

2 SOCIAL CHANGE, ETHNOCENTRISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW IDENTITY DIVIDES

Introduction

In 1995 Sir David Attenborough released a series, ‘The Private Life of Plants’, which used new filming techniques to dramatically speed up the passage of time. The results were sensational. Peaceful forest glades were revealed as whirling, chaotic worlds of dynamic change and perpetual competition. Plants formed friendships, went to war over territory and ran desperate races for access to precious light. The plant world is ever-changing, but because the change is slow, it usually escapes our notice. Social change is often like this too. Societies are in constant flux. The jobs people do, the education they have, where they come from, where they go to, how they think of themselves and what they value – none of these things are constant. Yet because such change is often slow, it goes unnoticed until a watershed moment draws attention to it. The EU Referendum was such a moment, when a shock result forced people to pay closer attention to changes long underway all around them. What people saw in the wake of the ‘Leave’ victory was a land suddenly divided, at odds with itself and locked into intractable conflicts: Brexitland. But the divides Brexit exposed were not new. They had been building in the electorate for years.

Two demographic shifts have been gradually reshaping British society for many decades – educational expansion and ethnic diversification. Just one generation ago a majority of the British

electorate were white voters with few or no educational qualifications. University was the preserve of a privileged minority,¹ and ethnic minority communities were still small and concentrated in the largest cities.² Educational expansion and mass migration have since driven a slow but relentless transformation of the electorate, with the youngest generations dramatically more highly qualified and ethnically diverse than the oldest.³ In this chapter, we examine these demographic shifts and explain how their relationship to an influential worldview – ethnocentrism – gives them disruptive political power.

Ethnocentrism is the ‘view of things in which one’s own group is the centre of everything’.⁴ The presence or absence of ethnocentric views plays a major role in determining on which side of the Brexitland divide people fall. On one side of this divide are the voters we call ‘identity conservatives’ – white voters with lower levels of formal education who most frequently hold ethnocentric worldviews, making them more strongly attached to in-group identities like national identity and more threatened by out-groups such as migrants and minorities. On the other side are two ‘identity liberal’ groups – university graduates and ethnic minorities – who for different reasons reject ethnocentrism. The conflict between these groups runs right through the heart of the electorate, and the activation of this conflict is a major source of the political upheavals and volatility of the past decade. The new political context we call ‘Brexitland’ is one in which identity conflicts between the formerly dominant but now declining identity conservative group and the growing but not yet dominant identity liberal groups have become a central structuring feature of British politics. The vision of Britain each side embraces is one its opponents reject. This conflict in worldviews, once mobilised, produces polarised politics – it is hard to compromise with those whose values you abhor. But it also produces highly dynamic and competitive politics, because at the present time neither identity conservatives nor identity

¹ Willetts (2018).

² Layton-Henry (1992); Finney and Simpson (2009a).

³ Martin (2019).

⁴ Sumner (1906).

liberals are large enough groups to prevail consistently and set the terms of debate.

The polarisation of identity politics is also exacerbated by the way white school leavers, graduates and ethnic minorities are clustered in certain age groups and areas. Both ethnic and educational change are generationally structured. The British electorate today contains older cohorts dominated by ethnocentric white voters, and younger cohorts where university graduates and ethnic minorities predominate. Social norms and social experience are generationally structured,⁵ with views about what is 'normal' strongly influenced by experiences in early adulthood, leaving the generations deeply divided in their experiences and their values. Many of those who grew up in a more ethnically homogeneous, socially conservative Britain have a profoundly different view of what Britain is and ought to be than members of the youngest generations, who have grown up in a much more ethnically diverse and socially liberal country.

Geography has a similar polarising effect.⁶ People on both sides of the identity politics divide live in distinct locations through choice and circumstance. The migration of university graduates for study and work concentrates them in the prosperous towns and big cities where university campuses and job opportunities are found. Ethnic minorities are also concentrated in larger cities, a result of past and present migration patterns.⁷ By contrast, white voters with low education levels move less often, and are becoming concentrated in more ethnically homogeneous and less economically successful rural and small-town areas.⁸ These growing ethnic and educational differences between big cities and small towns are further exacerbated by a growing age gap. While the recruitment of students and young graduates is making large towns and cities younger, smaller

⁵ Alwin and Krosnick (1991); Inglehart (1971; 1990); Inglehart and Abramson (1994); Sears and Valentino (1997); Tilley (2005); Grasso et al. (2017).

⁶ Jennings and Stoker (2016; 2017).

⁷ Finney and Simpson (2009b); Jivraj (2012). ⁸ Jennings and Stoker (2016).

towns are rapidly ageing as these groups move away while older residents remain.⁹ These trends magnify identity conflicts by increasing social segregation and reducing the level of contact and common experience between people on either side of the identity politics divide. Graduates mainly live among other graduates, in ethnically diverse places that accord with, and reinforce, their belief in a dynamic and diverse Britain. White voters with low education levels also live around similar people, in ageing and declining places which accord with, and reinforce, their sense of marginalisation and stagnation.

In this chapter we set out the demographic changes which are driving the emergence of identity politics: educational expansion and rising ethnic diversity. We then introduce the concept of ethnocentrism, the tendency to see the social world in terms of groups and group conflict; and illustrate how both educational levels and ethnicity are closely linked to this worldview. We then show how the generational and geographical polarisation in education levels and ethnic diversity serve to deepen the divides between people and places, and to magnify the political impact of the new identity politics conflicts. But while demographic change is inevitable, demography is not political destiny, as political parties have a vital role to play in determining how these new divides are mobilised into political competition.

Education: university expansion and the rise of the graduate class

Britain is in the middle of a historic transformation from a society of school leavers to a society of university graduates. This is part of an international trend evident in most developed democracies since the Second World War,¹⁰ and which is fast spreading to other countries as they become more prosperous.¹¹ Higher education is widely seen as economically and socially beneficial, and there has been a near-universal tendency for

⁹ Jennings (2017); Warren (2018). ¹⁰ Breen et al. (2009).

¹¹ Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009); Schofer and Meyer (2005).

wealthier nations to invest in expanding access to it. This process was initially slow in Britain, as governments held on to an elitist model where only a small minority attended university, but then made a late and dramatic switch to mass higher education, sending university attendance rates sharply upwards. The legacy of this tortoise to hare transformation is a particularly stark generational divide in education levels.¹² The first wave of British university expansion occurred in the 1960s, but this was modest and left university attendance at around 10 per cent of each cohort. Universities then grew slowly for the next two decades, with attendance rates in the 1970s and 1980s still in the 13–15 per cent range.¹³

The second wave of university expansion was the product of reforms by the early 1990s Conservative government, in particular the 1992 Education Act, which upgraded a large set of educational institutions to degree-awarding university status. The effects were substantial: university attendance rates more than doubled from 15 per cent in 1988 to 33 per cent in 1994, and have continued to rise since. The domestic undergraduate population in 2000 was six times larger than in 1960, and by the mid-2010s university attendance rates at eighteen were approaching 40 per cent. The expansion of higher education since the early 1990s means that the British electorate is currently divided between generations born before the 1970s, who grew up with an elitist higher education system, and those born since, who have grown up with ever-expanding mass higher education provision and consumption – though access remains skewed towards the wealthy and the middle class.¹⁴

University expansion is one part of a broader trend of increasing access to education. The proportion of students staying on beyond the compulsory school leaving age (fifteen until 1973, sixteen since) rose from 20 per cent in the early 1960s cohorts to

¹² Ermisch and Richards (2016). ¹³ Devereux and Fan (2011).

¹⁴ Boliver (2011); Blanden and Manchin (2004). There is evidence, though, that the expansion since the 1990s is beginning to reduce economic divides in HE access, see Blanden and Macmillan (2016).



Figure 2.1 Share of respondents who report having no formal qualifications and who report having an undergraduate degree or more

Source: British Social Attitudes surveys 1985–2016.

