

# Who are we?

## Identities in Britain, 2007

Lucy Stone and Rick Muir

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The views expressed here are those of the authors, and not those of ippr.

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## Introduction

Over the last few decades issues of identity and cohesion have moved to the centre of public debate and government concern. Two factors have been particularly important in fuelling this development. First, the rise in Scottish and Welsh national sentiment, and creation of devolved government in Edinburgh and Cardiff have generated a long-running discussion about national identity and the future of the union. Second, the rise of immigration up the political agenda, along with growing support for the far right and the emergence of radical forms of political Islam, has provoked heated debate about the merits of multiculturalism and the necessity or otherwise of binding identities – especially national identities.

Against this background, ippr is engaged in a project, *Identity and the Challenges of Diversity*, exploring how and why identity matters to public policy and what, if anything, policymakers can do to encourage shared identities. This paper, one of two published together, draws on a wide range of mainly quantitative research to explore how people in Britain think about themselves and their relations to others – their identity. (For the other working paper see Muir 2007.)

This survey, we recognise, is by no means definitive: for lack of time we have had to exclude many important aspects of social identity, including, for instance, gender and sexuality. We focus instead on those collective identities on which we have the most comprehensive survey data: nationality, locality, class, politics, ethnicity and religion. What we offer here, then, is a snapshot of some of the most important dimensions of British identity in 2007.

# 1. National identity

It is widely believed that people's sense of national identity has declined; that with globalisation and the rise of international markets, communication, travel and governing institutions, as well as increased migration, the relevance of the nation to people's lives has diminished. But is this right? When it comes to Britain, the question is unusually complicated because any changes in British identity are taking place against a background of shifting loyalties between Britain and its constituent nations.

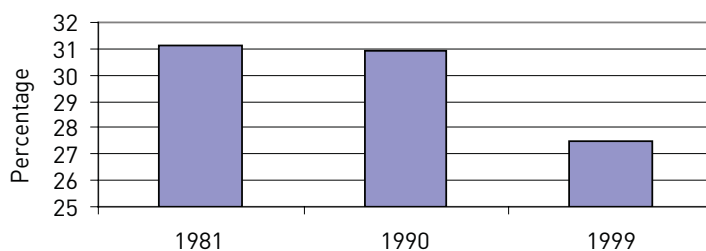
In what follows we first explore whether there have been changes in the degree to which people in Britain identify with Britain or any of its nations – that is a decline in our sense of identification with any nation. Second, we examine shifts in public allegiance towards the four British nations: Britain, England, Scotland and Wales.

We have not been able to refer here to Northern Ireland, which is very different in so many ways from the rest of the United Kingdom and whose inclusion would have significantly widened the scope of the work.

## National identity in general

The World Values Survey shows that people's sense of national identity has indeed declined in relation to other geographical identities in Britain, although the decline is perhaps not as dramatic as globalisation theory would lead us to expect (World Values Survey 1981-2000). This survey, conducted three times between 1981 and 2000, asked to which geographical location people felt the greatest sense of belonging, out of their locality, region, nation, continent or the world. In Figure 1 we show the percentages of people who made their country their first choice.

Figure 1: Percentage of those in Britain who identify with nation first (choosing from local, regional, national, continental and global identities)



Note: There is no data available after 2000.  
Source: World Values Survey 1981-2000

The number of people identifying with their nation first declined by around 4 per cent during the 1990s, while those identifying with their local area increased. Analysing the amalgamated international data from the World Values Survey, Pippa Norris found that there was a marked generational profile to those identifying first and foremost with the nation, with younger generations feeling less allegiance to the nation than did their parents and grandparents (Norris 2000). Norris argues that one's formative early years shape one's degree of nationalism, which will vary depending on the international context of the time, with the generations born at the time of the Second World War, for example, possessing a stronger national identity than those born in the era of globalisation.

In the case of Britain, the 1981 and 1990 surveys show relatively little difference in the percentage of younger and older respondents stating that their strongest allegiance was to the nation. However, in 1999 young people were less likely to give primacy to their country than their older compatriots, with just 23 per cent of those aged 15–29 stating that their country was their strongest identity, while 29 per cent and 31 per cent of the 30–49 and 50-plus age groups said the same. If these attitudes stick and if the pressures of globalisation intensify in the years to come, we might therefore expect to see national identity weaken further in Britain (World Values Survey 1981-2000).

We should, however, be cautious when interpreting the results of these so-called 'forced choice' identity surveys. Everyone inevitably has multiple identities and forcing people to choose between their geographical identities in this way may produce exaggerated outcomes. Just because one feels the strongest attachment to one's local area, does not mean one ceases to be a patriotic Brit or a cosmopolitan pro-European. Also, given

the dramatic spread of international travel, along with a more globalised popular culture and world-wide media and communication networks, one might have expected a rather more dramatic decline than that which has taken place. The nation continues to be the second most popular geographical reference point and for around a quarter of the British population it is their primary identity of this type.

Having examined the importance of national identity in the general sense (British people’s identification with their country, whichever country that might be), we now turn to shifting allegiances between Britain and its constituent nations.

## Britain and its constituent nations

### *Weakening sense of Britishness*

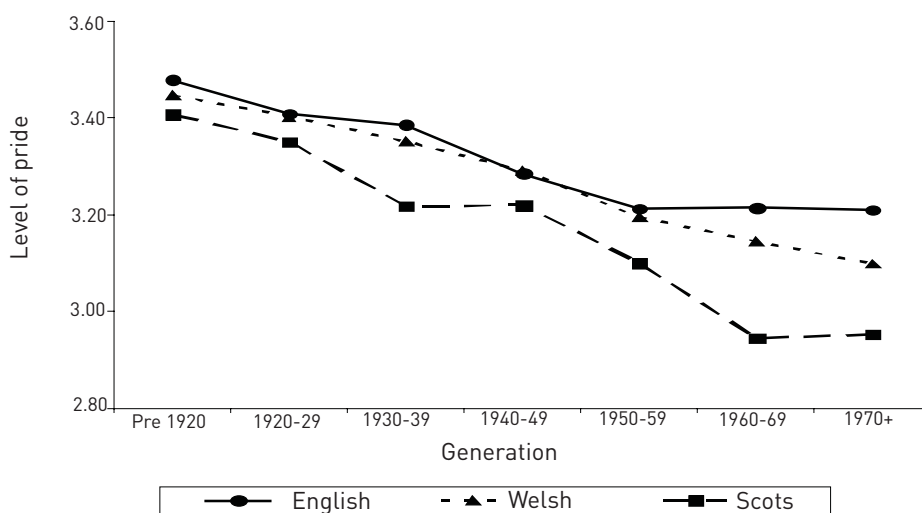
Findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey show an apparent weakening of British identity over the past decade. In 1996 52 per cent of those questioned answered that British was the best way to describe themselves, out of a choice of British, English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, European, other nationality, none of those or don’t know. Since then there has been a decrease in those describing themselves as British first and foremost, down to less than half, at 44 per cent in 2005 (Heath *et al* 2007).

The same data shows that there has been an increase in the number of people who, while describing themselves as British, do not feel that it best describes who they are. The size of this group grew from 15 per cent of the sample surveyed in 1996 to 23 per cent in 2005, a further indication of weakening British identity. There are also a consistently high number of people who do not identify themselves as British at all – 34 per cent in 1996 and 33 per cent in 2005 (*ibid*).

Reflecting this declining identification with Britain as a whole, there is also evidence of a decline in people’s sense of pride in Britain. We should note that a person’s sense of pride in their nation is distinct from their identification with it – one can still identify with one’s nation but feel a sense of shame regarding some aspects of its past and present. Asking questions about national pride, however, allows us to drill down into particular dimensions of national identity. Figure 2 shows levels of British national pride in England, Scotland and Wales, by generation, based on a scale (1–4) developed to show the mean level of national pride, with 4 indicating the most pride. It clearly shows that pride in Britain and Britishness has been declining with successive generations, although more so in Scotland and Wales than in England. This supports evidence that a weakening sense of Britishness is in part the result of growing identification with Britain’s historic constituent nations.

How does the way national pride is changing in Britain compare to the situation in other countries? The International Social Survey Programme looked at national pride on an international scale between 1995/6

Figure 2: British national pride according to generation cohorts in England, Scotland and Wales



Sources: World Values Survey 1990; Eurobarometer 1984, 1986, 1988, 1994, 1997; ISSP 2003, cited in Tilley *et al* forthcoming

and 2003/4 (Smith and Kim 2006). The survey tested two measures of national pride. The first (general pride) asked people to rank out of five their strength of agreement or disagreement with statements about shame in their country, whether they would rather be a citizen of their country than any other in the world, whether the world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like citizens of their country, and if they would support their country even if it was in the wrong.

