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## **Religious Communities, Immigration and Social Cohesion in Rural Areas: Evidence from England**

**ABSTRACT** Religious communities are important sources of bridging and bonding social capital, which, in turn, have varying implications for perceptions of social cohesion in rural areas. In particular, as well as cultivating cohesiveness more broadly, the bridging social capital associated within mainline religious communities may represent an especially important source of support for the social integration of new immigrant groups. Although the bonding social capital associated with evangelical communities is arguably less conducive to wider social cohesion, it may prompt outreach work by those communities, which can enhance immigrant integration. This paper examines these assumptions by exploring the relationship between mainline and evangelical religious communities, immigration and residents' perceptions of social cohesion in rural areas in England. The separate and combined effects of religious communities and economic in-migration on social cohesion are modelled using multivariate statistical techniques. The analysis suggests that mainline Protestant communities enhance social cohesion in rural England, while evangelical communities do not. The social integration of immigrants appears to be more likely where mainline Protestant and Catholic communities are strong, but is unaffected by the strength of evangelical ones.

### ***Key words***

Religious communities; immigration; social cohesion; rural areas; England.

## **Introduction**

Analysis of the causes and consequences of variations in cohesion amongst members of communities has a venerable history within rural sociology (e.g. Sorokin, 1928; Warren, 1978; Wilkinson, 1991). Much of this work reflected the notion that the population movements, which accompanied rural restructuring during the past century have posed a serious challenge to the viability and cohesiveness of rural communities. In particular, beyond the problems associated with poverty, socio-economic disadvantage and social heterogeneity, the arrival of new immigrant groups within rural areas may disturb long-held norms of social interaction within an area as residents are confronted with newcomers who may look different and bring dissimilar social and cultural practices (Naples, 1994; Neal, 2002). Immigration may test long-term rural residents' psychological need for control over their social environment (Chavez, 2005) by challenging existing preferences for homophily (Blau, 1977) or according to the 'racial threat' hypothesis prompting feelings of anxiety and insecurity (Blalock, 1967), which can weaken perceptions of cohesion within a given area (Quillian, 1995). At the same time, the 'social contact' hypothesis suggests that immigration can stimulate cross-cultural interaction leading to a corresponding reduction in out-group hostility, especially where social conditions are conducive to positive interactions (Allport, 1954). Yet despite a growing literature exploring immigrant integration in urban immigrant destinations, few researchers have studied the dynamics of the relationships between immigration and social sources of integration in rural areas. This study is intended to address this important issue by examining the recent historic movement of Central and Eastern European migrant workers into rural areas across England.

Social scientists agree that civil society is likely to bear a great responsibility for addressing the integration of immigrants within an area (e.g. Putnam, 2007; Theodore and Martin, 2007). In particular, the religious communities present within areas experiencing

immigration may play a vital role in this process. The ‘moral communities’ thesis developed by sociologists of religion suggests that religious groups and institutions build social cohesion within an area by fostering community integration and enhancing informal social control (Stark, Doyle and Kent, 1980; Welch, Tittle and Petee, 1991). However, subsequent developments in social science have led scholars to develop a more nuanced account of the contribution that different religious communities might make to social cohesion. Critically, Christian religious denominations often differ greatly in terms of doctrine, and so adherents of those denominations might well have divergent attitudes towards the community beyond the congregation. As well as exhibiting important doctrinal differences, denominations also vary in terms of the institutional support that they (are able to) offer to members and non-members, both in developed countries, such as the U.K. (Bruce, 1995) and developing ones, such as Mozambique (Agadjanian, 2001). One fruitful lens through which these denominational differences can be analysed is the distinction between mainline (or mainstream) and evangelical religious communities (e.g. Moorhead, 1999; Tipton, 2008). Although many Christian denominations do not fall neatly into a single category (see Green, 2005), it is possible to observe broad differences in doctrine and structure across the principal denominations in both North America and England.

Mainline Christian communities (Anglicans, Catholics, and Methodists in England) are associated with churches that have a long history and tradition. These churches tend to have a formal organizational structure and arguably promote a commitment to social responsibility or a strong “communitarian ethic”, which is elevated above the duties of church membership (Greeley, 1989). Mainline communities are also often more accepted within the civil society of the countries in which they are found and can draw upon a broader spread of funding sources than their evangelical counterparts. Core characteristics of the churches associated with evangelical communities include a certain degree of newness, frequently the

result of some kind of revival movement. Such communities tend to place a great stress upon personal conversion (being ‘born again’), the authority of the bible and the spiritual leader, and the importance of a religious foundation for social activism (Bebbington, 2008). Evangelical communities may eschew mainstream social structures, and their churches are often entirely dependent upon donations from their members. According to some social scientists, such variations in doctrine and institutional structure have important implications for how the different communities interact with the rest of society.

Robert Putnam (2000) claimed that mainline Protestants and Catholics within the US were more likely to be involved in service to the wider community than evangelical Christians who, by contrast, exhibit an inward focus on their own religious community. This, in turn, has led Beyerlein and Hipp (2005) to consider adherence to mainline Christianity a direct measure of bridging social capital (interactions that connect diverse actors), and adherence to evangelical Christianity a measure of bonding social capital (interactions that connect like-minded actors). Social capital encompasses “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, 19). As such, it is characterized by distinctive bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) aspects, which may embrace myriad diverse in and out-group identities or reinforce exclusive in-group identities. While some scholars have focused on the benefits emerging from “bridging” interactions connecting many different actors as the source of social capital (e.g. Granovetter, 1973), others emphasize the “bonding” nature of the shared norms that underpin group membership (e.g. Coleman 1994). The significance of Beyerlein and Hipp’s argument is that whereas bridging social capital is thought to promote interconnectedness across the wider community and thereby generate social cohesion (Bellair, 1997), bonding social capital may sometimes have the opposite effect by increasing group insularity and, in turn, social fragmentation (Sampson, Morenoff and Earls, 1999).

