

# How we get along

THE DIVERSITY STUDY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES 2020

Executive Summary

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The full report is available as a free download at:  
[www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/diversity](http://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/diversity)



# Preface

It is common to read in the media that our increasingly diverse society – particularly its ethnic, national and religious diversity – is becoming polarised and divided. This, it is feared, will lead to further marginalisation and prejudice.

The Government has reacted by developing a range of policies and interventions designed to tackle polarisation and its consequences and to foster better relations between diverse groups. Such interventions require significant amounts of money, time and human resource. In a time of pressures on finances and public services, local and national governments need to know whether or not the interventions they are funding are successful.

The Woolf Institute, which seeks to improve the relationship between religion and society through education, addressed the issues raised by these concerns and conducted a major two-year study. This included the examination of relevant existing research, surveying the views of more than 11,000 adults in England and Wales and undertaking interviews. We collected the data needed to understand how people perceive and experience diversity in their neighbourhoods, towns and cities and how this compared to an overall national picture. Our analysis is focused on personal, not institutional, attitudes towards diversity – in sum, what divides and what unites us.

We are encouraged by the extent of interest ***The Diversity Study of England and Wales 2020*** has generated at local authority, regional and national levels. We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who contributed to this study, both individuals and organisations.

There has been general agreement that, in today's society, it is essential not only to take diversity seriously, but also to reflect on the significance of how we view one another. Indeed, it is only with such an understanding that we learn how to get on together.

We believe this is an important report and ask that its findings, which takes into account an extensive range of different views, be widely considered across the political spectrum by policymakers, government officials, religious and community leaders and the wider public.

We commend it to you.



Shabir Randeree CBE  
Chair of the Board of Trustees  
Woolf Institute



Dr Edward Kessler MBE  
Founder Director  
Woolf Institute

# Introduction

What do we think of our neighbours? And what do they think of us? When it comes to race, religion and immigration, what divides us and what brings us together? Do we all share the same experiences of the diverse everyday world around us? Or is diversity something other people do? These are some of the questions that motivated the Woolf Institute to produce ***How We Get Along: The Diversity Study of England and Wales 2020***.

But they were not our only motivations. We wanted to address regular media reports of increasing polarisation and fragmentation of British society. Are these concerning depictions of us supported or challenged by large-scale data? Is there, in fact, more to unite us on issues of diversity than we might assume? And if so, how might public policy reflect this? We also wanted to address the lack of available evidence on diversity, integration and cohesion. In doing so, our study fills some of the knowledge gaps identified by the 2016 Casey Review and by many others since.

***The Diversity Study of England and Wales 2020*** has surveyed, mapped, measured and analysed attitudes and experiences relating to diversity across England and Wales. We worked closely with Survation, a leading market research company, and surveyed 11,701 adults throughout England and Wales. We asked respondents about their attitudes towards diversity in British society as a whole and within their local communities. We asked questions about the pace of change. To bring these issues closer to home, we invited respondents to share their attitudes towards a close relative marrying someone from a different background. We also explored our lived experiences of diversity both at work and among friendship groups.

We recognise that issues concerning diversity are complex and sensitive. Accordingly, we created a research design that reflects this complexity, the richness of the data and the regional differences across England and Wales. Similarly, we have taken care to present our findings and recommendations clearly and compassionately. To reach our conclusions, we have explored an array of factors that shape attitudes and experiences. The in-depth analysis presented in this report considers sex/gender, age, ethnicity and religion, location of residence and local levels of diversity, alongside education, employment, income and voting behaviour. To illustrate some of our main themes, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews.


***How We Get Along*** provides the granular evidence requested by many, as well as the information required to better inform national, regional and local policymaking. We are delighted to make our work available for use by the UK Government, the Welsh Senedd, local and combined authorities and city mayors.

To help enhance and complement current debates around institutional and structural forms of racism, we placed our focus on relations between everyday people. In doing so, we hope to transcend some of the political tribalism that we believe has hindered previous debates in this field.

