Future Identities: Changing identities in the UK – the next 10 years

DR 7: How will ideology affect notions of identity in the next 10 years?

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Contents

1. Identity and Ideology: The Complex Relationships

Both identity and ideology are contested concepts in social science. While some researchers question the validity and the explanatory potential of this concept altogether, other scholars differ in their views on what social identity stands for (Malešević 2011; 2006; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Jenkins 2008; 2006). Most approaches conceptualise identity in either strong or weak sense. The tendency among scholars who analyse identity in strong terms is either to see identity as the collective expression of group sameness or view it in opposition to the utilitarian forms of social action where identity is directly counterpoised to one's self-interest. The approaches that utilise a weaker sense of the concept range from the individualist positions that understand identities through the prism of the unsettled, variable and fragmented modes of selfhood towards those who analyse identities as process-oriented, interactive and contingent forms of social action (Jenkins 2008, Malešević 2003, Brubaker and Cooper 2000, Martin 1995).

In a similar vein there is no consensus among scholars regarding the concept of ideology. Whereas some researchers employ restrictive definitions which conceive ideology as closed systems of beliefs that govern social action, others operate with the more inclusive definitions where ideology stands for distinct worldviews or belief systems. In both of these instances ideology is perceived as a powerful social force able to mould behaviour of individuals who are inclined to act contrary to their self-interest. The methodological consequence of these different interpretations is that some researchers tend to study ideology as a total concept and view entire social orders as more or less ideological (Eagleton 2007, Hawkes 2003) while others focus on the impact of specific ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, conservatism, nationalism, or religious fundamentalism on different social groups, organisations or societies (Freeden 2003, 1996; Boudon 1989; Haywood 2003).

This conceptual and theoretical divide is also visible in the studies that explore the relationships between identity and ideology. The restrictive approaches are more inclined to study the manipulative practices involved in the formation and dissemination of ideological doctrines whereas the broader, inclusive, approaches insist on the flexibility and malleability of all belief systems. Furthermore, whereas the restrictive approaches see identities as being structurally embedded in social institutions the inclusive approaches emphasise the autonomy of social agents (Malešević 2006, 2002).

The impact ideologies have on one's sense of identity is also disputed by different perspectives. The tendency among some individualist approaches is to argue that self-interest rather than ideology plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of one's identity (Esarey *et al*. 2011; Svallfors 2004; Esping-Andersen 1999). Others see ideologies as being decisive in the creation and preservation of specific collective identities (Malešević 2011; 2006; Barker 2001; Garry 1992)[1]. However, most perspectives acknowledge that social identities and ideologies tend to be interconnected in the everyday life. This is particularly visible in the UK context.

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[1] For a more extensive elaboration of these different approaches and the definitions of identity and ideology used in this report see Malešević (2011; 2006; 2002)

2. Ideology, Identity and Behaviour

Although the utilitarian tradition of research identifies self-interest as a more significant predictor of individual and social behaviour than identity or ideology a number of recent studies point out that both ideology and identity have a significant impact on social and individual action (Jenkins 2008; Bailey and Gayle 2003). Traditional scholarship was of the view that collective behaviour can be moulded either by the actions, speeches or pronouncements of the political, cultural and other elites, or through the effective propaganda offensives of the state or the large private corporations who control the mass media, educational systems and other information outlets.

In contrast, recent studies highlight that social organisations cannot easily impose their ideological belief systems or mould identities of the wider population. Moreover, neither public opinion nor behaviour can be easily changed and that rather than being a blunt instrument, ideologies operate through the more subtle social mechanisms (Malešević 2006, 2002, Freeden 2003, Boudon 1989). These studies demonstrate that the patterns of individual and group behaviour are highly complex and often non-predictable. Several empirical studies have concluded that, since ideological preferences are often rooted in one's social identity, most individuals are reluctant to change their ideological commitments even when confronted with evidence to the contrary (Malešević 2010:205-207). Social psychologists have shown that individuals generally tend to absorb messages that they already approve of or agree with and reject or ignore those that question their ideological position or their social identity. Moreover most individuals prefer to read newspapers, listen and watch TV and radio programmes, or visit political or religious websites that are likely to confirm their existing belief-systems rather than consulting mass media that would directly challenge their views (Sunstein 2001; Heuer 1999; Weintraub 1988).