Based on these notions, it is possible to derive some broad expectations about the likely role that different Christian communities might play in the process of immigrant integration in rural areas. Firstly, mainline denominations might have the institutional strength required to be able to coordinate opportunities for positive encounters between existing residents and newcomers, evoke political responses to the needs of immigrants, fund bespoke support services, or run community awareness-raising events and workshops. This, in turn, might advance the interests of immigrant groups in ways that contribute to their successful integration within the host area (Schneider, 2007). Secondly, mainline religious communities may also be especially well-placed to assist in the process of integration because immigrants are often already affiliated to these communities in their home country. For example, Catholic religious communities in the U.S. have a long history of providing support for and advocacy on behalf of affiliated immigrant groups (Menjivar, 2003).

Thirdly, on the face of it, evangelical communities might seem less likely to take an interest in the welfare of non-member groups. Nevertheless, despite the hypothesized insularity of these communities, it is conceivable that their missionary zeal may actually drive them to reach out to immigrants as a source of potential converts (Menjivar, 2003). Not only are there strong doctrinal reasons for individuals to pursue ‘salvation’ in this way, but the hierarchical structure of evangelical communities may also prompt immigrant outreach work, especially where it is seen as high priority by the spiritual leader. Indeed, community leaders from evangelical communities joined forces with mainline ones to mobilize congregations to participate in the immigrant marches across U.S. cities in 2006 (Pantoja, Menjivar and Magana, 2008). Whether by responding to the needs of immigrant groups or providing platforms for collective action in their interest, the institutional strength and embeddedness of mainline religious communities could therefore hold the key to the social integration of

immigrants in rural areas, while the proselytizing fervor of evangelical communities too may play a vitally important role.

This paper analyzes the separate and combined effects of religious communities and immigration on perceptions of social cohesion in rural areas across England using multivariate statistical techniques. In the first part of the paper, the literature on the contribution of religious communities and immigration to social cohesion is reviewed, before their interactive effects within rural areas are theorized. Measures of social cohesion, religious communities, immigration and relevant control variables are identified. Results of a statistical model of the separate and joint effects of religious community membership and immigration on residents' perceptions of social cohesion in rural areas across England are then presented, and their implications discussed.

### **Religious Communities and Social Cohesion**

According to many observers, industrial restructuring during the twentieth century prompted a series of population movements in and out of rural areas, which have caused the re-evaluation of existing social identities in ways that have often proved detrimental to people's well-being (Fraser et al. 2005; Nelson 1999). This, in turn, has placed great pressure on the key social and institutional bases of community strength within rural areas, such as local schools, businesses, and religious groups (Cotter, 2004; Gray, 1994). As rural communities have undergone a process of transformation, so these institutions have had to work hard to adapt to the changing social, political and economic circumstances that they face. In particular, the religious communities within rural areas, though at risk of marginalization as population turnover inhibits the growth of group membership and commitment, remain a potentially critical source of social support for individuals (Halseth, 1999). Indeed, such communities remain a vital touchstone for the lives of rural Americans (Elder and Conger,

2000). Case study research in England too suggests that religious communities still play a vital role organizing and coordinating formal and informal activities that contribute to community vibrancy in rural areas (see Furbey et al. 2006), albeit to a lesser extent than was the case in the past (King, 2009).

In England, the Anglican parochial ministry has occupied a central place within the community life of country parishes for many centuries (Russell, 1986; Francis and Lanksheart, 1992), and, despite declining congregations, continues to marshal more material and human resources than most other non-state actors within rural England. For example, the Anglican Church is a statutory provider of education in England and runs about a quarter of all elementary schools, including almost half of those in rural areas. The Catholic Church too is responsible for the provision of a small amount of elementary schooling, whilst a tiny number of Methodist run schools are still in existence (Berkeley and Vijn, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Although evangelical religious communities, such as the Baptists and Pentecostals, have many adherents within the rural areas of England, they are not only deeply embedded in the social and political structure of those areas, often relying solely on the contributions of members and having little institutional expression beyond the Church. Thus, these communities arguably play less of a role in the wider community life of an area, preferring instead to focus on the spiritual concerns of the congregation.

Beyerlein and Hipp's (2005) social capital thesis suggests that mainline religious communities are critical sources of the norms and networks that can underpin the growth of social cohesion in rural areas. Several studies in the US indicate that mainline Protestant and Catholic communities encourage the development of bridging social capital across an area by organizing community activities, providing support to the needy and volunteering to assist other organizations that serve local people (e.g. Wilson and Janoski, 1995; Wuthnow, 2004). A similar role has been identified for such communities within rural areas across England

(Russell, 2005). Mainline religious groups also play an increasingly important role as partners in the delivery of local public services in the United States (Chaves, 2004) and in England (Church Urban Fund, 2008), where in the latter case they often have responsibility for the provision of elementary schooling in rural areas. Such engagement with and across the breadth of the community may strengthen the connections between religious adherents and non-adherents alike, adding to a perception of cohesiveness within the local area. By contrast, Beyerlein and Hipp (2005) argue that the inward focus of evangelical religious communities may weaken rather than strengthen community bonds.

In focusing their efforts on developing the cohesiveness of their own group, evangelical communities might restrict the growth of cross-group interactions and networks thereby depriving local areas of vital bridging social capital that might potentially be harnessed for the wider benefit of society (Iannacone, 1994). Such communities have sometimes been found to be less likely to participate in social programs or public service delivery than mainline religious communities (Chaves, 2004; Hoge et al., 1998). Although their activist doctrine may prompt them to engage in self-directed community development work (Menjivar, 2000; Smith, 2002), evangelical religious groups may be especially prone to exhibiting the insularity sometimes associated with bonding social capital (Portes, 1998). This, in turn, may make it harder for them to develop links with out-group members, especially given the illiberal attitudes evangelical adherents are sometimes thought to evince (Smith, 2002). Thus, it is anticipated that a positive relationship between mainline religious communities and residents' perceptions of social cohesion will be observed, but a negative one for evangelical religious communities.



## **Immigration and Social Cohesion**

Theories of social disorganization suggest that high levels of immigration are likely to disrupt social relations within an area (Shaw and McKay, 1969). Because cultivation of the degree of interpersonal trust underpinning the assimilation of newcomers within local communities requires substantial time and effort, sudden movements of population into an area represent a considerable challenge to residents' perceptions of control over their environment (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Sennett, 1970). The arrival of new residents with observably different ethnic origins, linguistic practices or cultural mores, in particular, can lead existing community members to feel (however unjustifiably) that they are becoming strangers in their own environment (Crowley and Lichter, 2009). Thus, although population growth is often indicative of increasing economic prosperity within an area, it can also present a serious test for levels of social cohesion (at least in the short term) (Bursik, 1988). Indeed, immigration and the apparent fragmentation of social identities in advanced democracies have led to what some observers describe as 'a new crisis of social cohesion' (Kearns and Forrest, 2000).