40 per cent in the early 1980s and over 70 per cent among the 2000s cohort. The cumulative effect of these repeated waves of educational expansion is a slow but steady rise in the overall formal education levels of the electorate, as younger cohorts brought through a dramatically expanded education system gradually replace older cohorts where most students left school at the earliest opportunity (see Figure 2.1). The changes year-on-year are small, but their cumulative effect is striking. When Margaret Thatcher won her third election victory in 1987, seven voters in ten had left formal education at sixteen or earlier, and university graduates (8 per cent) were outnumbered five to one by voters with no formal qualifications at all (42 per cent). By the time Tony Blair won his third election victory in 2005, the

graduate share had more than doubled, but graduates were still heavily outnumbered by unqualified voters. When Theresa May faced the electorate in 2017, nearly a quarter of voters had a university degree, triple the share of Thatcher's time, and graduates substantially outnumbered the unqualified. The year 2010 was an important turning point in this process: graduates were heavily outnumbered by the unqualified in every general election held before this point, but outnumber the unqualified in every election held after it.

Racial diversity and immigration: the rise of multiracial Britain

The second great demographic change of the post-war era is Britain's transformation into a racially diverse society. While Britain has long incorporated multiple distinct national cultures within a single state,¹⁵ and has longstanding and politically distinctive religious minorities,¹⁶ the rise in ethnic, racial and religious diversity¹⁷ seen since the onset of mass migration from the Commonwealth in the 1950s has been different in scale and scope to what came before.¹⁸ Britain's shift from a nearly all-white society to a racially diverse one has occurred, like the transformation of education levels, within a single lifetime, as Figure 2.2 illustrates. A pensioner turning seventy-five in 2019 spent their childhood in a society where less than one in a hundred people was born outside Europe or belonged to an ethnic minority, while a youngster turning eighteen in the same year has only ever known an ethnically diverse Britain with large well-established ethnic and religious minority communities, a country where around one person in five belongs to an ethnic

¹⁵ Colley (1992). ¹⁶ Clements (2015); Tilley (2015).

¹⁷ Platt and Nandi (2018); Heath et al. (2013).

¹⁸ While ethnically and religiously distinct communities from outside Europe have existed in Britain for centuries, reflecting Britain's colonial and Imperial history (see, e.g., Olusoga, 2017), these communities were relatively small prior to the Second World War.

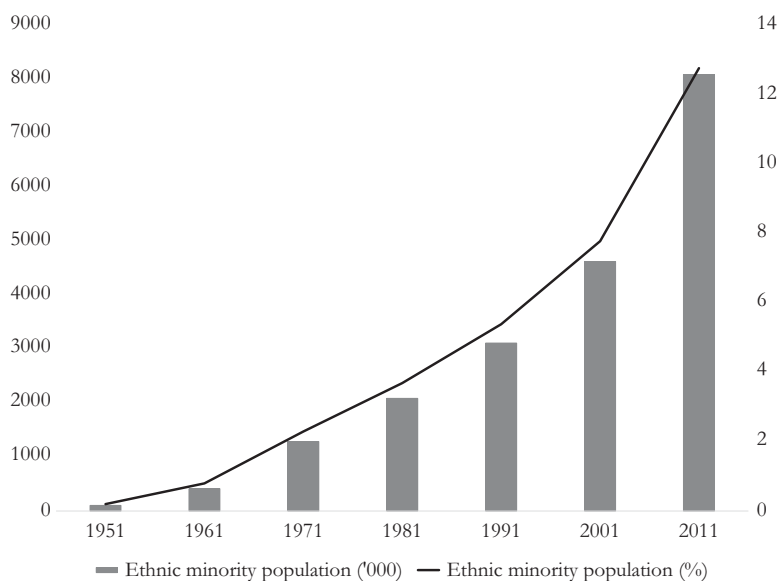


Figure 2.2 Ethnic minority population of the UK, 1951–2011

Sources: Census (1991–2011 ethnic minority population figures and 1951–2011 total population figures); Owen (1995) (1951–1981 ethnic minority population estimates).

group other than ‘white British’ and one in seven residents was born in another country.

This transformation is more than a matter of raw numbers. The nature of diversity has changed as minority communities have grown and become more established. In the 1950s Britain of current pensioners’ youth, residents from ethnic minority groups were almost all first-generation migrants who had usually come to Britain as adults. Race and migration were conflated, racial diversity was an imported phenomenon not, outside a few districts in Britain’s largest cities,¹⁹ a home-grown aspect of mass British culture. As time passed, a ‘second-generation’ ethnic minority population emerged, born and raised in Britain, and with no memory of their parents’ countries of birth.

¹⁹ Olusoga (2017).

As these British-born minority communities grew and settled across a wider range of neighbourhoods, racial diversity became more embedded in everyday British social life. Black and Asian people born in Britain were less willing to accept discrimination and disadvantage;²⁰ and the experience of being treated differently to other native-born fellow citizens shaped, and continues to shape, their social identities and political priorities.²¹ Rising diversity has thus led to new debates about the meaning of British identity, with British-born ethnic minorities favouring multicultural understandings of Britishness which recognise and include them, while older white voters still hold to an understanding of Britishness framed by the homogeneous pre-migration society in which they grew up. The idea of reversing the process of ethnic change through state-sponsored repatriation schemes remained popular with many white voters for several decades after mass migration began. Yet the absurdity of mass repatriation in a country with a large, rapidly growing British-born ethnic minority population was already obvious in the 1970s. As the West Midlands-born black British comedian Lenny Henry told television audiences at the time: 'Enoch Powell wants to give us £1,000 to go home. Suits me. It only costs me 50p to get to Dudley.'²²

Debates over identity and diversity are now about much more than immigration and will continue to evolve as the British population changes. The 2011 Census revealed that the ethnic minority population in England and Wales was evenly split, with 48 per cent born in Britain and 52 per cent born abroad. Many of the British-born 48 per cent will be third- or even fourth-

²⁰ Heath and Cheung (2007).

²¹ Nandi and Platt (2015); Heath et al. (2013); Maxwell (2012).

²² Story cited at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/may/01/studentpolitics.education, last accessed 25 April 2019. The same very obvious flaw in the far right BNP's 2009 proposals for ethnic minority repatriation was pointed out live on a television panel show by a British-born ethnic minority member who asked party leader Nick Griffin: 'Where do you want me to go? This is my country, I love this country, I am part of this country, I was born here.' Despite these very obvious problems, over 40 per cent of voters as late as 1993 still supported the idea of government-sponsored repatriation schemes in polling.

generation British-born. And the boundaries between ethnic minorities and the white majority are being further blurred as majority and minority communities intermarry. The fastest growing ethnic group in Britain is those reporting a mixed racial heritage, a group for whom a bright line separation between majority white British and ethnic minority identities makes little sense.²³ The 2011 Census found that six per cent of children under ten had mixed heritage, seven times the share among fifty-somethings. This made the mixed heritage group larger than any other single minority ethnic group among Britain's youngest residents – and continued rises in mixed marriages will ensure further growth in the years to come.²⁴ Among the youngest cohorts, ethnic identities have become knitted together at the most intimate level, as their family heritage binds them to multiple communities.²⁵

At the same time as established British-born minority communities have come of age and found their voice in society, new waves of migration have continued to bring new settlers to Britain, both from the original migrant countries and increasingly from elsewhere. Migration rates rose sharply from the late 1990s onwards, a shift big enough to constitute a 'second wave' of post-war migration. The scale and diversity of this new wave of migration is illustrated in Figure 2.3, which shows estimates of the total foreign-born population by broad region of origin. The overall migrant population nearly doubled between 2005 and 2017, rising from 5.3 million to 9.4 million. While there was substantial growth in all migrant populations, this varied a lot between regions of origin. Growth was slowest in the

²³ Ford et al. (2012). ²⁴ Muttarak and Heath (2010).