In the international context, Great Britain emerged about average in terms of general national pride, coming 14th out of the 21 countries surveyed. This was well behind countries such as the US, Australia and Venezuela, but ahead of France and Germany. When the same survey was repeated in 2003/4, nine years after the first round, the average Briton was less proud than in 1995/6, but remained in the same place in the international context. Unlike most parts of the world, in Britain there is a gender difference in those expressing national pride, with men more likely to do so than women. Younger people are much less proud of Britain in general terms than older people (ibid).

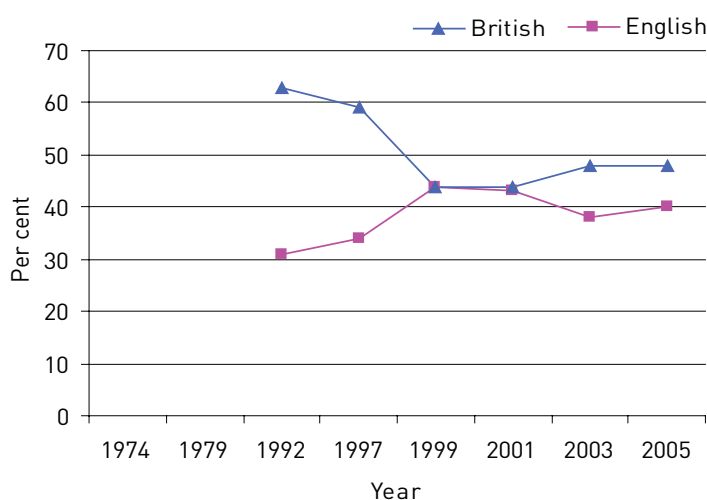
The same survey also looked at a second measure of national pride, which asked respondents about pride in the nation's democracy, political influence, economic achievements, sense of justice and achievements in science, technology, arts and sports. Here, Great Britain is above average on the international comparison, with an overall rating of 2.2 on a 4-point response scale running from very proud (4) to not proud at all (1), where the average score was 1.8. Again, however, younger people were markedly less proud than older people, with the single exception relating to the country's sporting achievements.

### *Englishness, Scottishness and Welshness*

To what extent is this weakening sense of Britishness being driven by the rise of Scottish, Welsh and English national identities? Welsh and Scottish people have long been more likely than English people to identify with their historic nation. But looking back over the last two decades it is clear that we have seen some relatively dramatic changes in how people think of their relation to Britain and its component nations.

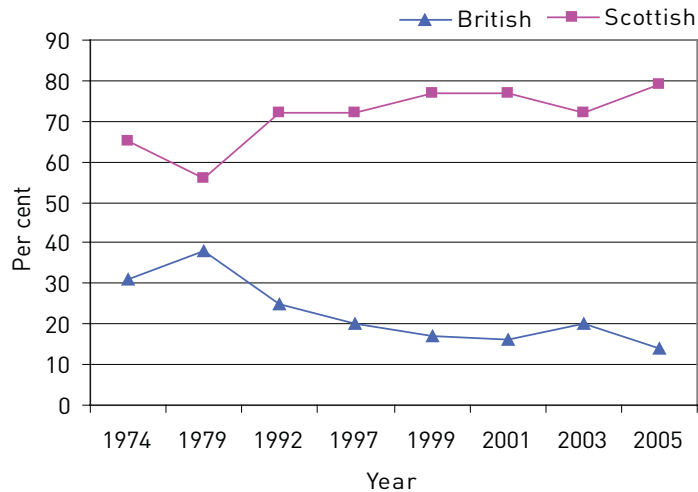
There are broadly two ways of measuring these changes. First, some surveys – the so called 'forced choice' surveys mentioned above – ask people to identify with one and only one nation out of a list. This data shows that identification with the constituent nations has grown, at the expense of Britishness (see Figures 3 to 5). When forced to choose in 2005, an overwhelming majority of Scottish (79 per cent) and a significant majority of Welsh people (60 per cent in 2003) identified with Scotland and Wales respectively, in preference to a British identity. In England only 40 per cent chose England in preference to Britain, although this figure has risen since 1992, when this data was first collected in England.

Figure 3: England: Englishness versus Britishness



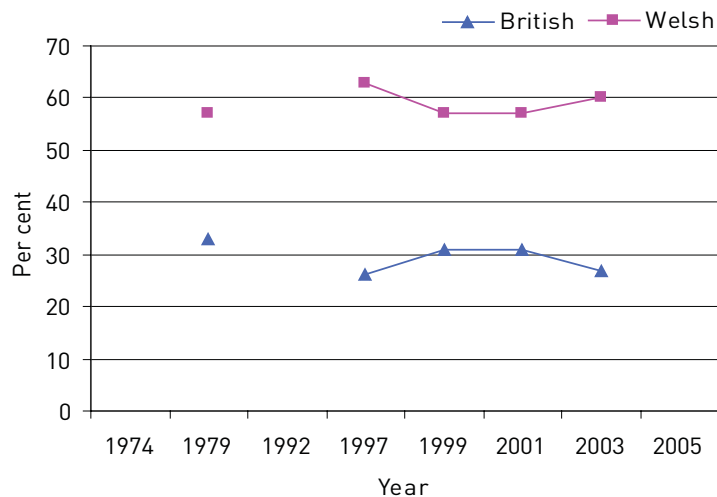
Sources: British Election Studies 1992–1997, British Social Attitudes Survey 1999–2005, cited in Heath *et al* 2007

Figure 4: Scotland: Scottishness versus Britishness



Sources: Scottish Election surveys 1974–1997, Scottish Social Attitudes surveys 1999–2005, cited in Heath *et al* 2007

Figure 5: Wales: Welshness versus Britishness



Source: Welsh Election survey 1979, Welsh Referendum Survey 1997, Welsh Assembly Election Survey 1999, Welsh Life and Times surveys 2001 and 2003, cited in Heath *et al* 2007

A second, more subtle approach recognises that many people feel both British and at the same time English, Welsh or Scottish, and seeks to gauge the weight that they attach to having these various identities (this is known as 'Moreno identity'). Using this methodology from 1999 until recent years, the British Social Attitudes survey shows a continuing trend in the same direction, with growing identification with the historic nations at the expense of Britain (ESRC 2006).

Between 1999 and 2003 in England there was a 5 per cent rise in those identifying themselves as more English than British (see Figure 6). More than a third (36 per cent) felt English and not British, or more English than British. In 2003 a smaller proportion (23 per cent) than in 1999 felt more British than English or British and not English at all. Only a third of English people in 2003 felt comfortable with saying they were equally British and English, down from 45 per cent in 1997.

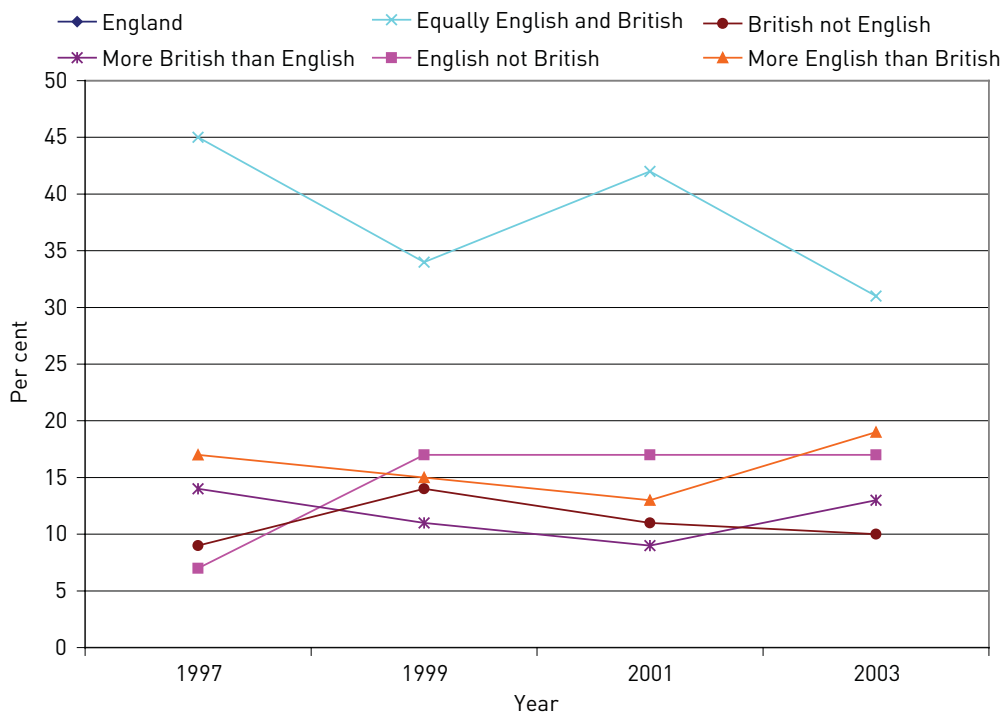
Therefore, fewer people were feeling comfortable with a roughly equal British/English identity while more were adopting more exclusive English or British identities.