Immigration poses a challenge for social cohesion in rural areas principally because of its impact on the perceptions of existing community members (Chavez, 2005; Crowley and Lichter, 2009). Anxieties about the arrival of new immigrant groups can be experienced by long-time residents of an area as a loss of control over the destiny of their current 'imagined community' (Sennett, 1970) – a perceived loss that is often resisted in more or less overt ways (Chavez, 2005). In part, this anxiety may reflect the 'natural aversion to heterogeneity' (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002) identified by social identity theorists (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1979; 1984), which ties group positive self-image to the maintenance of a negative out-group identity. According to this perspective, people tend to like others who more closely resemble themselves. Such anxieties could also be a product of feelings of 'racial threat', whereby ethnic and cultural prejudices are brought to the fore when the size and visibility of new

immigrant groups is much greater (Coenders and Scheepers, 1998; Quillian, 1995) – what Fennelly (2008) describes as a ‘symbolic threat’ which may or may not reflect reality.

Contradicting the racial threat thesis, social contact theory suggests larger population movements might actually prompt greater interaction between newcomers and existing residents, and thereby reduce residents’ out-group hostility (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Yet, collective action problems associated with influencing local affairs, such as the need for effective communication and coalition building, are also thought to be exacerbated by the introduction of diverse and potentially conflicting viewpoints on important community matters (see Walsh, 2006). As a result, rural areas experiencing high levels of immigration may not only have to overcome the negative effects of prejudice on cohesion, but also those associated with lower levels of political agreement (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000). Whatever its possible origins, a negative relationship between immigration and social cohesion has been corroborated by a number of quantitative studies at the state and metropolitan levels suggesting that it weakens social bonds (e.g. Putnam, 2007; Shumaker and Stokols, 1982). This leads to the expectation that large movements of newcomers into rural areas will be negatively related to residents’ perceptions of social cohesion.

### **Religious Communities, Immigration and Social Cohesion**

Rural restructuring has reinforced the role of key social and institutional bases of community strength within rural areas, such as local schools, businesses, and religious groups in the process of social integration (Cotter, 2004; Gray, 1994). And, there is some evidence to suggest that the involvement of religious communities in the pursuit of integration can have important benefits for rural areas. In addition to providing opportunities for the development of the bridging social capital that contributes to the growth of community cohesiveness more widely, mainline religious communities often participate in or coordinate activities, which

address the complex social problems experienced by immigrants (Farnell et al., 2006; Menjivar, 2003). As a result, they are sometimes better able to integrate migrants than are local state institutions, especially where immigrants are able to participate in religious communities to which they may have belonged in their native country (Romaniszyn, 1996).

Research has highlighted that in areas rich in mainline religious communities, immigrants may find that social integration is made possible by accessing the social support that such communities can provide (Schneider, 2007). Indeed, the sheer numbers of sources of support in such areas is an important determinant of the rate and intensity of volunteer participation amongst immigrant groups (Handy and Greenspan, 2009). Thus, areas with stronger mainline religious communities may be especially resilient to social problems associated with immigration, as they possess a large stock of appropriable human and material resources for the purposes of social integration. Again, this may be especially important for immigrants affiliated to the mainline community in question. For example, Romaniszyn's (1996) case study of Polish migrant workers in Athens, Greece, highlights the key role played by the Catholic Church there in enabling the immigrants to settle successfully.

In contrast to mainline religious communities, evangelical ones have sometimes been thought less willing to engage with issues of immigration, due to their inward focus on the concerns of the church with which they are associated (Hagan, 2006). Nevertheless, although such communities often exhibit less liberal and more conservative social attitudes in general in both the US (Smith and Johnson, 2010) and the UK (Francis, 2008), there is growing evidence to suggest that evangelical communities are active in outreach to immigrants because they are seen (initially at least) as potential converts (Menjivar, 2003). Not only are immigrants potentially members in the making, but the focus of existing members on individual salvation through participation in religious activities amplifies their commitment to

building the community of the faithful. African Pentecostal churches, which emerged in response to migrants' needs, for instance, are growing in number and influence in England (Burgess, 2009) – though these communities (and many others like them) are typically located within urban rather than rural areas.

All of the above leads to the expectation that rural areas with stronger mainline Christian communities will be able to moderate the negative relationship between immigration and perceptions of social cohesion. Those with stronger evangelical religious communities might benefit from the missionary zeal of those communities, but may also face a greater challenge in positively influencing residents' attitudes than their mainline counterparts. Hence, it is anticipated that in rural areas with a large number of immigrants, those with more mainline Christian adherents will be likely to maintain a higher level of social cohesion than those with more evangelical adherents.

## **Methodology**

The units of analysis are rural districts in England.<sup>2</sup> Using data on all such areas minimizes the likelihood of sample selection bias and enhances the potential for generalizing the findings (Heckman, 1979). These areas are a highly pertinent context for investigating the relationship between religious communities, immigration and social cohesion. Under the previous Labour national government, faith groups became regarded as vital partners in the drive to build strong and cohesive communities across England, especially within rural areas (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008a). This focus on the social benefits of faith is continuing under the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government's drive to promote what has been described as the 'Big Society' (Stunell, 2010). At the same time, the U.K. recently experienced one of the largest movements of population

in its history, when migrant workers from several Central and Eastern Europe countries were accorded the right to work there following their entry into the European Union (EU).

### **Dependent Variable**

Friedkin (2004) suggests that social groups are cohesive when aggregate level conditions “are producing positive membership attitudes and behaviours” (p.410). Social cohesion is conceived in this paper as an *ideational* construct that reflects individuals’ perceptions of social life, rather than as a *relational* construct pertaining to the composition of their social networks (Moody and White, 2003). Empirically, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but the specific question of relational cohesion is left in the background for this study and the cohesiveness of rural areas considered in large part to be constituted by the attitudes of the people residing within those areas.

