



## UK POLICY COMMUNITY VIEWING ETHNIC DIVERSITY POLICY: FROM STRONGER TO WEAKER MULTI-CULTURALISM?

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### Abstract

*Multiculturalism as the dominant approach to managing diversity in the UK has been called into question by politicians, community leaders and academics in recent years. This paper reports interviews about multiculturalism, social cohesion and future policy directions with leading figures in the debate, including Home Affairs Select Committee members, authors of major reports, experts, researchers and academics. The attitudes expressed when discussing overall policy directions do not fit the traditional left-centre-right dimension of British politics but, in most cases, indicate unease at assumed segregate effects of current policy. However, when specific issues (sharia law, faith schooling, dress/ diet codes, political representation) are considered the viewpoints of most interviewees are more pragmatic. Relatively few advocate strong policies to impose British values or move decisively away from a general multiculturalism stance. The transition most widely supported would be from stronger to weaker multiculturalism rather than from multiculturalism to a different approach to diversity.*

**Keywords:** UK Policy, Ethnic Diversity, Stronger, Weaker, Multiculturalism

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## A. Introduction

Multiculturalism is commonly seen as the dominant strand in official approaches to diversity and difference in the UK. It may be understood as 'the recognition of group differences within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity' (Modood 2007, 2; see Phillips 2009, 10, Parekh 2000a, 6, Parekh 2000b). The emphasis on recognition draws on Charles Taylor's seminal analysis of the 'politics of recognition' and of the fundamental shift in the 'presumptions' surrounding political discourse towards the view that equal recognition should be afforded to all established cultures (Taylor 1994, 67-8). Parekh points out that, in multiculturalism, demands for recognition go beyond the plea for tolerance and include 'acceptance, respect and even public affirmation of their differences' (2000a, 1). Probably the single most influential document, the report of the *Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, which he chaired, opens with a clear statement of the 'equal worth' of all individuals, 'irrespective of their colour, gender, ethnicity, religion, age or sexual orientation', a recognition that 'citizens are both individuals and members of particular religious, ethnic, cultural and regional communities', and the point that 'Britain is both a community of citizens and a community of communities, both a liberal and a multicultural society, and needs to reconcile their sometimes conflicting requirements' (Parekh 2000b, 10). The politics of recognition requires the negotiation and accommodation of difference.

Multi-culturalism has emerged during the past three decades as the dominant theme in the UK, replacing assimilationist and then integrationist policies. The primary objective of assimilation is to promote a unified culture by encouraging minorities to adopt mainstream cultural practices. Integration pays little attention to cultural differences, but focuses on the removal of the obstacles to social cohesion caused by disadvantage and discrimination. Multiculturalism adds explicit and codified respect for cultural differences (for reviews see Rattansi, 2011 ch1, Modood, 2012, 26-29).

Most commentators would see UK multiculturalism as stronger rather than weaker, with an increasing emphasis on support for the traditions and practices of minority communities as well as on equality and disadvantage. Policies include legislation against direct and indirect discrimination and harassment, recently codified and strengthened in the 2010 Equalities Act with a duty for public bodies to promote equality and the inclusion of 'promoting,

supporting and enforcing equality' across race and religion among the statutory duties of a unified Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC 2012); support for different cultural, ethnic and religious groups mainly from local government through the communities and neighbourhood programmes, recognition of diverse traditions and practices in education and acknowledgement of difference in such areas as Sharia and Jewish courts, acceptance of dress and dietary codes, the expansion of faith schools beyond the established Christian and Jewish schools, and rights to observe religious holidays.

Many observers see the British commitment to multiculturalism as distinctive: 'of all European societies, Britain has perhaps gone the furthest in accommodating her ethnic minorities by means of explicit state policy, Muslims included... This .. paradigm-setting anti-discrimination policy in Europe was framed within a consensual view of Britain as a multicultural society, where 'diversity' was extolled as a virtue long before this happened elsewhere' (Joppke 2009, 455). Recently the approach has been called into question for varying reasons by political leaders (Cameron 2011; Brown 2007), those at the heart of policy (Trevor Phillips 2005), academics (Joppke 2009) and other commentators (Anne Phillips 2009, Goodhart 2004, Sen 2006, 114-7).