The report provides evidence that, far from being divided and highly polarised, there is an emerging national consensus that diversity is good for our country, but that the pace of change has been too fast. It also suggests that while racism and xenophobia by individuals may be in decline, negative attitudes towards diversity based on religion, especially Islam, are still widely held.

The findings suggest that friendships and workplaces have a vital role to play in bringing people together. Changing work and life patterns as a result of coronavirus may require new local, regional and national approaches by policymakers to help us get along better in the future.

As you will read, some of our findings present a hopeful vision of British society, a place of diversity and inclusion to celebrate and cherish. Other findings suggest that, as a nation, we still have much work to do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'J Hargreaves'.

Dr Julian Hargreaves  
Senior Research Fellow  
Woolf Institute

# Key Findings

## Diversity

**There is a national consensus that diversity is good for British society – we get along.** Importantly, positive attitudes towards diversity are common between majority and minority groups. For example, there were no differences between White and Asian respondents in respect of attitudes towards ethnic diversity in British society, nor is there divergence amongst religious believers with respect to migrants and local communities.

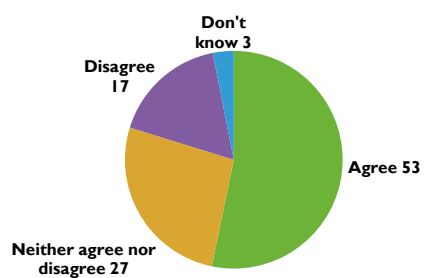
- Most people (53%) in England and Wales agree that ethnic diversity is good for British society. Around a fifth (17%) disagree. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by 3 to 1.
- Just under a half (46%) agree that migrants are good for British society. A fifth (20%) disagree. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by over 2 to 1.
- 41% agree that religious diversity is good for British society. Nearly a quarter (22%) disagree. Religious diversity is less popular than ethnic and national diversity, but those who agree still outnumber those who disagree by nearly 2 to 1.

**Despite widespread positive attitudes towards diversity, we found regional differences.**

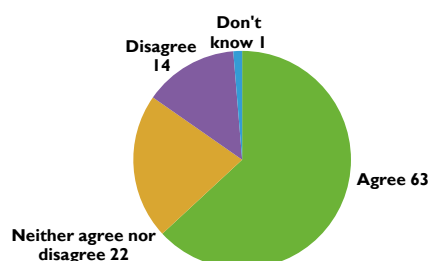
- Compared to people living in London, people in the North and East of England and in Wales tended to be less positive about diversity.

## Attitudes towards diversity

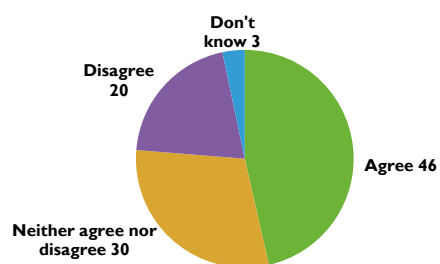
**Fig. 1 Ethnic diversity is good for British society (% agree or disagree)**



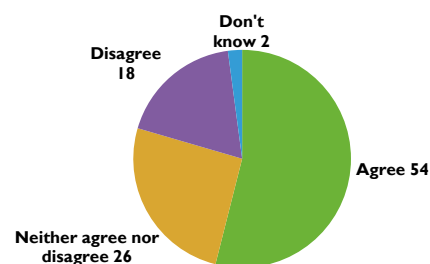
**Fig. 2 Ethnic diversity is good for my local community (% agree or disagree)**



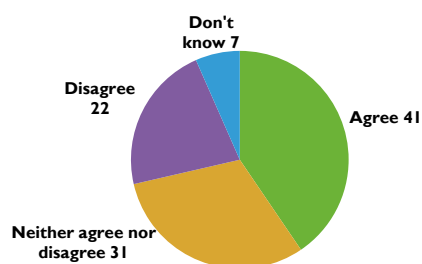
**Fig. 3 Migrants are good for British society (% agree or disagree)**