²⁵ In most cases, mixed/multiple ethnicities involve a combination of white British and ethnic minority heritage: 78 per cent of the 1.2 million people reporting mixed ethnic identity give such a combination, with the largest groups being white and black Caribbean (427,000), white and Asian (342,000) and white and black African (166,000). The mixed white and black Caribbean group is larger than the black Caribbean group among all the cohorts under the age of thirty, highlighting how the boundaries between the majority and the most established ethnic minority group have become very blurred among younger generations.

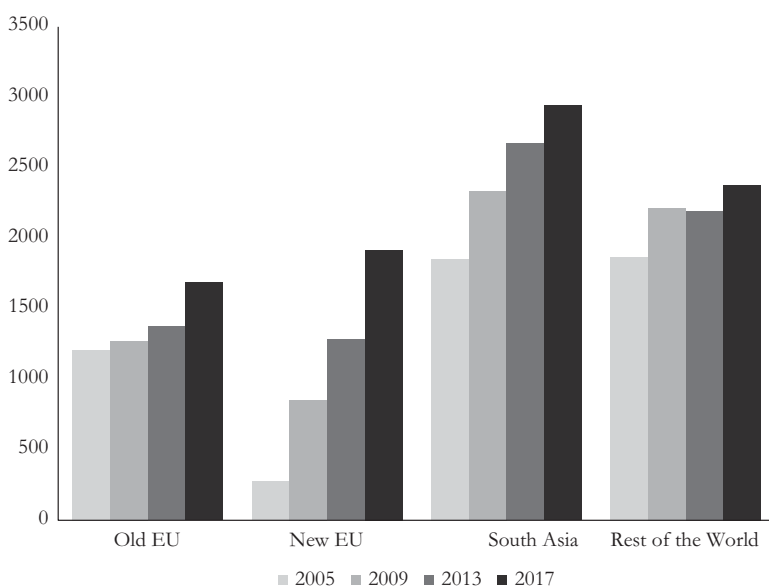


Figure 2.3 Migrant populations resident in Britain by broad region of origin, 2005–17

Source: Office for National Statistics.

‘Old’ EU migrant population (rising from 1.2 million to 1.7 million) and the diverse population from the rest of the world (up from 1.8 million to 2.4 million). The population of migrant residents born in the Asian subcontinent grew faster, nearly doubling from 1.7 million to 2.9 million. And the fastest growth of all came in the population of migrants from the new EU member states such as Poland, Romania and Lithuania – this population exploded from less than 200,000 in 2005 to nearly 2 million by 2017, a dramatic development with major political consequences, as we shall see in later chapters.

The second wave of migration to Britain has been more regionally and ethnically diverse, but it is also distinct in another politically consequential way – the new migrants are much less likely to have voting rights than those who arrived earlier.

The first wave of post-war migrants to Britain were for the most part Commonwealth and Irish citizens who possessed full political rights, including voting rights in general elections, from the day they arrived in Britain. These migrants rapidly became an important electoral constituency for politicians to court in many locations, and migrants' electoral power helped to counter-balance, at least in part, the influence of ethnocentric white voters threatened by their arrival.²⁶ Commonwealth migrant communities could use the power of the ballot box as one route to secure and protect their rights and status. Their British-born descendants, the vast majority of whom hold British citizenship, can do likewise. Things are rather different for the new migrants who have arrived since the late 1990s. A much larger share of these migrants come from non-Commonwealth countries, in particular the EU. They do not have general election voting rights on arrival in Britain, but can secure such rights only by becoming British citizens, which they are less prone to do than earlier waves of immigrants.²⁷ This marginalises the new migrants in electoral politics and skews the political debate towards those threatened by their arrival.

While the profile of British society has changed dramatically over the past few decades, these changes would not matter politically unless education or ethnic identity had an important effect on voters' values and political choices. Education levels and ethnic identity are associated with a number of differences in outlook and values, the most important of which concern ethnocentrism – the tendency to see the world in terms of groups and group conflict. It is the presence or absence of this perspective as a prevailing influence on how voters understand the world that is central to understanding how conflicts over identity arise from demographic shifts in education levels and ethnic diversity. Understanding what ethnocentrism is, why it matters to people and how to measure it, is therefore the task we turn to next.

²⁶ Saggar (1992; 2000). ²⁷ Murray (2016); Ford (2018).

Ethnocentrism: how educational and ethnic divides translate into political conflicts

The idea that structural changes can lead to the emergence of new conflicts between groups with different values and priorities is not a new one. There is a large academic literature mapping out how social change can drive political change in this way, the most prominent example being the work of Ronald Inglehart.²⁸ In a series of ambitious comparative studies, Inglehart developed a model of mass social change, with rising prosperity driving a gradual shift away from 'materialist' values focused on securing the basic essentials in life and towards a set of 'post-materialist' values focused on individual rights, self-actualisation and liberty. Inglehart argued that this is a generational process: the values individuals hold are formed in the 'socialisation' period of young adulthood and shape their political priorities for the rest of their lives. As a result, the political shift away from economic priorities towards social and humanitarian priorities lags several decades behind the economic shift from poverty to prosperity – generational change is slow, and older generations who grew up before prosperity arrived stick around in the electorate for a long time. Related arguments have built upon this influential account, proposing a similar generationally structured transformation in religious attitudes and behaviours,²⁹ in gender norms and gender roles,³⁰ and in the emergence of democratic values and institutions.³¹ Similar generational value-change arguments have also been used more narrowly, to explain differences in political values and identities,³² and shifts in these over time, with different generations retaining a lasting concern with the political problems prevalent in their youth,³³ and lasting attachments to the values³⁴ and political parties³⁵ which were dominant when they came of age.

²⁸ Inglehart (1977; 1990; 1997). ²⁹ Inglehart and Norris (2004).

³⁰ Inglehart and Norris (2003). ³¹ Inglehart and Welzel (2005).

³² Mannheim (1928); Bartels and Jackman (2014).

³³ Duffy (2013); Duffy et al. (2013). ³⁴ Tilley (2005); Grasso et al. (2017).

³⁵ Tilley (2002); Shorrock (2016).

These accounts all share a core argument. The social, economic and political conditions people experience during their youth have a lasting impact on their politics, so changes in those conditions are followed by a much slower, generationally structured change in political allegiances and priorities. Social and economic change may be rapid, but the political change it produces comes later, and more slowly. Our account shares many elements of this story. We also focus on generationally structured social transformations – educational expansion and rising ethnic diversity – and, as in these earlier accounts, the political changes we examine are in part the product of the mobilisation of lasting differences between the worldviews of different generations, worldviews shaped by their experiences in youth. We concentrate on one aspect of this broader story – the division between those who embrace an ethnocentric worldview, with groups and group conflict at its heart, and those who reject and oppose such a view of the world. This division forms the focus of our story for two reasons.

First, ethnocentrism and identity conflicts have proven explanatory power in a range of contexts and are becoming more important as developed societies grow more diverse. The political power of group conflicts has long been evident to researchers working on American politics, where ‘the color line’ has been one of the most powerful of political and social divides,³⁶ and where race and racial attitudes are still among the strongest predictors of political choice many decades after the Civil Rights movements ended the formal segregation and disenfranchisement of African Americans.³⁷ More recently, conflicts over immigration and its impact on American identity have come to the fore, adding another layer of identity conflict to the long-standing ‘scar of race’.³⁸ In Europe, a second large body of research has shown how mass immigration and the growth of

³⁶ Du Bois (1903); Myrdal (1944).

³⁷ Sniderman and Piazza (1993); Kinder and Sanders (1996); Tesler and Sears (2010); Tesler (2016).

³⁸ Sides, Tesler and Vavreck (2018); Helbling (2013).

