

# CSI 22: The social mobility of ethnic minorities

## Summary

- Migrants (the 1<sup>st</sup> generation) who were born abroad experienced net downward mobility
  - Among the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, who were born or educated in Britain, rates of upward mobility were similar to those of the white British from the same class backgrounds
  - Gender differences in the mobility chances of ethnic minorities are similar to those found among the white British
  - The mobility chances of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation minorities are shaped by their social class origins in much the same way as among their white British peers
  - But the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, especially the black Caribbeans and black Africans, continues to have substantially greater risks of unemployment than their white British peers from similar class origins
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## Introduction

Britain has become increasingly diverse over the past decades, with the size of the ethnic minority population increasing to 14% at the 2011 Census. Moreover, a large proportion of ethnic minority individuals are now born in Britain, and hold British citizenship. So we should not equate ethnic minorities with migrants. Indeed, there are many reasons for expecting the experiences of British-born minorities to differ from those of migrants born abroad and coming to Britain as adults.

Issues of social mobility are important as they relate closely to whether migrants and their children experience equality of opportunity in Britain. We ask the following questions:

- How do ethnic minority rates of mobility compare with those among the white British?
- Do patterns work differently for the 1st generation, for whom migration may disrupt processes of class mobility and stability, from later generations?
- Do we find greater gender differences in mobility chances among people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi background than among the white British?
- Does ethnicity trump class? Specifically, do class origins have lesser impact on the class destinations of minorities than they do for the majority?

## How do ethnic minority rates of mobility compare with those for the white British?

White British men and women surveyed in 2009-11 had experienced net upward mobility. While there was quite a lot of movement both up and down, on average white British men and women were likely to be in a higher social class position than the one they had grown up in. Nearly 45% moved up and 34% moved down from their classes of origins. There was thus net **upward** mobility of around 10 percentage points. This was largely due to 'increasing room at the top', that is to the expansion of professional and managerial occupations (which we term the 'salariat') and the contraction in the number of skilled and unskilled manual jobs.

## Conceptual issues

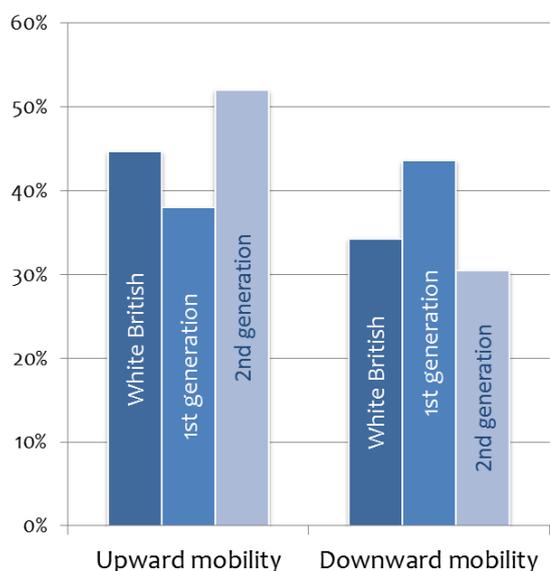
Sociologists make an important distinction between 'absolute' and 'relative' rates of social mobility. When discussing **absolute** rates, sociologists in essence are asking questions such as 'what proportion of the adult population is in a different social class from the one they grew up in' (the absolute rate of intergenerational mobility) and 'are more people upwardly mobile than the numbers who are downwardly mobile' (the extent of **net** upward or downward mobility). Sociologists measure absolute rates in terms of straightforward percentages of the population.

When discussing **relative** rates, sociologists are asking 'how big is the difference in mobility chances of someone from, say, a working-class background relative to someone from a professional/managerial background?' Relative rates of mobility are a way of telling us how strong is the link between class origins and class destinations. Sociologists nowadays measure relative rates using the statistical technique of odds ratios, although in this note we use simpler techniques which are easier to present. (In more detailed work published elsewhere we report the results of analyses using odds ratios and related statistical techniques. The results are broadly similar, although differ in some details.)

We distinguish between the migrants (whom we term the 1<sup>st</sup> generation) and their children (the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation). We include people who arrived before school age with the second generation as they will have received all their education in Britain and will be fluent speakers of English. Throughout, we exclude students and the economically inactive (such as those looking after the home or retired).

