

# 3 DIVIDED OVER DIVERSITY: IDENTITY CONSERVATIVES AND IDENTITY LIBERALS

## Introduction

Long-term demographic changes have driven the emergence of an identity politics divide, with two growing groups of identity liberals on one side and a declining, formerly dominant, group of identity conservatives on the other side. In this chapter we lay out in more detail the values and attitudes underpinning this divide and explain why identity conflicts between these groups are often intense and difficult to resolve. Two reactions to rising ethnic diversity have pulled the white majority in different directions: a process of gradual overall accommodation to change has been offset by rising polarisation within the white population. As we showed in Chapter 2, successive cohorts of British voters are growing up in steadily more diverse social contexts. Each generation of white voters expresses higher levels of comfort with diversity and ethnic minorities than its predecessor. A multicultural Britain is becoming a part of ‘normal’ social life, but this happens slowly because each generation’s sense of ‘normal’ is informed by the conditions when they grew up, and older generations whose norms were informed by earlier social contexts stick around in the electorate for a long time.

Both ethnic diversification and rising social acceptance of it are set to continue. As we noted in the preceding chapter, the fastest growing ethnic minority group in Britain today is the mixed ethnicity group: children with parents from different

ethnic groups. Not only does this point to rising acceptance of diversity in the most intimate of social spheres, it also means the youngest cohort just arriving in the electorate features a growing group for whom ethnic diversity is a daily experience around the childhood dinner table as well as in the playground, on campus or in the office. At the time of writing (2020), the segment of the white British population who grew up before mass migration began in the 1950s, and who therefore express the strongest opposition to diversity, is elderly and declining. Conversely, the youngest voters currently joining the electorate express greater acceptance of diversity in all walks of social life than every older cohort. Within two decades, there will be virtually no voters left with any direct memory of Britain before the onset of mass migration.

While diversity is becoming more accepted overall, there are new arguments arising around the terms of this accommodation, over how and where to draw the lines between in-groups and out-groups, and what forms of group-based judgements are socially acceptable. The overall drift towards more inclusive attitudes has been accompanied by rising polarisation within the electorate. Older generations in general, and in particular white school leavers, are less exposed to diversity in their everyday lives, and often see ethnic change as threatening to their understandings of British identity and culture. They favour government action to slow down or reverse this process of change. Younger generations and liberal graduates see diversity and ethnic change as both inevitable and laudable, and want to see the government focus instead on stronger action to combat the discrimination and disadvantage faced by ethnic minority groups. There are fundamental disagreements not only about the substance of policymaking in response to rising diversity, but also about how to talk about diversity. What one side sees as legitimate expressions of anxiety about the speed of change and attachment to traditional identities is criticised by the other as illegitimate expressions of prejudice. This race card politics – with fundamental disagreements over where the line is drawn in discussions of groups and group attachments – is a growing

obstacle to compromise and dialogue to resolve the new political conflicts of Brexitland.

This chapter will first expand on how we measure the differences between the three identity camps, focusing on their relative tendency towards ethnocentric ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking. Then we will tackle the question of why these differences are so hard to bridge and introduce the social norms employed by each distinct identity camp to defend their position and attack the legitimacy of their opponents. Such norms polarise discussions by denying the legitimacy of the opponent’s concerns, making compromise and even basic engagement in a meaningful debate more difficult. Ultimately, it is this lack of mutual recognition and dialogue that generates the intense and polarised disputes which characterise Brexitland identity conflicts.

### **Identity conservatives: ethnocentrism as a political agenda**

Ethnocentrism has two central aspects: attachment to in-groups and negative attitudes towards out-groups. To track the evolution of ethnocentric attitudes and identity politics over the long run, we have sought out measures which have been asked reasonably often on long-running political and social surveys. For in-group attachments, we draw particularly on measures of national identity. The nation is one of the most salient in-group identities for voters. Who does, and does not, belong to the nation is a central question in debates over diversity and immigration in Britain, as it has been in other countries experiencing mass immigration and ethnic change. National identity is also regularly asked about in surveys, so we have relatively rich data to draw upon in examining its effects. However, the nation is unlikely to be the only identity important to ethnocentric voters, and readers should bear in mind that other forms of group attachments which are not captured in the data sources available to us are also likely to matter to ethnocentric voters. The measures we use include belief in British superiority to other nations, the protection of Britain’s culture and economy from foreign influence, and the notion that Britain should put its

national interests before international cooperation. Later, we also make use of preferences for English or Scottish over British national identity, because both these forms of nationalism have strong and politically consequential ethnocentric elements.<sup>1</sup>

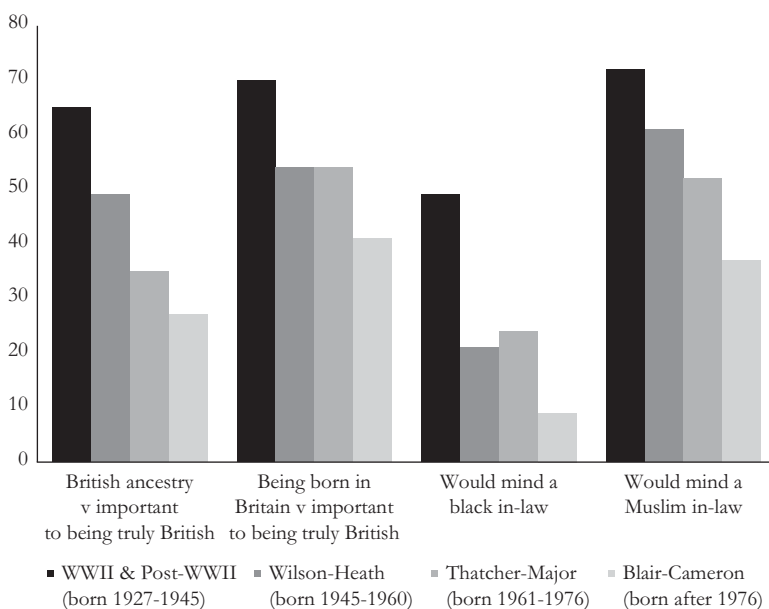
Out-group hostility comes in many forms, including negative stereotypes, feelings of threat, negative emotions and discriminatory behaviour amongst others, but as we wish to track the evolution of British politics over a long period, we are once again forced to focus our analysis on what is regularly available in existing data sources. The most frequently available measures of out-group hostility, and thus the ones we focus on, are ‘social distance’ measures capturing opposition to social contact with minority groups, self-rated racial prejudice and various measures of hostility to immigrants as an out-group.