A review of literature and debate indicates that the themes in discussion are complex and are not structured simply in relation to the established left-right or liberal-collectivist dimensions of British politics, which underpin positions in relation to mainstream economic or social policies. These traditions have been associated with the emergence of class cleavages in modern society and turn on the relationship between state and market and the role of collectivism in enhancing or constraining individual freedom. The debate about multi-culturalism also involves cross-cutting issues which centre on understanding of the relationship between individual identity and group culture and between group rights and individual rights. It is noteworthy that Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative 2010 Manifestoes do not mention multiculturalism, although Labour presents a strong anti-discrimination programme, based on a new Equality Act and the EHRC (Labour 2010, 21-2) and the Liberal Democrats also promise action against discrimination (2010, 30, 95). Conservative references to discrimination simply concern gender and disability (2010, 16, 35). One factor constraining mainstream parties may be

concerns that minority parties, committed to 'end the policy of multiculturalism' (UKIP, 2010, 4) and 'repeal the race relations act and ... the EHRC' (BNP 2010, 4) may encroach on traditional support.

This gives rise to a complex range of possibilities both in the discussion of policy directions and in relation to the political coalitions which will influence new developments. New policy approaches under discussion include:

- 1) A much greater emphasis on measures to promote dialogue and interaction between different groups, whether to foster social understanding and cohesion or to reduce the capacity of power-holders in minorities to shape the lives of weaker members of their communities;
- 2) Greater attention to basic democratic political values: free speech, equality before the law, equal political rights and tolerance, for all citizens;
- 3) Policies that promote with more or less vigour specific British values and identity, assuming that a consensual, unitary conception of Britishness can be defined. Britishness is understood as including a sense of nationhood and belonging and often a particular conception of British culture, history and traditions; it may be seen as co-existing alongside the other traditions of various groups or as replacing them and assimilating minorities to majority culture; and
- 4) A shaping of policy by the recognition that new more intercultural identities are emerging in everyday interactions, especially among younger people in cities, and that it is important for policy not to obstruct this process.

The various proposals for new policy directions rest on different understandings of the impact of multi-culturalism in our society, influenced by different interpretations of the outcomes of current policies and informed by varying approaches to the relationship between individual identity and culture and to the role of the state. They take place in a setting in which terrorist attacks, riots in which race issues have played a major role and concerns about the growth of extreme right politics among white members of deprived communities during the past decade have pointed the urgency of the debate.

The objective of this paper is to contribute to the debate about how multiculturalist policies are likely to develop in the UK. In particular, it examines whether the new policy directions represent additions to or a rejection of traditional multiculturalism. Is the claim that 'multiculturalism is dead' convincing? One influence on future directions will be the way in which

these issues are understood by leading figures in the policy community. The paper reports findings from loosely-structured discursive interviews with members of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) from left, right and centre parties, recognised figures in debate including those who have written major policy reports on citizenship, multicultural education and opportunity, researchers in think tanks working on ethnicity and immigration issues, lobby groups and senior academics.

## **B. Discussion**

We explored issues related to the role of government and of group culture in sustaining diverse identities through a series of interviews carried out between November 2011 and October 2012 with individuals prominent in debate and actively engaged in policy-making. These include politicians from each main party, who sit on the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee and are directly involved in policy debate and other Conservative and labour MPs; Sir Keith Ajegbo, who chaired the 2007 Curriculum Review which established how citizenship and diversity should be taught in schools; Lord Parekh who chaired the Commission on Multi-Cultural Britain, which defined multiculturalism in modern British politics; a range of think-tanks, left and right-leaning and non-aligned; and commentators such as Kenan Malik, a prominent intellectual critic of multi-culturalism and Lord Ahmed, a leading members of the British Muslim community. The interviews covered all the major strands in discussion on multiculturalism analysed earlier and provide insight into the full range of current policy debate. (see Appendix for details of the interviewees).