In contrast, as we can see from Figure 1, ethnic minorities who migrated to Britain as adults were more likely to be downwardly mobile: that is, they were more likely to occupy lower-level class positions than the ones in which they had grown up in their country of origin. Only 38% of adult migrants were upwardly mobile while 44% were downwardly mobile – net **downward** mobility. Some of this net downward mobility will have been due to difficulties with the English language or their foreign qualifications.<sup>1</sup>

It is a different story, however, among the second generation – that is among ethnic minorities who were brought up and had received all their schooling in Britain (and who would therefore be fluent in English as well as having British qualifications). Here we find that there was net upward mobility, even more so than among the white British.

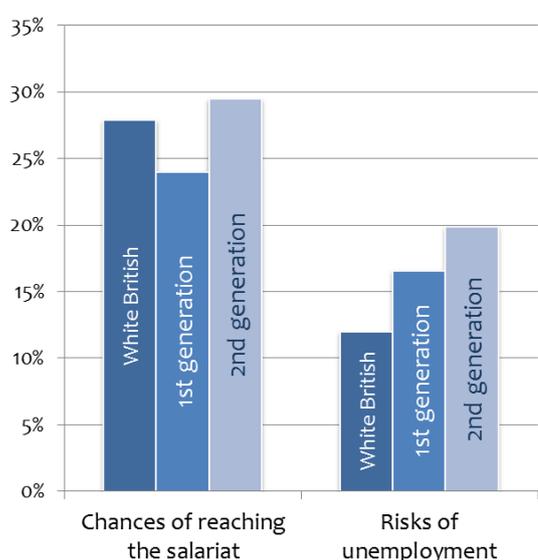


**Fig 1: The 1<sup>st</sup> generation experienced less upward and more downward mobility** *Source: pooled BHPS and UKLHS 2009-2011*

The high level of upward mobility among the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation will reflect, among other things, their low starting points. Because their parents had experienced downward mobility, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation will have been starting from lower-level positions in the class structure than the typical white British person. There was thus more scope for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation to move upwards (and not much scope to move downwards). It is therefore more useful to compare like with like: how do the mobility chances of minorities compare with those for their white British peers starting from similar lower-level positions in the class structure? We show this in Figure 2. In this figure we restrict our analysis to people who grew up in lower working-class homes. We show their chances of upward mobility into the salariat, and we also show their risks of unemployment, since unemployment remains a serious problem for minorities in

the labour market.

Figure 2 confirms the story that the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, the migrants, had poorer chances in the labour market than their white British peers from the same class origins. However, Figure 2 also shows that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation ethnic minorities from lower working-class homes had a slightly better chance of upward mobility into the salariat than did the white British from similar backgrounds (30% versus the 28% among the white British), in contrast to the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, who clearly had inferior chances.



**Fig 2: 2<sup>nd</sup> generation minorities from lower working-class origins have higher rates of unemployment but similar chances of getting to the salariat than their white British peers**

*Source: pooled BHPS and UKLHS 2009-2011*

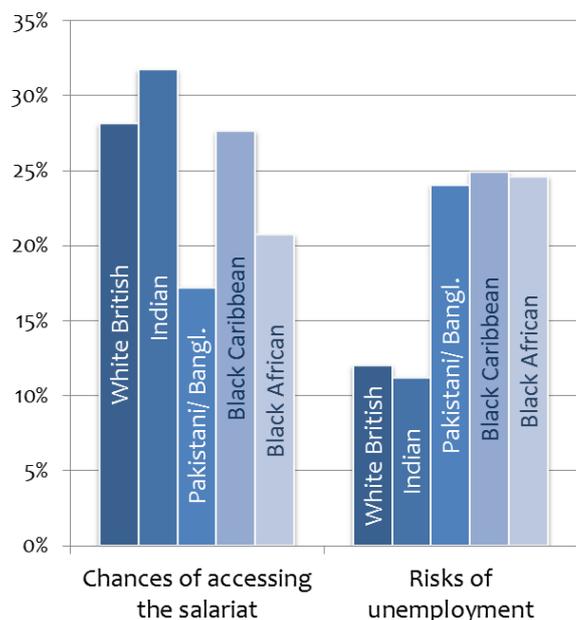
*Note: In Figures 2-4 results are adjusted to take account of age and gender differences. The lower working-class covers routine occupations and the workless.*