Both in-group attachments and out-group hostility show a strong generational pattern,<sup>2</sup> as illustrated in Figure 3.1. Older generations consistently express stronger support for an ethnically exclusive national identity, and more opposition to ethnic minority in-laws. When we have measures asked repeatedly over many years, we find these attitudes are generally stable over time within generations, while showing large and persistent differences between generations.<sup>3</sup> There are also deep and enduring divides by education level and ethnicity in ethnocentrism, as Figure 3.2 illustrates. White school leavers are much more likely, for example, to agree that birth and ancestry are very important markers of ‘being British’ and to agree that those who do not share British culture and traditions can never be ‘truly British’. By contrast, large majorities of white graduates

<sup>1</sup> See Sobolewska and Ford (2018). For a more comprehensive account of English nationalism and its political effects, see Henderson and Wyn-Jones (2020).

<sup>2</sup> We assume, in line with previous research, that these ethnocentric worldviews are stable over time for individual people. See, for example, Kinder and Kam (2009: 66–9). More recent work has also found evidence of high stability in hostility to immigrants as an out-group, across multiple panel studies in multiple countries, which is what we would expect if ethnocentrism is a stable aspect of voters’ worldviews. See Kutsov, Laaker and Reller (2019).

<sup>3</sup> See the Online Appendix ([www.cambridge.org/Brexitland](http://www.cambridge.org/Brexitland)) for details. See also Ford (2008); Storm, Sobolewska and Ford (2017).



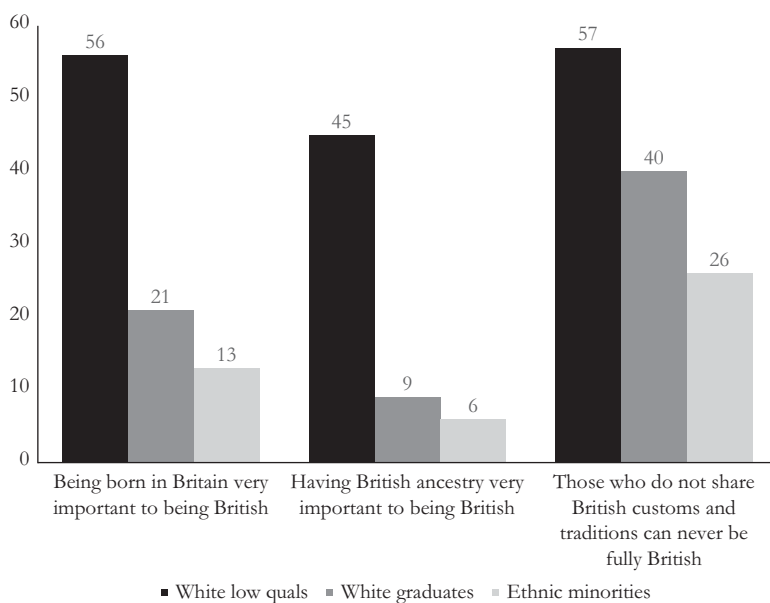
**Figure 3.1** Share of people in different generations expressing ethnocentric views (percentages)

Source: British Social Attitudes, 2013.

and ethnic minorities reject birth and ancestry as markers of Britishness, and both groups are also more likely to reject the argument that the national in-group should exclude those who do not share British culture and traditions. However, while the link between demographics and identity attachments is strong, it is not perfect: there is a substantial minority of low-qualification whites who reject ethnocentric conceptions of the nation, and a substantial minority of graduates and ethnic minorities who express at least some support for them. The same patterns obtain for hostility to minority and migrant out-groups.<sup>4</sup>

Ethnocentric voters also have a distinctive political agenda encompassing a range of issues where groups and group conflict

<sup>4</sup> See the Online Appendix for further details: [www.cambridge.org/Brexitland](http://www.cambridge.org/Brexitland)



**Figure 3.2** Ethnocentric national identity among white school leavers, white graduates and ethnic minorities (percentages)

Source: British Social Attitudes, 2013.

are salient. We illustrate this in Table 3.1, where we show the differences in the views of those who score highest and lowest on measures of ethnocentrism. Across a range of issues, including immigration, equal opportunities, views of the EU and views of devolution and constitutional reform, ethnocentric voters consistently favour stances which protect or enhance the position of their in-group, while opposing policies which protect or enhance the position of out-groups. Ethnocentric voters hold negative views of the EU, seeing it as a threatening out-group which constrains the sovereignty of their national in-groups. Ethnocentric voters are also strongly prone to negative views of immigrants and tend to oppose policies which support and protect ethnic minorities. On any issue framed as a conflict between in-groups and out-groups, ethnocentric voters will reliably line

Table 3.1 Ethnocentrism and views on political issues involving group conflict

Issue	Agreement with statement, high ethnocentrism	Agreement with statement, low ethnocentrism	<i>Difference</i>
<b>Immigration attitudes</b>			
Immigration should be reduced 'a lot'	83	27	56
Migration is bad for the economy	73	17	56
Migration undermines British culture	69	16	53
Asylum seekers should not be allowed to stay	46	10	36
Britain would lose its identity if more Muslims came*	88	50	38
Britain would lose its identity if more Eastern Europeans came	82	48	34
<b>Equal opportunities/multiculturalism</b>			
Oppose government assistance to support ethnic minority customs and traditions	72	43	29
Ethnic minorities should blend into society, not maintain customs and traditions	70	50	20
Government takes better care of ethnic minorities than the white majority*	65	30	35

Table 3.1 (cont.)