Muslim minorities have sparked the emergence of new radical right parties which mobilise support from ethnocentric voters threatened by these developments, while views about immigration and diversity also exercise a growing influence on voters' choices between mainstream parties.³⁹

There is a broad consensus in these two large research communities on a number of key points. There are deep and growing divides in white majority populations centred on identity attachments and views of out-groups. These divides have proved uniquely capable of shifting white vote choices and disrupting political alignments,⁴⁰ especially when voters perceive particular migrant or minority groups as threatening.⁴¹ Conversely, ethnic minorities' political choices are strongly influenced by their experience of white hostility and discrimination, giving them a lasting attachment to the (usually left or liberal) parties which have fought for their political and social rights, and a lasting hostility to centre-right and radical right parties which have mobilised ethnocentric sentiments in the majority electorate.⁴²

The second reason we focus on ethnocentrism is that it provides an intuitive framework for understanding many of Britain's recent political upheavals. As we show in Chapter 5, it was the activation of ethnocentric sentiments among identity conservatives that pushed immigration to the top of the political agenda in the 2000s, and it was ethnocentric voters threatened by immigration who turned against the New Labour government and then later the Conservative-led Coalition government, opening the door for UKIP in the 2010s. Meanwhile, as we discuss in Chapter 7, identity liberals – graduates and ethnic minorities – were becoming an ever more central part of the Labour Party electoral coalition, shifting the centre-left electoral coalition away from poorer, economically left wing but

³⁹ For overviews of this active research area, see Mudde (2007); Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn (2016); Golder (2016); Rydgren (2018).

⁴⁰ Ivarsflaten (2008); Mudde (2007). ⁴¹ Helbling (2013); Kallis (2018).

⁴² Dancygier and Saunders (2006); Bergh and Bjorklund (2011); Heath et al. (2013); Sanders et al. (2014); Sobolewska (2017).

ethnocentric white school leavers and towards better off, economically moderate but identity liberal university graduates and ethnic minorities. These emerging identity conflicts then moved to centre stage in the defining political drama of the past decade – the EU Referendum – with ethnocentric narratives of an in-group ‘taking back control’ from hostile and threatening out-groups defining the campaign to leave the EU (see Chapter 8). Identity conflicts also played a major role in the re-alignment of Scottish politics – with arguments about ‘us versus them’ used to drive the rise of the SNP, which then channelled such sentiments in a very different direction in their bid to secure Scottish independence (see Chapter 9).

The first person to name the tendency to see the world through the lens of groups ‘ethnocentrism’ was the sociologist William Graham Sumner in the early twentieth century. Sumner argued this tendency to attach to social groups and to denigrate rival groups was universal in human social life and explained a diverse range of otherwise puzzling behaviour.⁴³ A large body of research across several disciplines has confirmed this core intuition – people everywhere are indeed remarkably prone to identifying with social groups and turning even arbitrary and explicitly meaningless group contests into emotive battles of ‘us versus them’.⁴⁴ But this tendency, like many aspects of personality and worldview, varies across populations in systematic and predictable ways. Political scientists and social psychologists have revealed ethnocentrism to be a stable personality orientation leading some people to be chronically prone to seeing social life in terms of attachments to in-groups and hostility to out-groups,⁴⁵ while others seldom think about social problems in terms of group conflicts. As Donald Kinder and Cindy Kam, who have studied the phenomenon and its political effects in the United States, put it, ethnocentrism is ‘a readiness

⁴³ Sumner (1906). ⁴⁴ Tajfel (1970; 1981).

⁴⁵ These two sides of ethnocentrism, though they frequently overlap, are distinctive. People can and do express strong attachments to in-groups which do not generate hostility to out-groups. See Brewer (1999); Jardina (2019).

to reduce society to us and them . . . a readiness to reduce society to us *versus* them'.⁴⁶

The origins of ethnocentrism, and why it varies between people, have been much debated, with different researchers emphasising different aspects of the complex mix of psychological and sociological forces which encourage or discourage the group conflict habit. Ethnocentrism may be an aspect of the 'authoritarian personality' – a tendency to value and insist upon conformity, order and authority, and to find diversity, ambiguity and uncertainty threatening.⁴⁷ Or it may be one of a basket of tools employed by people with a 'closed' personality disposition,⁴⁸ who find a complex and unstable social world more threatening and harder to deal with than those with a more 'open' disposition.⁴⁹ Group competition can also stimulate ethnocentric thinking. People may attach to a group who share a set of goals and compete for economic resources or political influence to secure these goals. Doing so will often put them into competition with other groups seeking the same scarce resources for different goals, and the resulting conflict over resources and influence encourages ethnocentric thinking – sometimes people see an issue as a matter of 'us versus them' because it

⁴⁶ Kinder and Kam (2009: 8). ⁴⁷ Adorno et al. (1950); Altemeyer (1981; 2007).

⁴⁸ Johnston, Lavine and Federico (2017).

⁴⁹ This difference between 'open' and 'closed' personalities has many sources – political and moral values, perceptions of uncertainty, and the influence of basic brain structure on reactions to threat and novel situations – but all converge on a similar and stable set of different responses: a preference for the known over the unknown, for stability over change, for certainty over uncertainty, and for simplicity over complexity. Ethnocentrism may be one expression of the more general 'closed disposition' – 'closed' personality types are attracted to clearly defined, homogeneous predictable groups, who provide a source of stability and security. They are also more prone to finding new groups with different beliefs threatening, and to dislike change in the mix of groups in society, not due to any features inherent in these groups, but due to their general sensitivity to threats and aversion to novelty. Conversely, those with more 'open' personalities may tend to embrace diversity and change, in keeping with their general personality orientations, and oppose ethnocentrism because it is harmful to the kind of diverse and dynamic society that they favour.

is, indeed, a competition between groups.⁵⁰ Inequalities and hierarchies between groups can have a similar effect. When a group feels its privileges or resources are under threat from a competing group, or when a group feels its members do not get fair treatment or a fair share, then all group members will be more prone to see the world in terms of ‘us versus them’.⁵¹

There are a number of key features to ethnocentrism which make it a valuable tool for understanding Britain’s recent political disruptions. Ethnocentrism is a *stable* personality orientation, one that *varies* between individuals, and can be *activated* among those who hold it when they perceive *threats* to the in-groups they care about, particularly threats from opposed and disliked out-groups. Ethnocentric voters are sensitive to threats and will mobilise politically against them, leading ethnocentrism to become a stronger predictor of political preferences and choices when such threats are present. It is the stable links between ethnocentrism and demographic features of the electorate which enable it to translate demographic divides into political conflicts; and it is the capacity of ethnocentric ‘us versus them’ thinking to be activated by threats that gives ethnocentrism its disruptive ‘flash’ potential, with large and rapid shifts in voters’ priorities and behaviour occurring when a perceived threat emerges. Both aspects are crucial to understanding the current political context, which features both long-term structural change and rapid, volatile changes in voter behaviour.

The ethnocentric worldview is stable over time. Those who express a stronger ‘us against them’ worldview at one point in

⁵⁰ Some famous and startling experiments in social psychology have shown how powerful inter-group hostilities can be stimulated by relatively modest contests: when psychologist Muzafar Sherif and colleagues (Sherif et al. 1961) set up competitions between two teams of eleven-year-old boys, they rapidly turned nasty, with insults and even blows traded as the ‘Rattlers’ and ‘Eagles’ competed for prizes. At larger scales, competition between ethnic or racial groups for resources and privilege is a powerful and well-documented factor in political conflict in many societies, conflict which has often escalated into open warfare (Horowitz 2000).