There is however one big difference between the chances of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation minorities and the white British: 2<sup>nd</sup> generation minorities from lower working-class backgrounds were significantly more at risk of unemployment (20%) than were their white British contemporaries, who had an unemployment rate of 12%. So while the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation from these backgrounds had significantly better chances of upward mobility than did the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, their risks of unemployment remained as high as or even higher than those for the 1<sup>st</sup> generation. This quite possibly reflects continuing racial discrimination in the labour market against minorities of all generations.<sup>2</sup>

### How do mobility chances of the different minorities compare?

In Figure 3 we take the same approach as in Figure 2, restricting the analysis to people from lower-working class backgrounds. But this time we distinguish between four main ethnic minority groups – those of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African background. (We have to group the Pakistani and Bangladeshi-origin groups together because of small samples sizes.) As in Figure 2, we focus on people from

routine working class or workless families and look at their chances of upward mobility into the salariat and at their risks of unemployment. We group the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation together, but we should note that the Black African group has a higher proportion of 1<sup>st</sup> generation members, while the Black Caribbean group has a higher proportion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.



**Fig 3: Among people from lower working-class origins, those with Indian backgrounds have the most favourable mobility chances: other minorities have particularly high risks of unemployment** *Source: pooled BHPS and UKLHS 2009-2011*

As previous research has shown, people of Indian background are clearly the most successful, with the highest rate of upward mobility into the salariat (32%) and the lowest risk of unemployment (11%). They compare favourably with the white British. The other three groups all have higher risks of unemployment with around one quarter being unemployed, and the Black African and Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin groups have distinctly poorer chances of upward mobility into the salariat as well.<sup>3</sup>

### Gender differences?

So far we have been combining the data for men and women.

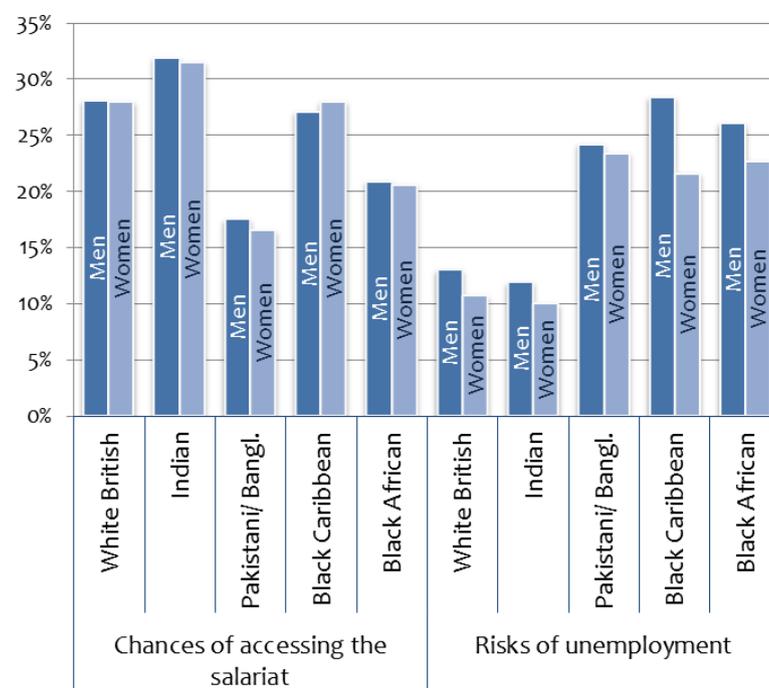
However, we know that there are big differences in the mobility

chances of men and women: women are less likely to reach the higher-level professional and managerial jobs, and are more likely to work in lower-level professional and semi-professional jobs. They are also much more likely to be found in clerical work, and less likely to be found in skilled manual jobs. Do we find the same patterns among men and women with a minority background? In particular, do the patterns vary by ethnic group, with women of Pakistani or Bangladeshi background perhaps having poorer chances than their menfolk?

**Fig 4: Gender differences are generally similar among minorities and the majority, but black men from lower working-class backgrounds have particularly high risks of unemployment**

*Source: pooled BHPS and UKLHS 2009-2011*

Figure 4 shows rather small gender differences in the chances of reaching the salariat from lower-working class origins. Moreover, these gender differences are much the same among the different ethnic groups. (However, we should note that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are significantly more likely to be economically inactive.) In contrast, men are more at risk of unemployment than women, and this is particularly true for black Caribbean and black African men who have particularly high risks of unemployment.