Issue	Agreement with statement, high ethnocentrism	Agreement with statement, low ethnocentrism	Difference
<b>Euroscepticism</b>			
Would vote to leave the EU in a referendum	62	22	40
Little or no benefit to UK from EU membership	54	23	31
UK should not follow EU decisions it disagrees with	76	40	36
<b>Devolution/constitutional arrangements</b>			
Support for English Parliament (England)	22	19	3
Support for English independence (England)	20	13	7
England benefits more than Scotland from UK (Scotland)	37	22	15
Support for Scottish independence (Scotland)	30	20	10

Sources: British Social Attitudes, 2013; Scottish Social Attitudes, 2013 (Scottish devolution items), items marked \* from British Election Study, 2010. Ethnocentrism measured using ethnic nationalism, except on questions marked with \* where self-rated prejudice is used due to data constraints.



up behind the policies seen as best defending ‘us’ against ‘them’. The main exception is constitutional preferences – while ethnocentric Scottish voters show a stronger tendency to see the UK system as biased against them, and to favour reforming it or leaving it altogether, ethnocentric English voters do not (yet) express similar resentments about United Kingdom political institutions.<sup>5</sup> This could change in the future, if ethnocentric English voters come to see the other nations of the UK, or the UK’s overarching political institutions, as opponents frustrating the preferences of their in-group.

While ethnocentric attitudes inform a coherent worldview and political agenda focused on conflict between in-groups and out-groups, the lines of this conflict are not drawn in the same way by all ethnocentric voters. Ethnocentrism is a tendency to divide the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’, but the nature of the boundaries used to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’ and the political and social issues seen as ‘us versus them’ conflicts vary between individuals and evolve over time. The political context people grow up with informs where these lines are drawn. Over time, new minority groups who are initially seen as alien and threatening come to be accepted as part of a broader ‘us’, with their cultural and racial differences recognised but no longer seen as a threat.<sup>6</sup> Even within the most ethnocentric demographic groups, there is substantial potential for tension between older and younger generations who draw the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ differently, with older cohorts rejecting groups that younger cohorts accept. Figure 3.3 illustrates this, showing how the share of both white university graduates and white school leavers who accept the idea of an ethnic minority in-law rises steadily among younger generations who have grown up in a more diverse Britain.

<sup>5</sup> See Henderson and Wyn-Jones (2020) for interesting discussions of why this is, and whether this situation may change in the future.

<sup>6</sup> Alba and Nee (2003); Alba and Foner (2015).



**Figure 3.3** Share of white graduates and school leavers accepting the idea of an ethnic minority in-law

Source: Ford (2008).

### Graduate conviction liberals: social norms and the politics of anti-racism

While views about who belongs to ‘us’ and ‘them’ shift over time and between generations, identity conservatives all share a tendency to see politics in terms of groups and group conflict. Conviction identity liberals, the first of the two identity liberal groups, are very different. This group’s identity liberalism involves both the rejection of this ethnocentric worldview and the embrace of anti-prejudice social norms which stigmatise those who hold such views. Conviction identity liberals see the ethnocentric worldview, and the political stances which flow from it, as morally wrong and regard combatting the in-group bias and out-group hostility of identity conservatives as a core political value. This conviction is reflected in a commitment to strengthening and entrenching *anti-prejudice social norms* which stigmatise majority ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour as

socially and morally unacceptable.<sup>7</sup> Identity liberals seek to protect vulnerable minorities from the ethnocentric hostility and discrimination they deplore, embracing both equal opportunities policies which aim to protect minorities from discrimination<sup>8</sup> and improve their representation in powerful institutions.

We use different measures to capture the normative and practical elements to conviction liberal politics. The first is a set of attitudes called 'motivation to control prejudice' which capture the degree to which people have internalised anti-racism social norms and seek to police their own behaviour in accordance with these norms. These motivations, like ethnocentrism, vary strongly with education level and generation, with younger university graduates showing the strongest commitment to anti-prejudice norms, and older white school leavers the weakest. Unfortunately, direct measures of this concept have only recently been developed so we only have them available in a handful of recent surveys. For earlier periods, we have to make use of indirect measures which can serve as a proxy for a commitment to anti-racism social norms such as positive views of migrant and ethnic minority groups, and friendship with members of these groups.

As Table 3.2 illustrates, positive views of out-groups, opposition to ethnocentrism and motivation to control prejudice are all more widespread among white university graduates than among white school leavers. Majorities of white graduates think British culture is enriched by migration, see ethnic minority migration positively, and hold positive views of ethnic minorities, all stances which most white school leavers reject. Nearly three-quarters of white graduates report having multiple migrant-origin friends compared with just a third of white school leavers (and a fifth of older white school leavers). Half of white graduates think strong patriotic feelings lead to

<sup>7</sup> Ivarsflaten, Blinder and Ford (2010); Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten (2019).