The available evidence also indicates that in most cases the origin, development and change in one's ideological outlook can be traced back not so much to the top down but instead to the bottom up processes (Sageman 2004). In other words rather than being brainwashed by the political leaders, prominent intellectuals, journalists, top clergy, corporate, neo-liberal, moguls or their social organisations the acquisition of specific ideology and identity and in particular the impact of such belief systems on one's behaviour are strongly rooted in the micro universe of family, friends, neighbours, peers and one's locality. For example, the recent studies of religiously and nationalistically inspired suicide bombers, violent cult devotees and gang members in UK, US and further afield have shown that in most instances one's ideological and behavioural transformation was linked not to top leadership or state structures but to the much smaller networks of friends and family members (Hassan 2011; Collins 2008; Kalyvas 2006; Ricolfi 2005).

2.1. The British Experience

In the UK context most research has focused on the impact national, religious, ethnic, class and political identities and ideologies have on one's behaviour. The available empirical research shows that whereas the sense of one's national identity and nationalism have remained very strong over the past four decades other forms of identification, just as most other ideological orientations have undergone a significant change. Hence both British and the separate English, Scottish, and Welsh identities have experienced an increase over the past forty years. For example, whereas in 1989 85% of UK citizens were very proud or quite proud

to be British by 2005 this figure has risen to 93% (Antonsich 2009:286), (see table 1). Similarly most recent surveys indicate that the sense of being English, Scottish and Welsh is on the rise too (Bechhoffer and McCrone 2010; 2008). As Bechhoffer and McCrone (2010) emphasise 'in England there has been a slow but significant shift towards people describing themselves as English, with a sharp jump in the mid-2000s'. However the same studies emphasise that many citizens of the UK still favour dual identities (e.g. British and English or British and Welsh). Thus '37 per cent of the English said they are only or mainly English, 46 per cent equally English and British, and 13 per cent only or mainly British. The comparable figures for Scots are 73 per cent, 21 per cent and 3 per cent' (Bechhoffer and McCrone 2010).

This also seems to be the case with most ethnic minorities who, with a partial exception of the young people of African and Caribbean heritage, also maintain strong dual identities (Heath and Roberts 2008). Such strong national identities have a significant impact on one's behaviour which is well reflected in the relatively strong popular opposition towards the greater European integration, high level of support for the stronger immigrant control policies, and in the case of Scotland for the independence referendum.   Some studies notice a slight generational shift whereby the younger Britons feel less attached to their nations, more influenced by the cosmopolitan belief systems and also less willing to act on behalf of their nation. In this context the rise of Scottish nationalism had a significant impact on weakening of British national identity among the younger generations of Scots (Tilly and Heath 2007). However, much of everyday expressions of nationalism have become banal and routine rather than being conveyed in the violent outbursts or blatant racism. For example, both national identity and nationalism tend now to be voiced more often in sporting competitions (e.g. Olympics, Football World cups, Six Nation Rugby etc.), tourism, popular cinematic works, or national cuisine rather than in the persecution of minorities and glorification of militarism or warfare (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Edensor 2002; Billig 1995). Furthermore, nationalism seems to be resistant to the economic and political forces of neoliberalism, consumerism and globalisation. Hence instead of diminishing its impact, these forces have in fact fostered the proliferation of nationalist ideology and have strengthened the popularity of national identification (Sutherland 2012; Hearn 2011).

All this evidence points to the conclusion that the banal forms of nationalism and a sense of national identity are likely to strengthen rather than weaken over the next ten years. This also includes the further expansion of 'dual identities' and the proliferation of separate nationalisms such as Scottish, Welsh and English. Northern Ireland is more complicated as it involves at least the two competing sets of national identities and nationalisms but, as the recent studies demonstrate (Coakley 2007; Fahey at al 2005) here too the national identifications (British and Irish respectively) have been rising steadily and one would expect that this will continue to be the case in the foreseeable future.

