THE TIES THAT BIND

Analysing the relationship between social cohesion, diversity, and immigration

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SUMMARY

- Social cohesion is the strength of interactions between members of society. These interactions are characterised by a number of norms that include trust, a sense of belonging, and a willingness to participate.

- Measures of social cohesion include generalised trust, interpersonal trust, civic participation and volunteering.

- Evidence from the US suggests a strong relationship between rising diversity and lower levels of generalised trust. There is much less evidence for a relationship between diversity and other measures of social cohesion in the US.

- There are some cultural reasons to suspect that American evidence might not fully apply to Europe and the UK.

- European evidence at a national level does not suggest a negative relationship between diversity and trust or other social cohesion indicators.

- Evidence from the UK is mixed. There is some evidence to suggest an association between higher diversity and lower generalised trust - yet there is also conflicting evidence which finds no such association.

- There is little evidence to suggest a negative relationship between diversity and other measures of social cohesion such as: civic participation, trust in authority, or voluntary work in the UK.

INTRODUCTION

Concerns that modern societies may exhibit less cohesion and weaker cohesion are not new. Emile Durkheim's concept of solidarity is widely considered to be the precursor to the modern concept of social cohesion (Hooghe 2007; 728). Durkheim constructed this concept to address his own concerns that a transforming Europe may exhibit weaker solidarity (Durkheim 1984). In recent decades the belief that inward migration may damage community relations has increased. Following rioting in ethnically diverse communities in 2001 the Labour government set up a 'Community cohesion unit' tasked with improving community relations. A recent

ComRes poll for ITV News found that 34% of respondents believed that immigration had a bad affect on their local community, whilst 34% believed immigration had no impact, and only 19% believed that immigration had had a positive impact (ComRes 2015).

FIGURE 1: PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF IMMIGRATION (COMRES 2015)

OVERALL, WOULD YOU SAY THAT IMMIGRATION IS GOOD OR BAD, OR DOES IT HAVE NO IMPACT ON YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY?

SOURCE: COMRES (2015)

GOOD   NO IMPACT   BAD   DON'T KNOW
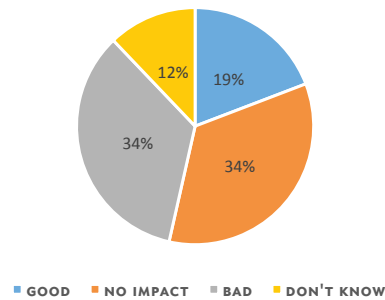
Since the 1990s researchers have been increasingly interested in testing the relationship between international migration and social cohesion. This research originated in the United States where prominent researchers such as Putnam observed a relationship between increased diversity and lower levels of reported trust. More recently much more research into the relationship between international migration and social cohesion has been conducted in the UK and Europe. This paper begins by analysing various definitions of social cohesion. It then documents research into the relationship between social cohesion and migration in the US, Europe, and the UK.

WHAT IS SOCIAL COHESION?

Whilst the concept of social cohesion can be traced to the time of Durkheim, attempts to explicitly define social cohesion are much more recent (Pahl 1991). In the literature it is possible to distil two different discourses on social cohesion; one of the academic social sciences and one of policymakers (Chan, To, and Chan 2006). The discourse from the academic social sciences has largely continued in the tradition of Durkheim (e.g. Berger 1998 or Gough and Olofsson 1999) but have, for the most part, resisted defining social cohesion definitively. Attempts to define social cohesion have largely come from policymakers. Since the early 1990s various definitions of social cohesion have been suggested. Since social cohesion is a fairly nebulous term these definitions have varied substantially in scope and content.

Chan et al. (2006) observes a practice amongst policymakers of considering a cohesive society to be the ends and defining social cohesion as the means through which this end can be achieved. This occurrence is fairly widespread amongst policymakers. For example Berger-Schmitt, in a widely utilised definition, defines social cohesion through multiple dimensions (Berger-Schmitt 2000). Her dimen-

sions include elements such as equal opportunities and factors such as poverty. Defining social cohesion in this way is troublesome because it assumes an empirically untested link between cohesion and poverty. Even if such a link was empirically established to define social cohesion through the means required to achieve a highly cohesive society would be wrong. Chan et al. offer the following example: 'While redistribution of assets is certainly one way to achieve equality, it would be counter-intuitive to define the latter in terms of the former. Redistribution, after all, is only a means to achieve equality; it does not constitute equality per se' (Chan et al. 2006; 283).

Frequently policymakers have been accused of using the concept of social cohesion as an empty vessel in which they fill their own particular concerns. More robust definitions define social cohesion as the strength of interactions between members of society. These interactions are characterised by a number of norms that include trust, a sense of belonging, and a willingness to participate (Chan et al. 2006).