Table 3.2 Positive views of out-groups and attachment to anti-prejudice social norms among white graduates and white school leavers

Issue	Agreement, white graduates	Agreement, white school leavers	Difference
<b>Contact/positive views of out-groups</b>			
Positive view of asylum seekers	40	12	28
Think of self as European	29	7	22
Multiple friends born outside Britain	72	35	37
Benefits of migrants from EU outweigh costs	41	13	28
British culture enriched by migration	64	16	48
Positive feelings about Muslims*	60	34	26
Ethnic minority immigration good for Britain	52	24	28
<b>Opposition to ethnocentrism</b>			
Strong patriotic feelings lead to intolerance in Britain	48	30	18
Strong patriotic feelings lead to negative attitudes to immigrants	53	31	22
<b>Anti-prejudice social norms</b>			
Acting in non-prejudiced ways towards Muslims is personally important to me	59	39	20
Using stereotypes about Muslims is not OK according to my personal values	68	44	24
I get angry with myself when I have a prejudiced thought	40	26	14
I do not want to appear racist, even to myself	68	56	12

Sources: British Social Attitudes, 2013, items marked \* from British Election Study, 2010. Anti-prejudice norms measures from 'Welfare State Under Strain' survey fielded by YouGov in 2013.

intolerance or generate hostility to immigrants, while only 30 per cent of white school leavers endorse such views. Majorities of white graduates report feelings of guilt at prejudiced thoughts and strong motivations to treat minority groups equally. What characterises the conviction liberal worldview most prevalent among white university graduates is thus not just the absence of prejudice, but a positive commitment to oppose and fight discrimination.

These views in turn inform a distinctive equal opportunities and anti-discrimination policy agenda.<sup>9</sup> Nearly half of white graduates believe ethnic minorities should be able to keep their customs and traditions, and large majorities support greater efforts by government to ensure equal opportunities for ethnic minorities and access to public education by legal migrants. However, support for stronger multicultural or affirmative action policies is markedly lower. While a majority of white graduates believe ethnic minorities should keep their cultural traditions rather than assimilate, only a minority back government-funded efforts to support minority cultures. Similarly, while a substantial majority of white graduates support greater government effort to improve equal opportunities for ethnic minorities, only a small minority would back 'affirmative action'-style policies which explicitly target resources, university places or jobs at ethnic minorities. Britain's conviction liberals favour a kind of passive multiculturalism – they want ethnic diversity celebrated and ethnic minorities protected from discrimination, but they do not generally support interventionist policies which give minority groups preferential treatment in decisions about jobs, university places or other resources.

<sup>9</sup> Further details on this are provided in the Online Appendix: [www.cambridge.org/Brexitland](http://www.cambridge.org/Brexitland)

### **Ethnic minority necessity liberals: discrimination, linked fate and strategic alliances**

We might expect British ethnic minorities to be obvious allies of the ‘conviction liberal’ white graduates who embrace anti-racism norms and advocate for equal opportunities policies. The truth is more complex. While ethnic minorities share white graduates’ support for anti-racism and equal opportunities, they also express some ethnocentric attitudes at similar rates to the white majority,<sup>10</sup> they are far more religious on average than the white population,<sup>11</sup> and often hold socially conservative views on family, sexual orientations and gender roles.<sup>12</sup> These are all factors which could potentially align them with identity conservative white voters. On the other hand, ethnic minorities strongly support policies accommodating religious and ethnic diversity and equal opportunities, and these issues are much more important for minority voters as a factor determining their political choices.<sup>13</sup> Even though there is great diversity within and between the different ethnic minority communities, and little evidence that their political attitudes on bread-and-butter issues differ from those of the general population,<sup>14</sup> ethnic minorities’ intense and shared focus on prejudice and discrimination tends to align them politically with white graduates, for whom anti-racism is also a core political value. Yet this alignment is predicated almost entirely on white graduates’ commitment to protect minorities and their rights, as on many other issues socially conservative ethnic minority voters and liberal individualist white graduates are poles apart. If other social issues were to rise to the top of the political agenda, such as gay rights, gender equality or teaching liberal social values to children, the coalition of ethnic minorities and white graduates would come under strain. Many European anti-immigrant

<sup>10</sup> Storm, Sobolewska and Ford (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Voas and Ling (2010); Voas and Fleischmann (2012); Lewis and Kayshap (2013).

<sup>12</sup> Saggat (2004); Heath et al. (2013); MORI (2018).

<sup>13</sup> Heath et al. (2013: chs 5 and 6).

<sup>14</sup> Studlar (1986); Sobolewska (2005); Heath et al. (2013)

parties already seek to mobilise such tensions by campaigning heavily on secular liberals' anxieties about Muslim minorities' religiosity and socially conservative values.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of anti-racism and equal opportunities to the political alignment of ethnic minorities reflects a real and continuing experience of disadvantage and hostility in many areas of social life. Black and Asian minorities generally, and Muslim minorities in particular, are more likely to be targeted by police,<sup>16</sup> suffer at the hands of immigration officials,<sup>17</sup> and face discrimination when competing for university places,<sup>18</sup> seeking employment,<sup>19</sup> and trying to rent or buy a home.<sup>20</sup> The widespread experience of discrimination and disadvantage in many walks of life shapes ethnic minority voters' political priorities. Nearly half of respondents to the 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study, the most comprehensive recent survey of ethnic minority political attitudes, believed that ethnic minorities did not receive the same opportunities as white people in Britain, nearly six in ten thought black and Asian people were stopped by the police for no reason, and over 90 per cent reported that there was racial prejudice in Britain. For white identity liberals, action on discrimination is an expression of abstract values, but for ethnic minorities it is a matter of concrete personal and group self-interest. Even though ethnic minority voters are often socially conservative, they align with white liberals on issues such as those civil liberties, immigration and equal

<sup>15</sup> Betz (2016); Kallis (2018).

<sup>16</sup> Bowling and Philips (2007); Philips and Bowling (2017).

<sup>17</sup> A problem greatly exacerbated by the 'hostile environment' policies introduced by the Conservatives in 2014, which made the nation's landlords and public service providers into informal and unregulated immigration officials, by making migration status checks mandatory on all those seeking to rent property or access public services, and resulted in high-profile cases of discriminatory treatment causing major harm to the lives of elderly British ethnic minority citizens (Gentleman 2019). The application of this policy to the rental sector was judged discriminatory and in breach of human rights law by the High Court of England and Wales in 2019 (Spencer 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Boliver (2013; 2016). <sup>19</sup> Heath and DiStasio (2019).