The interviews explored respondents' understanding of multiculturalism and of current challenges to it and of the way policy should develop. They were loosely structured around a schedule that covered:

- 1) General discussion of multiculturalism and of its strengths and weaknesses;
- 2) The relationship between multiculturalism and social cohesion;
- 3) More detailed comments on specific policy areas, current in debate; and
- 4) Views about future policy directions.

Respondents discussed multiculturalism both as a general policy approach and in relation to more concrete issues and paid specific attention to possible future policy development.

The interviews varied in length from 30 to 90 minutes. They were recorded and analysed in relation to the two themes identified in the conceptual framework (the roles of government intervention and of group culture in shaping identity) through an iterative process that involved identifying key responses in relation to the themes, seeking to establish patterns of response and then applying these patterns recursively to the interviews. The object was to delineate the range of positions that were held across the policy debate and to consider how understanding of current issues related to ideas about the best way forward in policy.

The analysis examines how the two dimensions of the role of state intervention and of the balance between group and individual in the formation of identity interact. It falls into four sections, presenting general views on the state of multiculturalism, on how the assertion of British national identity and the pursuit of more dialogic negotiated positions interact in relation to social cohesion, more specifically, on how high-profile issues should be managed, and discussion of possible future developments in multicultural policies.

### **1. The impact of multiculturalism and unease about multicultural policies**

The core understanding of multi-culturalism as 'respect for diversity' (as Lord Ahmed, a Labour peer, put it) was shared across the interviewees. This did not preclude references to problems by the majority of those interviewed, primarily to do with the possible divisiveness of support for cultural differences. Julian Huppert (Liberal HASC) talked of 'having a variety of different cultures all intermixed .. generally in a good way'. James Clappison (Conservative, HASC) states 'I am all for people having their own way of life'. Alveena Malik from the Young Foundation stressed the positive benefits of multiculturalism in allowing migrants from the 'Windrush period' to 'retain their values, cultural practices and traditions alongside British traditions and values'. Simon Woolley, from the lobby group Operation Black Vote, was a particularly ardent enthusiast of UK approaches to multiculturalism. Lord Ahmed, Julian Huppert, David Lammy and Alun Michael (Labour HASC) also spoke particularly enthusiastically about British achievements in managing diversity.

However, while there is a strong sense of respect for the values of different cultures, most respondents from the left, centre and right of the political spectrum

and also those adopting more modern, culturally influenced approaches (Katwala or Lammy on the left and Alveena Malik; Huppert in the centre; Barwell on the right) and those located within more traditional class-centred viewpoints (Field on the left, Clappison on the right) all in various ways express concerns about the segregative effects of current multi-culturalist practice. This underlines the sense of unease with existing direction in policy discussed earlier and the fact that it spreads beyond standard political divisions of government and opposition or left, centre and right.

Some supporters of multiculturalism commented on the range of meanings associated with the term and the risks associated with multicultural policies. Lord Parekh (Labour Peer, chair of the influential Runnymede Trust *Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, 2000b) distinguishes multicultural (a society where diversity is accepted, 'the people's creation'), and multiculturalism (a policy programme 'the product of state engineering'). Both can co-exist, but problems are associated with the latter. Gavin Barwell (a Conservative back-bencher) pointed out that many of his constituents in Croydon would extend the term to include 'anti-racism', and some politicians use it to mean separate treatment for different ethnic groups, which generates problems of segregation. Alveena Malik referred to the development of a 'silos' mentality among ethnic communities. A generational shift towards more dynamic, hybrid and cosmopolitan understandings of cultural differences among young people in large cities calls for a different approach.

