

Social Diversity and Social Cohesion in Britain

Abstract

Data from a large-scale and nationally representative survey was used to examine whether there is in Britain a trade-off between social diversity and social cohesion. Using six separate measures of social cohesion (generalised trust, volunteering, giving to charity, inter-ethnic friendship, and two neighbourhood cohesion scales) and four measures of social diversity (ethnic fractionalisation, religious fractionalization, percentage Muslim, and percentage foreign-born), it shows that, net of individual covariates, there is a negative association between social diversity and most measures of social cohesion. But these associations disappear when neighbourhood deprivation is taken into account. These results are robust to alternative definitions of neighbourhood. It also investigates the possibility that the diversity-cohesion trade-off is found in more segregated neighbourhoods. Very little evidence to support that claim. Overall, it is material deprivation, not diversity, that undermines social cohesion.