, with one variable rising as the other falls. The strongest inverse relationship shown here is that between the percentage of the economically ac-

tive population who were unemployed in 2001, and the average price of a semi-detached house in 2005. This yields a correlation coefficient of -0.626.

In the social sciences, correlation coefficients as low as plus or minus 0.2 are generally regarded as worth commenting upon, whilst those of plus or minus 0.6 are thought of as being strong. Accordingly, I have emboldened all figures in this table with a magnitude of 0.2 or above. Unfortunately, some of the putative explanatory variables may be highly correlated with each other, which makes the task of investigating the underlying relationships between the data quite difficult. However, starting with the strongest relationships is usually the most advisable technique.

Adopting this approach suggests a complex relationship between ethnic diversity and the indicators of social capital. First, there is an inverse, but very weak, correlation between ethnic and racial diversity and both educational attainment by children and participation in local elections. Indeed, participation rates in local elections are not significantly correlated with anything else, whilst the factors related to children's exam performance are overwhelmingly economic. There is seemingly a clearer relationship between ethnic diversity and crime, with a reasonable correlation of 0.245 between the index of ethnic diversity and burglary rates, and a high correlation of 0.581 between ethnic diversity and robbery rates.

However, the picture is complicated by other possible explanations for high crime rates, and the correlations relating to these. For example, the burglary rate is more highly correlated with the three indicators of relative prosperity than with diversity, and there is also a reasonable correlation with the size of the city. Similarly, there is also a good correlation of 0.506 between sheer size and the robbery rate, lending some support to the theory that human beings may suffer from 'crowding stress' like many other species.

Most noticeable of all though is the very high correlation between the robbery rate and the size of particular ethnic groups, suggesting that robbery is not related to diversity *per se*, but maybe just to the particular problems that certain sub-cultures have with gang or drug culture. Indeed, an unsophisticated analysis could be constructed that would simply relate the high crime rates in diverse areas to a higher propensity to criminality among certain minorities. Statistics related to this issue are very hard to find now, and do not seem to appear in recent issues of the government statistical annual *Social Trends*. However, if one is prepared to scour the archives for publications from a less politically-correct age, the 1993 edition did contain an ethnic breakdown of convicts (aged 21 or more) under sentence on 30 June 1991 for certain types of offence. This suggests significant ethnic differences

in the propensity to commit certain crimes. Even if these sharp differences in apparent offending rates were due in part to some bias on the part of the judicial system, and even if the sharpness of these differences has ameliorated over time, the differences are so great as to indicate that the apparent correlation between diversity and robbery rates might be due to the problems of a particular subset of ethnic groups.

Fortunately, these statistics suggest that burglary does not have as significant an 'ethnic' component. Indeed, the figures relating to juvenile burglars at this time suggested that they were disproportionately white.¹¹ Therefore, if there is a relationship between diversity and burglary, even when other major factors (such as prosperity and size of city) are taken in to account, it could suggest low levels of 'social capital'. The technique for performing this analysis is called multiple regression, and involves devising an equation that best fits the relationship between the variables in the dataset. This can be done easily by a variety of statistical software packages. Our hypothesis is that the burglary rate in the 56 cities is related to the size of the city (the logarithm to base 10 of the population, denoted p), the percentage of the working-age population drawing one of the three benefits listed (denoted b) and the index of ethnic diversity (denoted d). My statistical



GARY WOODS

PENTONVILLE ROAD, LONDON

software tells me that the best fit is produced by the equation: burglary rate = $1.3p + 1.162b + 0.0935d - 1.8$

Thus, size, benefit-dependency and ethnic diversity are all seemingly linked to higher burglary rates, and a test of statistical significance suggests that there is only a 20% chance that in the case of ethnic diversity this relationship is coincidental. This level of confidence is not enough to get this conclusion published in a scholarly journal, but it suggests that further research is required and would be likely to confirm the relationship. To clarify the significance of this equation, it suggests that even when the size and prosperity of a city are taken in to account, there is a correlation between ethnic

diversity and burglary rates – despite the fact that burglary is overwhelmingly a crime committed by whites. It thus lends some support to Putnam’s theory that in diverse areas, people have poorer relations with their own ethnic group as well as others.

Indeed, the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion tried to minimise the relevance of Putnam’s conclusions, but in an amusing and self-defeating manner. When summarising the findings of *Our Shared Future*, the Minister for Local Government and Cohesion, Phil Woolas, confidently announced that the findings showed that “there is no general statistical link between the level of diversity and cohesion. This shows the theory that high

diversity leads to poor cohesion to be wrong". However, Woolas noted that there were "certain forms of diversity which can lead to poor cohesion",¹² and these included:

- "urban areas that are just starting to experience diversity, such as some of the outer London Boroughs and Southern commuter towns"
- "rural areas that are just starting to experience diversity, such as the areas around the Wash"
- "ethnically diverse urban areas experiencing new migration, such as inner cities in the major metropolitan areas experiencing changes to the country of origin of new arrivals"
- "deprived ex-industrial areas where two communities are living parallel lives".

This list seems to include the great majority of places which have an ethnically diverse population, so it may have been easier for Woolas to admit that there *is* a general relationship between diversity and low social capital, and then list the exceptions to that rule.