<sup>20</sup> Carlson and Eriksson (2015); Ausburg, Schneck and Hinz (2019).

opportunities where discrimination, and potential state responses to it, are salient to them.

Research into the political attitudes of minorities generally finds that even ethnic minority voters who have not personally experienced discrimination are nevertheless aware it is prevalent in British society and believe that it impacts on their lives. They are therefore strongly supportive of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies.<sup>21</sup> This perception of prejudice as a force shaping the lives of all minority group members is closely connected to 'linked fate', a belief that the fate of the individual is inextricably linked and influenced by what is happening to the wider group and how the group is treated.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is the general perception that prejudice is a social problem rather than individual experiences of discrimination that most influence ethnic minority voters' political attitudes and behaviour.<sup>23</sup>

## Why identity conflicts are polarising: a clash of social norms

The conflicts between identity conservatives and identity liberals flow from their very different ethnocentric tendencies, the status of the majority in-group and the problems faced by minority out-groups. Yet the mere existence of such differences does not explain the polarised nature of political arguments over race, immigration and other identity issues. Such debates often evoke very strong emotions because they involve strong normative claims. In fact, paradoxically one of the most polarising aspects of identity politics conflicts stems from a point of very broad agreement. There is a general social consensus that racism is a personal failing and a social evil, so those judged racist, or

<sup>21</sup> Around 40 per cent of respondents who said they had not experienced discrimination personally in the last five years still agreed that it holds back non-white people (Ethnic Minority British Election Study, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Dawson (1996); though see Lanijonu (2019) about how in Britain linked fate is less influential than in the United States.

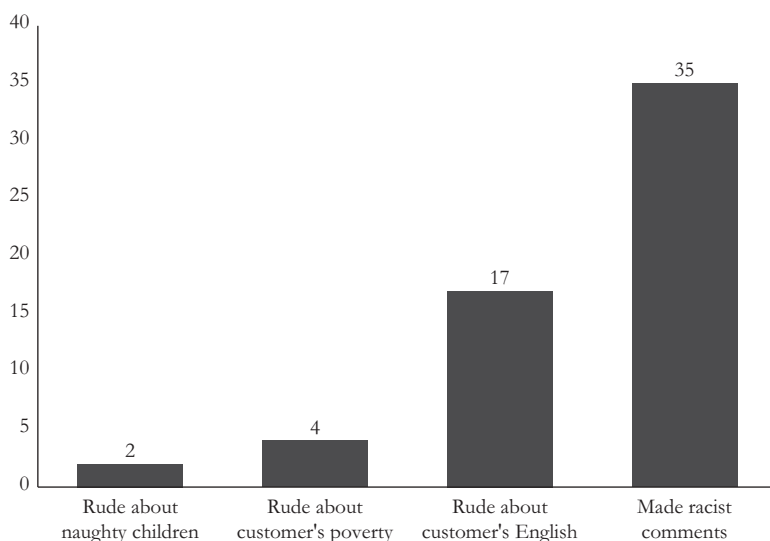
<sup>23</sup> Sanders et al. (2014)



even accused of racism, face a substantial social stigma. Disagreement as to what constitutes racist, and thus unacceptable, behaviour therefore becomes very heated because all involved recognise that the stakes are high. The result is an emotive tug of war between identity liberals seeking to apply more expansive definitions of racism in order to expunge prejudice from society, and identity conservatives pushing back against such definitions, which they feel inhibit free expression of legitimate views and group attachments, and stigmatise them unfairly.

To illustrate how widespread social norms sanctioning racism are, we designed an experiment to compare the punishments people suggested for racist behaviour in an everyday social situation with those they would impose for other forms of social transgression. We asked respondents in a nationally representative survey to imagine that they were a shop manager, and that they need to decide what sort of disciplinary action, if any, to take against an employee who was rude to customers in various ways. We randomly varied the kind of rude behaviour they had to judge, with a total of four options tested: criticising mothers for not controlling their children; suggesting customers were too poor to buy the shop's goods; criticising customers for using poor English; and making racist comments towards a customer. Our design was therefore testing whether there was a distinctive stigma attached to racism, in comparison with other sources of rudeness, resulting in a stronger punitive response. We offered our respondents a range of reactions of differing severity, including dismissing the employee immediately, giving them a warning, and doing nothing.

The results, presented in Figure 3.4, confirm that racist behaviour is indeed taken more seriously than other forms of social transgression. While the majority of our hypothetical managers were not keen to tolerate rudeness on any grounds, they were more likely to dish out warnings rather than dismiss employees in most of our scenarios. Only 2 per cent would dismiss an employee for being rude about a customer's parenting. Surprisingly, given Britain's class divisions and the salience of debates over food banks and poverty in recent years, only 4 per cent

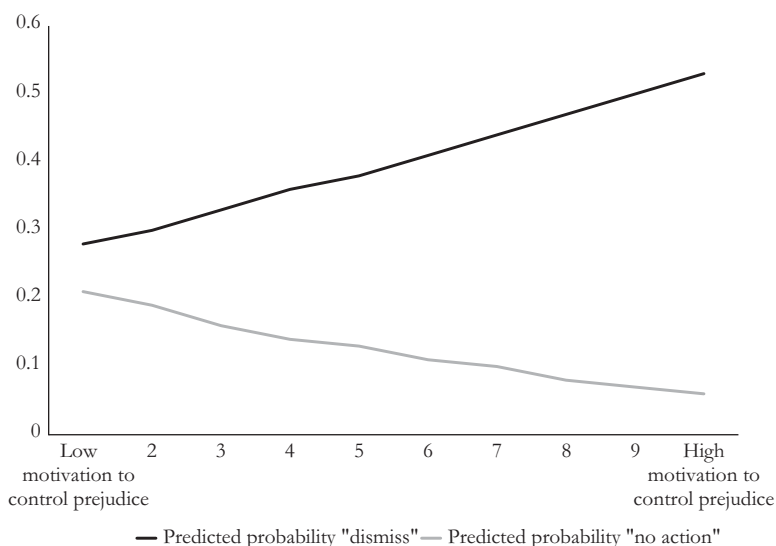


**Figure 3.4** Share of respondents who would dismiss an employee for different forms of rudeness to a customer (percentages)