Table 1 – National pride ('very proud' + 'quite proud'). EuroBarometer 1982–2005 (percentages)

Country	1982	1986	1999	2001	2005
Great Britain	89	89	95	94	93
France	81	84	87	89	92
Denmark	83	87	93	91	93
Belgium	63	66	77	82	85

Source: Antonsich (2009:286)

In contrast to national identities both religious ideologies and religious identities have experienced significant decline. The general weakening of religious identities among the British population is paralleled with the low levels of church attendance, increasing proliferation of atheism, agnosticism and other secular ideologies and the continuous lack of trustworthiness of clergy (see figure 2). The UK consistently ranks high in the proportion of those who do not believe in God. For example, between 1991 and 2008 the number of professed atheists has increased by 8% and it currently stands at 18% (Smith 2012). Even among the self-declared believers the religious participation is in decline: whereas in the mid 1960s more than 75% of the population regularly attended church services; by 2005 this had dropped to under 50% (Heath and Roberts 2008). The most recent data indicate that regular church attendance has dropped to only 6% (Woodhead and Catto 2012). This religious decline is less pronounced in Northern Ireland and among Muslim and Roman Catholic population in the rest of the UK (Kaufmann 2010). Judging from these trends it seems most probable that as the religious ideologies continue to decline so will the sense of one's religious identity for the majority of British citizens. However, as some ethnic and religious minority groups were less affected by secularisation trends (i.e. Islamists, Salafists, Orthodox Jews, etc.) it is very likely that the strength of their religious identity will not be significantly affected over the next ten years.
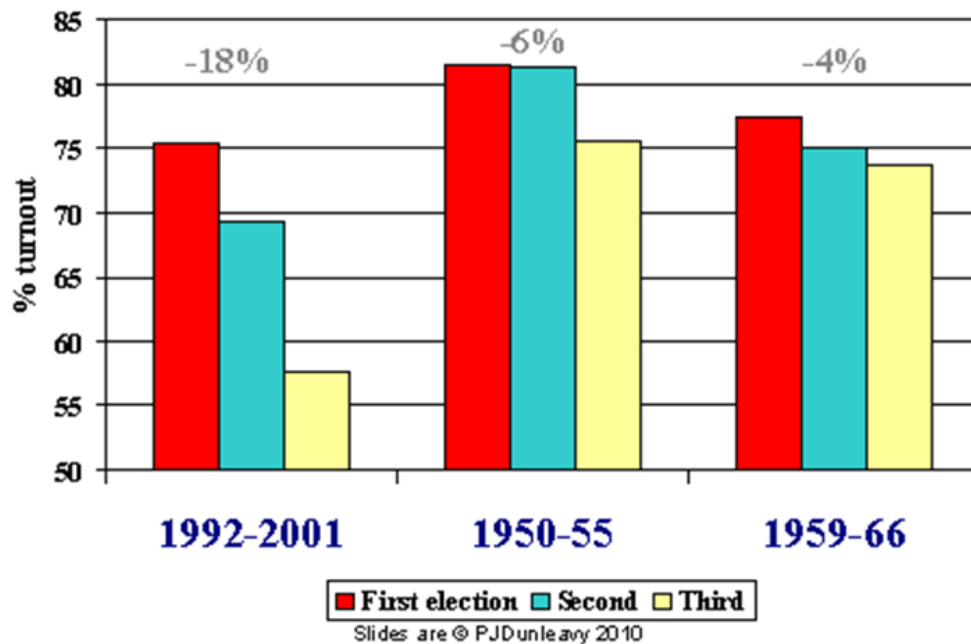
Top UK turnout falls across 3 elections