In 2003, 65 per cent of people in Scotland felt more Scottish than British, or Scottish and not British, with only 22 per cent feeling equally British and Scottish (Figure 7). The number of those feeling more Scottish than British increased between 1997 and 2003, and those feeling both Scottish and British declined over the same period (ESRC 2006).

We can see a similar pattern in Wales, with a decline in the number saying that they feel equally Welsh and

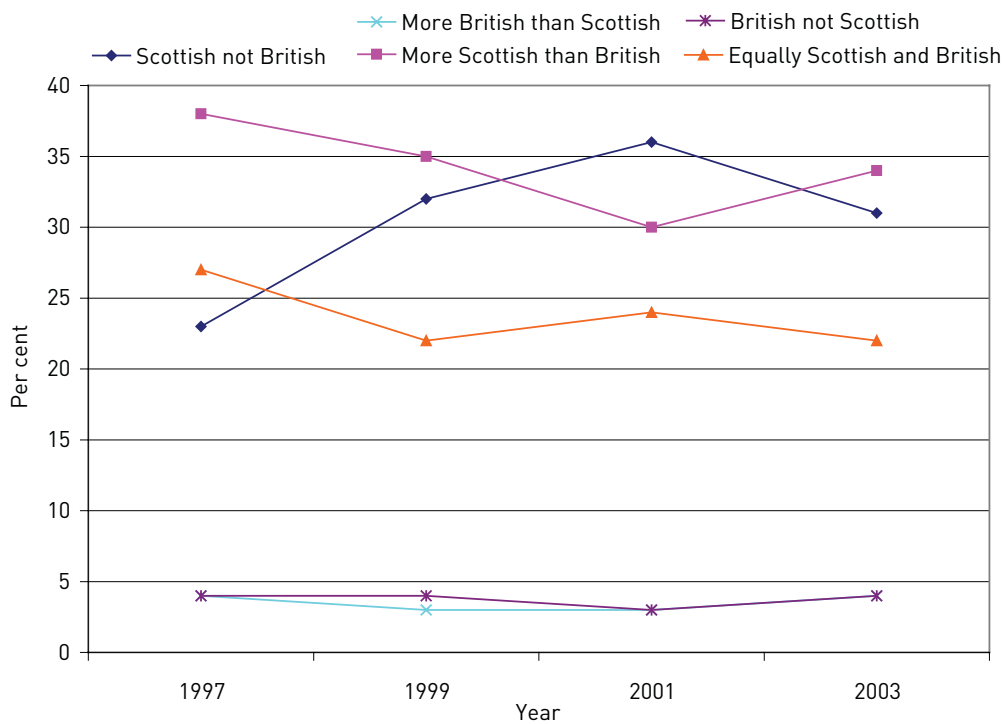


Figure 6: Moreno Identity in England: Englishness and Britishness



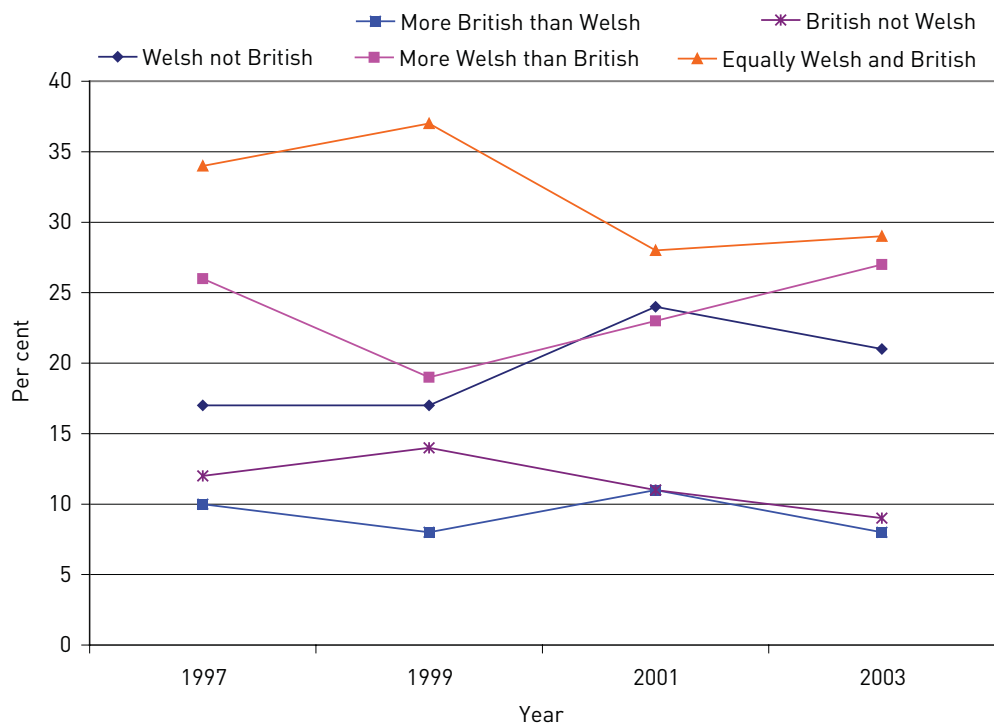
Source: British Social Attitudes Survey 1997–2003 cited in ESRC 2006

Figure 7: Moreno Identity in Scotland: Scottishness and Britishness



Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 1997–2003 cited in ESRC 2006

Figure 8: Moreno Identity in Wales: Welshness and Britishness



Sources: Wales Life and Times Survey, ESRC surveys cited in ESRC 2006

British and a rise in those saying they feel more Welsh than British, although the proportion stating the latter is lower than the proportion in Scotland feeling more Scottish than British.

In conclusion, people's sense of British identity is in decline and there has been growing identification at the same time with the historic nations of the UK. A sense of Britishness remains stronger in England than in Wales and Scotland, although in England the population is divided between those who feel more or less comfortable with identifying themselves as either English or British. The implication for policymakers keen to promote a renewal of Britishness (see Muir 2007) is that they will have to reverse a current trend and that their endeavours will not be equally well received in different parts of the UK.

## Our changing understanding of Britishness

Britishness, then, appears to have become weaker and minority nationalisms (Heath *et al* 2005) have become stronger – and all against a background of national belonging declining in importance relative to people's broader sense of who they are. There is also evidence showing that the way in which people understand their national identity has undergone significant change.

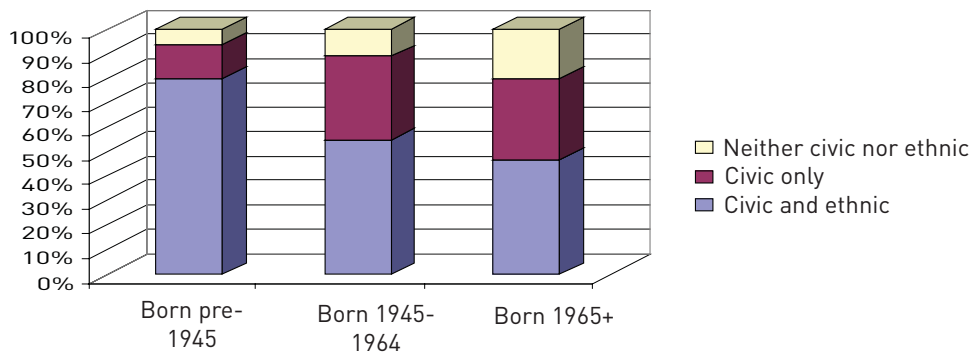
People researching nationalism often distinguish between two broad types of nationalism: ethnic and civic. Ethnic nationalists tend to think that in order to belong to a nation you need to have parents or even a long line of ancestors of that nationality, and to have been brought up on its customs and traditions – they understand national belonging as a matter first and foremost of blood and culture. Civic nationalists, by contrast, think of national belonging as a matter of residence, shared political values, common civic institutions and, perhaps, shared language.

Support for a civic understanding of Britishness has grown over the last decade. According to British Social Attitudes data the proportion of British people with a civic and ethnic view of what makes someone 'truly British' fell from 63 per cent in 1995 to 58 per cent in 2003, while those holding exclusively a civic view rose from 23 per cent to 32 per cent (Tilley *et al* 2004). According to the data, we are much less likely than we were 10 years ago to think that one has to have (white) British ancestors to be British oneself – or that one has to be Christian. Once again, as Figure 9 demonstrates, the trend is cohort based, with younger generations more inclined to a civic concept of Britishness than older people.

As would be expected, people who are civic nationalists tend to be more tolerant and more welcoming of immigrants than those who can be described as ethnic. Similarly, those who identify with civic nationalism

are more likely to support international institutions and internationalist policies (Heath 2005). If support for civic nationalism continues to grow as the older post-war generations give way to younger ones, there is good reason to think that Britain will continue to become a place with a more liberal and cosmopolitan sense of national identity.