Source: YouGov survey commissioned by the authors, March 2018.

would dismiss an employee for ridiculing a customer's poverty. As we expected, the sanctioning of rudeness based on race is much more severe, reflecting the strength of anti-racism norms. Thirty-five per cent of respondents recommended firing the employee for making racist comments, twice as many as would react to rudeness based on language skills. This sharp rise in support for the most punitive action was mirrored by a sharp decline in those saying they would take no disciplinary action at all – while many people were happy to let rudeness about naughty children slide, virtually no one was willing to let racist comments or rudeness about language skills pass without taking action.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Given that our experiment was designed in such a way that any given respondent saw only one of these options, rather than all of them to choose



**Figure 3.5** Predicted probability of dismissing the employee and of taking no action by levels of motivation to control prejudice

Source: YouGov survey commissioned by the authors, March 2018.

The vast majority of imaginary shopkeepers, fully 97 per cent, saw racism as a transgression they should punish, an impressively broad social consensus, though people varied in how severe they thought the punishment should be. As Figure 3.5 illustrates, the strength of the sanction people apply is closely related to their own anti-prejudice norms. Those who expressed the strongest motivation to police their own prejudices also applied the toughest sanctions to others: nearly half of those at the top of the anti-prejudice scale would dismiss the racially prejudiced employee. Meanwhile, those who did not express a strong need to control their own prejudices were also more forgiving of others' transgressions – less than a third of those at the bottom of the anti-prejudice scale would dismiss the

from and compare, we can be sure that this is not an artefact of social desirability bias sometimes seen in surveys and public opinion polls.

racially offensive employee, while roughly a quarter would take no action at all.

Anti-racism norms are thus a potent force in society – people are more willing to take strong action against racist behaviour than against other forms of anti-social behaviour, and very few people were willing to ignore racism entirely. A perceived violation of anti-racism norms can therefore do real harm to someone's social position or even their livelihood. To be called a racist in today's Britain is a powerful stigma that can shut people off from the respect and support of peers and colleagues and put reputation and employment at risk. Identity conservatives are particularly aware of the power of the label 'racist', which they often resent as a means used by liberals to shut down discussion and marginalise their concerns.<sup>25</sup> This is why the common use of the phrase 'I'm not a racist, but . . .', while widely perceived as being a prelude to saying something that is in fact racist, actually reflects invocation of a shared recognition that racism is unacceptable. It is an attempt to reach out to those on the other side of the conversation, seeking common ground and trying to neutralise an anticipated hostile response to views the speaker worries may be seen as contentious. Yet it usually has the opposite effect, alerting the other side to the fact that views they reject will be expressed. The roots of this social tension lie in an ongoing struggle to settle the boundaries separating beliefs and behaviour that should be stigmatised as racist from more benign expressions of group attachment and judgements about others. The result is a tug of war between identity liberals, who seek to broaden definitions of prejudice and strengthen the social norms stigmatising its expression, and identity conservatives seeking to defend what they see as legitimate expressions of group preferences and group attachment.

Many examples of this tug of war can be found in the political debate over immigration. Identity liberals frequently frame anxieties over migration inflows or calls for greater control as either

<sup>25</sup> Gest (2016).

direct expressions of prejudice, or efforts to legitimate racist or xenophobic motivations. A former Labour immigration minister attacked UKIP campaign posters in 2014 criticising the economic effects of immigration, featuring white workers in hard hats, as ‘racist’,<sup>26</sup> while in 2010 Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown dismissed a voter who expressed similar anxieties about migrants from the EU as a ‘bigoted woman’.<sup>27</sup> When Labour opposition leader Ed Miliband made a pledge to introduce immigration controls, complete with branded merchandise, this was met with a torrent of negative commentary from identity liberals, who attacked the pledge as ‘pandering to racism’,<sup>28</sup> and years later continued to reference ‘Ed’s racist mug’ as an example of Labour appeasing prejudice.<sup>29</sup> Actions labelled as racist by identity liberal commentators and political activists have included: expressing anxiety about or opposition to immigration<sup>30</sup>; displaying symbols of English national identity such as the George Cross flag<sup>31</sup>; voting for UKIP in 2014 and 2015<sup>32</sup>; and campaigning or voting for Brexit in 2016.<sup>33</sup> In all of these cases, and more, the strategy employed by identity liberal campaigners has been to expand the definition of racism to include these actions directly or to achieve the same goal indirectly by ascribing racist motives to ambiguous behaviours.

Identity conservatives show the opposite tendency – looking to defend expressions of in-group attachment or hostility towards certain out-groups as expressions of ‘legitimate concerns’<sup>34</sup> and to exclude them from the unacceptable label of

<sup>26</sup> Wintour, Watt and Carrell (2014).

<sup>27</sup> Carter and Wainwright (2010). Brown’s successor Ed Miliband was personally congratulated by Duffy after his first conference speech, in an effort by the new Labour leader to demonstrate reconciliation.

<sup>28</sup> *The Guardian* (2015); Wight (2015). <sup>29</sup> Goodfellow (2019).