Figure 1 – The Election Turnout

Political identification has also experienced a marked decline. The ideological polarisations of the 1980s and early 1990s have given way to the growing disinterest in active party politics, particularly amongst the younger generation. This weakened party identification is well evidenced in the continuous decline in the turnout at elections, the pronounced disinterest in volunteering for party activities, the low levels of trust in politicians and in general unwillingness to identify with a particular party or its policies (see figures 1 and 2). For example, the number of those without any party identification has increased from 7% in 1964 to 17% in 2005 (Heath and Roberts 2008). There is a greater ideological convergence around some key liberal issues from human rights, attitudes towards homosexuality, same sex marriage, abortion, civil liberties to environment and animal rights. The vast majority of UK citizens strongly support the key values of liberal democracy: over 80% back the Bill of Rights, fair trial, privacy in personal communication, free assembly and free elections (JRRT 2010; 2004). This is not to say that political identities are not shaped by ideology. On the contrary there is a clear divide between the conservative, liberal and social democratic populations. As recent survey results demonstrate, religion is the single most significant predictor of whether an individual would support the Conservatives or Labour: 44% of those without any religious identification reject the possibility of ever voting Conservative (Ashcroft 2012). However, the liberal-democratic ideas remain the dominant normative ideological discourse and an important source of identity for most UK citizens (Malešević 2006). This pre-eminence of soft liberalism and the general weakening of party identification are likely to continue over the next ten years. Nevertheless the relative fatigue with the mainstream parties is likely to reflect in some popular increase in support for the fringe parities and political movements on the far right and far left (i.e. the gradual rise of BNP and Respect among others).
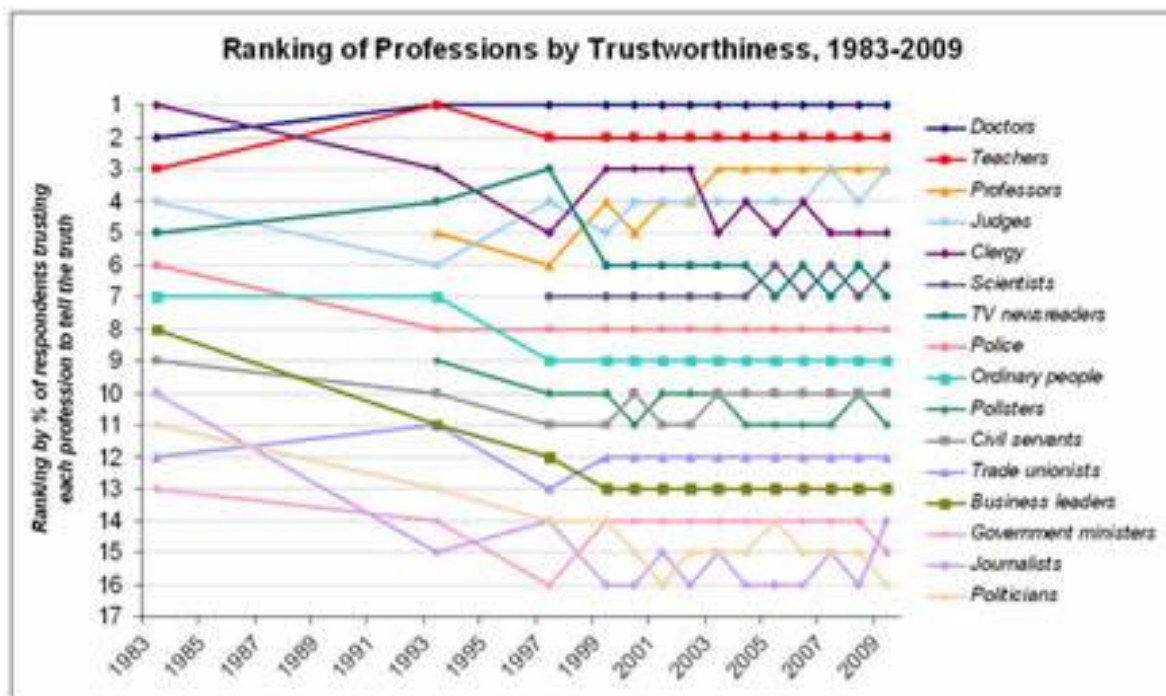
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Figure 2 – The Trustworthiness of Professions

Source : IPSOS MORI

The class identities have also witnessed some decline. Although as Heath, Curtice and Elgenius (2009:37) show 'there has been a dramatic decline in the strength of class as a normative reference group' there is still pronounced tendency to rely on the language of class and perceive oneself and others in class terms (see table 2). Although class membership is popularly less defined in terms of one's occupation and more people identify as 'middle' rather than 'working' class the main drivers of one's class identity perception remain tied to ideological categories such as one's father's occupation (Heath and Roberts 2008). The relative stability of nominal class identification (as opposed to the actual class differences) is likely to continue in the near future. Being grounded in part in family allegiances and other forms of micro solidarity the class identification is likely to remain resistant to any substantial change. The prolonged recession, the ever increasing rhetoric of social inequalities and the proliferation of youth unemployment are all likely to reinforce one's sense of class identity.

Table 2 - The strength of belonging to one's social class

Column percentages		
	1963	**2005**
Class identity		
Close to middle class	14	14
Middle class but not close	13	22
Neither	6	6
Working class but not close	29	35
Close to working class	37	22
N	1938	2102

Source: Heath *et al* 2009: 29.