MEASURES OF SOCIAL COHESION AND IMMIGRATION

Due to the inconsistency in defining social cohesion numerous measures have been utilised by researchers. One of the most common is generalised trust. Generalised trust refers to how much respondents believe they can trust people in their community (Zimdars and Tampubolon 2012). Hooghe has criticised researchers who use generalised trust as the sole predictor for social cohesion. He argues that generalised trust is the measure most vulnerable to the effects of increasing diversity. According to Hooghe, studies that look solely at the relationship between generalised trust and diversity are therefore likely to overstate the effect of increasing diversity (Hooghe 2007). A closely related but different measure to generalised trust is interpersonal trust. To measure interpersonal trust researchers frequently offer two statements such as 'most people can be trusted' and 'you can never be too careful', they then ask respondents to agree with one of these statements (Stolle et al. 2008). Other measures of trust include trust in authorities such as the police or local council. Researchers also frequently use participation as a proxy for social cohesion. Participation is usually measured by civic engagement (voting, writing a letter to MP etc.) and voluntary work (Pennant 2005).

Diversity is repeatedly used by researchers as an indicator of immigration. Ethnic fractionalisation is a commonly used measure of diversity. Ethnic fractionalisation measures the probability that 'two randomly selected individuals in a neighbourhood belong to the same ethnic group' (Demireva 2014; 1). Whilst diversity is not an exact measure of immigration (some immigrants will come from the same ethnic group as natives) it offers the advantages of a) being easier to measure at a community level and b) analysing the migration that people are most concerned about. For instance British people are seemingly much more relaxed about migration from ethnically similar countries such as Ireland than from more ethnically diverse countries. The popular anti-immigration party UKIP have stated that they do not consider 'Irish people to be immigrants' (Audley 2014).

Some researchers view social cohesion and its proxies as intrinsically valuable. That is: highly cohesive communities are themselves desirable but there is evidence to suggest that cohesive societies perform better on a number of measures. Dincer and Uslaner (2009) find that a ten percentage point increase in generalised trust increases the growth rate of GDP by 0.5%. Several studies report a strong, positive association between generalised trust and happiness (Carl and Billari 2014; Inglehart 1999; Putnam 2000: 332–5) and self-rated health (Carl and Billari 2014; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith 1997). Lower generalised trust is associated with higher levels of violent crime and corruption. (Lederman et al. 2002; and Uslaner 2002). These findings suggest that cohesiveness is a valuable resource for both the individual, and society more widely.

THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

The largest body of evidence on the relationship between social cohesion and migration comes from the USA. Amongst American researchers Robert Putnam is the most prominent. In his 2007 work 'E Pluribus Unum' he developed his 'hunkering down' theory. Putnam theorised that people in ethnically diverse areas tend to 'hunker down' (Putnam 2007). That is individuals pull in like a turtle, trusting less and participating less. Putnam has amassed a large quantity of evidence to support his theory. Putnam finds a strong positive relationship between trust of neighbours and racial homogeneity (see appendix; figure 1). His research controls for factors such as population density, region, gini-coefficient and crime. In diverse cities such as Los Angeles or San Francisco approximately thirty percent of residents declare that they trust their neighbours 'a lot'. Conversely in the more ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods of North and South Dakota, around 70–80 percent of the inhabitants say the same. The more diverse the community, the less people trust their neighbours. Interestingly Putnam finds that in-group trust is also lower in more diverse areas. That is, in more diverse settings, Americans distrust not merely people who do not look like them, but also people of their own race (see appendix; figure 2).

Much of the evidence from the United States supports Putnam's findings. Alesina and La Ferrara (2002) find a very strong relationship between increased diversity and lower levels of trust. Costa and Khan (2003) Miller (1995); Messick and Krame (2001); Alesina and La Ferrara (2000); Delhey and Newton (2005) all find significant relationships between lower trust and higher diversity. Interestingly whilst Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston (2008) confirm that diversity does erode trust, they find that the effect is negated when individuals interact with their neighbours regularly. They postulate that social ties may overcome the feeling of being threatened by diversity. There are some exceptions, for instance Ross, Mirowsky and Pribesh (2001) found that the negative effect of diversity on trust was explained away by poverty, and by the proportion of single-parent families, in Illinois. However the vast majority of American evidence confirms Putnam's findings.

A difficulty with much of the evidence from US is that it uses generalised trust as the sole indicator of social cohesion. As previously discussed generalised trust may be more susceptible to increasing diversity and is one of a number of indicators of social cohesion. Costa and Kahn (2003) find that increasing diversity does negatively affect volunteering and civic participation in the United States. However they find that the effect is less pronounced than that of diversity on generalised trust and it is somewhat explained by income inequality.