Quantitative data on citizens’ perceptions of social cohesion can be drawn from the General User Survey conducted by local governments serving rural districts across England. The survey asked a representative sample of residents a series of questions about the quality of life in their local area, focusing in particular on their experience of community solidarity. Fieldwork for the survey took place between September and November 2006. A random or stratified random sample of respondents was drawn from the Small Users Postal Address File (PAF). Data were then collected by local governments using a standard questionnaire template, before being independently verified by the Audit Commission, a central government regulatory agency. Each local government was required to achieve a sample size of 1100 based on a confidence interval of  $\pm 3\%$  at the 95% confidence level. The collected data were finally weighted by age, gender, ethnicity and household size to ensure that the achieved sample was demographically representative.

The questions within the survey were all based on a 5-point response scale with the published figures used for the analysis showing the mean of responses for each district, calculated as those agreeing with the survey statements as a percentage of those responding to the question (see Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007). An item assessing whether respondents believed that people from diverse backgrounds got on well together in the area was included in the survey specifically to gauge perceived levels of social cohesion. This question is the standard survey item used by UK central government as an indicator of a cohesive society. It captures the overall degree of harmony between groupings based on social class and economic position, as well as those based on faith or ethnic identities (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008b).

### **Independent Variables**

To ensure that temporal causality runs in the correct direction, the independent variables are operationalised at least one year prior to the dependent variables.

*Religious communities.* Based on data from a census of all Christian Churches in England carried out by Christian Research in May 2005, measures of adherence to five broad Christian denominations are used to gauge bridging and bonding social capital effects. The bridging social capital associated with mainline communities is captured using variables measuring the number of Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic adherents per 1000 capita. The bonding social capital associated with evangelical communities is gauged by measuring the number of Baptist and Pentecostal adherents per 1000 capita, since, unlike Anglicanism and Methodism in the UK, these denominations are not directed by a central church, but rather adhere to a principle of local autonomy for each congregation. Adherence to Christianity has been on the wane in the UK for some years now (Voas and Crockett, 2005). Nevertheless, the proportion of adherents amongst the local population is a good

proxy for social capital, since this measure captures the likely the relative size and therefore social and political influence of such communities.

*Immigration.* Immigration is measured using a proxy for the arrival of a large group of migrant workers within the UK; the numbers of European Union Accession (EU A8) citizens allocated National Insurance (NI) numbers in English local government areas during 2005. In the wake of the accession to the EU of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004, the UK Home Office estimated an annual rate of immigration of 5,000-13,000 EU A8 nationals (Dustmann et al, 2003). Not only was the level of worker migration associated with EU accession far greater than predicted (228,080 NI numbers were allocated to EU A8 citizens in 2005 alone), but its spatial distribution did not follow closely any established pattern of immigration from Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, the incidence of migrants was not limited to metropolitan areas, but was also high in rural locales across the country that previously had low levels of immigration (Drinkwater, Eade and Garapich, 2009).

EU A8 citizens currently comprise about 50 per cent of the migrant worker population in rural England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). Of these, most work in business administration and management, agriculture, hospitality/catering or manufacturing. In this respect, the rural migration following the accession of the A8 countries to the EU mirrors that associated with new immigrant destinations in rural America, with many workers finding employment in industries such as food processing (Crowley and Lichter, 2009). However, there is also divergence from those patterns of migration in terms of the numbers of migrants obtaining administrative positions, which perhaps reflects the fact that EU A8 citizens have the right to seek employment in England, unlike many of their undocumented counterparts in the U.S.

All in all, the great scale of the worker migration to England following EU enlargement in 2004 represents a kind of natural experiment for testing for the impact of immigration on social cohesion. It also offers an interesting case study of the relationships between religion and immigration, as all but one of the EU A8 countries (the Czech Republic) is predominantly Roman Catholic in religion, and so this group of migrant workers might be expected to integrate especially well in areas with stronger Catholic communities. The number of allocations to EU A8 citizens was summed, and the resulting figure divided by the size of the resident population to ensure that the measure was not distorted by greater movement into larger areas.

### **Control Variables**

*Socio-economic disadvantage.* Relative levels of socio-economic disadvantage were measured using the average ward score on the indices of deprivation in 2004. This is the population-weighted measure used by UK central government constructed from indicators of: income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, living environment. Rural communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage arguably have fewer resources with which to resolve collective action problems (Cloke et al. 1995), and tend to experience lower levels of community spirit as a result (Countryside Agency, 2000).

*Demographic diversity.* The multiplication of social identities in socially heterogeneous areas may affect levels of citizen engagement. For example, ethnically diverse rural areas can suffer higher rates of crime (Osgood and Chambers, 2000), and the population is often more polarized between young and old and rich and poor in rural localities than in the city (Cloke et al. 1995). To measure demographic diversity, the proportions of the age, ethnic and social class sub-groups identified in the 2001 UK national census (such as children aged 0-4, Black African and Lower Managerial and Professional Occupations) for each local



authority area were squared, summed and subtracted from 10,000, with high scores reflecting high diversity(see Trawick and Howsen, 2006). *Social alienation*. Population size and density figures drawn from the UK national census in 2001 control for the possibility that residents of smaller, less densely populated rural areas experience stronger social ties and correspondingly higher levels of social control (Wilkinson, 1984). Moreover, areas with more dense populations may offer greater opportunities for anti-social and criminal behaviour to flourish. For instance, prior research indicates that crime rates are lower in less populous rural areas (Osgood and Chambers, 2000).

*Community organizational life*. Community organizational life in rural areas is measured as the number of community, social and personal services organisations (such as voluntary associations, film societies or sports clubs) per 1000 capita registering for value added (or goods and services) tax in 2005. This measure represents a good indicator of potential benefits for social cohesion of a larger number of CBOs being active within local areas and has been used in previous studies incorporating rural areas (e.g. Lee, 2008).