⁵¹ Pratto and Sidanius (2001); Hagendoorn (1995).

time reliably express similar views if you ask them again years or even decades later. Political scientists Donald Kinder and Cindy Kam reviewed a range of different studies which went back to the same people repeatedly over many years and found that in all these studies ethnocentric attitudes were stable over time. Ethnocentrism behaved in this respect like many other political values, being shaped most in the impressionable years of youth, and becoming harder to shift thereafter.⁵² Studies of both in-group attachments such as national identity,⁵³ and out-group hostilities such as racial prejudice,⁵⁴ have arrived at similar conclusions.⁵⁵

This brings us to the second critical feature of ethnocentrism: it *varies* by education level and ethnic identity. Educational expansion and rising ethnic diversity have therefore opened up new divides between ethnocentric voters and those who reject their group-centred worldview. Education strongly predicts levels of both in-group attachment and out-group hostility in the white majority, as we shall see in the next chapter. The relationship between ethnocentrism and ethnic identity is a little more complex. Ethnic minorities are also prone to express hostility to out-groups – for example, large numbers express

⁵² Kinder and Kam (2009: ch. 3).

⁵³ Barrett (2000); Citrin, Reingold and Green (1990); Citrin and Sears (2014).

⁵⁴ Ford (2008); Storm, Sobolewska and Ford (2017).

⁵⁵ The stability of the ethnocentric habit of mind and the variation in ethnocentrism across populations also raises the possibility that it could, perhaps, be a pre-programmed tendency, written into our genetic code by natural selection. It is a plausible speculation that early humans who formed stronger group attachments and identified and eliminated threats from competing groups more quickly could prevail over those with weaker group attachments, and hence that such a trait could spread in a population. It is, however, fiendishly difficult to figure out the genetic aspect in complex human characteristics such as political orientations and group attachments, which are likely to involve the complex interactions of many different genetic traits and environmental influences. While some researchers have attempted to estimate the genetic element in political orientations (e.g., Martin et al. 1986; Alford, Funk and Hibbing 2005; Funk et al. 2013), the meaning and credibility of such estimates remains intensely debated (see, e.g., Charney and English 2012), suggesting this is not a question that researchers can as yet answer with much confidence.

hostility to a close relative marrying someone from a different ethnic or religious group⁵⁶ – but they also tend to reject the group identities favoured by ethnocentric white voters, such as attachment to an ethnically defined nation. This is a consequence of the structural position of ethnic minorities, who are frequently the targets of ethnocentric hostility from the white majority. Ethnic minorities therefore understandably tend to reject the forms of identity and group attachment most attractive to ethnocentric white voters, as they are usually excluded from these and often face hostility from those who most strongly express them. While ethnic minorities are just as prone to ethnocentric thinking as the white majority, this tendency is less likely to find political expression among minority groups, who instead tend to align with white graduate ‘conviction liberals’ in an ‘identity liberal’ alliance of groups opposed to ethnocentric white ‘identity conservatives’, as we show in more detail in the next part of this chapter and in Chapter 3.

The stability of ethnocentric worldviews, and their lasting association with educational and ethnic differences, raises a paradox we need to resolve. How can stable attitudes, and very slow demographic change, account for rapid and dramatic political shifts such as those seen in Britain over the past decade? The third key feature of ethnocentrism resolves this paradox: the political influence of ethnocentric attitudes depends on the political context. Ethnocentrism becomes *activated* when ethnocentric voters perceive a *threat*, leading ethnocentric voters to rally around their threatened in-groups and mobilise hostility to the out-groups seen as posing the threat. Growing identity divides can remain latent in the electorate until ethnocentric voters perceive a threat, at which point change can happen very rapidly.⁵⁷ The most influential examination of this threat–activation dynamic comes from Karen Stenner, who works in a tradition with long historical roots, which proposes that the

⁵⁶ Storm, Sobolewska and Ford (2017).

⁵⁷ Sniderman, Hagendoorn and Prior (2004); Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007); Sniderman et al. (2014).

tendency of hostility towards out-groups is a result of an authoritarian personality.⁵⁸ In a series of studies Stenner demonstrates how authoritarian voters who value social order and conformity behave no differently to others when they feel secure, but their attitudes and behaviour are transformed once they perceive a threat to the things they value.⁵⁹ Authoritarians become dramatically more intolerant towards out-groups, and they mobilise to eliminate the threat and restore the security and conformity they crave. A seemingly stable political situation can be rapidly transformed by surges in intolerance, demands for strong leadership and action against threatening out-groups.⁶⁰

Immigration, for example, is an issue with a strong tendency to trigger such dynamic threat responses – immigrants are by definition people seeking to cross a group boundary and join a new group. Ethnocentric voters are prone to perceive immigrants as a threat to the national in-group and will mobilise to defend their national in-group when migration is a salient issue. Other issues such as national security, terrorism and war inherently involve group conflict and threats from out-groups, and all such issues tend to activate authoritarian personalities.⁶¹ Stenner has argued that such disruptive surges in authoritarian sentiment are a structural feature of politics, and liberal democracies need to develop better mechanisms to channel and respond to them.⁶²

Such threat-mobilisation dynamics have been observed for a long time. A striking early example comes from the research of British sociologist Margaret Stacey, who examined the social and political upheaval caused by an influx of immigrants into the

⁵⁸ See Kinder and Kam (2009) for other interpretations of the sources of ethnocentrism. See also the Introduction and Chapter 3 for our take on the relationship between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism.

⁵⁹ Feldman and Stenner (1997); Stenner (2005).

⁶⁰ A good example of this is reaction to terrorist threat embedded in survey experiments: there is a lot of literature showing this, but good places to start are Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) and Sniderman et al. (2014).

⁶¹ Kinder and Kam (2009). ⁶² Stenner and Haidt (2018).

small Oxfordshire market town of Banbury in the 1930s.⁶³ Stacey found ethnocentric activation in response to threat, with Banburian locals showing the same pattern of hostile mobilisation against threatening newcomers that we see in the political conflicts over immigration now playing out on a national stage. The arrival of new people who spoke differently and looked different, the subsequent pressures on existing provision and, even more tellingly, the appearance of new and alien shops on Banbury High Street triggered ethnocentric hostilities among native Banburians, who told Stacey they felt like strangers in their own town. Yet the twist in this tale is that the immigrants who settled in Banbury in the 1930s were all fellow Englishmen and women coming to work in a newly opened factory.⁶⁴ Yet because Banburians saw the issue in terms of a locally defined 'us' facing a threat from alien outsiders, their latent ethnocentric tendencies were activated, and they mobilised to defend themselves from this threat to local identity and traditions.

For insular 1930s Banburians, migrant workers coming from a few counties away were already alien enough to be seen as a threatening 'them'. In the more mobile and globalised societies of today, in-groups and out-groups tend to be more broadly defined, but the pattern of dynamic ethnocentric response to threat remains the same. As British society has undergone two massive demographic changes, three new groups of voters have emerged: one associated with higher levels of formal education and the distinct values associated with it; the second a product of growing racial and ethnic diversification; and the third arising from a formerly dominant segment of the white majority reacting defensively to decline. We now present a thumbnail sketch of these groups, and the tensions between them, to provide a summary illustration of how tensions between these

⁶³ Stacey (1960). We are grateful to Malcolm Parkes for making us aware of this remarkable work.

⁶⁴ The category of immigrants from overseas is so negligible in the Banbury study that it does not even earn its own entry in the table on origins of immigrants to the town (Stacey 1960: 13).

groups shape identity conflicts in current British politics. In the next chapter we will provide a more extensive account of these groups' identities and values, and of the political arguments which mobilise them against each other.