Figure 9: Changing definitions of Britishness



Source: British Social Attitudes 1995 and 2003, in Tilley *et al* 2004

Yet it is important not to become too optimistic. If the polls show growing support for a civic understanding of national belonging, they also show that over the last decade the public has become increasingly concerned about immigration, and this concern appears to be driven by worries not just about the material impact of inward migration, but also about its effect on identity and shared culture (Lewis 2005). So we might interpret the rise in civic nationalism as a reflection not so much – or not only – of a genuine increase in public support for civic nationalism, but an increased public awareness that this is how national citizenship is officially understood – or even that this is how we are meant to understand it.

We have said that support for a civic as distinct from an ethnic understanding of Britishness varies across the generations. But it also varies according to one's level of formal education. People with lower educational qualifications are much more likely to have an exclusive understanding of their national identity. British Social Attitudes data shows that those with degrees are significantly more likely to have a civic conception of national identity than those with no formal qualifications (Tilley *et al* 2004). Education, we can conclude, is an important factor in supporting a more open and pluralist idea of Britishness.

Research also shows that British identity is becoming less associated with traditional institutions and more with values and non-state public figures. A YouGov survey in July 2005 found that the values of free speech (61 per cent), sense of fairness and fair play (54 per cent), justice (51 per cent), innovation (52 per cent) and tolerance (41 per cent) were much more important in defining Britishness than the monarchy (38 per cent), the national anthem (30 per cent), the empire (25 per cent) or the Church of England (17 per cent) (YouGov 2005). The same poll showed that people had slightly more pride in the athlete Kelly Holmes as a symbol of the 'best of British' (51 per cent) than the Queen (50 per cent). There are some institutions, however, that retain an importance for people in defining our national identity, with 90 per cent of people believing that the National Health Service is as important as ever in portraying a positive image of Britain abroad, while the BBC is also thought to present a good image of the country (Opinion Leader Research 2005).

## Who identifies with Britain or its constituent nations?

What is the social composition of those who feel British or who feel English, Scottish and Welsh?

Importantly, black and minority ethnic groups are much more likely than white people to identify with Britain than with its constituent nations. In the 2001 General Household Survey, for example:

- 51 per cent of black and minority ethnic respondents described themselves as British only, compared to 29 per cent of white respondents.
- 52 per cent of white respondents described themselves as English compared to just 11 per cent of black and minority ethnic respondents.
- 16 per cent of white respondents saw themselves as both British and English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish,

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compared to just 2 per cent of black and minority ethnic respondents. (Walker *et al* 2001)

Further research by MORI found that only 9 per cent of black and minority ethnic respondents strongly identify with England, Wales or Scotland, compared to 39 per cent of the general public as a whole (MORI/CRE 2002).

Of course, there are large differences between different minority ethnic groups, with some identifying more readily than others with Britain. Less than three out of ten white Irish people living in Britain identify with Britain, Scotland, England or Wales, the lowest score for any ethnic group. Black Africans were less likely to identify with Britain than black Caribbeans in the census, although this might be because a higher proportion of black Africans than black Caribbeans were born outside the UK. Also, Irish people apart, people with roots in countries that once formed part of the British empire, such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, were also more likely to see themselves as British (Office for National Statistics 2005).

Evidence also indicates that those who identify most with Englishness tend to have less progressive attitudes towards issues of race and migration than those who identify most strongly as British. British Social Attitudes data shows that those who feel predominantly English are more likely to admit to racial prejudice and more likely to believe that equal opportunities for minority ethnic groups have 'gone too far' than those who feel predominantly British (Curtice and Seyd 2001).

In Scotland, however, this dynamic works differently, with Scottish national identity being more inclusive of black and minority ethnic groups than English national identity. For example, those who feel predominantly Scottish are less likely to admit to racial prejudice than those Scots who feel predominantly British (*ibid*). Minority ethnic Scots are much more likely to identify themselves as Scottish than minority ethnic respondents in England are to identify themselves mainly as English. Whereas just 7 per cent of non-white people in England identify themselves as English, 33 per cent of non-white people in Scotland identify themselves as Scottish; this is more than the number of minority ethnic Scots identifying themselves as British (just 17 per cent) (Curtice 2006). Scottish identity is in this sense a more inclusive and civic form of national identity than Englishness.

There are some indications of a class profile to people's sense of national identity. The British Social Attitudes survey shows that in 2000 only 34 per cent of middle-class professionals described themselves first and foremost as English, but this rises to 46 per cent among working-class respondents. And although in 1996 the professionals category felt only slightly less English than they did in 2000 (31 per cent), those feeling English rose by 20 per cent over the same period among the working class. Englishness was more popular than Britishness for the working-class and manual foreman categories, whereas the reverse was true for the middle-class professionals, routine non-manual workers and the petty bourgeoisie (British Social Attitudes 1983–2005).

While in Scotland the historic national identity has become stronger while embracing the country's minority ethnic population, in England the trends are more worrying. An identification with Englishness is on the rise, but it is also associated with a more ethnic and exclusive understanding of national belonging than Britishness. Ethnic minorities in England most strongly identify themselves as British, with very few seeing themselves as English. This poses a number of important questions: will the growth of Englishness lead to an increasingly ethnic conception of national identity in England? Or can Englishness become more inclusive as its popularity grows, rather like the historic national identity in Scotland? Should English progressives focus on promoting a more civic kind of Britishness, which is Chancellor Gordon Brown's focus, or should they also be seeking to make Englishness a more pluralist and cosmopolitan identity, as suggested recently by singer and political activist Billy Bragg, and one-time Home Secretary David Blunkett? (See Brown 2006, Bragg 2006, Blunkett 2005.)

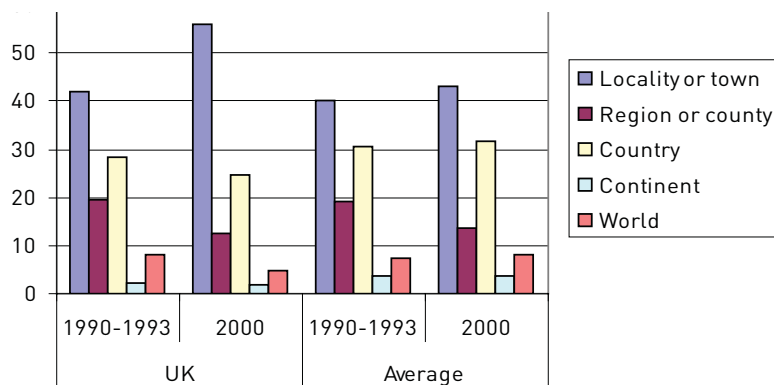
## 2. Alternative geographical identities

### Local identity

With much of the identity debate focused on national identity, it has perhaps been overlooked that there is a more salient location for shared identities in people's lives: their locality.

While all other territorial identities have declined in the UK, Figure 10 below shows that identification with one's locality (as distinct from region or larger area) increased between 1990 and 2000. Although this is in line with international trends, there has been a much larger increase in the UK than elsewhere. Most individuals in the UK identify most strongly with their locality or town in preference to a regional, national or global identity. Fifty-six per cent of the population identify with their locality first, compared with 25 per cent that identify with the nation. All generations choose local identity as the most important.

Figure 10: Spatial identity of UK population compared to international average



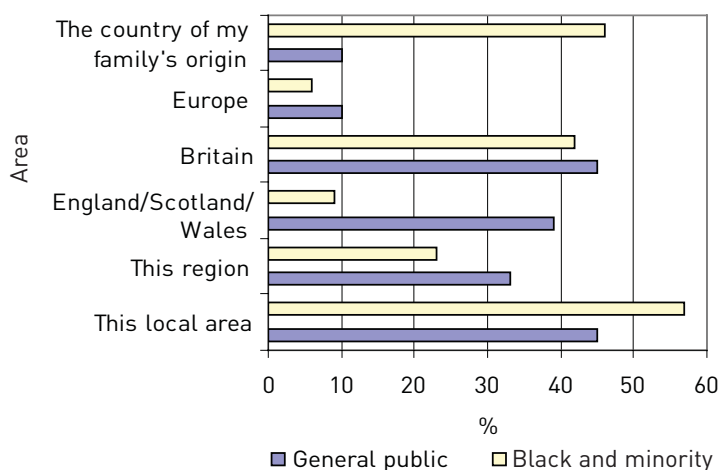
First choice when asked at which level they felt the strongest sense of belonging.

Source: World Values Survey 1990-2000

The fact that people place more emphasis on their local area than any other territorial entity is significant for debates on community cohesion and identity. While much of the focus in these debates is at the national level, exploring the role of Britishness or British values, there is also potential for building on strong local identities to help break down barriers in towns, cities and neighbourhoods. In some areas a strong local identity rooted in a shared residency of a particular town or neighbourhood might be powerful enough to bring together people from different ages or ethnic backgrounds. For more on this see Muir 2007.

As Figure 11 shows, black and ethnic minorities tend to identify themselves more strongly with their local area than the population as a whole. People from ethnic minority groups also say that 'this local area' is more important to their sense of identity than the country of their family's origin.