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the all the variables used in the modelling of social cohesion across rural areas in England. Skewness tests revealed that social cohesion, Roman Catholic adherents, immigration, ethnic diversity, social class diversity, population density and community organizations were not normally distributed across rural areas (test results of -2.63, 2.19, 4.89, 2.31, 3.21, 6.86 and 1.98). Logged versions of the positively skewed variables were used in the analysis, and a squared version of the dependent variable– the results are the same for the uncorrected social cohesion measure.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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## Findings

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models of the relationship between religious communities, immigration and social cohesion are shown in Table 2: the first model regresses the independent and control variables onto perceptions of cohesion. In the second model, interactions between religious communities and immigration are included to test whether bridging social capital effects associated with mainline adherents extend to the social integration of immigrants, and whether the outreach orientation of evangelical adherents might also be evident in this context. The findings are not distorted by multicollinearity as the average Variance Inflation Factor score for the independent variables is about 1.6 (Bowerman and O'Connell, 1990). Breusch-Pagan tests for heteroskedasticity revealed the presence of nonconstant error variance, so robust estimation of the standard errors was carried out.

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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The statistical results for the first model provide mixed support for the anticipated relationships between the control variables and social cohesion. The coefficient for deprivation has a negative sign and is statistically significant. The coefficient for ethnic diversity is negative, as expected, and has a weak statistically significant association with residents' perceptions of social cohesion. The results for age and social class diversity, however, do not support the proposed argument on their relationship with social cohesion. The expected relationship between sources of social alienation and social cohesion too receives no corroboration. When controlling for other relevant variables, population density is not related to social cohesion, and, contrary to expectations, population exhibits a positive relationship. It is conceivable that residents in large communities may share a greater sense of communal pride (Lekwa, Rice and Hibbing, 2007). Finally, areas benefiting from vibrant

community organizational life have significantly higher levels of cohesiveness. This finding on social cohesion in rural areas mirrors evidence on the positive externalities associated with community organizational life across urban areas (e.g. Sampson et al., 2005).

Taken in combination, the religious community measures make a statistically significant addition to the explanatory power of the first model ( $F$  ratio = 3.54,  $p \leq .01$ ). Moreover, the anticipated distinction between the bridging and bonding effects of mainline and evangelical Christian communities is largely confirmed. Perceptions of social cohesion are positively associated with a higher proportion of Anglican and Methodist adherents within an area, while a greater share of Baptists and Pentecostals is associated with lower cohesion. However, the coefficient for Roman Catholic adherents, though positive, is statistically insignificant. It is possible to derive the substantive effects of these variables from a model predicting the non-squared version of the dependent variable. The coefficients for this model (available on request) suggest that a ten percent increase in the proportion of Anglicans within an area would result, on average, in a one percent increase in the mean rate of social cohesion in rural areas in England. For Methodists, a similar increase in the proportion of adherents would result in a two per cent growth in cohesion, for Baptists a three percent reduction and for Pentecostal adherents a four per cent drop.

The immigration measure makes an extremely large statistically significant improvement in the explanatory power of the regression model ( $F$  ratio = 44.62,  $p \leq .001$ ). High levels of economic in-migration therefore appear to be having a detrimental effect on perceived social cohesion across rural areas in England, even when controlling for other relevant variables. In fact, interpretation of the substantive effect of this variable suggests that a ten percent increase in the number of migrant workers entering an area would result in a one percent decrease in social cohesion – an effect, which has great resonance in this case given that the migration of EU A8 citizens was about seventeen times greater than predicted.

This finding corroborates case study research suggesting that residents in rural areas experiencing high rates of EU A8 immigration have been susceptible to feelings of ‘racial threat’ (Dawney, 2008). It also illustrates that the effects of prejudice and out-group hostility on perceptions of social cohesion include cultural as well as racial biases, mirroring the findings of studies that reveal the strains that white ethnic diversity can sometimes place on perceptions of community attachment (Rice and Steele, 2001).

In sum, these findings highlight that the social integration of new immigrant groups in rural areas is likely to be very challenging. To explore the potentially positive role religious communities may play in immigrant integration, it is necessary to examine the extent to which they may moderate the negative relationship between immigration and social cohesion shown in the first regression model. This requires the entry of interaction terms in the statistical model.

The interactions between religious communities and immigration shown in Table 2 make a statistically significant addition to the explanatory power of the first regression model ( $F$  ratio = 4.15,  $p \leq .002$ ).<sup>3</sup> Two of the five interactions offer strong confirmation of the argument that mainline religious communities fulfil an important role in the social integration of immigrants: the coefficients for Anglican adherents and Roman Catholic adherents x immigration are both positive and statistically significant, with the latter appearing to have an especially strong relationship with social cohesion. None of the other interactions are statistically significant.

To fully explore the statistically significant interaction effects it is necessary to calculate the marginal effects of immigration on cohesion at varying levels of the moderator variables (i.e. Anglican or Catholic adherents) (see Brambor, Clark and Golder, 2006). Graphing the slope and confidence intervals of the marginal effects is the most effective way to present this information. Accordingly, Figures 1 and 2 provide a graphical illustration of

the moderating influence of Anglican and Catholic communities on the relationship between worker migration and social cohesion.

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INSERT FIGURES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

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Figure 1 confirms that the strength of the Anglican community within an area is likely to have an important moderating effect on the relationship between immigration and social cohesion. In particular, as the number of adherents per capita moves from its minimum to maximum level (10.13 to 61.05) the negative effect of immigration clearly decreases. However, the point at which this negative relationship becomes statistically insignificant (where the upper confidence interval meets the zero line on the graph) is beyond the range of the data (about 130 Anglicans per 1000 capita). By contrast, figure 2 indicates that as the number of Catholic adherents rises from its minimum to its maximum level (6.9 for the logged version of the measure used in the regression model) the negative relationship between immigration and residents' perceptions of cohesion is eventually eradicated.

On balance, the results presented in the figures support the conclusion that mainline religious communities have important moderating effects on the negative relationship between immigration and social cohesion – at least for this sample of rural areas in England. In particular, a greater share of Anglicans and (especially) Roman Catholics within an area is likely to enhance the prospects of immigrant integration within an area. However, no such moderating relationship was observed for rural areas with greater numbers of Methodist adherents, or for those with greater numbers of evangelical adherents. There are several possible explanations for these findings

In addition to the bridging social capital effects associated with its outward looking focus, the Anglican community is able to draw on an especially strong base of institutional support for community development activity. Although regular church attendance has

declined in recent years, the Church of England remains both the largest and well-resourced religious institution in rural areas across the country. Thus, despite comparatively small congregations by US standards, the Anglican community is still a strong focus for civic activism and volunteering. Indeed, in many rural areas the resident Church of England priest and lay clergy may be the only non-governmental or non-private actors with access to resources, such as people and buildings, suitable to support such community-wide activities (Farnell et al. 2006; Russell, 2005). They are also likely to have strong links with or be actively involved in the schools within an area (Berkeley and Vij, 2008), many of which may be attended by the children of migrant workers. In terms of sheer scale and capacity to assist in the process of incorporating immigrants within rural areas, the Anglican community may therefore be second only to the local state in its reach.

