

## When it comes to integrating immigrants, friendship is the key

We also need more robust public conversation: while minority rights need to be respected, some minority practices cannot be above criticism



An integrated society is one where everyone is a potential friend Photo: NYT

By David Goodhart

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How do you integrate newcomers, and even long-standing residents who continue to live apart, into British society? As a consequence of two factors – persistently high immigration and Islamic extremism – it is a question that is ever more urgently asked. Yet answers remain elusive.

On Monday, I am launching a new unit at the think tank Policy Exchange to inject some factual objectivity into these arguments and to try to make it easier to talk about ethno-cultural differences, in the same way that we talk about social class.

Objectivity is hard to achieve. There remains deep disagreement about the extent of the integration problem, how to deal with it, and even what the goal is and why it matters. Nevertheless, most reasonable people believe at least two things. First, it is a two-way process: both the host society and the incomer have to adapt, though the latter has to do so more. Second, there is a balance to be struck between accepting that people of similar backgrounds will want to

cluster together and the belief that a good society requires some mixing and sharing across social and ethnic lines.



We must accept that people of similar backgrounds will want to cluster together Photo: Channel 4

The news is not all bad. There has been an increase in mixed-race couples and children (though still little marrying out among South Asians); a gradual increase in cross-ethnic friendship; some decline in residential segregation (mainly driven by higher intra-minority mixing); and the emergence of a larger ethnic-minority middle class.

On the negative side, there is the indigestibility problem created by the speed and scale of recent immigration plus the extra tensions created by global Islamic extremism impacting upon an already somewhat segregated Muslim minority.

*"Vanishingly few British people say they do not want someone from another race as a neighbour"*

And there are two factoids that suggest there is a potential long-term "divergence" problem to be addressed. The first, from Eric Kaufmann's work on the 2011 census, finds that 41 per cent of the non-white population (some 4.1 million people) live in wards

where white Britons are a minority, in some cases a small minority. That figure was just 25 per cent in 2001.

The second, from the work of Simon Burgess, finds that more than half of ethnic-minority pupils

in England are in schools where white British children are a minority. That rises to 60 per cent for those in Year One (and 90 per cent for those in Year One in London).



More than half of ethnic-minority pupils in England are in schools where white British children are a minority Photo: REX

Vanishingly few British people say they do not want someone from another race as a neighbour and only about 30 per cent of people say they would prefer to live in an area where everyone is from the same background. It is, however, clear from opinion surveys that people are hostile to legislation to promote mixing. Integration in a liberal society cannot be mandated by the government.

That does not mean legislation has no role. The law – everything from anti-discrimination law to rules governing marriage visas or the outlawing of FGM – can act as a weak integrationist force. But there are at least three other tools to promote it: nudge; the power of good examples; and public approval/disapproval.

The nudge potential is under-explored. Consider the minor adjustment to an online exam that helped eliminate the performance gap between white and ethnic-minority police recruits in Avon and Somerset.

*"One appealing definition of an integrated society is one in which almost everyone is a potential friend"*

What about good examples? In my book *The British Dream* I cite a primary school that experienced a sudden influx of Somali children, causing white parents to flee

the school. The school called a parents' meeting and explained how the new pupils would not hold back their children's progress as they would be taught separately until their English was adequate. This stopped the exodus and the school is now one of the best in its area.

David Cameron has been showing the way on public approval/disapproval in recent days using his pulpit to raise the issue of teaching English to women who have lived here for decades and opposing the full-face Muslim veil without taking the French road to banning it.

This is about creating a more robust public conversation – respecting minority rights but not regarding some minority practices as above criticism. For example, the persistence of cousin marriage among some British Pakistanis is, as the Bradford Royal Infirmary has recorded, producing a large number of illnesses and disabilities. The dangers need to be more widely described and greater public efforts made to prevent the practice, short of making it illegal.



Cousin marriage amongst Pakistanis in Bradford is producing a large number of illnesses and disabilities

If I have one piece of advice for the Prime Minister's "opportunity and integration" review headed by Louise Casey it is to focus on friendship. More mixed schools would help, maybe as part of a wider duty on local authorities to promote social and ethnic mixing (and to publish regular statistics on them).

For one appealing definition of an integrated society is one in which almost everyone is a potential friend: differences of race, class and religion are not obstacles to personal trust, loyalty

and even intimacy between individuals of very different backgrounds.

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