3. Identity Formation and Ideology Transmission

There is a degree of consensus among scholars studying identity that one's primary socialisation has significant impact on one's identity formation. Both personal and social aspects of one's identity entail the presence of significant others: parents, siblings, peers, neighbours etc. Both childhood and adolescence are singled out as the formative years in developing one's sense of identity and in acquiring some key principles of particular ideological doctrines (Jenkins 2008; Jenks 1996; Tajfel 1982; Erikson 1968). This is not to say that once formed identity and ideology remain unchanged and consistent throughout one's life. On the contrary identity formation and ideology articulation always remain unfinished, on-going, processes on social as well as on the personal level. The studies of identity and ideology transmission highlight the importance of specific institutions and social organisations in this process. The key institutional vehicles of ideology dissemination are the educational system, mass media, political parties, and civil society. The several empirical studies confirm that one's collective identity is often reflected in the support for the key principles of a particular political ideology (Malešević 2006; Boudon 1989).

Hence the patterns of voting behaviour in the US, UK and many European states demonstrate that the liberal, conservative or socialist family identity allegiances have significant impact on how individuals vote (Lever 2005; Cohen 1993; Wattier 1983). In addition ethnicity, gender, religion and national loyalties play an important part in determining how individuals vote, whether they take part in political demonstrations or ideology-focused events, associations, religious organisations, private corporations and a variety of social movements.

The role of educational systems has proved central in this process as the leaders and the middle ranking activists of most social movements, political parties and other ideological associations and networks, including the militant and radical groups tend to be highly educated individuals (Hassan 2011; Sageman 2004). For example, recent studies indicate that most Islamist and Salafist activists have higher degrees in science, engineering and medicine while the engineers clearly predominate among the violent Islamist and secessionist groupings (Gambetta and Hertog 2009; Shermer 2006).

3.1. The British Context

The British society is at the forefront of these trends. One's sense of national identity remains shaped by primary socialisation as well as by the educational system, mass media and civil society actions. The pronounced generational difference in the strength of national identity in England and Wales is linked in part to the changing curricula in the primary and secondary education which has over the last few decades moved away from the nation-centric toward more universalist and multicultural interpretations of history, geography and social science (Heath and Roberts 2008; Tilley and Heath 2007). The partial exception here is the generation coming of age in the 1980s and early 1990s who seem to be more nationalistic than their predecessors. Some researchers describe this phenomenon as 'Thatcher's Children' suggesting that most of these youths were socialised during the heyday of neo-liberal nationalism (Russell *et al* 1992; Tilley 2002, 2005). The studies also indicate the impact of tabloid mass media on some sections of British population and they particularly emphasise that the strong national identification and nationalism are more widespread among the Protestant,

non-degree holding population (Heath and Roberts 2008; Tilley and Heath 2007). This generational decline in the British national identity is especially pronounced among some ethnic minorities such as the Black Caribbean youths, among which more than 30% express no sense of attachment to Britain. As Heath and Roberts (2008) demonstrate this sense of national alienation is much stronger among the second than first generation of migrants. Nevertheless, in most cases family upbringing, peer groups and networks of friends remain a crucial vehicle for identity formation and ideology transmission. In this context an overwhelming majority of the British population remain staunchly loyal and proud of their nation-state (Antonsich 2009). This strong and fairly stable sense of national identity is also reinforced through the routine events such as the sporting and singing competitions, films, patriotic video games etc. (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Edensor 2002). The expectation over the next ten years is that this generational divide will remain but also that most citizens of Britain will maintain a strong sense of national identification.

The decline of religious identification is linked in part to the weakening of principal religious institutions. Following the child abuse scandals the Catholic Church has lost a great deal of prestige and trust among British Catholics while the relatively swift liberalisation of the Anglican Church has alienated more conservative believers. Church attendances have dramatically dropped and there is a tendency among even the most committed 'to believe without belonging' (Davie 1994) while the rest of the population has been characterised as 'neither believing nor belonging' (Voas and Crockett 2005) (see figure 3). In this context the networks of local identity including the family, peers and friends have become more important for the transmission of religious creeds and the development of religious identities. This is particularly visible among the minority religious groups, some of which have embraced religious identification in the wake of negative media portrayals of their religion. For example in 2006 almost 50% of British Muslims thought that there is a 'conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society' whereas in France this attitude was supported by less than 28% of the French Muslim population (Joppke 2009:12). Furthermore, unlike France where 42% of Muslims consider themselves French first and Muslim second, in the UK 81% of Muslims see themselves as Muslims first and Britons second and only 7 % felt the opposite was the case (The Pew Global Project Attitudes Survey 2006)[2] . This mutual distrust between the Muslim minority and the mainstream society is also evident in the rise of Islamophobia which is 'by far the commonest form of religious prejudice in Britain' and is 'disproportionally concentrated among men, the elderly, and the lowest social groups and Conservative voters' (Field 2012). Nevertheless it seems that most religious ideologies find it difficult to hold back the more powerful secularizing influences. In this context it seems most likely that, with the partial exception of some minority religions, the impact of religious ideologies on one's identity will continue to decrease over the next decade.

