

**Contact with immigrants and minorities is not as important as some believe in changing attitudes. Diverse areas are transient – this affects white attitudes more than diversity.**

When connected to the BHPS, the survey is one of the few in the western world making it possible to track both the demographic backgrounds and attitudes of large numbers of individuals over time.

Rich data on mixed marriages, mixed-race individuals, friendships and households will enable researchers to explore whether these factors are associated with less white British people leaving an area, lower levels of anti-immigration sentiment and right-wing voting.

Other features of Understanding Society that make the research possible include:

- the large sample size permits analysis of people living in ethnically diverse wards (segregated or integrated) and relatively white wards adjoining diverse ones
- Wave 1 of the survey captured information from 200 BNP and 200 UKIP supporters, sufficient to test a range of interesting variables

- information can be linked to ward-level census data
- unlike national surveys, this allows for the analysis of how attitudes change at local level, how moving is connected to attitudes, and how the local affects the national.

#### Policy implications – what the research says

Contact with immigrants and minorities is not as important as some believe in changing attitudes because diverse areas are also transient, and transience affects white attitudes more than diversity.

Greater opposition in local authority areas compared with smaller wards can be explained by the idea that people with few face-to-face contacts with immigrants and minorities can be threatened by an awareness of ethnic change in their wider area, but this sense of threat is reduced by contact with minorities and immigrants who live close by.

#### Further information and resources

*Exit, voice or accommodation?: white working-class responses to ethnic change in Britain.*  
Demos, <http://www.sneps.net/research-interests/whiteworkingclass>

*Kaufmann; White Flight from London*  
<http://www.demos.co.uk/blog/whiteflightfromlondon>

*ONS Census 2011*  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/census-result-shows-increase-in-population-of-london-as-it-tops-8-million/censuslondonnr0712.html>

*Centre for Dynamics of Ethnicity*  
[http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/census/885\\_CCSR\\_Neighbourhood\\_Bulletin\\_v7.pdf](http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/census/885_CCSR_Neighbourhood_Bulletin_v7.pdf)

<http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21577384-whites-are-fleeing-britains-inner-cities-so-everybody-else-everyone-out>

If you would like a more detailed briefing on this research or to discuss how you can make use of Understanding Society in your research please email [info@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:info@understandingsociety.ac.uk).



## White flight: the emerging story

Pioneering research – a case study



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This case study is part of a series aimed at potential users of Understanding Society data, including: policy makers, researchers and people in a position to influence social policy. If you are using data from Understanding Society and would like to profile your work, please email [info@understandingsociety.ac.uk](mailto:info@understandingsociety.ac.uk)



Understanding Society has been commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The Scientific Research Team is led by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex.

**A mounting concern that the white British population is abandoning cities due to an influx of ethnic minorities has led some commentators to conclude there is 'white flight' from urban areas.**

As immigrants move in, so the argument goes, white residents who consider themselves as being in the minority, move out. Some see this as a sign that Britain is becoming more segregated and that the UK is becoming polarised as white British people 'flee' or are 'squeezed out' of the cities.

But is it just the white working class who are moving out of British cities? Is the notion of 'white flight' an simplified view of a much more complex and nuanced picture? And is there, in fact, a third possibility that contact between ethnic newcomers and the white British population produces white acceptance of diversity?

In an effort to paint a picture of white working class responses to increased diversity a team of researchers from Birkbeck College London and the think tank Demos are conducting an unprecedented programme of research. *Exit, Voice or Accommodation?: white working-class responses to ethnic change in Britain*, is a project funded by the ESRC Secondary Data Analysis Initiative.

**Preliminary findings**

Early findings have been presented at a wide range of events and received widespread comment and media attention.

Key findings include:

- Anti-immigration-motivated 'white flight' is not taking place even among those who oppose immigration.
- White British people who live in ethnically mixed areas are less opposed to immigration than those who don't. Regular contact with minorities and immigrants locally dampens anti-immigration views but larger shares of immigrants in one's local authority increases opposition slightly.