Figure 11: Relative location of identity with minority ethnic groups and the general public



In answer to a question, 'On this card are a number of different areas or communities. Which two or three would you say you most identify with?'

Source: MORI/CRE 2002

As Table 1 indicates, in England, rural dwellers have a slightly stronger local identity than urban dwellers, and Londoners have the weakest sense of attachment to their locality.

**Table 1. Identification with different areas in England – national, European, regional and local**

Attachment to different areas						
	London	N & W urban	S & E urban	N & W non-urban	S & E non-urban	All England
Percentage feeling closest attachment to						
Local area	77	84	83	89	89	85
Region (Gov. Office)	77	80	71	78	70	75
England as a whole	79	82	86	87	86	84
Britain as a whole	80	80	83	83	81	81
Europe as a whole	45	30	36	38	32	35

Source: ODPM 2005

### Cosmopolitan identities

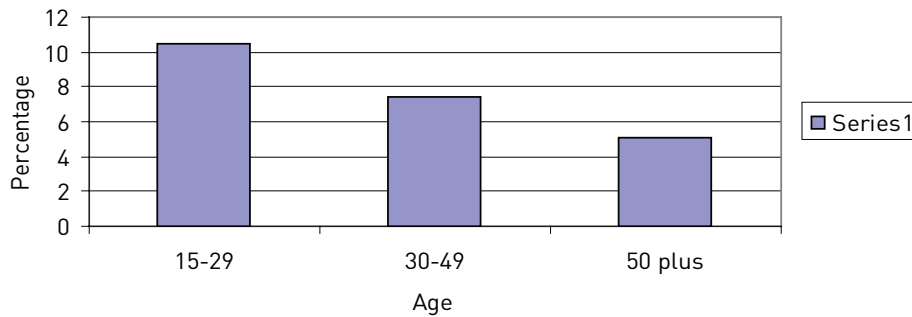
It is often assumed that the overall decline in a sense of national identity has been accompanied by a rise in cosmopolitan, global identities. Cosmopolitans are people who identify much more with their continent and the world as a whole than with the nation, and who possess a greater faith in global institutions. However, data from the World Values Survey shows that national and local identities are generally much stronger than cosmopolitan identities. From among a representative sample of most of the world’s population, 47 per cent say they identify most strongly with their locality or region, 38 per cent identify most strongly with the nation, and just 15 per cent feel that their primary geographical identity is with their continent or the wider world. Just 2 per cent of the world’s population are what Pippa Norris describes as ‘pure cosmopolitans’, only identifying with the world or their continent (Norris 2000).

More positively from the cosmopolitan point of view, younger people are much less nationalistic and much more internationalist than the older generations. This implies that cosmopolitan identities have been growing internationally, as generations born at the time of the Second World War, for instance, are replaced by those born in the era of globalisation and the Internet (ibid).

So, what about Britain? Using the World Values Survey data we can see that the British younger generations of 1999 did have a stronger sense of global identity than the older generations, coupled with a lower level of nationalism (see Figure 13). This suggests that in Britain too, global identities might well grow as the older, more nationalistic generations are replaced with younger more cosmopolitan cohorts.

However, if we compare the UK with international trends (the average of all countries surveyed, shown in Figure 10 above), we find an unexpected picture. Whereas global identity has increased over the average of all countries (and more so in developed countries) it actually showed a decline in the UK (World Values Survey 1990-2000). Despite processes of increasing globalisation between 1990 and 2000 there has been a halving in the number of Britons who describe themselves first and foremost as citizens of the world. Closer analysis shows that this decline occurred across generations (Figure 14). Although there was an increase in global identity among young people from 1981 to 1990, this then declined from 1990 to 1999.

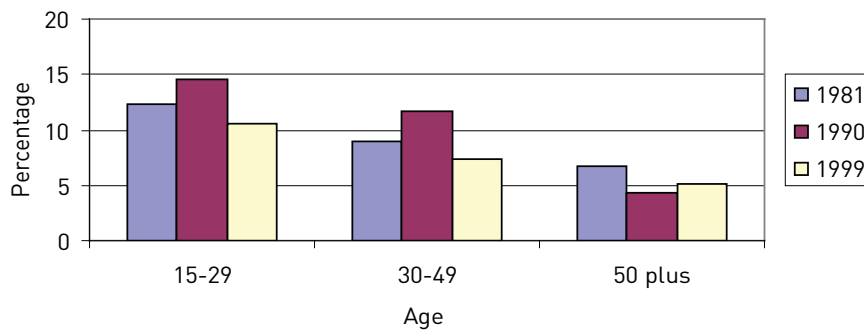
Figure 13: Global identification across the generations in Britain



Notes: First choice when asked at which level they felt the strongest sense of belonging. There is no data available post 2000. Sample size between 1000 and 1484.

Source: World Values Survey 1990-2000

Figure 14: Cosmopolitan Britons by age: trends



Note: First choice when asked at which level they felt the strongest sense of belonging.

Source: World Values Survey 1990-2000

Of course, we need to be cautious about concluding from these results that there is an absence of cosmopolitan identity among most Britons. These surveys ask people to choose their primary identities, cutting out other aspects of their identities that may also have meaning. Just because one has a stronger attachment to the nation does not mean one lacks a cosmopolitan identity at some level.

If the British public do not strongly identify with the world, do they identify with Europe? Unfortunately, from an internationalist point of view, a strong European identity is only found among a very small proportion of the UK population, and is very low when compared to the European average. Given a choice of different geographical places with which to identify, only 10 per cent of the UK population made Europe their first choice in 2004. And this is true across different ethnic groups. In fact, people from black and minority ethnic groups are even less likely to identify with Europe than their white counterparts (Figure 11 above, MORI/CRE 2002). Londoners are more likely to have a European identity than people from elsewhere in England, while the urban North and West are the least pro-European among the English regions (ODPM 2005).

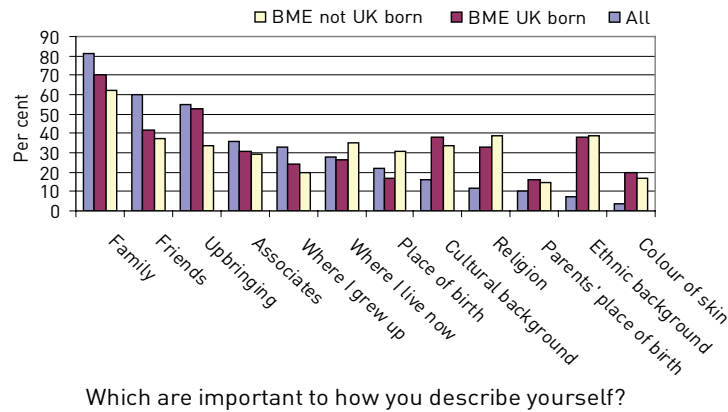


### 3. Ethnic identities

It is often observed that white British people tend not to think of themselves as having an ethnic identity – they think that such identities are characteristic of minority ethnic groups only. But of course, all of us belong to one or more ethnic group. Moreover, as we have seen, a significant minority of white people do understand their national identity in ethnic terms; this is strongest among less educated groups, and is more true of Englishness than Britishness (in England) or Scottishness (Tilley *et al* 2004, Curtice and Seyd 2001).

As a general rule, however, ethnic minorities do tend to identify more heavily than people from majority groups with their ethnic or racial group, and Britain is no exception.

Figure 15: Ethnic and cultural background, place of birth and country of origin in context



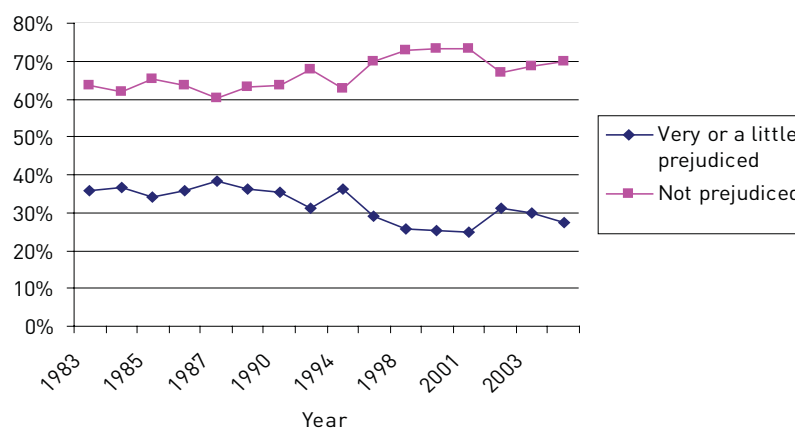
Source: MORI/CRE 2002

A 2002 MORI survey for the Commission for Racial Equality found that whereas less than 5 per cent of Britons identify the colour of their skin as important to how they describe themselves, 20 per cent of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups do so. And whereas a little more than 5 per cent of Britons identify their ethnic background as important to their identity, the figure rises to nearly 40 per cent of people from BME groups (MORI/CRE 2002).