### Do class origins have lesser impact on class destinations for minorities?

So far, we have dealt with what sociologists term 'absolute' rates of social mobility. We next turn to 'relative' rates of mobility; that is, we ask how the chances of people from different origins compare in terms of gaining access to desirable occupations (like those in the salariat) and avoiding less desirable ones (like those in the lower working class). Among the white British, people's social class origins are quite closely associated with their chances of getting into high-level occupations themselves. For example, the chances of a white Briton from a lower working-class home gaining access to a professional or managerial job are significantly worse than those of

someone from a salariat background: for people from salariat backgrounds the chances are around 55%, twice the chances of someone from lower working-class families, who had only a 28% chance of getting to these jobs – a gap of 27 percentage points.

These relative class chances are much the same among both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation minorities as they are among the white British. As we can see from Figure 5, the chances of 1<sup>st</sup> generation minorities reaching the salariat are lower than white British ones. This holds true both for those from salariat and from working-class origins. For those from salariat origins the chances are 50% compared with the white British 55%; for those from lower working-class origins they are 25% compared with the white British 28%. However the gap between the two origin classes is much the same at around 26 percentage points. Migrants, the second generation and the white British thus all experience **relative** social class inequalities of a more or less similar magnitude, although their **absolute** rates differ. Class matters among migrants and their children just as it does among their peers from the majority group. Both generations are internally stratified by social class in much the same way as the white British are.

**Fig 5: Relative chances of reaching the salariat for people from lower working-class and salariat origins**

Source: pooled BHPS and UKLHS 2009-2011

|                                    | White British | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation |
|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Salariat origins</b>            | 54.7%         | 50.2%                      | 54.4%                      |
| <b>Lower working-class origins</b> | 27.8%         | 25.4%                      | 32.2%                      |
| <b>Ratio</b>                       | 1.97:1        | 1.98:1                     | 1.69:1                     |

We find that the same pattern broadly holds true for the different ethnic minorities, although Black Africans appear to experience ‘perverse fluidity’.<sup>4</sup> That is, those from salariat origins were not able to gain access to the salariat positions to the same extent as their white peers (only 38% of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 42.5% of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Black Africans from salariat families were found in salariat positions).

## Conclusions

Our major conclusion is that ‘class matters’. Within each ethnic minority, and within both generations, we find major internal class differences, much like those we find within the white British population. Minorities are not homogeneous. Instead they largely experience the same patterns of class stratification that has long been recognized in Britain and indeed in the countries from which the migrants came. There is in fact evidence that a country like India has much greater class, and gender, differences than Britain.<sup>5</sup> It therefore appears likely that minorities’ experience in Britain largely reflects British patterns of class division rather than the ones found in their countries of origin.

There are however two important exceptions to this story of assimilation to a British pattern of stratification. First, we saw that the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, the migrants, exhibited much more downward mobility than do the white British or indeed their children in the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.

Secondly, we find that minorities, even in the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, have not yet achieved equality of opportunity with the white British. They have unemployment rates double those of their white British peers. This remains a major challenge for policy-makers.

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**Acknowledgements:** The authors are grateful to John Goldthorpe

**Publication date: March 2016**

<sup>1</sup> Dustmann, C. and Fabbri, F. 2005. ‘Immigrants in the British labour market.’ *Fiscal Studies* 26(4): 423-70.

<sup>2</sup> Wood, M., Hales, J., Purdon, S., Sejersen, T. and Hayllar, O. 2009. *A Test for Racial Discrimination in Recruitment Practice in British Cities*. DWP Research Report 607. Leeds: Corporate Document Services.

<sup>3</sup> More detailed analysis shows that the poor chances of upward mobility for the Black African and Pakistani/ Bangladeshi groups characterized the 1<sup>st</sup> but not the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.

<sup>4</sup> See Yaojun Li and Anthony Heath (forthcoming) ‘Class matters: a study of minority and majority social mobility in Britain (1982-2011)’, *American Journal of Sociology*.

<sup>5</sup> See Divya Vaid and Anthony Heath (2010) ‘Unequal opportunities: class, caste and social mobility.’ Pp 129-164 in Anthony F Heath and Roger Jeffery (eds) *Diversity and Change in Modern India: Economic, Social and Political Approaches*. Proceedings of the British Academy 159.

