

Migration and neighbourhoods

Author: Dr Richard Gale

Introduction

Very often, public debates about 'neighbourhoods', whether urban or rural, assume these to be fixed and stable social units. In popular language too, 'neighbourhoods' are often referred to as distinctive places because of the 'communities' they are seen to contain. By the same token, residents often identify strongly with their neighbourhoods on account of the familiarity of their surroundings – the presence of friends and family members, for example, as well as familiar shops and amenities, often serve to make the neighbourhood an extension of 'home'.

Over time, however, neighbourhoods are far more dynamic and open to change than these popular and political perceptions suggest. Above all, through the changing balance between births and deaths in a neighbourhood, as well as the net effects of inward and outward migration, the populations that make up neighbourhoods are subject to constant, and often quite dramatic social change.

This case study looked at the broader issue of changing neighbourhoods from the point of view of one particular social group – British Muslims. Over the last decade, following the events of 9/11 and the bombings of Muslim fanatics in London in July 2005, there has been much concern amongst politicians and policy makers that some urban neighbourhoods – particularly in the cities of London, Birmingham and Bradford – have become too densely populated by Muslim communities.

In terms of their residential choices, British Muslims have been referred to as 'introspective' and 'self-segregating', and as living 'parallel lives' apart from fellow city-dwellers (The term 'self-segregation' in this context refers to the choice to live in areas that are already heavily concentrated with a particular population group, and which are therefore socially and spatially separate from the wider population).

Areas with large Muslim populations, meanwhile, have been seen as 'hotbeds' for the recruitment of young (mainly male) Muslims to terrorist organisations. Focusing on Birmingham, and using data from the 1991 and 2001 Censuses, the case study looked to see whether or not Muslims really were 'self-segregating'. In other words, can we confidently say that Muslims are becoming more numerically dominant within particular neighbourhoods as some politicians have openly claimed? The main conclusion of the research is that on average, Muslims are in fact not self-segregating at all, but are in fact moving into increasingly mixed, socially diverse areas.

Findings

1. Ethno-religious identities in Birmingham

According to the 2001 Census, which asked a question on religion for the first time since the Census of 1851, we can see

that the Muslim population of Birmingham stood at 140,000, comprising 14 percent of the city's population, which stood at slightly less than one million.

	ALL	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	Other religion
White	70.4	89.5	25.5	1.0	93.9	2.6	1.3	56.8
British	65.6	83.1	22.6	0.9	83.7	1.4	1.2	52.6
Irish	3.2	4.8	1.4	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.3
Other European	1.5	1.5	1.6	0.1	9.0	1.1	0.1	2.9
Mixed	2.9	2.5	2.4	0.6	2.0	2.0	0.4	4.8
Asian	19.5	0.4	13.0	98.0	2.6	91.8	98.0	16.2
Indian	5.7	0.3	7.6	94.2	0.3	3.6	93.4	14.3
Pakistani	10.6	0.0	0.5	0.1	1.4	69.4	0.2	0.2
Bangladeshi	2.1	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.4	13.8	0.0	0.0
Other	1.0	0.1	4.8	3.3	0.4	4.8	4.4	1.7
Black/Black British	6.2	7.2	1.8	0.2	0.9	1.7	0.1	19.4
Chinese/Other	1.1	0.4	57.3	0.2	0.6	1.9	0.1	2.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Combining the results of the Census on both religion and ethnicity, we see that the large majority of Muslims in the city are of Asian ethnic heritage (see Table 1 below). Thus, people of Asian ethnic backgrounds accounted for 91.8 percent of the local population. Probing these data further, we see that most of this figure comes from the combination of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations, who together make up 83 percent of the Muslim total (Conversely, well over 90 percent of both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Birmingham identified themselves as Muslims).

2. Ethnic segregation in Birmingham

Making comparisons across time are hampered by the fact that no question was asked on religion in the 1991 Census. However, given that a large proportion of Muslims in Birmingham as elsewhere in the UK are of either Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnicity, we can use the figures for these groups as a proxy for Muslims.

Ethnic Group	Index of Segregation	
	1991	2001
White	58.4	55.3
Black Caribbean	41.7	37.0
Black African	38.7	33.1
Indian	51.3	44.2
Pakistani	66.3	61.3
Bangladeshi	67.0	62.5
Chinese	29.5	31.4
Other	31.4	19.0