<sup>30</sup> Hasan (2014). <sup>31</sup> Barnett (2018). <sup>32</sup> Kimber (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Shaw (2019); Choonara (2016).

<sup>34</sup> The frequent use of the phrase ‘legitimate concerns’ has led to this phrase itself being satirised by identity liberal political activists on social media, where it is treated as the contemporary version of ‘I’m not racist but ...’ A search of the phrase ‘legitimate concerns immigration’ by the authors in August 2019 on Twitter reveals that the most popular tweets and widely

racism. A few examples from across the political spectrum illustrate this approach. Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP and a prominent figure in the Leave.EU campaign, defended claiming that many families would not want Romanian neighbours by asserting this highlighted ‘real concerns’ driven by Romanian migrants’ involvement in organised crime.<sup>35</sup> He similarly defended the deployment in the EU Referendum campaign of a poster depicting thousands of Middle Eastern refugees on the Croatia–Slovenia border in 2015, under the slogan ‘Breaking Point’, by claiming the poster was ‘the truth’ and ‘an example of what is wrong inside the European Union’.<sup>36</sup> Boris Johnson, Prime Minister at the time of writing, defended an August 2018 article calling it ‘weird and bullying’ for Muslim women to wear face-covering veils, then went on to compare women who did so with ‘letterboxes’ or ‘bank robbers’, as an example of politicians ‘speaking directly’ about voters’ concerns, something he said the public wanted to see.<sup>37</sup>

The defence of identity conservative stances as ‘legitimate’ is often combined with criticism of overly expansive identity liberal definitions of racism, a pattern of argument found frequently among Labour politicians seeking to defend efforts to reconnect with identity conservative voters against accusations of pandering to racism from their own identity liberal activists. In 2016, Labour candidate for Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham accused his party’s campaigners of ‘avoiding people’s eyes and shuffling away’ when voters raised concerns about immigration and attacked the tendency to label and stigmatise those who raised such concerns:

*[The left] have a tendency to label people who speak up. Accusations of ‘pandering to UKIP’, xenophobia or even racism are thrown around*

shared tweets using this phrase typically came from identity liberals criticising it, and those who use it, as seeking to advance racist arguments.

<sup>35</sup> BBC (2014). <sup>36</sup> *The Scotsman* (2016). <sup>37</sup> *The Scotsman* (2019).

*quite freely. This has the chilling effect of making people who speak out fearful of doing so.*<sup>38</sup>

The emotionally heated character of such political arguments once again reflects the high stakes in this debate. There are political risks to drawing the line too narrowly or too broadly. An overly restrictive definition of racism will underestimate its prevalence and seriousness as a social problem, weaken the case for political and social action to tackle it, and could legitimate behaviour which harms the lives and interests of minority groups. Yet there are also risks to an overly expansive definition of prejudice. If the term 'racist' is applied too broadly by one side in political debates, it may lose its sting – being seen less as a fundamental and universal taboo and more as a tool of political rhetoric. As the definition of racism and racist behaviour is broadened, it can become diluted, weakening the social consensus for action against prejudice. At the extreme of this would be a situation where radical identity liberals posit that all white people are racist, perhaps irredeemably so, with more identity conservative white voters responding by treating prejudice as a personality quirk to be tolerated, rather than a social injustice in need of urgent correction.<sup>39</sup> Identity conservatives have also liberalised over time, with younger generations expressing much more comfort with racial diversity than their parents, and it can therefore be alienating for them to be criticised as bigots by their identity liberal peers. They may feel, with some justification, that the goalposts are being moved, as despite adopting more tolerant views, they are still criticised as narrow-minded by identity liberals.

Identity conservative voters stung by such criticism often look to contest the expanding application of anti-racism norms by laying the counter-charge of 'political correctness' – arguing that some complaints of racism reflect overly draconian and

<sup>38</sup> Burnham (2016).

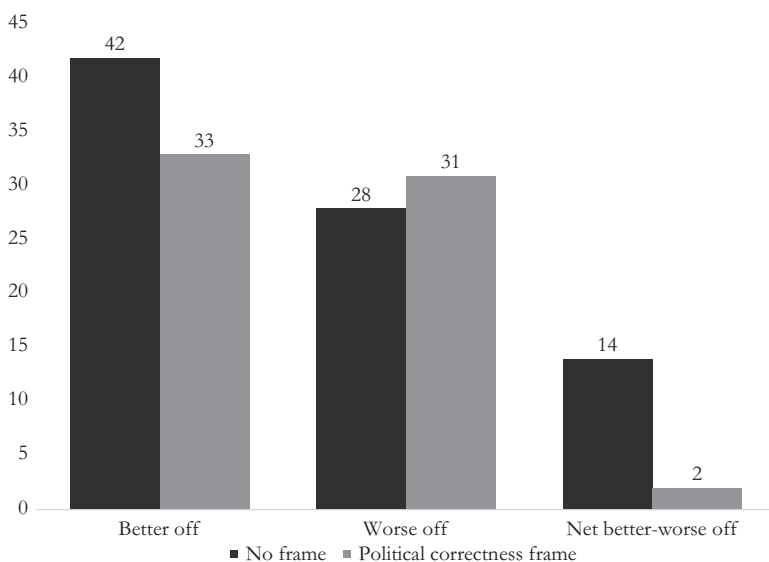
<sup>39</sup> This possibility is satirised in the song 'Everyone's a Little Bit Racist' in the musical *Avenue Q*.

inflexible social rules on speech and behaviour. Many people on this side of the Brexitland divide often think enough has now been said and done on the issue of racial inequalities (despite empirical evidence that these persist<sup>40</sup>) and see the zeal of anti-racist campaigners as excessive and oppressive, a view expressed through phrases such as ‘political correctness gone mad’. Identity liberals see this invocation of ‘political correctness’ as a defensive deflection, used to belittle or dismiss claims about prejudice, and undermine support for policies aiming to combat it. Both sides of the identity politics divide have developed rhetorical tools to undermine their opponents’ arguments, while seeking to impose their own framing on identity conflicts. Identity liberal activists attempt to police the terms of identity conflicts by deploying a more expansive definition of prejudice and stigmatising their opponents’ objections as intolerance. Identity conservatives counteract this by deploying a narrower definition of prejudice and saying it is instead ‘politically correct’ identity liberals who are being intolerant, by seeking to marginalise those with different views.