From demographic change to political conflict: conviction liberals, necessity liberals and identity conservatives

Educational expansion and the rise of conviction liberals

The first of the three new groups is the product of educational expansion. Education is strongly and negatively associated with ethnocentrism: the more exposure to formal education voters have, the more they reject ethnocentric notions of groups and group conflict. In particular, university graduates' attachments to social group identities are weaker and more flexible, and the groups they do attach themselves to are typically broader and more inclusive.⁶⁵ Graduates express consistently higher support for individual rights and freedoms, and consistently lower support for the conformity and authority prized by ethnocentric voters. We call this worldview 'conviction identity liberalism': a general tendency to prize individual and minority group rights, and to see diversity as a social good to be promoted. Such an outlook reveals itself in many contemporary social conflicts – it is, for example, university graduates and social liberals who are most likely to question traditional gender roles and family structures, and express the strongest support for feminism and gender equality initiatives,⁶⁶ and it is university graduates who most eagerly champion the rights of LGBT+ people to live their lives as they see fit.⁶⁷ Conviction liberals are more comfortable with complexity and ambiguity – seeing multiple shades of grey in the issues ethnocentric conservatives prefer to see in

⁶⁵ Surridge (2016); Lancee and Sarrasin (2015); Meesen, Vroome and Hooghe (2013); Weakliem (2002).

⁶⁶ Bozendahl and Myers (2004); Davis and Greenstein (2009).

⁶⁷ Ohlander, Batalova and Treas (2005); Schwartz (2010).

black-and-white terms.⁶⁸ The trends towards diversity, cosmopolitanism and individualism which identity conservatives find most threatening are the very social changes conviction liberals embrace and seek to advance.

Conviction identity liberals may be less attached to groups than ethnocentric people, but they also hold a distinctive stance on groups and group conflicts beyond this more individualistic worldview. Conviction liberals regard group equality and the fight against prejudice and discrimination as a key political and social value. They therefore seek to stigmatise and sanction those who discriminate against others based on group membership and oppose policies and political parties which they associate with mobilising ethnocentric motives (see Chapter 3). They also seek to internalise anti-prejudice norms, sanctioning themselves for giving in to ethnocentric impulses or prejudiced thoughts,⁶⁹ and to entrench and expand anti-racism norms in society, seeking to make discriminatory attitudes and behaviours socially unacceptable.⁷⁰

Ethnic diversity and necessity liberal ethnic minorities

While ‘conviction liberal’ white university graduates oppose ethnocentrism and embrace diversity as a matter of principle, reflecting the central role of individualism and anti-racism in their personal values, the situation is more complicated for ethnic minorities. Ethnocentric suspicions of out-groups are as widespread in ethnic minority communities as they are in the white majority. Ethnic minorities,⁷¹ in particular those of

⁶⁸ Johnston, Lavine and Federico (2017).

⁶⁹ Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten (2013); Ivarsflaten, Blinder and Ford (2010).

⁷⁰ Mark Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler, looking at a similar group (who they call ‘non-authoritarians’) argue that they have a distinctive conception of social justice – ‘fairness as out-group preference’. That is, identity liberals tend to find attractive the idea that showing an explicit preference for currently and previously stigmatised minority groups is an important aspect of fairness (Weiler and Hetherington 2009).

⁷¹ In the UK, the term ethnic minorities is applied to those minorities who the Census describes as ‘non-white’, therefore effectively making the terms ethnic minorities and racial minorities interchangeable. Although there is a lot of

Muslim origin, also tend towards the socially conservative values shared by ethnocentric voters in other areas, including religiosity, women's rights and gay rights (see Chapter 3). This social conservatism makes some ethnic minorities unlikely allies for identity liberals, who strongly support liberal stances on such issues. Ethnic minorities, however, have a distinct and powerful motive for aligning with identity liberals in conflicts over identity and diversity – they are typically the most prominent *targets* of the ethnocentric hostility expressed by white identity conservatives, and the experience of such hostility shapes their political priorities. The perception that ethnic and racial discrimination is a pervasive source of injustice is widely shared among ethnic minority voters,⁷² and leads them to see their individual fates as linked to the broader status of their ethnic group. This perception of 'linked fate' is a powerful predictor of ethnic minorities' political attitudes and behaviour, leading them to align with conviction liberals who seek to politically and socially stigmatise prejudice, and to oppose ethnocentric whites who are seen as a threat.⁷³

As a result of this, the place of ethnic minorities in any electoral coalition is driven strongly by the identities and value conflicts that are salient to the majority white electorate. As long as the focus of conviction liberals' attention is on racial justice and extending anti-racist social norms, and ethnocentric conservatives are politically mobilised against migrants and minority groups, ethnic minorities have a strong incentive to align with conviction liberals, even though their views on many other social issues fundamentally differ. However, this makes for a

debate about what makes an ethnic minority and to what extent non-whiteness or whiteness are objective – or relevant – categories, we follow the Census classification in this book (for an extended discussion see Sobolewska 2017).

⁷² Heath et al. (2013).

⁷³ The idea of members of racial minorities thinking that what happens to other members of their racial group affects what happens to them individually has been developed in the US to describe a unique set of political attitudes of African Americans (Dawson 1996), but has since been shown to influence the political behaviour of ethnic minorities in the UK also (Sanders et al. 2014).

volatile and potentially thin coalition which could dissolve when arguments, for example, over gender equality or gay rights, take centre stage, or when the threat posed by white identity conservatives recedes due to demographic decline, a greater acceptance of minorities or the focus of ethnocentric hostility moving to other out-groups.

Decline and backlash: identity conservatives

It is crucial in understanding the politics of identity conservative voters to remember that until recently they constituted an overwhelming majority of the electorate. Before mass migration and educational expansion, ethnocentric white school leavers' views defined the mainstream. From their point of view, it is society that changed and left them behind, their only apparent fault being that they did not change sufficiently with it.⁷⁴ It is therefore no surprise that such voters tend to adopt a conservative stance, seeking to slow down or reverse social changes which they find threatening to their group and which erode its formerly dominant status.⁷⁵ Change is perceived as a loss for ethnocentric white voters: a loss of their dominant position, and a loss of the cultural conformity and continuity which they value. Many members of this group associate educational expansion and rising ethnic diversity with a loss of political status – and not without reason, as the electoral and demographic dominance of identity conservatives is indeed steadily being eroded. Such a tendency is also in keeping with these voters' ethnocentric worldview – when people are chronically prone to see politics as a conflict between 'us' and 'them', they will naturally tend to believe that the rise of new groups can be accommodated in politics only by marginalising formerly dominant groups. It is thus no wonder that slogans of restoration such as 'Make America Great Again' or 'Take Back Control' have proved resonant with identity conservative voters.

⁷⁴ Gest (2016); Cramer (2016).

⁷⁵ Kaufmann (2018); Eatwell and Goodwin (2018); Jardina (2019).

Ethnocentric identity conservatives are threatened by both of the rising identity liberal groups. They are threatened by the graduate class, because graduates are conviction liberals who reject their values, such as ethnically defined national belonging, and embrace social changes they oppose, such as immigration and multiculturalism. Identity conservatives are also threatened by migrants and minorities because they are attached to ethnically and culturally defined majority group identities which are eroded by mass migration and the rise of minority communities. Identity conservatives are also threatened by the general shift in social norms and values associated with the rise of both groups, resulting in a steady rise in social liberalism, and the growing stigmatisation of some of their traditional views and attachments. Although, as we show in the next two chapters, identity conservatives have also become more liberal over the long run, they lag behind other groups, and therefore find today that many views they see as unproblematic expressions of their identity attachments or concerns with change are deemed to be unacceptably intolerant by many younger identity liberals with stronger anti-racism norms. Identity conservatives are well aware of this, particularly because of the dominance of identity liberals in the media and within political elites, and often express resentment that they cannot speak their minds and express their opinions freely on issues they care about.⁷⁶ As we will describe in Chapter 3, this leads to a 'politics of racism', with conflicts between identity liberals and identity conservatives over the scope of anti-racism norms and the acceptable range of opinions on identity issues.

While these thumbnail sketches are simplified caricatures of large and heterogeneous groups, they give a sense of the tensions at the heart of the identity politics conflicts now emerging – on one side of this are rising identity liberal groups committed to diversity and anti-racism, and on the other side a declining, formerly dominant group attached to narrower

⁷⁶ Gest (2016).

in-group identities and threatened by rising diversity and social liberalism. We will discuss the attitudes of these three groups in greater length in the next chapter, but now we turn to look at how generational and geographical polarisation can intensify the conflicts between these groups by reducing the level of contact between group members which might promote compromise and understanding.