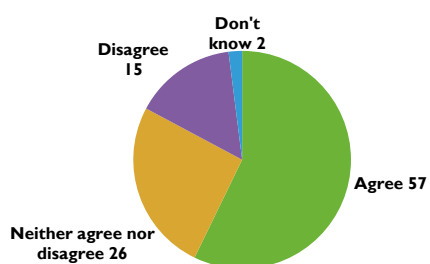
**Fig. 4 Migrants are good for my local community (% agree or disagree)**



**Fig. 5 Religious diversity is good for British society (% agree or disagree)**



**Fig. 6 Religious diversity is good for my local community (% agree or disagree)**



Data source: Survation 2019

## Change

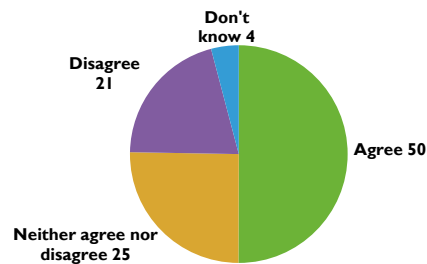
**Despite positive attitudes towards diversity, many people across England and Wales appear to be uncomfortable with the pace of national and local change. There is an emerging consensus that for many it has been too quick.**

- Almost two thirds of people (60%) in England and Wales agree that the number of migrants in Britain has increased too quickly in the past 10 years. 17% disagree. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by over 3 to 1.
- Half (exactly 50%) agree that ethnic diversity in Britain has increased too quickly in the last 10 years. 21% disagree. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by over 2 to 1.
- 43% of respondents agree that religious diversity in Britain has increased too quickly in the past 10 years. 19% disagree. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by over 2 to 1.
- 54% of those who perceive their community to be nationally diverse agree that the number of migrants has increased too quickly. 22% disagree. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by over 2 to 1.

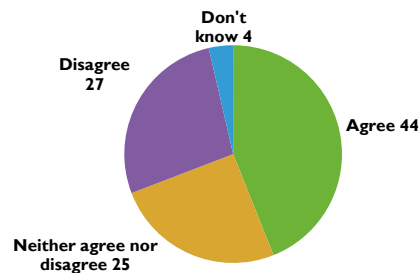


## Attitudes towards change

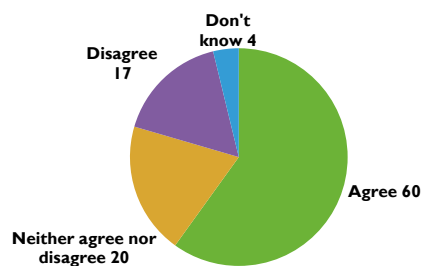
**Fig. 7 Ethnic diversity in Britain has increased too quickly in the past 10 years (% agree or disagree)**



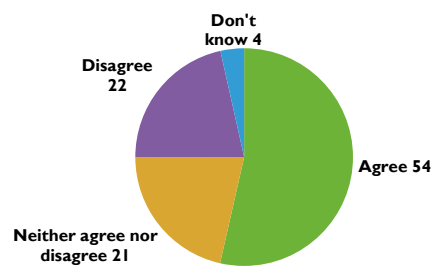
**Fig. 8 Ethnic diversity in my local community has increased too quickly in the past 10 years (% agree or disagree)**



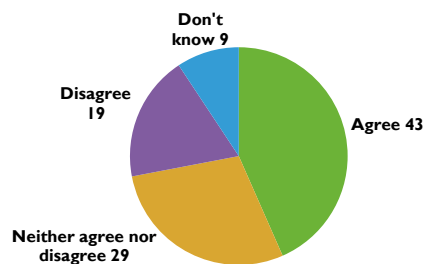
**Fig. 9 The no. of migrants in Britain has increased too quickly in the past 10 years (% agree or disagree)**