In some cases anxieties about multiculturalism move beyond segregation to concerns about the erosion of national identity. Clappison suggests that multiculturalism 'has been used as saying existing [majority] forms of culture are no longer legitimate..that's not been helpful'. David Goodhart, director of the non-aligned think tank, Demos, argued that multiculturalism may be understood as 'the right to be separate' but multicultural practice is 'asymmetrical': it promotes minority separateness but regards majority identity 'as illegitimate or in some sense unproblematic'. This argument is made yet more strongly by Frank Field, a Labour back-bencher, 'no-one from the elites wanted to assert English identity...'.

## **2. Social cohesion: the role of state intervention; group versus individual identity**

This issue is pointed in answers to a specific question about the balance 'between the need to respect cultural differences and the need to maintain shared values and social cohesion'. This provoked responses on whether and how the state should support cohesion and on the status of British values and identity. These are

the issues that emerged in the earlier review of the literature and debate. They are summarised in the conceptual framework in terms of how far state policies to promote multi-culturalism are valued, as opposed to people's understanding of the balance between group culture and individual agency in creating identity, and of the relationship between group rights and individual rights.

The differences between respondents on these issues may be contrasted along the two dimensions. Almost all those interviewed argued that a common basis in institutional forms embodying shared democratic values (freedom of speech, equality before the law, equal political rights) was essential. They differed in whether and how far additional state interventions and cultural directions were necessary. While the positions taken by individuals vary by degree and sometimes shade into each other, those who stress the role of government in promoting national identity may be distinguished (notably Clappison, Conway (associated with Civitas, a non-aligned classical liberal think-tank), Barwell, and, from a rather different perspective, Frank Field).

This position is located predominantly but not exclusively on the political right. Others tend to rely much more on the cultural role of common social values (Lord Ahmed, Julian Huppert, Alveena Malik, and Anthony Painter, associated with the non-aligned think-tank, Demos and this is shared across a broader range of non-aligned, centrist and left viewpoints. Located somewhere between unitary national identity as the basis of cohesion and common values is the view that specific steps should be taken to guarantee a dominant position for the majority culture. This position spans right and left and is shared by David Conway, Frank Field, David Goodhart and in some ways Matt Cavanagh, from the centre-left think-tank IPPR, and Sunder Katwala.

Some commentators point to the importance of interventions to combat disadvantage and discrimination rather than sustain cultural differences and express concerns about residential divisions (Sunder Katwala, Simon Woolley and also Gavin Barwell). A substantial number argue from various perspectives that the ways people deal with cultural relations and diversity in their lives and communities are continuing to evolve (Lord Ahmed, Julian Huppert, Alveena Malik, Anthony Painter, and from his own position, Lord Parekh). On the one hand this limits the applicability of state interventions, which may lag behind people's everyday life practice. On the other, it contrasts with the approach that stresses the role of government in promoting an identity centred on nation as the core of social cohesion.



**a. British identity**

The argument that a sense of British identity is needed alongside a respect for cultural diversity is put clearly by Gavin Barwell: ‘we need to promote difference, but need to have something that binds us together into British society..’ This is where we have ‘gone wrong’. This includes the promotion of core political values such as tolerance, respect for democracy and the rule of law, although these are acknowledged as shared with other societies. In a similar vein, James Clappison states that it is important to have: ‘something that brings everyone together..feeling the same allegiances and feeling pride in the same things’. In relation to the promotion of national identity, he states that ‘I don’t think we should be ashamed to have pride in our national culture and the symbols of our national culture. I think people are very proud, for example, of the armed forces... the royal family.. and other symbols of our national life. David Conway discusses the issues in terms of ‘constitutional patriotism’, but social cohesion cannot be those cold institutions which are common to lots of [societies]. It has to be ..particular to that society’.