Figure 15 puts the importance of ethnicity into context: for instance, it shows that while non-UK-born black and minority ethnic respondents do feel that their ethnicity is more important to them than the population generally, the area where they currently live is also more significant for these groups than for the population as a whole. This sense of local attachment is also more important to them than their skin colour or cultural background.

Also, let us not forget that while white British people do not claim to have a strong sense of ethnic identity, the persistence of racist attitudes is indicative of ethnic identification by some white people. The good news is that, across the UK, self-reported racism seems to be on a downward turn, as shown in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16: Self-reported racial prejudice in the UK



Source: British Social Attitudes 1983–2003



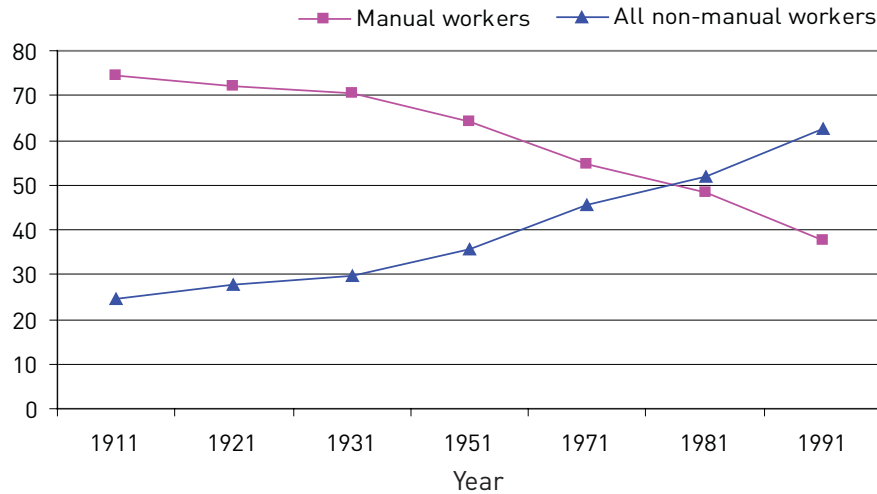
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Whereas in 1983 36 per cent of people said they would describe themselves as either very or a little racially prejudiced, this had fallen to 28 per cent by 2004. However, the extent of this decline in self-reported racial prejudice over 20 years is not great – almost a third of the British public still claim that they are to some degree racially prejudiced. Given the social stigma attached to racist attitudes, the levels of actual prejudice are likely to be higher.

## 4. Class identities

The British class structure went through substantial change over the last century. Those employed in manual occupations shrank from making up 75 per cent of the workforce in 1911 to just 38 per cent in 1991. These jobs have been displaced by managerial, professional and clerical jobs (Figures 17 and 18).

Figure 17: Manual versus non-manual occupations in Britain 1911-1991



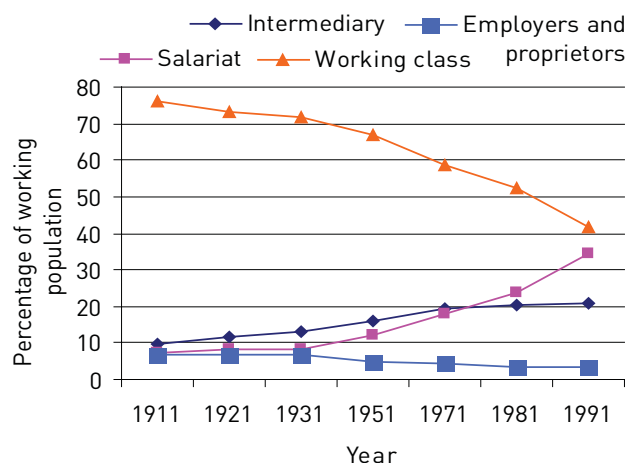
Source: Census data, 1911-1991 in Gallie 2001

Measuring the size of social classes is difficult because how we define categories such as middle-class or working-class is highly contested. Most recent sociological work on class, in particular work on social mobility and electoral trends, uses the Goldthorpe schema. This distinguishes essentially between three groups, on the basis of their income, security, chances of advancement and autonomy in the labour market:

- the salariat: both the higher salariat (professionals, managers and administrators in large enterprises) and lower salariat (semi-professionals, managers and administrators in small enterprises)
- the petty bourgeoisie: farmers, small employers and own account workers
- the working class: both the higher working class (manual foremen, technicians, skilled workers) and the lower working class (semi and unskilled manual workers, including agricultural workers).

Goldthorpe argues that routine non-manual workers should be considered as marginal to the middle class, as manual foremen are to the working class (Heath and Payne 1999). On the basis of this framework, Britain's class composition has changed dramatically over the last century, as shown in Figure 18.

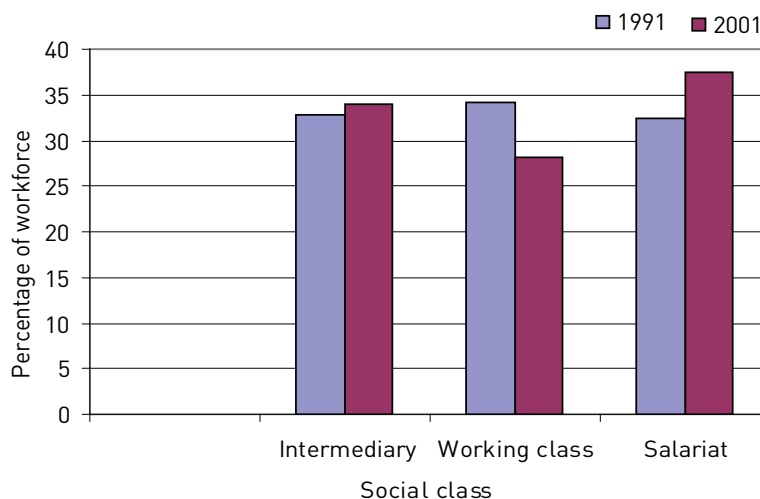
Figure 18: Trends in UK social class structure 1911-1991



Source: ippr analysis of census data 1911-1991 in Gallie 2001

Although it uses different data and categories (from the Labour Force Survey, rather than the census), Figure 19 shows that this overall trend of a decline in the working class as a proportion of the population has continued in recent years. By 2000 the salariat had overtaken manual workers as the single largest group, making up 37.5 per cent of the workforce, with the manual working class shrinking further from 34 to 28 per cent. The intermediary group, here including those in clerical work, personal services and sales, also rose slightly from 33 to 34 per cent. Britain is becoming a more middle-class country and the working class as defined in terms of people doing manual work is for the first time less than a third of the British workforce.

Figure 19: Trends in UK social class structure 1991-2000



Source: Labour Force Survey 1991-2000 in Gallie 2001

How do trends in class *identity* correspond with these changes in occupational structure? The first thing to note about class identification is that there has been surprisingly little change in spontaneous (or non-prompted) class identification. In 1964 47 per cent of people could, without prompting, place themselves in a social class, but this had fallen by just 2 per cent to 45 per cent by 2005. There was an increase in spontaneous class identification in 1983, a time when party politics was much more polarised along class lines, to 53 per cent, but this has since fallen away to its previous level (Heath *et al* 2007).

Less surprisingly, given the trends in occupational structure, the number of people who spontaneously identify themselves as working class has fallen (from 33 per cent in 1964 to 25 per cent in 2005), while the number who spontaneously identify themselves as middle class has increased (from 14 per cent in 1964 to 20 per cent in 2005).

There are a further 17 per cent of people who place themselves in what might be described as a 'reticent' middle class category when prompted by an interviewer. Overall, if stronger and more reticent identifiers are included, the number of people describing themselves as middle class rises to 37 per cent of the population, up from 30 per cent in 1964. Remarkably, however, given the change in occupational structure highlighted earlier, this still means that a majority of the country (57 per cent) identifies itself as working class (Heath *et al* 2007).

Research for the Future Foundation in 2006 also found Britain – in identity terms – to be a majority working-class nation, with 53 per cent describing themselves as working class, compared to 43 per cent as middle class. This research found that there may be as many as half a million people earning over £100,000 a year who say they are working class. It also found that almost a third of employees doing professional, managerial and technical jobs define themselves as working class. Only 1 per cent of people admitted to being upper class, suggesting that very few people wish to place themselves in that category. The research also found that only 1 per cent of the top 10 per cent in terms of earnings called themselves upper class, with three quarters of those describing themselves as middle class. At least as far as the rich are concerned, it would seem that 'we're all middle class now' (Future Foundation 2006).