Identity polarisation: generations and geography

Both educational expansion and ethnic transformation are structured by generation, and the oldest British cohorts have dramatically different educational and ethnic profiles to the youngest. Both identity liberal and identity conservative voters also cluster together and live apart from the other group. Graduates and ethnic minorities congregate in big cities, while white school leavers concentrate in smaller towns and rural areas. These are polarising tendencies – identity liberals and identity conservatives increasingly live and socialise among people from their side of the identity politics divide, and apart from those on the other side. Such geographical segregation also has the potential to increase the electoral impact of identity conflicts, as the British electoral system is built around competition for control of small, geographically defined constituencies. Growing numbers of these seats are dominated either by identity liberal or identity conservative voters, giving the MPs representing them a strong electoral incentive to represent the locally dominant viewpoint, and thus helping to mobilise identity conflicts into Parliamentary politics when they arise (see Chapter 5).

The generational polarisation of identity politics is illustrated in Figure 2.4, which shows the changing proportions of under forties and over seventies who belong to the core identity conservative and identity liberal demographics. In 1986, the core identity conservative group of white school leavers was a dominant majority among all age groups, though it was smaller among the youngest cohorts. The group has steadily declined since, but the retreat has been much more rapid in the youngest age

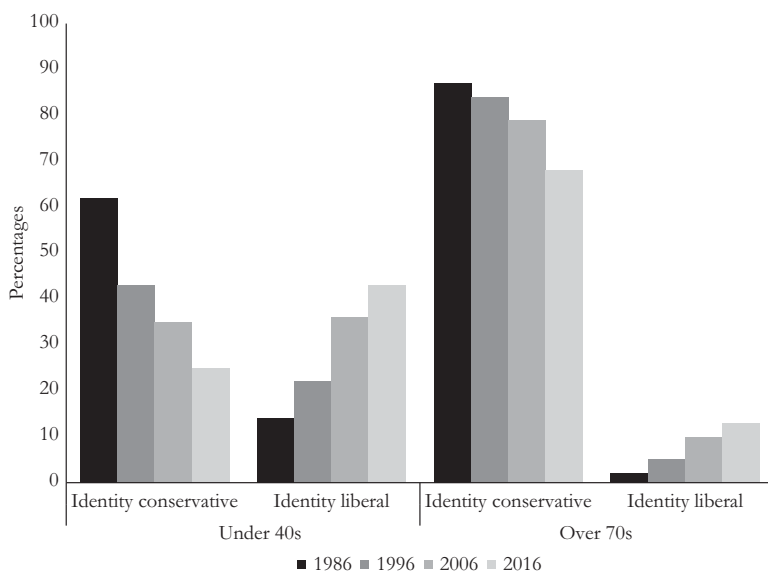


Figure 2.4 Share of under forties and over seventies belonging to the core identity conservative and identity liberal demographic groups, 1986–2016

Source: British Social Attitudes surveys, 1986–2016.

groups, who have grown up since the rise of mass higher education. The share of British residents under forty who are white school leavers fell from nearly two-thirds in 1986 to less than a third in 2016. Among those over seventy – a large and high-turnout group in Britain’s ageing society – this decline was much slower. Nearly two-thirds of the oldest generations were still white school leavers in 2016. Identity conservatives are a shrinking minority in the youngest cohorts but continue to define majority opinion in the oldest cohorts. The generational rise of identity liberals mirrors the generational decline in identity conservatives. Graduates and ethnic minorities were a small minority of all cohorts in 1986, but have grown rapidly since, with the growth strongly concentrated in the youngest generations. By 1996, identity liberals made up a fifth of those under forty, by 2006 they were up to over a third, and by 2016 they had

risen to nearly 40 per cent of the youngest generations, substantially outnumbering identity conservatives. As we moved into the 2010s, identity liberals were the dominant group defining mainstream opinion in the youngest generations, while remaining a minority group outnumbered by identity conservatives in all the older cohorts.

Very large generational divides have thus opened up between the youngest cohorts, where identity liberals are now dominant, and the oldest cohorts, where identity conservatives still set the tone. Such divides will be with us for a long time, because generational replacement is a very slow process. Ethnocentric older cohorts dominated by white school leavers will remain in the electorate for decades, providing a large and persistent constituency for ethnocentric politics. Conversely, while university graduates and ethnic minorities are far more numerous among the cohorts growing up since university expansion and the second wave of mass migration, it will be many years before generational replacement enables them to achieve the kind of overall electoral dominance that white identity conservatives enjoyed just a few decades ago. Both the educational and ethnic trends driving this generational replacement process are accelerating – the children attending school in Britain today are the most ethnically diverse in history, and university attendance rates continue to break records each year. As a result, the differences in the demographic composition of young and old cohorts will continue to rise in coming years, increasing the potential for generational conflict.

These differences in composition are consequential because our social lives are structured by generation – we go to school and university with people the same age, then join workplaces organised into age-structured hierarchies, with those from the same generation starting at roughly the same time and moving up the workplace hierarchies together.⁷⁷ Peers born within a few years of each other are therefore heavily over-represented within

⁷⁷ Alwyn and McCammon (2003).

friendship groups and social networks, and the mix of people in a generation has a big influence on our everyday social experiences. When a cohort is more ethnically diverse, diversity will seem more 'normal' to its white members. When a cohort has a higher share of graduates, university education will be seen as a more 'normal' aspiration, and the political values found among graduates will be seen as more 'normal' too. Generations dominated by identity liberals show, for example, much more liberal attitudes towards intermarriage between different ethnic groups, and have a strong social norm stigmatising expressions of opposition to such marriages.⁷⁸

A similar polarising trend is evident when we look at where identity liberals and identity conservatives live. Britain's ethnic minorities have always been unevenly geographically distributed, reflecting the legacies of early urban settlement and chain migration. Ethnic minority communities are concentrated in larger urban areas – in particular, the largest English cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester.⁷⁹ While levels of ethnic diversity are rising all over the country, driven by immigration, ethnic minority population growth and the internal migration of ethnic minorities,⁸⁰ the pattern of growth in minority communities has been highly uneven. Figure 2.5 illustrates this, plotting the change in local ethnic diversity between 2001 and 2011 against the starting level of local ethnic diversity.⁸¹ The pattern is clear: the more diverse a place was in 2001, the larger the increase in ethnic diversity it has experienced since. The ethnic minority share in the least diverse places rose on average by two percentage points in the following decade,

⁷⁸ Storm, Sobolewska and Ford (2017); Ivarsflaten, Blinder and Ford (2010).

⁷⁹ Smaller towns and cities such as Bradford and Leicester also have very high levels of diversity due to being the focal points of particular migration flows: Bradford imported unskilled labour from Pakistan for its textile industries, while Leicester received a high share of East African Asian refugees resettling from Uganda and Kenya.

⁸⁰ Ethnic minorities, like white Britons, tend to move from inner cities to the suburbs as their ages and incomes rise (Finney and Simpson 2009b).

⁸¹ Measured as the percentage of residents who identified their ethnic group as something other than 'White British' in the 2001 Census.