The emphasis on national symbols as the foundation for social cohesion alongside a respect for diversity derives from a classical liberal approach to citizenship. This perspective stresses the value of allowing individual freedom to follow their own way of life ‘so long as it does not damage the rights of others’. It then needs to identify something outside the cultural choices of free individuals and the democratic institutions that guarantee those choices to supply national cohesion.

This perspective shares the idea that nationhood and social cohesion would be imposed from the top down with the approach that stresses loyalty to national institutions. There are implications for citizenship tests, educational curricula and a common understanding of history discussed earlier. It assumes a unitary British identity. It is vigorously rejected by Sir Keith Ajegbo, author of the curriculum review, ‘Diversity and Citizenship’, who advocates the need for on-going discussion, debate and negotiation over the nature of British identity, but sees an important role for education in ensuring that people recognise diverse cultural practices (2007).

### **b. Evolving common values**

Most of those interviewed understood social cohesion as a matter of shared values and social practices, something that evolves in everyday life rather than being developed through policies endorsing specific institutions and so subject to change and requiring space for negotiation. This raises issues about segregation and about divisions between communities and about the way in which community interactions occurred. It opens the way to a fluid and plural rather than a fixed and pre-defined notion of identity. Some commentators stressed the pace of change in big cities and among younger people.

This approach moves away from a unitary basis for cohesion: 'cultural traditions shouldn't exclude. They must be open to other people's views and must not push forward their views as the primary and only way of doing things' (Alveena Malik, a point echoed by Anthony Painter, who also speaks of 'cultural pluralism').

This perspective typically opposes a top down approach: 'forced marriages don't work' (Lord Ahmed). Simon Woolley argues that 'light touch' multiculturalism facilitates the development of 'multi-faceted identities ... The idea you get social cohesion by asking people to abandon their culture is completely wrong'. Lord Parekh nuances the approach: multiculturalism does not fit an 'ideological template'. It is 'a kind of spontaneous vernacular cultural openness that you find on the streets of London which we celebrate...not organising people into communities'. However, there is also an important role for government in ensuring that recognition of cultural difference is ingrained in public life.

The theme of evolving cultural accommodation is taken further by those who emphasize processes of generational change, so that 'the context has changed' (Alveena Malik, see also Lammy, Katwala). This leads to a further concern: younger people who wish to pursue more inter-cultural life styles may be constrained by traditional multi-culturalism, as Anne Phillips argues (2009). David Lammy points to problems for young people 'growing up not just in local environments but in parochial environments'. However, no other respondents referred to the constraining authority of 'old men' within minority communities. The main concern with multiculturalism is about segregation between communities rather than coercion within them.

Many respondents express concerns about aspects of multi-culturalism, as leading to segregation, undermining national identity or constraining an organic social process of conviviality, but there is a sense of general support for diversity. It is possible to identify a right-centre-left political spectrum between those who see the way forward in terms of more top-down process of national identity formation and those who stress processes of interaction and dialogue taking place within society, provided that discrimination and disadvantage are addressed. However this would over-simplify the debate in two ways. First it would leave out the distinctive positions of those like Frank Field who favours an explicit state-guaranteed social contract, and those, like Lord Parekh, who make a strong distinction between the role of government in providing common institutions and the role of civil society in providing the space and opportunity for more convivial process of negotiation and accommodation between cultures to take place. Secondly it would narrow the perspective and divert attention from the range of different positions on the balance between state actions and cultural processes and on the extent to which the management of cultural diversity should be a matter of individual agency rather than group rights.

### **3. Specific Policy Areas**

The interview schedule directed attention to issues currently at the forefront of discussion: faith schools, sharia courts, forced marriage, arranged marriage, dress codes (included veiling), political representation and reform of the House of Lords. Should minorities be allowed exemption from common legal requirements and practices on grounds of culture or faith?