Other establishment bodies have been slightly more forthright. A year previously, the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, had admitted that Home Office research showed that ethnic diversity was associated with lower levels of trust and happiness. Interviewed in May 2006 for the BBC2 series *The Happiness Formula*, Phillips acknowledged that studies showed

that "people, frankly, when there aren't other pressures, like to live within a comfort zone which is defined by racial sameness". The same month, the Commission for Racial Equality published the results of some research undertaken the previous year, under the title *The Decline of Britishness*. This study had involved interviews and discussions with ethnically varied 'focus groups' from cities across Britain, at which topics related to national identity, migration and social cohesion had been debated. Interestingly, the researchers discovered that white people who claimed to support multiculturalism, and thus presumably believed that ethnic diversity is beneficial, could not explain why. They found that "moderate and tolerant people seemed to lack any arguments or examples to defend their position ..."¹³ and concluded that the "research showed that even those participants who supported multiculturalism were unable to back up their feelings with arguments during focus group discussions".¹⁴

Meanwhile, in an introspective report investigating their own biases, published in the same month as *Our Shared Future*, the BBC also admitted that they have been peddling a rather one-sided perspective on such issues. Some BBC producers noted that some of their staff were under the impression that they could never broadcast anything that might be construed as detrimental to ethnic minorities, and in one revealing

anecdote, it was reported that:

“Roger Mosey, in his time as Head of Television News, had a similar experience, in the case of a film about census returns in parts of east London, showing that ethnic communities had become the majority. The film included interviews with council officials, members of the Asian community, and one white resident – who pronounced himself happy with his neighbourhood. Questioned as to whether this *vox pop* was really representative of the white community, the reporter replied with pride: ‘Oh no, we had to work really hard to find him!’”¹⁵

The British establishment might thus be right to fear that, among people who actually live in diverse areas, support for multiculturalism may be shallow and superficial. This is not necessarily because overt ethnic tensions blight such areas, but simply because social capital – and thus trust and happiness – tend to be lower. Indeed, Putnam believes that his research actually understates the damage that ethnic diversity can do to social capital, as the people who are most distressed by diversity can always try to leave a neighbourhood that they don’t like. Freedom of movement thus allows the most untrusting and dissatisfied people to leave diverse areas and move in to more homogenous ones, thus reducing the difference in social capital levels between them.¹⁶ There has been ample evidence of such ‘white flight’

in the USA for decades, and a similar process may have been at work in England between 1991 and 2001. Of the 56 cities classed as PUAs, the white population fell in every one where the ethnic minority population was more than 6% of the total in 1991, whilst the white population fell by at least 5% in all cities where the initial ethnic minority population had exceeded 11%. Only Milton Keynes experienced both a substantial ethnic minority population and significant growth in the white population during this period. In a similar vein, it has also been suggested by some that the record levels of emigration from Britain in recent years are at least partly due to indigenously Britons’ dissatisfaction with the transformation of their homeland by mass immigration. A very readable expansion of this thesis is *Time to Emigrate?* by George Walden (2006), a former Tory ‘wet’ who has seemingly dried out on this issue.

It thus seems that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion’s claim that there is no general link between increasing diversity and poor social cohesion has to be treated very sceptically. If they are wrong, the consequences for social trust, crime rates, happiness levels and many other aspects of life in Britain will be severe. Given current immigration policies, David Coleman, Professor of Demography at Oxford University, recently informed the House of Lords Economic Affairs

Committee that Britain's population in 2051 will be 75 million, of whom 29% will be non-white. The current figures are 60 million and 9% respectively.¹⁷ Our cities will thus be significantly larger and much more diverse, and the likely correlations of this illustrated by Table 1 do not seem to indicate that they will be more pleasant places to live as a result.

However, it could be argued that a focus on social cohesion and social capital actually ignores many of the most profound effects that immigration and ethnic diversification can have on a society. The impact of demographic changes on national politics and the economy as a whole are only loosely related to the sort of phenomena that Putnam's theories explore. In fact, it could be argued that whereas immigration has had an influence on social cohesion in England for decades, its effects on parliamentary politics or the distribution of wealth are only just becoming significant, with developments such as the alleged mass desertion of Muslim voters from Labour at the 2005 general election, or the downward pressure on wages in some sectors caused by competition from East European workers. It is to these issues that I will turn in part two of this article. ♦

JOHN COURTHORPE
*is the pen-name of
a freelance writer*

NOTES

1. Anthony Browne, *The Retreat of Reason: Political Correctness and the Corruption of Public Debate in Modern Britain*, London: Institute for the Study of Civil Society, April 2006 (2nd edition), pp4-14, pp101-115
2. Commission on Integration and Cohesion, *Our Shared Future*, London: CIC, 14 June 2007, p9
3. *Ibid*, p111
4. Robert Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century – The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 30, No 2, June 2007, pp137-138
5. John Lloyd, "Study Paints Bleak Picture of Ethnic Diversity", *Financial Times*, 9 October 2006
6. *Op cit*, p20, p29
7. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *State of the English Cities: A Research Study*, London: ODPM, March 2006
8. <http://www.socd.communities.gov.uk/socd/Download.aspx>
9. I have also included a measure of population and a measure of the proportion of working-age people drawing benefits to show how these correlate with the explanatory variables down the left-hand side of the table
10. Alberto Alesina & Edward Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference*, Oxford: OUP, March 2004; Alberto Alesina & Enrico Spolaore, *The Size of Nations*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, December 2003
11. Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 23*, London: HMSO, 1993, p175
12. Phil Woolas, *Migration and Cohesion*, London: Communities & Local Government, 2007, pp4-5
13. Commission for Racial Equality, *The Decline of Britishness: A Research Study*, London: CRE, May 2006, p19
14. *Ibid*, p29
15. British Broadcasting Corporation, *From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21st Century*, London: BBC, June 2007, p68
16. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum", pp153-154
17. Ben Leapman, "UK 'Will Swell to 75m' as Migrants Raise Births", *Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 2007