- Far from being driven out, white British people who move (be this to a diverse or homogeneous area) tend to be more tolerant of immigration than those who stay in their neighborhoods.
- Whites in more transient areas with a higher share of renters and singles tend to be more tolerant of immigration, even if they are themselves homeowners or council tenants.
- White middle class people's attitudes are more affected than those of white working class people by contact with ethnically diverse communities.
- Although evidence of 'white flight' is negligible, when white British people move - notably the white working class and white homeowners - they are more likely to opt for whiter areas than minorities. This may be because people move toward friends and family, or because they prefer different cultural amenities, all of which draw whites and minorities to different locales.

**Policy context**

According to the 2011 census, over the last 10 years London grew by 12% to 8.2 million. Over the same time, the white British population fell by 620,000. Ethnic minorities now represent 40% of London's total population.

Other British cities have seen similar patterns: 4.6 million people from ethnic minorities (45% of the total) live in areas where white Britons make up less than half the population. The figures generated a flurry of headlines.

Influential commentators such as the former Chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Trevor Phillips, warned that the

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WHITES MAY BE LEAVING FOR ...



Better schools

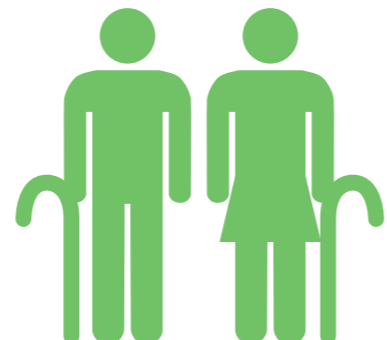


Cheaper homes



Fresh air

... OR BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ...



Retirees



Better educated



Wealthier

'majority retreat' of white British people from inner-city areas is hindering the integration of new immigrants. David Goodhart, Director of the think tank Demos, has said that cities are becoming segregated thanks to 'white retreat'.

Some groups that criticise the previous Labour Government's 'mass immigration' policy say it led to large numbers of immigrants flooding into big cities and driving out the local white population. Others, such as researchers Professor Eric Kaufmann and Dr Gareth Harris argue, however, that most ethnically diverse wards are urban and poor and that whites may be leaving for better schools, cheaper homes, fresher air, or because they are more likely to be retirees, wealthier or better educated.

Kaufmann asserts:

- commuter towns that fringe the capital are quietly becoming more mixed
- as European migrants head towards cities, richer Asians and blacks are leaving city centres for largely white suburbs and young whites are mixing readily with other cultures in the cities
- ethnic mixing and integration is being helped by more minority people moving into England's whitest areas
- people of all races are moving out, although there is evidence that when people move, whites - especially working-class whites - tend to move to significantly whiter areas than minorities.

With neighbourhood integration at the heart of David Cameron's ambitions for a Big Society, coupled with new laws planned to curb immigration, it is an issue which will continue to dominate policy debate and the headlines.

**The research project**

The research looks at whether white British working class people are moving away from the city to avoid the influx of ethnic minorities or whether other factors are at work.

It also explores interconnections between white working-class mobility, opinion on immigration and far-right voting and looks in depth at processes of accommodation or what brings about the acceptance of diversity.

The project uses four major UK datasets:

- Understanding Society/British Household Panel Survey
- The Home Office Citizenship Surveys
- ONS Longitudinal Survey and
- ONS small-area census data (2001 and, when available, 2011 releases).

Election data going back to 2000 is also being used.

**Why Understanding Society and BHPS?**

- Understanding Society is being used to look at the connections between the ethnic composition of wards/local areas and:
- how this affects individuals' actual movement of neighbourhood
  - individuals' intentions to leave their neighbourhood
  - individuals' opinions about their neighbourhood
  - voting behaviour.

The study asks a range of relevant and useful questions about people's political and ideological leanings, English national identity, intentions to move, how they plan to vote, religion and migration history.

***Most ethnically diverse wards are urban and poor. Whites may be leaving for better schools, cheaper homes, fresher air, or because they are more likely to be retirees, wealthier or better educated.***