

Multi-ethnic neighborhoods in England retain diversity unlike in the U.S.

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Multi-ethnic neighborhoods in England retain their diversity and are much more stable than such neighborhoods in the U.S., according to geographers from the U.S. and U.K. The team examined how

neighborhood diversity has changed on a national scale from 1991 to 2011 using U.K. Census data.

Past studies of this kind have often focused on [neighborhoods](#) in which the presence of two or three different ethnic groups constituted a diverse neighborhood but this study applied a more rigorous standard. A multi-ethnic neighborhood had to have at least five or more [ethnic groups](#) represented and no group could represent more than 45% of the neighborhood's [population](#).

The analysis was a [research collaboration](#) by: Richard Wright, a professor of geography and the Orvil E. Dryfoos Chair of Public Affairs at Dartmouth College; Gemma Catney, a senior lecturer in geography at the School of Natural and Built Environment at Queen's University Belfast; and Mark Ellis, a professor of geography at the University of Washington.

Published recently in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, the study classified all English neighborhoods by ethnic mix. As 85.4% of the population identified as white in 2011, not surprisingly, the most common types were ones with a white majority. The overall share of these types of neighborhoods, however, is declining as the proportion of more diverse neighborhoods increases. The research revealed that England's multi-ethnic neighborhoods have grown steadily from 0.5% of all neighborhoods in 1991 (170 of all neighborhoods) to just over 1.5% in 2001 (528 of all neighborhoods) to over 4% in 2011 (1,417 of 32,944 neighborhoods). This may seem like a small proportion of the total, but multi-ethnic neighborhoods in England are now the third most common type. The 2011 data also indicates that about 5% percent of the [total population](#) in England or 2.5 million people lived in multi-ethnic neighborhoods.

The findings demonstrate that England's multi-ethnic neighborhoods are

highly stable and are continuing to increase: 88% of multi-ethnic neighborhoods in 1991 retained their diversity in 2001, and over 95% of multi-ethnic neighborhoods in 2001 remained highly diverse in 2011. London's neighborhood diversity was the most stable in the country, accounting for 56% of multi-ethnic neighborhood stability in 1991 and 73% in 2011.

The authors asked if this stability is to be explained by high rates of owner occupancy with fewer renters or perhaps, by an aging population. The data revealed the opposite. Only 42% of the population in highly diverse neighborhoods owned their homes as compared to 67% of residents in other types of neighborhoods. When the age profiles of multi-ethnic neighborhoods were compared with other neighborhood types, the results showed a higher proportion of 20- to 30-year-olds across both white British and ethnic minority groups, reflecting recent immigration and immigration. Given the youthful population mix, older whites aging out of these multi-ethnic neighborhoods did not appear to play a role in the stability of neighborhood diversity.

"In England, we suspect people are seeking multi-ethnic diverse neighborhoods out because they are so diverse," explains Wright. "These places may be stable because they are desirable. The typical population churn of people moving in and out may actually be contributing to this stability."

While multi-ethnic neighborhoods in England tend to be highly stable, racially diverse neighborhoods in the U.S. are not. Such U.S. neighborhoods are often transitional, typically in the midst of a shift from being predominantly white to predominantly Latino areas. The co-authors cite their previous research, which found that "less than 50% of neighborhoods retained their high-diversity status for more than a decade (2000-2010)." One striking aspect of the recent study is that the U.K. Census relies on units (lower layer super output areas), which are

much smaller in population (about 1,600 people) than the U.S. Census tracts (4,000). As the co-authors explain, while one might be inclined to think that smaller neighborhoods may be more susceptible to instability, the results prove otherwise.

The research illustrates that many of England's neighborhoods are becoming increasingly diverse and also debunks the common misconception in England that neighborhoods with ethnic populations are becoming more segregated. Greater intermixing of neighborhoods can help foster tolerance and may help reduce discrimination; however, the researchers point out that Brexit has created uncertainties with the future of immigration and emigration, which will no doubt, impact future stability of neighborhood diversity in England.

More information: Gemma Catney et al. The evolution and stability of multi-ethnic residential neighbourhoods in England, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/tran.12416](https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12416)

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