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM?

There are some potential reasons to suspect that the situation in the US might not be totally applicable to the UK and Europe. Sturgis, Brunton-Smith, Read and Allum (2011; 6) suggest that diversity and cohesion is 'highly historically contingent and we cannot assume, without evidence, that associations observed in one context will generalize in a straightforward manner'. Several researchers have argued that the American experience of slavery may have produced a unique trust-gap between races in the United States. (Sturgis et al. 2011, Patterson 1999, Stolle and Howard 2008). Whilst the historical context of diversity varies between the US and Europe there are other reasons to suspect that Europe and the US may be different. Fieldhouse and Cutts find that levels of racial inequality and racial segregation are more pronounced in the US than the UK (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2010). Drawing on the work of Finney and Simpson (2009) they also find that whilst ethnically diverse areas are almost universally viewed as undesirable in the US, such areas can be viewed positively in the UK (particularly by ethnic minorities). Finally the profile of immigration varies substantially between the US and UK. In the US Latin America provides the largest source of immigrants. In 2013, 46 percent of immigrants (19 million people) reported having Hispanic or Latino origins (Zong and Batalova 2013). In the UK migrants have traditionally travelled from Commonwealth countries but now increasingly come from European countries such as Poland.

FIGURE 2: GENERALISED TRUST IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES[1]
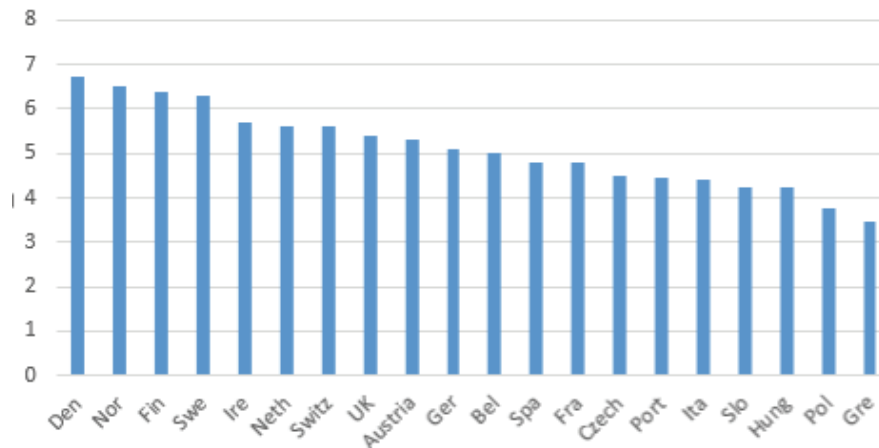
Some studies have attempted to analyse diversity and social cohesion through European comparisons. These studies generally do not examine social cohesion and diversity at a community level, but instead analyse them from a national perspective. For example Hooghe, Reeskens, Stolle and Trappers (2009) compared levels of generalised trust and levels of immigration across twenty European countries. Interestingly this analysis did not find that ethnic diversity had a significant relationship generalised trust. They used twenty-six different measures of immigration and diversity. Only in two cases did they observe significant relationships. These were between generalised trust and a) the inflow of foreign workers and b) the increase in the inflow of foreign workers. Hooghe et al. suggest that this may be due to natives perceiving an unwelcome increase in labour market competition that subsequently erodes trust. However they advise caution in interpreting too much into the two significant relationships. They argue that 'if one conducts 26 analyses, the odds are that at least a few of them will lead to significant findings' (Hooghe et al. 2009; 216). Further they state that when the two outliers (Germany and Italy) are removed then the relationship is rendered insignificant.

In a previous but similar study Gesthuizen, Van der Meer and Scheepers (2009) utilised the 2004 Eurobarometer survey of twenty-seven thousand respondents from twenty-eight European countries. They compared diversity to social cohesion indicators such as interpersonal trust, participation in voluntary organisations, and donations to such organisations. They found no significant relationship between levels of diversity and interpersonal trust. They also found that diversity had a positive relationship with participation and membership of voluntary organisations, and donations to them.

European evidence at a national level generally does not support the theory that diversity erodes trust. This echoes some evidence from worldwide national compari-

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1 The graph displays the mean scores per country on the generalized trust scale (standardised to a 0 to 10 range) according to the European Social Survey. Source: (Hooghe et al. 2009)

sons that have also found no relationship between diversity and trust at a national level (Bjørnskov 2007, 2008) (Anderson & Paskeviciute 2006).