These figures, showing a majority of people identifying as working class, seem at odds with the census data under the Goldthorpe schema shown above. There are a number of explanations for this. First, it is not just

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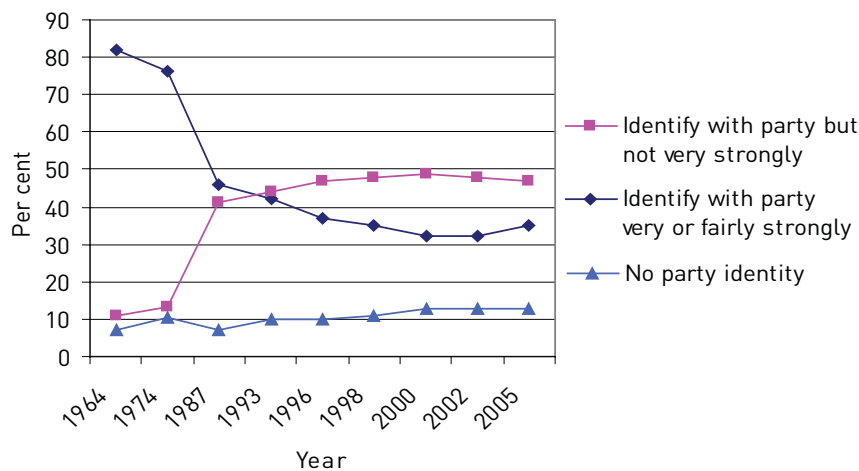
current socio-economic status that determines one's class identity. Rather, class tends also to refer to family, education, social attitudes and cultural background. This explains why there are such a large number of people doing professional or managerial jobs or earning over £100,000 who consider themselves working class: such people are obviously aware that they earn a lot of money, but identify as working class because they come from a working-class background. Heath *et al* (2007) found in follow-up interviews in the British Election Study (BES) that this was indeed how many conceptualised their class identity, deriving it more from how they were brought up than from their current job.

Second, the smaller number of people identifying themselves in the BES data as middle class without being prompted, compared to a larger number of unprompted working-class identifiers, suggests that the British middle class is much more reticent about its class status than the working class. There may well be a cultural tendency at work, in which people who think of themselves as working class (even relatively affluent ones) are proud of their roots, while middle-class people are more reticent about admitting their social background (Future Foundation 2006).

## 5. Political identities

In the years after the Second World War, the heyday of the mass political party, political orientation was an important source of identity, and one closely linked to class. All that has changed over the last few decades, with party membership and identification low and still falling (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Party identity in the UK 1964-2005



Sources: British Election Study 1964–1974 in Heath 2006 and British Social Attitudes survey 1987–2005 in Heath *et al* 2007

The number of those claiming to identify strongly or fairly strongly with a political party has declined significantly, while the number of those with no partisan identity or only a weak one has increased. The weakening of distinctive partisan identities is also shown by the fact that only half of supporters of both main political parties, Labour and the Conservatives, feel they have a lot in common with other supporters of their party. This figure rises to 62 per cent for the next main political party, the Liberal Democrats, and is much higher for all other minor political parties, at 70 per cent (Heath *et al* 2007). The catch-all nature of the two largest parties, especially New Labour, has diluted the distinctiveness of their partisan support. British Social Attitudes data reflects this in the case of Labour, with the number of people saying Labour is ‘good for one class’ (as opposed to ‘good for all’) declining from 49 per cent in 1986 to 26 per cent in 1997 (British Social Attitudes 1983–2005).

## 6. Religious identities

Trends in religious identity in the UK are complicated and in some respects particularly elusive. There are many different ways of measuring religiosity: religious belief, religious identity and active participation or attendance at a place of worship. The relationships between these different variables are complicated: are fewer people attending church, for example, because they have ceased believing in God, and if not, what does their behaviour mean? If one attends once a year, what does this imply in terms of religious commitment? Does identifying as belonging to a particular religious group actually entail any religious belief at all?

Several trends, however, seem clear. First, religion is more important to people from black and minority ethnic groups than white people (see Figure 15 above).

Second, there has been a headline decline in the proportion of Britons who say they belong to a religion (see Figure 21, below). Religious belief as opposed to belonging has also been in decline. This decline in both religious belonging and belief has been generational and cumulative: children of non-religious parents are likely to be non-religious themselves. At the same time, there is a continuing tendency towards secularisation, so that people who are born into religious families are more likely to grow up non-religious than those who are born into non-religious families are likely grow up religious (Voas and Crockett 2005).

Britain is among the least religious of nations, although religion is generally weaker in most developed countries, with the notable exception of the United States. A 2002 international poll for the Pew Research Center found that only 33 per cent of Britons felt that religion was important in their lives (Table 2). This contrasts to 92 per cent of Indians, 77 per cent of Brazilians and 59 per cent of Americans.

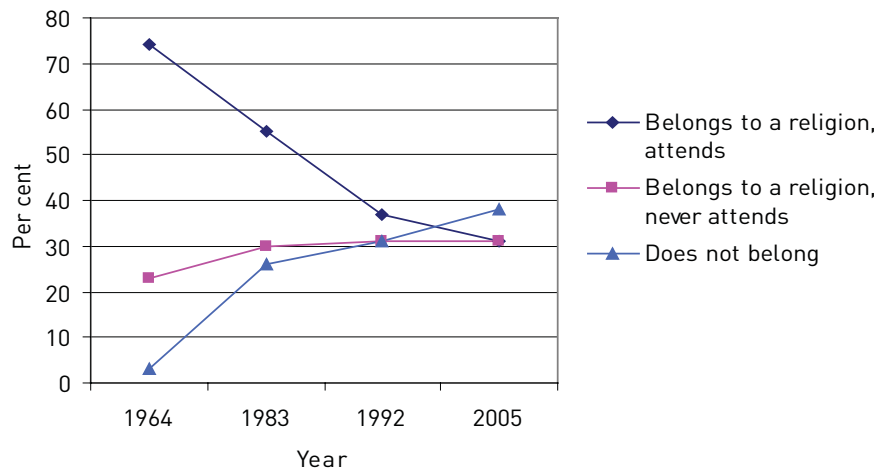
Country	Percentage of adults for whom religion is important
India	92
South Africa	87
Brazil	77
Turkey	65
USA	59
Poland	36
Great Britain	33
Canada	30
Italy	27
Germany	21
Russia	14
Japan	12
France	11

Source: Pew Research Center 2002

Third, this decline in religious belief and practice is seen not just among white people, but among black and minority ethnic groups as well (Crockett and Voas (2006). As Figure 15 showed, people from black and minority ethnic groups born in this country are less likely than those born outside it to identify with a religion.

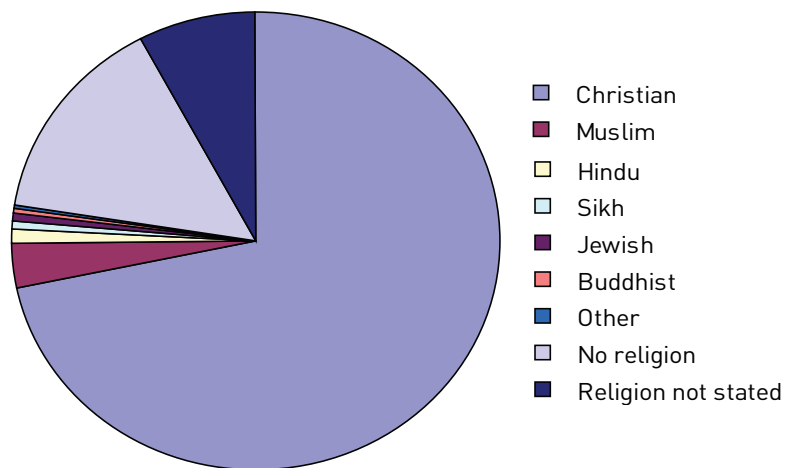
The final notable trend is that Britain has become religiously much more diverse with secularisation being offset, somewhat, by inwards immigration of new citizens to whom religion is important. Figure 22 shows that almost a quarter of 2001 census respondents (23 per cent) either say they belong to no religion or do not state a religion. 71.6 per cent of British people claim to be nominally Christian, with Muslims being the

Figure 21: Religious belonging and attendance in the UK 1964-2005



Sources: British Election Studies 1964–1992 in Heath *et al* 2007

Figure 22: Religious identity in the UK, 2001



Source: 2001 Census, Office for National Statistics

largest non-Christian group, making up 2.7 per cent of the population and over half of the non-Christian religious population. This is followed in descending order by Hindus (1 per cent), Sikhs (0.6 per cent), Jews (0.5 per cent) and Buddhists (0.3 per cent).

Given that 2001 was the first time people were asked to state their religion in the census, we cannot make any conclusions about trends from this data. However, other data shows increasing religious diversity in recent years. According to Christian Research, active membership of 'other religions' and 'new religious movements' grew from 1.4 million (2.44 per cent of the UK population) in 2000 to an estimated 1.6 million (2.73 per cent) five years later (Christian Research 2005). This can mostly be attributed to increased immigration – most of the non-Christian believers are among minority ethnic groups, with white British people remaining overwhelmingly Christian or non-believing. Larger families among some minority ethnic groups also play a role in the growth of non-Christian believers – South Asian groups, for example, have the highest average number of children per household (Office for National Statistics 2005).