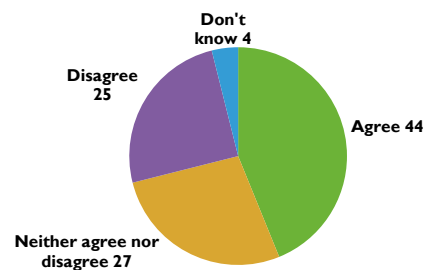
**Fig. 10 The no. of migrants in my local community has increased too quickly in the past 10 years (% agree or disagree)**



**Fig. 11 Religious diversity in Britain has increased too quickly in the past 10 years (% agree or disagree)**



**Fig. 12 Religious diversity in my local community has increased too quickly in the past 10 years (% agree or disagree)**



Data source: Survation 2019

# Marriage

**We are a society largely comfortable with the idea of a close relative marrying someone from a different ethnic or national background.** This is often seen in social science circles as a proxy for the acceptance of diversity.

We are, however, less comfortable with a close relative marrying someone from a different religious background. This particularly applies to marrying a Muslim, the group most often targeted by negative attitudes from other faith groups, but also the group most likely to have negative attitudes towards other faith groups.

**Religious prejudice, rather than racism or xenophobia, is the “final frontier” for diversity, a place where individuals are willing to express negative attitudes.**

- Around three quarters of us are comfortable with a close relative marrying an Asian or Black person (70% and 74%).
- Less than half (44%) are comfortable with the idea of a close relative marrying a Muslim.
- The word “Muslim” appears to trigger more negative sentiment than the word “Pakistani”. Given the vast majority of British Pakistani people are Muslim, we would expect feelings towards both groups to be broadly similar. However, feelings towards a close relative marrying a Muslim person appear to be more negative than those towards a Pakistani person.
- Attitudes between faith groups are more negative than between ethnic and national groups. The strongest negative attitudes towards marrying someone from another background are observed when we group the survey respondents by religion.
- Despite the evidence of uncomfortable marriage feelings between faith groups, our interviews suggest that attitudes within minority faith communities are far from static. On the contrary, they are undergoing significant generational shifts. In particular, British Muslim women are exercising more freedom to decide when, whom and how to marry.

## Attitudes towards a close relative marrying someone from a different background

The heatmaps below report attitudes at the local authority level towards a close relative marrying someone from a different ethnic, national or religious background. Green tones indicate positive attitudes, red tones indicate negative attitudes and tones in between represent weaker sentiment or ambivalence.

**Fig. 13 A Black person**



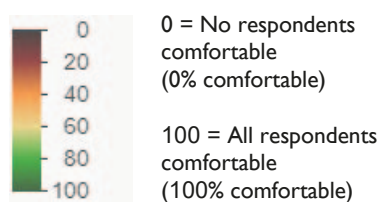
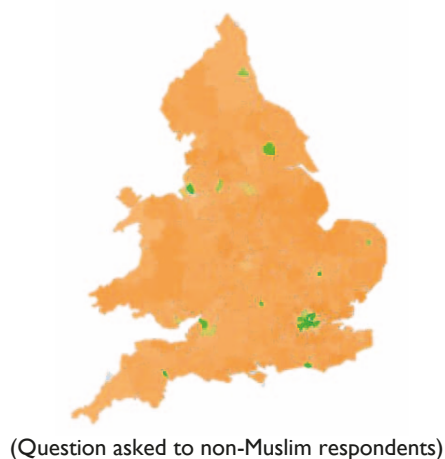
**Fig. 14 An Asian person**



**Fig. 15 A Pakistani person**



**Fig. 16 A Muslim person**



**Data source: Survation 2019**

# Friendship

**Diverse friendships are the norm in British society.** Our findings reveal that large majorities of the public enjoy friendships that are ethnically, nationally or religiously diverse. Previous studies have shown that having diverse friends impacts more forcefully on our prejudices than our prejudice does on our choice of friends.