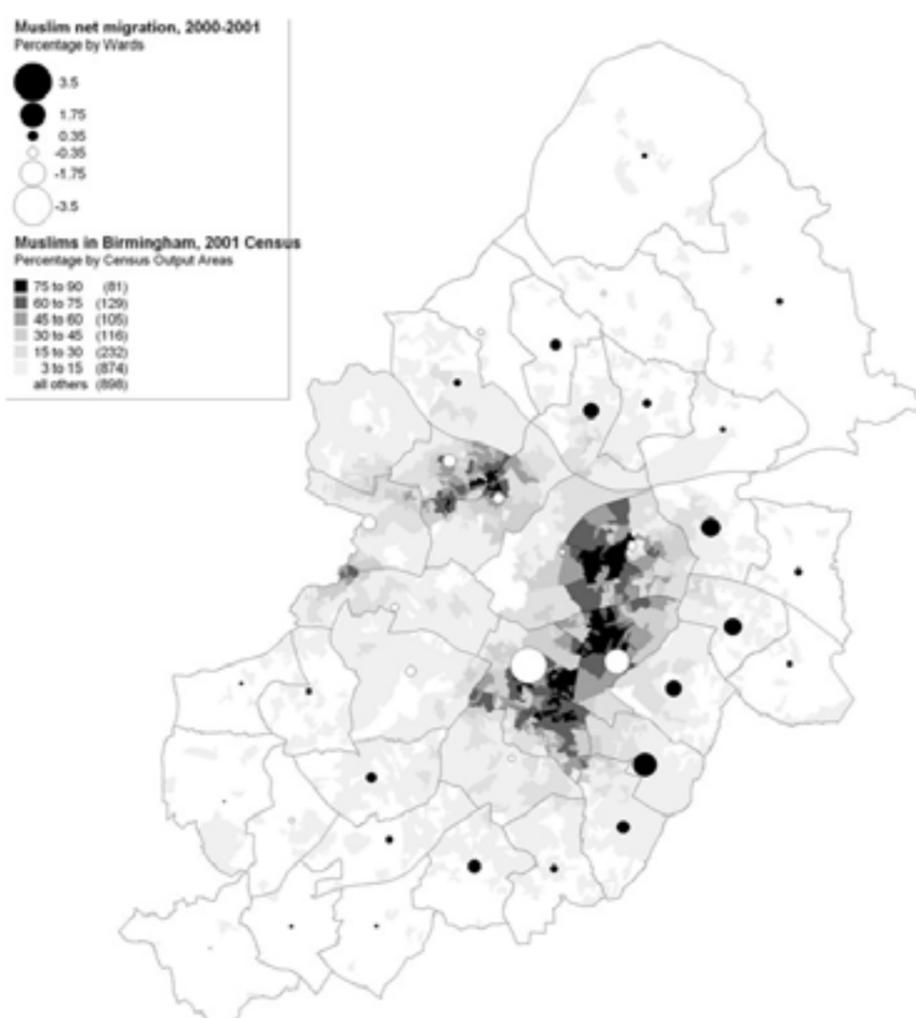
Table 2 shows the changing pattern of segregation for all ethnic groups across both the 1991 and 2001 Censuses. The

'Index of Segregation' (IS) measures the degree of residential intermixture between two groups (in this case, each ethnic group and the rest of the population), with '0' meaning 'no segregation', and '100' meaning complete segregation. Interpretations of the Index are a matter of judgement, but generally, values above the high fifties are thought to reflect high levels of segregation. The table clearly shows that for all groups, with the exception of the (numerically small) Chinese group, segregation fell. Importantly, this holds true for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (i.e. Muslims) as well; with IS scores in the 60s, segregation levels for these two groups continued to be the highest of all, but nevertheless fell significantly between 1991 and 2001.

3. Migration as a factor of segregation

These bold index figures are useful in terms of identifying overall segregation patterns. However, as noted in the introduction, changes in group characteristics at the neighbourhood scale encompass both natural population change (births minus deaths) and migration. Figures generated using the IS are thus insensitive to the relative importance of these two factors. In addition, migration is an important factor socially, given that it reflects choices (between more or less constrained options) over where households wish to live. As such, we need to separate migration from natural change in explaining overall neighbourhood population change and look at migration in isolation.

The map in Figure 1 shows the relationship of Muslim internal migration to Muslim residential concentrations in Birmingham



for the 2001 Census. Specifically, it shows Muslim net migration flows between each ward of the city for the calendar year prior to the Census (2000-2001). What the map shows is that net out-migration (the white dots) is highest in areas of greatest Muslim concentration, whilst net in-migration (the black dots) is highest in areas where Muslim residential concentrations are lower. This clearly shows that Muslims in Birmingham are choosing to move out of more highly concentrated community areas into more socially mixed areas.

Conclusions

Public debate over Muslims in the UK has expressed concern at levels of Muslim spatial concentration, on the assumption that high levels of Muslim segregation promote radicalisation and lead to terrorism. Although many British Muslims continue to live in relatively segregated conditions, there is considerable evidence that spatial concentrations of this community are in fact reducing rather than increasing.

Internal migration is an important aspect of this wider change, since it reflects active choices over where Muslims wish to live. In Birmingham as elsewhere in the UK, it is clear the Muslims are choosing increasingly to live in mixed-ethnic areas.

Muslims are not self-segregating but socially and spatially integrating.

Figure 1: A classification of Welsh neighbourhoods using Living in Wales attitudes data.