The main theme in responses was pragmatism. Individuals accepted exemptions as appropriate and fitted them into a logic of multiculturalism or national identity by reference to regulation or negotiation between the different cultural communities with a strong practical element in policy-making. Lord Ahmed's position typifies an across-the-board acceptance of multicultural exemptions from common schooling in faith schools, in relation to sharia courts, dress codes and in representation of non-Christian religious groups in the House of Lords. This is argued in terms of the valuing of diversity and may be seen as strong traditional multiculturalism. A more nuanced position is described by Sunder Katwala and Julian Huppert as 'pragmatic', by Anthony Painter as 'common-sense', by Simon Woolley as 'light-touch' and by Alveena Malik as resting on negotiation.

Gavin Barwell (on the political right) from a more liberal perspective argues that 'a fine balance has to be struck' between exemptions and 'the general principle that the law of the land should apply to everybody'. The utilitarian approach of examining whether 'you are doing anything that hinders the rights of others' has to be applied on a case-by-case basis. James Clappison (also on the right) says simply 'I am all for people having their own way of life'.

From a position more to the left, Matt Cavanagh states 'you just have to have a discussion about which parts of the culture are going to be tolerated'. This is close to Lord Parekh's rejection of a pre-ordained multicultural 'template': 'in small and large ways, communities integrate with each other... there is no grand design'. David Lammy raises concerns about 'some aspects of arranged marriages' in particular in relation to women, but says: 'I am confident that social mobility and education.. deals with the problem'. Field was the only respondent to oppose exemptions to rules.

The object was to privilege existing English cultural norms. For example, he supported Christian (but not Muslim or Sikh) faith schools. Huppert is relaxed about dress codes and sharia law 'so long as there is clear consent' but opposes faith schools; 'I don't think it is right to have state-funded faith schools. I don't think the state should be indoctrinating people or funding that indoctrination... faiths are ...welcome to have their own Sunday schools ... but I don't think you should have state-funded faith schools'. Although Conway accepts some existing exemptions to rules, he regards the granting of such exemptions as potentially a 'slippery path': However, he would accept some faith schools as preferable to less formal religious schooling over which there would be little control.

The discussion of the respondents' more general understanding of multiculturalism and how it emerges in relation to the main policy controversies highlights two points: first, a simple left-centre-right pattern fails to capture the range of responses. There are indications of a division between those that might be termed traditionalists and those who adopt a less centralist view. The former stress the role of the interventionist state, whether in relation to a multicultural policy agenda, the imposition of national identity or the management of community tensions, while the latter group place more emphasis on the role of organic community processes or on individual choice

and agency. Secondly as the discussion focused more on the policy issues which are currently high on the agenda, positions became more nuanced and pragmatic with those from different backgrounds talking in terms of negotiation, discussion and settling cases on their merits. The theoretical differences become rather more blurred. The emphasis is much more on making things work and less on preserving particular frameworks except among a very small group.

Most of those interviewed, representing a wide range of viewpoints, express unease about multiculturalism as currently practised, when considering it as an overall policy framework. When it comes to discussion of specific issues, solutions tend to be more pragmatic and to allow a larger role for interaction and dialogue as suggested for example in the Denham report. This implies a common core of values, but it is the values that underpin dialogue: tolerance, legal and political equality, free speech. One way of putting it would be to say that the politics of recognition thrives in terms of a weak multiculturalism that respects difference but requires openness on the part of members of different communities and an underpinning of individual democratic rights.

Strong multiculturalism that focuses centrally on protecting group rights and maintaining cultural practices in minority communities receives much less support because it is seen to entrench difference. Those positions that promote specific interventions, whether to impose British national identity or to constrain authority within communities, are much less prominent in the discussion.

#### **4. Policy futures and the constraints on multiculturalism**

So far the discussion has been structured in terms of existing policies and the areas highlighted in current debate. The interview schedule went on to address the question of how policy should develop and of the conceptual framework within which diversity should be managed in the future. In general the pattern of answers indicates support for a pragmatic and incremental development of multiculturalism rather than a rupture or U-turn in policy. Even those who place most emphasis on the problems of multiculturalism as leading to a more segregated society appear to think in terms of gradual changes.