Although a linear positive relationship with perceptions of social cohesion was not observed for Roman Catholic adherence, a moderating effect on the impact of immigration on cohesion emerges very strongly. Like the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church has the organizational presence and resources to support community activities across a wide range of geographical areas. However, the capacity supporting the outreach of the Catholic community is likely to be much more thinly spread than that underpinning the community service of the Anglican community. In this instance, then, it is likely that there is an additional factor at work that explains the strength of the interaction effect. That factor is almost certainly the religious adherence of the Central and East European migrant workers. Apart from the Czech Republic, all the other EU A8 countries are predominantly Roman Catholic in religion. In particular, Poland, the country from which the vast majority of the migrant workers emanate, is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, with very high rates of religious belief (almost 90%) and observance (over 50%) (European Commission, 2005). The finding in the final regression model is therefore suggestive of distinctive bridging social

capital effects attributable to the values of Catholic adherents in the host country and within the new immigrant group.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the share of evangelical adherents neither strengthened nor weakened the negative relationship between immigration and perceived social cohesion. This indicates that while these religious communities may play little positive role in the integration of immigrants, neither do they appear to make integration more difficult. It is possible that the inward focus of the Baptist and Pentecostal communities in England leads them to take less interest in reaching out to immigrant groups than those in the U.S., though it is also probable that they lack the organizational capacity to do such outreach work to the same degree as the mainline communities in rural England. Further research on the role of evangelical communities within rural areas could illuminate this interesting issue.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has provided quantitative evidence on the relationship between religious communities, immigration and perceptions of social cohesion across rural areas in England. In keeping with the bridging and bonding social capital hypotheses advanced in the paper, mainline Protestant religious communities are associated with more cohesive communities, and evangelical ones with less social cohesion. At the same time, worker migration from Central and Eastern Europe has a strong negative relationship with social cohesion. However, the strength of Anglican and (especially) Roman Catholic communities within rural areas may mitigate the negative relationship between immigration and perceptions of cohesiveness, thereby enhancing the prospects of social integration. These findings have important theoretical and practical implications.

The analysis presented here builds on existing theoretical and empirical work on religious communities in rural areas, providing a direct test of the links between those

communities, immigration and social cohesion. Prior studies have examined the separate effects of these phenomenon using crime rates (e.g. Lee and Bartowski, 2004) or residents' perceptions of community attachment (Brehm, Eisenhauer and Krannich, 2004; Brown, Dorius and Krannich, 2005). Until now, the combined effects of these phenomena have not been investigated within the same study, nor have their separate effects on residents' perceptions of the cohesiveness of their community been considered. What emerges from this analysis is a pattern of immigrant integration in rural areas, which provides some support for both the 'racial threat' and 'social contact' hypotheses. In the first instance, higher rates of worker migration are associated with weaker social cohesion, yet it appears that the presence of strong mainline religious communities can enable feelings of racial threat to be overcome. This suggests that there may be great potential for bringing together these two arguments about inter-group relations within a framework for empirical analysis, which gives greater recognition to the complex temporal processes at work in immigrant integration in rural areas. It also points towards the need for more in-depth qualitative ethnographic research around this issue as well as longitudinal quantitative studies to explore the causal mechanisms associated with immigrant integration in greater detail.

Despite the strength of the findings, the analysis presented here has limitations. The statistical results may simply be a product of when and where the survey was conducted. Rural England has a very particular social structure, which may not map closely onto rural life elsewhere. Although Christian communities in England often play a similar role in supporting community activities as their counterparts in rural America, the salience of participation within those communities for rural residents has been in decline for some years now. The findings presented here may therefore speak to the on-going institutional embeddedness of mainline communities rather than their doctrines or beliefs that they espouse, or the commitment and outreach work of their members. Thus, it would be



important to examine in more detail, how, and in what ways, that embeddedness influences the prospects of immigrant integration

Similarly, evidence on the relationship between social cohesion and the arrival of other immigrant groups than those studied here would enable the dynamics of the immigration-cohesion relationship to be explored further. Although the sudden movement of large numbers of immigrants into rural areas is not common in England, such population shifts are more frequent in other countries, including the U.S. where African-American and Latino migration in non-metropolitan areas is now extremely widespread (Donato et al., 2007). The relationships observed here between Central and East European immigration and cohesion may take different forms for alternative immigrant groups. For example, the overwhelming whiteness of rural England is sometimes thought to make long-time residents especially hostile to non-white immigrant groups (Chakraborti and Garland, 2004). How the process of integration occurs for different immigrant groups is a topic of vital importance for future research.<sup>4</sup> Finally, by focusing on social cohesion at the aggregate level across rural areas the findings are susceptible to problems associated with drawing inferences about individual attitudes from aggregated data (Blakeley and Woodward 2000). Subsequent research could therefore build on this study by investigating religious communities, immigration and social cohesion using multi-level modelling.<sup>5</sup>

The findings presented here indicate that religious communities and recent immigration have an especially large statistically significant independent effect on perceptions of social cohesion. They also highlight that mainline religious communities can moderate negative externalities for social cohesion associated with the arrival of large numbers of newcomers in rural areas. Whether as a product of their embeddedness within the institutions of rural England, their doctrine of social responsibility or their strong connections with affiliated immigrant religious groups, mainline communities seem to manifest bridging

social capital, which offers the prospect of improved immigrant integration in this setting. This implies that more should be done to understand how the role of these communities in promoting the integration of newcomers in local areas can be supported. Future studies of the relationship between religious communities, immigration and social cohesion in rural areas should therefore seek to include measures of the policy interventions and strategies designed to address this important issue.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there are currently no data available at the rural district level on the religious character of elementary schools, with which to explore the relationship between religious communities and this particular institutional structure in more depth.