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[2] However one should bear in mind that these types of 'either -or' questions do not allow the respondents to express 'dual' or 'multiple' forms of identification. Once this is allowed it seems that most British Muslims opt to see themselves as equally Muslim and British (see EMBES 2010).
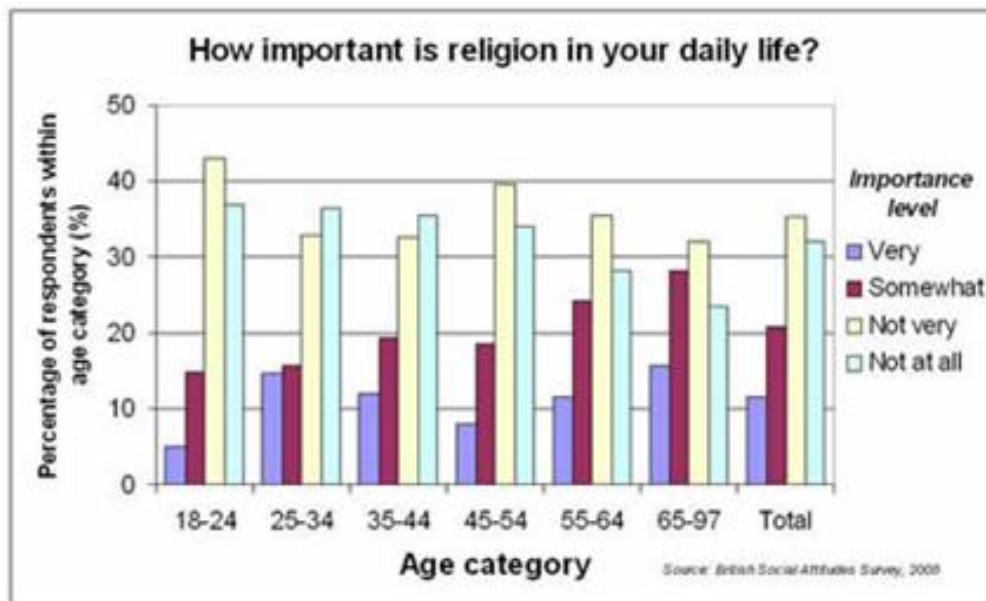
Figure 3 – The Importance of Religion

Source : British Social Attitudes Survey 2008

The educational system, mass media and family upbringing have also been key mechanisms for the formation of class identities. Although in previous years class identification was more tightly linked with party politics and institutions associated with specific parties (e.g. Labour with the trade unions, and left wing tabloids, etc.) this has changed significantly over the last 15 years. For example whereas in 1987 46% of people saw Labour as a party that looks after the interests of working classes, by 2005 this figure dropped to only 10% (Curtice 2007). The objective structural changes in industry have seen the decline of jobs associated with the manual labour and rise of the middle class professions. One of the more significant changes has been the de-coupling of a woman's class identity from her partner's occupation (Heath *et al.*, 2009). However, since the 2008 economic decline and the growing unemployment the nominal class identification became more pronounced again. Although some aspects of class identification (i.e. the unemployed vs. employed) is likely to gain in strength over the next ten years, as there are no significant organisational vehicles for the dissemination of class based ideologies, it seems most likely that class based solidarity will remain weak. The view that 2011 violent riots in some British cities are an expression of 'emerging resistance to neo-liberalism' and 'the strengthening of class solidarity' has not been empirically substantiated (Geddes 2011). It seems that the class identification will remain a weak predictor of any possible future youth riots.