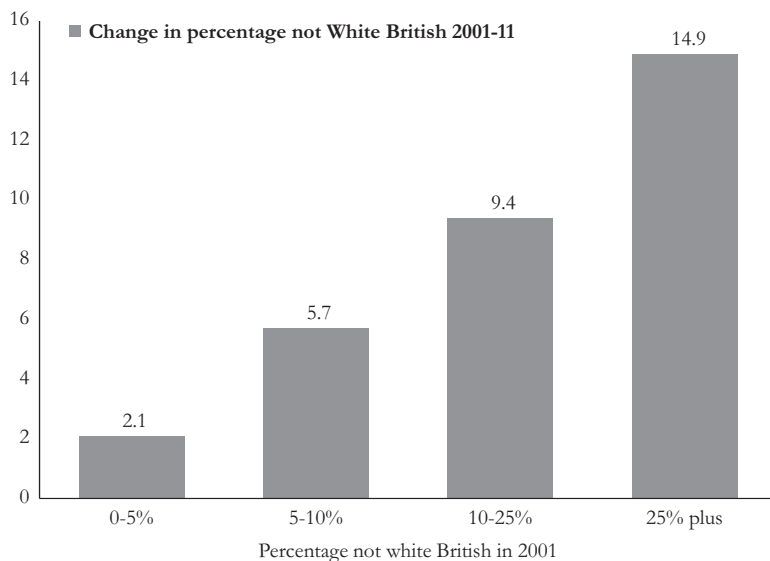


Figure 2.5 Local authority change in ethnic diversity 2001–11 by starting levels of ethnic diversity in 2001, England and Wales

Source: Census 2001 and 2011.

while in the most diverse places the increase was 15 percentage points – more than seven times as large.

With diversity rising most where it was already high, and rising least where it began low, local identities and experiences of diversity are diverging. Britain’s ethnically diverse cities, led by London, are becoming ‘superdiverse’ places with a multitude of internally diverse migrant and ethnic minority communities,⁸² where there is no locally dominant group and the white British are just one ethnic community among many. At the other end of the spectrum, a large part of the British population – and the bulk of older ethnocentric white voters – live in rural, small town and urban contexts which are still nearly mono-ethnic, with 95 per cent or more of the population identifying as white British, and with only modest growth in their small

⁸² Vertovec (2007).

minority communities. The everyday experiences of diversity are diverging between communities, just as the formative experiences of diversity are diverging between generations.

Britain's towns and cities are also diverging by education levels. Mass university education now produces two major waves of internal migration in Britain every year – the first as new students move to start university, the second when new graduates move again in search of work. Both moves tend to increase the segregation of communities by education level.⁸³ Britain's universities are nearly all located in large towns and cities, while the students they educate come from all over the country. Each autumn, young people depart en masse from the smaller towns and rural areas where they grew up and flow into Britain's big cities and university towns to register for their degree studies. A few years later, when these same young people flow out of the university campuses, it is again the biggest cities that benefit, and the smaller communities that lose out. Most graduates either stay in the city where they have studied or move on to other large cities – particularly London – where graduate job opportunities are best.

Mass higher education is thus experienced by smaller communities as a massive loss of youth and potential – the higher a young student flies, the more likely they are to leave, and the less likely they are to return. The expansion of university education has ramped up the scale of this process, and as access rates approach 50 per cent Britain's universities now annually suck the 'best and brightest' from every community in the country into the nation's large urban areas, while those who leave school after GCSEs and A-levels typically remain where they are. Growing geographical segregation increases the disruptive political potential of identity conflicts in several ways. The first is a matter of composition.⁸⁴ As Britain's big cities and smaller communities have diverged, the common ground between different communities has shrunk and the differences between their

⁸³ Swinney and Williams (2016).

⁸⁴ Maxwell (2019).

values and priorities have grown. Where we live, like the generation we grow up in, also has a powerful and lasting influence on the social networks we form, so geographical segregation increases the contact we have with like-minded groups, while reducing everyday contact with people whose experiences and views are different. This entrenches the views that individuals encounter more frequently and marginalises opinions that, though frequently held outside the immediate peer group, or local area, are seldom encountered within it.⁸⁵

The political impact of geographical segregation is also magnified by Britain's electoral system. Members of Parliament are elected to represent a single area and all the voters within it, so when places become more polarised by education and ethnicity, this increases the influence of distinctive local attitudes and priorities of MPs. Legislators representing ethnically diverse and graduate-heavy seats have an electoral incentive to faithfully represent the identity liberal worldview of their constituents, while MPs in seats where white voters with low education levels are locally dominant have a similar incentive to represent the ethnocentric outlook of their local voters, even if, as we show in Chapter 5, such views are often far away from such MPs' personal values.

From demographic change to political change: is demography destiny?

Is demography destiny? Can we predict the impact these dramatic ongoing demographic changes will have on our political system? Our answer is a resounding 'No', for two reasons. First, previous claims that demographic change will produce inevitable political shifts have come to grief, because they have underestimated the capacity of political actors to respond and adapt to demographic change. Four prominent examples from recent British political history illustrate this. In the wake of Labour's

⁸⁵ Sunstein (2002).

fourth successive election defeat in 1959, two leading researchers asked ‘Must Labour lose?’⁸⁶ The authors argued the likely answer was ‘Yes’, but the Labour Party begged to differ, winning four of the next five elections. British election researchers reflecting on Labour’s repeated successes in the 1970s then argued that demographic and generational change would further cement Labour’s dominance in the contests to come.⁸⁷ Mrs Thatcher put paid to that notion. Researchers in the 1990s, writing in the wake of four Conservative election victories, once again raised the existential question, asking whether ‘Labour’s Last Chance’ had passed, with the social changes unleashed over many years of Conservative rule portending terminal decline for the opposition.⁸⁸ As in 1960, this diagnosis arrived just a few years before its refutation, in the form of a new leader, a new strategy and renewed electoral success. Finally, researchers and party strategists argued in the early 2010s that the Conservative Party would struggle to secure a general election majority unless it could improve its appeal to Britain’s rapidly growing ethnic minority communities.⁸⁹ A few years after these reports were published, the Conservatives under David Cameron won their first House of Commons majority in over two decades, despite failing to improve their appeal to ethnic minority voters.⁹⁰ In all of these cases, the parties confounded predictions of doom by finding ways to adapt their appeal and shift their electoral coalitions to address the effects of demographic change. There is no inevitable read across from demographic change to political change because parties are not passive observers, but active agents who react to change and shape its political meaning.

This argument applies with particular strength to identity politics, because of the dynamic nature of identity conflicts, with voters’ preferences shifting rapidly in response to the rise and

⁸⁶ Abrams and Rose (1960).

⁸⁷ Butler and Stokes (1974: chs 9–11); Thorburn (1977). ⁸⁸ Heath et al. (1994).

⁸⁹ Ashcroft (2012a); Cooper (2018); see also Wheatcroft (2005).

⁹⁰ Martin (2019).

fall of perceived threats. This process provides many openings for elite actors looking to influence the political impact of identity conflicts. Parties and leaders can seek to activate or deactivate identity attachments by framing political narratives in ways that emphasise divisions between groups or focus on the values and identities that unify otherwise diverse people. As we shall see, such choices have played a large role in how parties have approached identity issues to date, and the choices they make have lasting consequences on the political form identity conflicts take. Different choices may open up new paths to resolving such conflicts in future.

For both of these reasons, we argue not that demography is destiny, but rather that demographic shifts change the *electoral resources* available to parties and open up the *potential* for new political conflicts to emerge. Demographic change creates new opportunities and new risks for parties, but does not determine the choices they make in the face of new challenges, or the consequences of these choices. Different reactions to the same trends can channel demographic change towards divergent political outcomes, as we illustrate in our analysis of the very different ways demographic divides and identity conflicts have been mobilised in Scotland (see Chapter 9). It is the choices parties have made in response to new risks and opportunities, and the mobilisation of voters in response to these choices, which have charted the road to Brexit, and beyond into the Brexitland politics of today, with the country divided as never before by identity conflicts. The story we aim to tell in the coming chapters encompasses both the changing opportunities for identity politics which have arisen from demographic change, and how the choices made by different governments have shaped the form of identity politics that has emerged. In this first section, we now move to a more in-depth review of the identity attachments and identity conflicts that define Brexitland (Chapter 3), before examining how these divides were first mobilised a generation ago during the first wave of post-war immigration (Chapter 4).