<sup>2</sup> To ensure that the analysis focused on rural areas, only data from local governments serving rural communities (known as district councils) were entered in the statistical models. These governments were selected on the basis of the urban-rural administrative area classification used by UK central government (see Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002). This classifies local government areas as rural or urban on the basis of an index of population density, overall employment, public transport usage, agricultural employment, mining/energy/water production employment and ethnic homogeneity.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the coefficients for the separate effects of religious communities and immigration shown in the second model cannot be compared directly with those in the first one. The coefficients in the model including the interaction terms show the effects of each of these two variables when the other is set to zero (Jaccard and Turrisi, 2003). For example, the significantly negative coefficient for Anglican adherence in the interactions model is derived from an assumption that immigration is zero, which is beyond the range of the data (as shown in table 1).

<sup>4</sup> Repeating the analysis presented in the paper for a measure of non-EUA8 immigration reveals similar results to those for EU A8 immigration, albeit with one important exception – the interaction between non-EUA8 immigration and Pentecostal adherents is negative and statistically significant. Systematic investigation of variations across alternative groupings of these non EUA8 immigrants (e.g. non-white immigrant groups from former U.K. colonies) would constitute a research agenda in its own right, and so due to space constraints is not explored further in this study.

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the General User Survey and Church Attendance data are not available at the individual level.

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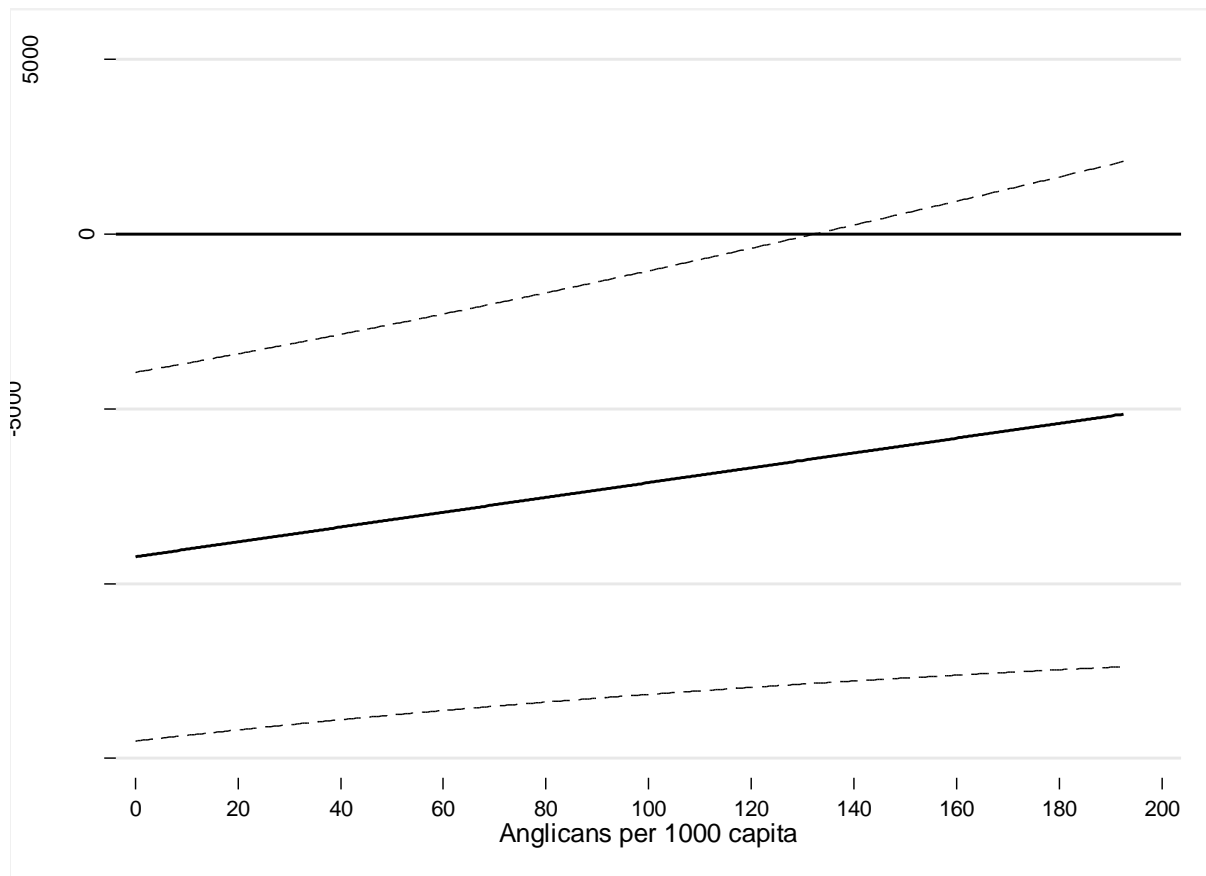
**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Min	Max	s.d.
Social cohesion	80.59	38.00	89.00	7.21
Anglican attendance per 1000 capita	27.57	10.13	61.05	9.24
Methodist attendance per 1000 capita	8.16	0.95	29.05	5.57
Roman Catholic attendance per 1000 capita	13.30	0.00	57.82	7.20
Baptist attendance per 1000 capita	5.08	0.00	17.00	3.74
Pentecostal attendance per 1000 capita	1.69	.00	6.75	1.41
Recent immigration per 1000 capita	3.53	0.41	33.00	3.64
Deprivation	14.51	6.20	32.57	5.66
Ethnic diversity	919.45	260.37	4020.04	614.67
Age diversity	8680.73	7279.36	9932.64	275.44
Social class diversity	8763.09	8051.43	9837.77	151.07
Population	94415.78	24457	169331	30659.16
Population density	213.74	23.19	2794.87	272.42
Community-based organisations per 1000 capita	2.85	1.14	8.56	1.10
Data sources:				
Deprivation	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004) <i>The English Indices of Deprivation 2004</i> , London: ODPM.			
Age diversity, ethnic diversity, social class diversity	Office for National Statistics. (2003). <i>Census 2001: Key Statistics for Local Authorities</i> . London: TSO. Age diversity comprised 12 groups: 0-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-44, 45-59, 60-64, 65-74, 75-84, 85+. Ethnic diversity comprised 16 groups: White British, Irish, Other White, White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Other Mixed, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian, Caribbean, African, Other Black, Chinese, Other Ethnic Group. Social class diversity comprised 12 Socio-Economic Classifications: Large Employers and Higher Managerial Occupations, Higher Professional Occupations, Lower Managerial and Professional Occupations, Intermediate Occupations, Small Employers and Own Account Workers, Lower Supervisory and Technical Occupations, Semi-Routine Occupations, Routine Occupations, Never Worked, Long-Term Unemployed, Full-time Students, Non-Classifiable.			
Recent immigration	Department of Work and Pensions (2006) <i>National Insurance Number Allocations to Overseas Nationals entering the UK</i> . DWP/ONS: London.			
Population, population density	Office for National Statistics. (2003). <i>Census 2001: Key Statistics for Local Authorities</i> . London: TSO.			
Community-based organisations per capita	Small Business Service. (2005) <i>Business Start-Ups and Closures: VAT Registrations and De-registrations</i> , London: DTI. The measure comprised 2 VAT-registered enterprise groups: Public Administration, Other Community, Social and Personal Services.			
Church attendance per capita	Peter Brierley (ed.) UKCH Religious Trends No. 6 2006/2007, London: Christian Research.			