The charge of political correctness does not carry the same sting as an accusation of racism, but it may nonetheless be influential. We tested this possibility in a second survey experiment fielded to a representative sample of voters. We presented respondents with a question about the value of diversity in London, but half were also given a statement dismissing positive views of diversity as ‘the politically correct thing to say nowadays’. By comparing those randomly assigned to see the ‘political correctness’ treatment with those who did not, we could test whether flagging up ‘political correctness’ as a counter-argument would persuade people to be more openly critical of London’s diversity. As Figure 3.6 illustrates, this was indeed what happened. The share saying London benefitted from diversity drops 9 per cent, while the share saying diversity either

<sup>40</sup> For recent evidence see at: [http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Are-employers-in-Britain-discriminating-against-ethnic-minorities\\_final.pdf](http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Are-employers-in-Britain-discriminating-against-ethnic-minorities_final.pdf), last accessed 14 October 2019.





**Figure 3.6** Views about the benefits of diversity, with and without ‘political correctness’ counter-argument (percentages): Is London better off, or worse off because of ethnic diversity?

Source: YouGov, 2015.

made no difference or made London worse off rose. The balance of support in the population shifts from overall rating diversity as beneficial to London to being evenly split between supporters and critics. Making ‘political correctness’ salient thus seems to achieve for identity conservatives some of what making anti-racism norms salient achieves for identity liberals – shifting opinion about which views are legitimate to express. The positions people are willing to adopt in identity conflicts depend on how the conflicts are framed. Each side has cards to play in this – voters adopt more liberal positions if they think anti-racism norms are truly at stake, but some will also adopt more conservative positions if the invocation of ‘political correctness’ calls the relevance of these anti-racism norms into question.

When we look at who is most responsive to the political correctness prompt, we find an initially surprising pattern. Those who express the strongest motivation to control prejudice, and were in the previous experiment keenest to fire a racist employee, are also most prone to express neutral or negative views more frequently when praise of diversity is framed as ‘political correctness’.<sup>41</sup> This fits with the idea that those strongly motivated to follow anti-prejudice norms are therefore highly sensitive to the framing of arguments about diversity, and will also respond to cues which indicate that the expression of inclusive attitudes is not normatively required. Those motivated to control prejudice are thus responsive to the standards set by wider society, and will shift their stance in response to both liberal and conservative shifts in the framing of identity arguments. This raises the stakes further in the constant dialogue over the social acceptability of attitudes about groups and group attachments. The support for ethnic minorities’ rights and policy responses to ethnic inequality will often depend on which of the two social norms prevails: anti-racism or anti-political correctness.

## Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked the vexing question of how group attachments and views of racial and ethnic diversity define and divide identity conservatives and identity liberals. We have outlined the ethnocentric attitudes that form the basis of the identity conservative worldview: attachment to narrowly drawn in-groups and strong suspicions of outsiders. We have also shown how the worldview of identity liberals goes beyond simply lacking such ethnocentric predispositions, and involves embracing diversity and a focus on protecting the rights of racial and religious minorities. We have examined why it is so hard for these two groups to settle their differences, or even to engage in

<sup>41</sup> Details of this analysis are provided in the Online Appendix: [www.cambridge.org/Brexitland](http://www.cambridge.org/Brexitland)

a constructive dialogue over identity issues. The high normative stakes of identity politics arguments make them inherently polarising. As a result, differences in worldviews can quickly become questions of legitimacy and moral worth, with both sides incentivised to police and penalise perceived infractions of social norms, and to contest the definitions and rhetoric employed by their opponents.

There is a very broad political and social consensus that racial prejudice is wrong, and that those who hold racially prejudiced views should be stigmatised. As such, the stigma attached to bigotry is powerful: accusations of racism can and do end political careers, and the perception that a party or policy is racist can erode support for it.<sup>42</sup> Yet while there is broad agreement that racism is a social evil and racists should be punished, there is no such consensus over how to define prejudice or how to sanction those who express it. The result is a tug of war between identity liberals, who seek to broaden definitions of prejudice and strengthen the social stigma attached to it, and identity conservatives, who seek to defend what they see as legitimate group preferences and criticise the excessive extension of anti-prejudice norms as itself an instance of intolerance. Any expression of group attachment or group judgement can become part of this 'race card politics' – with identity liberals seeking to stigmatise such expressions as unacceptable prejudices, while identity conservatives defend them as a legitimate expression of group identities and anxieties. Identity conservatives also frame these debates in emotive and polarising terms, attacking identity liberals as intolerant 'politically correct' zealots who use politicised accusations of racism to stifle the expression of legitimate viewpoints and stigmatise those who hold them.

This polarisation of debates over identity matters. When both sides are interested in policing the behaviour of their own social group, and seeking to apply their own normative framings to identity debates, people become more focused on the symbols

<sup>42</sup> Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten (2013).

and rhetoric used in the debate and cease to consider the substance of the issues they are debating. The emotional heat that identity conflicts generate makes coalition-building across identity divides is more difficult. Having laid out the general dividing lines between identity conservatives and identity liberals, we now turn to consider how the conflict between them first became activated by the issue of immigration. The origins of more recent identity conflicts over immigration and other identity politics issues, and of the political parties' reputations on these issues, lie in the heated political arguments which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, during the first wave of post-war migration. This is the story we tell in the next chapter.