**When it comes to tackling prejudice, friendship matters and works.**

- 87% of respondents who told us they are religious have friendships with people from other faith backgrounds.
- Three quarters (76%) of respondents stated they have at least one friend from a different ethnic background.
- Over two thirds (69%) of British respondents reported having non-British friends.
- All ethnic groups are equally likely to have ethnically diverse friendships. All faith groups equally likely to have religiously diverse friendships.
- We found little evidence supporting stereotypes that Jewish and Muslim people only mix with their own.

**Again, despite the largely positive overall picture, we found regional differences.**

- People in the North West are the least likely to have ethnically diverse friendships. Compared to people living in London, and after taking into account differing levels of diversity, they are 54% more likely to have friends only from the same ethnic background.
- People in the North East are the least likely to have any non-British friends. Compared to people living in London, people there are over twice as likely to have only British friends.

# Workplace

**Most workplaces are diverse. They provide opportunities for integration and meeting points to create shared goals, break down stereotypes and foster positive attitudes towards one another.** Those without work are up to twice as likely to have no friends outside their own ethnic, national and religious groups. Our analysis suggests that workers are a “safe bet” for integration and cohesion strategies.

- Three quarters of all workers in England and Wales (76%), regardless of ethnicity, work in a setting that is ethnically diverse.
- Three quarters of workers born in the UK (75%), and three quarters of those who described their ethnicity as British (75%), work with non-British workers.
- Over three quarters of all workers in England and Wales who self-described as religious (81%) work in settings that are religiously diverse.

Our research also examined people in non-diverse workplaces and “workplace solos” (people who are the only representative of their ethnic, national or religious group at work):

- In terms of non-diverse workplaces, 1 in 5 White workers work with no other ethnic groups. They are the ethnic group most likely to do so.
- British Asian workers are the minority group most likely to work in non-diverse places – 1 in 12 (8%) work only with other Asian workers.
- In terms of “workplace solos”, 1 in 5 British Asian workers work with no other people from their own ethnic background. Over a third of people who described their ethnicity as Mixed work as “solos”.
- 1 in 8 Muslim workers are “workplace solos”, as are around 1 in 5 from the other minority faith groups (Hindus, Jews and Sikhs).

**Again, our data revealed regional differences.**

- Workers in the North East, North West and Wales are 70% more likely than those in London to work only with British colleagues.
- Workers in the East Midlands are nearly four times more likely than those in London to work only with colleagues from the same religious background.

# Policy Recommendations

The findings from this report suggest several important policy considerations:

- Despite public concern and media narratives that our country is increasingly polarised, there is an emerging national consensus that **diversity is good for Britain**, but **the pace of change has been too fast for many**. Our findings suggest that “pro-diversity” and “pro-immigration control” positions are neither contradictory nor irreconcilable. The existence of an emerging consensus on both diversity and change offers policymakers opportunities for coalitions and broader appeal. They should seek to build on this finding when considering issues such as equality and immigration.
- Regional variations in attitudes to diversity suggest the need for an **even more devolved, regional approach to integration and cohesion policymaking**, including the increased use of local consultations. **This means giving more attention to regional difference and allowing local and regional government more responsibilities and discretion to manage diversity.**
- **Friendship should occupy a more prominent role in policymaking**, with friendships between people from different backgrounds more actively encouraged and supported.
- Building on the above, there should be a **shift in the focus in workplaces tackling inequality towards promoting diversity**. Policymakers and employers should consider “workplace solos” more often. More broadly, all workers are a “safe bet” for integration and cohesion strategies. As potential “ambassadors” of their own ethnic, national or religious group, they are well-placed to challenge stereotypes and establish new norms of social mixing.

The Woolf Institute's vision is one in which discussion and engagement overcome prejudice and intolerance. It combines teaching, research and outreach, focusing on Jews, Christians and Muslims, to foster understanding between people of diverse beliefs and improve the way that people live together in society.

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