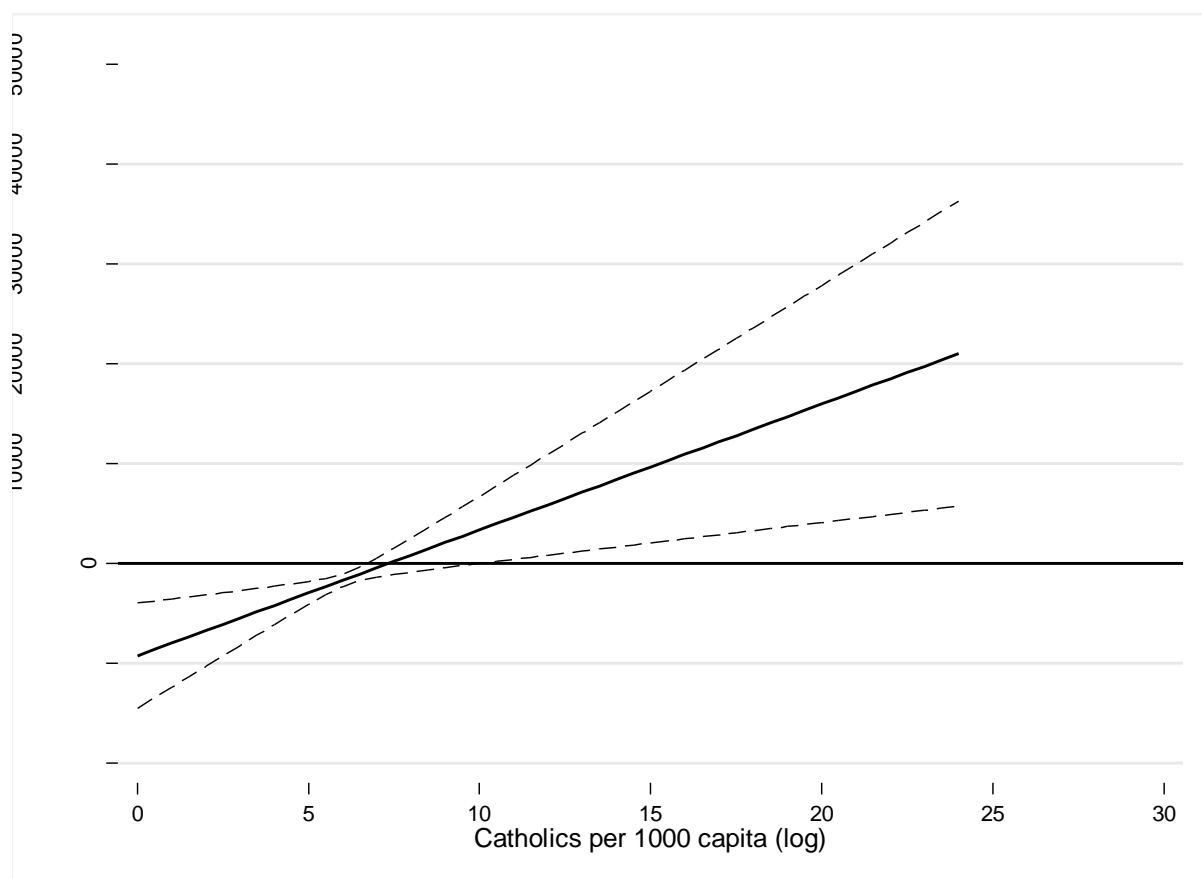
**Table 2.** Religious communities, immigration and social cohesion in rural areas

	Slope	s.e.	Slope	s.e.
Anglicans (A)	14.216*	7.830	-8.708	9.668
Methodists (M)	32.113**	11.599	23.179	19.568
Roman Catholics (log) (C)	-145.784	392.437	-7678.357**	2494.623
Baptists (B)	-41.704*	18.156	-62.780*	27.796
Pentecostals (P)	-68.073+	52.246	-48.702	65.878
Recent immigration (log) (I)	-772.158**	115.589	-9230.077**	2692.071
<i>Interaction terms</i>				
A x I			21.200*	10.312
M x I			8.411	14.542
C x I			1260.608**	436.057
B x I			21.762	27.941
P x I			-23.508	54.707
<i>Control variables</i>				
Deprivation	-36.573*	16.676	-34.436*	17.365
Ethnic diversity (log)	-286.662+	16.676	-142.038	152.421
Age diversity	.131	.229	.118	.229
Social class diversity (log)	27462.58**	8484.347	21171.34*	8962.708
Population	.008**	.003	.007*	.003
Population density (log)	-125.554	120.924	-171.642	120.192
Community-based organisations (log)	1122.268**	289.835	939.361**	294.612
Constant	-101063.2**	33620.58	-105880**	36317.99
<i>F</i> -statistic	8.37**		11.91**	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.59		.64	

Note: n=138      +  $p \leq 0.10$ ; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (t-scores shown in brackets).



**Figure 1** Marginal impact of immigration on social cohesion contingent on Anglican adherents within an area (95% confidence interval)



**Figure 2** Marginal impact of immigration on social cohesion contingent on catholic adherents in an area (95% confidence interval)