The party political identification has also experienced marked decline for most groups. The technological developments of recent years with the expansion of internet and social media have made the ideology transmission much easier and cost effective. All major political parties rely on internet campaigns. In addition the new technologies have enabled a variety of the non-state organisations and new political movements to propagate their ideological doctrines and address much wider audiences. These new means of communication and organisation (such as Facebook, Twitter etc.) were decisive in recruiting many previously unconnected individuals into the variety of radical groups including those advocating the use of violence (Hassan 2011). However, while these new technologies have proved very useful for galvanising and organising

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collective action there is no reliable evidence that these technologies alone have impact on identity or ideology change. The recent studies indicate that one's party identification and ideological orientation continue to be inherited from family, peers and other micro groupings. Although these family based links have also experienced some decline (particularly on ability of fathers to influence the ideological and party loyalties of their children), they still remain highly influential mechanisms for ideology dissemination and identity formation (Heath and Roberts 2008; Kalyvas 2006). Despite the fact that all leading parties have embraced new technologies and new modes of ideology transmission the decline in the party political identification is likely to continue over the next ten years.

The last few decades have also witnessed emergence of 'new' forms of identification linked with the proliferation of 'new' ideologies – environmentalism, vegetarianism, animal rights, pacifism, anti-consumerism and anti-globalisation among others. The general tendency among these groups is to rely on the alternative means of ideology dissemination and prefer social media (Facebook and Twitter), street protests, and more spectacular expression of political action to the traditional channels of communication. Although these new social movements are often comprised of highly committed individuals and are defined by a stringer sense of group solidarity, their impact on the mainstream British society has been limited (Heath and Roberts 2008). While the prolonged economic crisis and growing socio-economic inequality will probably stimulate emergence of new alternative movements, some of which with the global resonances such as the Occupy movement, their impact on the wider society is likely to remain modest over the next decade.

4. Conclusions and Summary

The complexity of relationships between ideology and identity are well evidenced in the British case. There is no simple causality between these two phenomena and in most instances it is difficult to pinpoint which comes first (Malešević 2011; 2006). This is even more of the case when trying to assess their impact on one's behaviour. However, the available empirical evidence indicates that there are some clear trends which are likely to continue over the next ten years:

1. The political party identifications of UK citizens have weakened and are likely to continue to weaken in the foreseeable future. Liberalism in different forms remains the most powerful normative ideological discourse in the UK and it is likely that this will not change dramatically any time soon. The liberal discourse has a profound impact on the formation of liberal-democratic political identities of most UK citizens, whereas the liberal democracy is still perceived by an overwhelming majority as the most desirable form of government. The next ten years might see a gradual rise of some far right and far left radicalism. However, these movements are likely to remain at the margins of political life.

2. In addition to, broadly defined, liberal ideology nationalism is the only other ideological discourse likely to dominate the formation of individual and collective identities in the next decade. While liberalism is the dominant normative ideology, nationalism remains to be the dominant operative ideology (Malešević 2006) and this will most probably continue in the recent future. Despite the generational differences (with the English and Welsh youth less nationalist than others) one should expect the further rise of Scottish, English and Welsh nationalisms in the near future. It is also likely that the Republican Irish and the Unionist British nationalisms in Northern Ireland will continue to strengthen. However, many individuals will continue to express dual and multiple identities and much of this nationalism is likely to remain banal/routine rather than aggressive or xenophobic. The ever changing economic and political conditions in Europe and the world and the rising economic insecurity are likely to strengthen rather than weaken one's identification with the nation-state. The persistent economic and political crises are likely to lead towards greater scepticism towards the supranational organisations such as the EU.

3. Although the nominal expressions of class identity remain strong, the substance of class identification has been weakened significantly. With the waning of socialist ideological discourse and the broader structural changes that class solidarity has weakened as are the organisational channels for developing such identities. However, the protracted economic crisis can lead to group polarisation which ultimately might generate a greater sense of class identity, particularly among the unemployed and the marginalised ethnic minority youths. However, any significant change in the potential rise of class identification will remain dependent on the emergence of the class based social movements and organisations which remain quite weak at present.

4. Religious ideologies are on the wane as are the mainstream religious identities. The only exception are the relatively small but very well organised new religious movements and religious groupings associated with the ethnic minority population, who are likely to become even more religious in the near future. However, the dominant religious denominations will have even less impact on the shaping of collective and individual identities over the next ten years.

5. Other ideologies including republicanism, environmentalism, religious fundamentalism, feminism, anti-globalisation or the animal rights ideology have significantly less influence on the majority of the UK population. Although these ideological discourses will have a significant impact on the formation of identities of some, relatively small, groups they are less likely to have a significant impact on the beliefs and behaviour of most UK citizens.

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