There is not the space here to discuss each of these religious identities in turn, but we shall briefly examine available data on, first, the largest religious group – Christianity – and second, Islam, which, in the current political climate, has been a focus of intense and, many would say, unhelpful, public scrutiny.

Christianity remains, at least on the face of it, the most popular religion in Britain today, with nearly three-quarters of the population describing themselves as Christian in the 2001 census. However, the census figures are misleading, reflecting the close connection many people still make between national identity or culture and Christianity, rather than any very strong identification with the Christian religion (Voas and Bruce 2004).

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When asked in the British Social Attitudes Survey whether they belonged to a particular religion, only 54 per cent of the sample called themselves Christian in 2004, down from 66 per cent in 1983 (British Social Attitudes Survey 1983–2004). The fall in attendance at many local churches around the country is a further sign of a weakening of Christian belief or practice. The Christian Research English Church Census found that Sunday church attendance among all Christian dominations fell between 1989 and 2005 (for the Church of England it fell by 31 per cent and for the Roman Catholic Church by 49 per cent), except in the case of Pentecostalist and new Christian churches, which grew by 22 per cent and 10 per cent respectively (Christian Research 2005). This latter phenomenon is a reflection of the arrival of new migrant communities into the country with stronger Christian identities, in particular from Africa. Black churches grew by 18 per cent between 1995 and 2005, compared to a drop in church membership more widely of 5 per cent over the same period (John 2006).

Not only are the number of Christians declining, but also those that remain appear to feel a relatively weak sense of identification with their fellow Christians. Of all religious groups, Anglicans have the weakest sense of in-group identification, followed by Roman Catholics. Non-Christian believers by contrast, identify much more strongly with their co-religionists (Heath *et al* 2007).

Muslims make up Britain's second largest religious group after Christians, and British Muslim identity has of course come under intense media and political scrutiny since the events of 9/11 and July 2005. Perhaps it is not surprising then, to learn that British Muslims appear very worried about the current political climate and what this means for their communities. Most British Muslims report feeling that Europeans are hostile to their community (41 per cent) – less than in Germany, but more than in France and Spain. Almost one third of British Muslims (28 per cent) say they have experienced such hostility personally (more than in Germany and Spain, but less than in France). What is more, 80 per cent of British Muslims feel either very or somewhat concerned about the future of Muslims in Britain, which is more than in France, Germany and Spain (Pew Research Center 2006).

Despite this, most British Muslims were positive about the overall direction of Britain and felt that conditions for Muslim women were better in Britain than in Muslim countries. They did, however, feel more concerned than in the other European countries that their religion was declining and that young people were being influenced by secular culture (*ibid* 2006).

When weighing the importance of religious as compared to national identity, British Muslims place most value on their religious identity (see Figure 23). Eighty-one per cent of British Muslims consider their religious identity is more significant than their national identity. We should note that the same is true of Muslims living in Pakistan, 87 per cent of whom consider themselves Muslim first and Pakistani citizens second. There are similar majorities of Muslims preferring their religious over their national identity in Jordan, Egypt, Turkey and Nigeria. British Muslims, however, appear more likely than Muslims in other European countries to say that their religious identity is more important than their national identity. French Muslims divide almost equally between those giving precedence to national or religious identity (*ibid*).

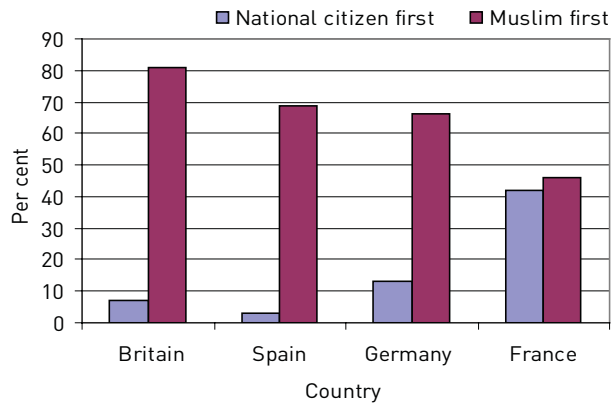
One point of note is the growing importance of religion and religious identity to younger as compared with older British Muslims, bucking the trend noted earlier of the declining importance of religion to young people, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. According to a recent study, 37 per cent of 16- to 24-year-old British Muslims would prefer to live under sharia law (the majority, 50 per cent, preferred British law), compared to just 17 per cent of those over 55 years old. In line with this trend, younger Muslims are more likely than older Muslims to favour sending their children to Islamic as opposed to mixed state schools and are more likely to prefer that Muslim women choose to wear the veil. This greater sense of Islamic identity and popularity of related cultural attitudes is likely to be a sign of resistance to the current political climate: around one third of British Muslims feel that they have been under suspicion or treated with hostility because of their religion (Mirza *et al* 2007).

We should distinguish between a growth in religiosity and a growth in support for extreme versions of political Islam. Whereas most British Muslims perceive there to be a rise in Islamic identity and see this as a good thing, the overwhelming majority (77 per cent) are concerned about the rise in 'extreme political views' (Pew Research Center 2006). A number of polls have triggered alarmist headlines by finding small but significant minorities of younger Muslims especially expressing sympathy with groups like Al Qaeda – for instance a recent poll for Policy Exchange found that 7 per cent of 16- to 24-year-old Muslims 'admired' organisations such as Al Qaeda, 'who are prepared to fight the West', compared to just 3 per cent of those aged over 55. However, expressing admiration, as the authors of the report note, is more likely to be an



expression of disillusion with the West than support for terrorism (Mirza *et al* 2007). Using a more nuanced question in 2006, the 1990 Trust found that only a very tiny minority (1.9 per cent) of Muslims believed it was justified to carry out a terrorist attack on civilians in the UK (ibid).

Figure 23: Importance of national or religious identity to Muslims in four European countries



Source: Pew Research Center (2006)

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## Conclusion

This paper does not attempt to represent a comprehensive study of the state of identity in the UK. There are a number of important identities that are not covered, for example, gender, family, age and identities related to popular culture and we cannot claim to have done full justice to the complexity of the identities discussed.

The purpose has been to provide a snapshot of who we understand ourselves to be in 2007, in particular by looking at those identities that have been traditionally very strong in Britain and on which there is good survey data over time: nationality, ethnicity, class, party politics and religion.

In general terms the kaleidoscope of British identities has been changing over recent decades, although not always in expected directions. Some traditional identities have markedly declined, most notably religious and party political identities. Surprisingly, class identity retains its resonance with British people, although its meaning and content have changed with the major economic changes of the last few decades. While allegiance to the nation has declined slightly in favour of more local identities, nationality remains a potent sense of identification. What is more significant than the decline in national identification is its changing content and in particular a shift in loyalties away from Britain to the historic constituent nations of the UK.

What are the implications of this analysis for public policy? First, for politicians keen to promote shared geographical identities as a way of fostering greater community cohesion (see Muir 2007), the increased salience of local identities is significant. The debate on cohesion has so far focused in general on national identity, with a number of commentators arguing that a shared sense of 'Britishness' could help us to relate to one another across religious, ethnic and other lines. And yet in culturally diverse towns and neighbourhoods, a shared sense of local identity might also help bind communities together. Local government in particular could play a role, using its public voice to foster an inclusive sense of local belonging.

Second, the changing complexion of our national identities in this complex multi-national state poses a challenge for advocates of a new 'Britishness'. In Scotland, for example, Scottish identity has greater resonance than British national identity, including among minority ethnic Scots. In England, by contrast, there is a growing divide between those who prefer English or British national identity. For example, unlike in Scotland, Britishness in England is much more popular than Englishness among black and minority ethnic groups. This poses a challenge for the English left: should it focus on promoting Britishness or Englishness as an inclusive shared identity? Britishness would find the greatest resonance among non-white groups, but would neglecting English identity leave it open to ethnicisation by the far right? Britain's ongoing national identity crisis looks set to continue and the implications for community cohesion remain unclear.

Third, while there has been an overall decline in religious identity (especially among young people) there is evidence that among young Muslims religion is taking on a much greater importance than for their parents and grandparents. This no doubt has its roots in long-running social disadvantage at home, as well as resentment at British foreign policy and a sense that British Muslims are being viewed with increasing suspicion and hostility.

Stepping back a little, it is perhaps possible to see this third development – growing religiosity among a minority, against a background of weakening religious identity among the population as a whole – as an instance of a broader pattern revealed by our survey. As most British people have become wealthier and gained access to higher levels of formal education, their collective identities have weakened. Yet the trend is by no means universal: old sources of identity remain strong or are becoming stronger among some, mainly less well off groups. This brings with it the danger of new social cleavages and conflicts.

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