Alveena Malik's solution to the problem of 'silo' mentalities is 'more openness', a process that she sees as well-developed among younger people. One

tactic is to side-step race and 'mobilise around common community issues such as noise pollution or traffic'. Sunder Katwala refers to more 'granular' and low-level approaches to social divisions, for example tackling 'residential segregation', a position also taken by Lammy. Alun Michael points out that we 'deal with most of our major issues by incremental changes'. Simon Woolley's approach emphasizes 'light touch' policy direction. All this fits within Lord Parekh's overarching strategy of communication and negotiation, which should be pursued as an evolutionary process, without offering a predetermined 'template' for exactly how cultural difference should be managed.

The rather different approaches of those like Frank Field, who sees citizenship very much in contractual terms and requires minorities to sign up to core values as a condition of membership, take the debate in a rather different direction and one in which cultural values are imposed. David Conway's notion of a historically-based English citizenship has similarities in the dominance of a particular cultural system, but it is one which is understood to be rooted in a national heritage. He stresses the use of nation-centred material such as Marshall (1905).

### **C. Conclusion**

General views on multiculturalism among the members of the policy community interviewed point to a broad acceptance of the value of respect for diverse communities, combined with disquiet over the segregative aspects of current policies and a strong desire for change among nearly all commentators. Ideas about how policy should develop do not seem to fit neatly within a traditional left-centre-right framework, but indicate some divisions between those who think in terms of top-down intervention to impose a more cohesive and unitary nationally-based culture, and those who pay more attention to continuing intercultural processes between community groups, the traditional as against the dynamic approach.

As the analysis paid attention to the specific policy areas that are currently the focus of debate, the divisions at the level of overall social analysis become more blurred. There are more frequent references to pragmatism, case-by-case decisions, incremental change and dialogue and accommodation between communities. Comments about future policy directions follow this path in most cases, with only two of those interviewed suggesting very different directions for policy and one rejecting the link

between multiculturalism and segregation completely. This reflects Meer and Modood's arguments that contest 'the idea that British multiculturalism is subject to a wholesale 'retreat' and suggest instead that it has been, and continues to be, subject to productive critique that leads to something best characterised as a 'civic re-balancing' (Meer and Modood 2009, 473). Such rebalancing involves both the greater conviviality stressed by Gilroy and Vertovec and also elements of communitarianism that allow dialogue and interaction between culturally different communities.

Our analysis is based on a relatively small sample. We do not claim that our findings are comprehensive or fully representative of the entire spectrum of attitudes towards cultural diversity. Our interviews are prominent commentators and proponents of the main strands in current policy debate and provide an indication of the range of views shaping policy directions. While political rhetoric typically refers to segregation, the claim that 'multiculturalism doesn't work' and to communal divisions, practical policy development seems likely to pursue more gradual shifts rather than a rejection of the developed tradition. An expansion of community dialogue and reliance on the informal processes of exchange and cultural interpenetration, with some support from government and continued emphasis on combating disadvantage and discrimination seem the most widely supported outcomes.

In terms of the conceptual framework discussed earlier, the dominant position remains multicultural, including state intervention to guarantee basic individual rights and respect for difference. There are also indications of a shift from strong to weak multiculturalism in the pragmatic willingness to discuss and accommodate different religious and cultural practices. Views that endorse the pre-eminence of a 'British' culture have some support, but it is an identity that includes respect for diversity. The classic liberal solution of rolling back state intervention does not seem to gain great support. The state continues to carry major responsibility, but must operate in a way that fosters core values of democratic dialogue and must not damage intercultural relationships in people's day-to-day lives. People as individuals are accorded a stronger role in shaping their identities, but group culture remains legitimate and is the basis for exemptions from legal requirements in the contested areas.

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