COHESION AND DIVERSITY IN THE UK

TABLE 1: UK STUDIES ON COHESION AND DIVERSITY

STUDY	AREA	DIVERSITY INDICATOR	COHESION INDICATORS	FINDINGS
Andrews (2011)	Rural England	Ethnic (Migrant)	Social cohesion scale	Ethnic diversity has a weak, but statistically significant negative association with residents' perceptions of social cohesion.
Laurence (2011)	UK	Ethnic (Migrant)	Social cohesion (trust, reciprocity and participation)	Rising ethnic diversity in a community is associated with lower reported levels of social cohesion. This effect may be negated by 'bridging ties'.
Laurence & Heath (2008)	UK	Ethnic (Migrant)	Social cohesion	Ethnic diversity is generally a positive driver of community cohesion. With the exception of areas where there is a relatively large Pakistani & Bangladeshi cohesion is significantly higher in all the other diverse areas.
Letki (2008)	Great Britain	Racial	Social cohesion (interactions, trust)	When the association between racial diversity and economic deprivation is accounted for, there is no evidence for the eroding effect of racial diversity on interactions within local communities. However diversity does have a negative association with perceptions of trust.
Pennant (2005)	England	Racial	Social cohesion (trust	No significant relationship between diversity and trust in authority, nor between diversity and volunteering/ civic participation. There is a negative relationship between diversity and generalised trust.
Sturgis et al. (2011a)	UK	Racial	Generalised trust	No significant relationship between diversity and generalised trust.
Sturgis et al. (2011b)	London	Racial	Social cohesion (trust and other neigbourhood values)	Without controls, no negative association between diversity or segregation and cohesion. With controls, a positive association is observed.
Uslaner (2011)	UK	Racial	Generalised trust	Diversity is not associated with lower levels of generalised trust.

The table above surmises studies into the relationship between cohesion and diversity in the UK. Blue indicates that the study finds a negative relationship between indicators of cohesion and indicators of diversity, green indicates a positive relationship, and red indicates that the findings are mixed.

The table illustrates that evidence from the UK is much more mixed than the evidence from the USA. Pennant (2005), Andrews (2011), and Laurence (2011) all observe a negative association between diversity and generalised trust. That is, the more diverse a community the less likely residents are to trust their neighbours. Laurence (2011) finds that this association may be somewhat negated by 'bridging ties' (see appendix; figure 3). Bridging ties refers to connections between members of different ethnic groups. However a negative association between diversity and generalised trust is not as ubiquitous in British research as it is in comparable American research. Sturgis et al. (2011a) and Uslaner (2011) both find no significant association between diversity and generalised trust in the UK. This suggests that findings from the US cannot be applied uncritically to the UK.

Several British researchers have suggested that neighbourhood status explains much of the negative relationship between higher diversity and lower social cohesion. Support for this is provided by some qualitative research studies such as Cantle (2005). Letki (2008) suggest that most indicators of social cohesion are better explained by neighbourhood status than by levels of diversity. Sturgis et al. - looking exclusively at London - find that once economic deprivation is controlled for, higher levels of ethnicity have a positive effect on measures of social cohesion. It is of course important to note that London has a special relationship with immigration; relative to the rest of the UK (Sturgis et al. 2013). Nonetheless, since the majority of migrants to the UK settle in London it remains an important finding.

There is little evidence for a negative relationship between diversity and other indicators of social cohesion. Letiki (2008) finds no relationship between ethnic diversity and organisational involvement in the UK. Pennant finds no correlation between diversity and levels of participation - measured through civic engagement and volunteering (Pennant 2005). She also found no correlation between social cohesion and most measures of trust (trust in police, courts, parliament, the local council, courts or employers). However Fieldhouse and Cutts (2008) found that increased diversity had positive effects on political participation but negative effects on community participation (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2010).

Social cohesion is a complex and multifaceted issue and it should not be surprising that its relationship with immigration and diversity is equally complex. Evidence from the United States suggests a strong relationship between increased diversity and lower generalised trust. Studies in the UK are much less ubiquitous on this finding. Some studies observe such a relationship, whilst some studies observe no such relationship. Frequently when non-trust measures are used an indicator for social cohesion no negative relationship between diversity and cohesion is found in the UK. Trust is but one measure of social cohesion and the measurement of trust through surveys is far from precise (Nannestad 2008). Researchers and readers should therefore not be solely reliant on trust as an indicator of cohesion.

The negative effects of immigration on social cohesion are frequently cited as a reason for restrictions on immigration. This paper has demonstrated that a negative relationship between diversity and cohesion is far from proven in the UK and Europe. Studies that have analysed social cohesion and diversity at a national level in Europe have failed to unearth a significant relationship between the two. In the UK some evidence suggests that ethnic diversity does not have a negative relationship with participation and civic engagement.

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