

# Devolving race? Examining the impact of localism and devolution on ethnic minorities in Britain

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## BACKGROUND

Devolution in the UK represents a hugely important constitutional shift that underpins a significant reshaping of the state-citizen relationship. Devolution specifically refers to the formal transfer of powers from central to local governments and is perhaps most associated in the UK with transfers of power to the governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. More recently, regional devolution has meant that powers have been transferred to regional authorities such as Manchester. This project will examine how different forms of devolution contribute to and are affected by shifting narratives of nationalism and understandings of citizenship and carry the potential to shape new forms of inclusion and exclusion, with a particular focus on ethnic minorities.



## INTRODUCTION

'Place-shaping' through the construction and promotion of specific local identities are integral to localism and devolution (Healey, 2015). Of particular interest to this project is the way that devolution can allow for the production of particular kinds of nationalist discourses that can operate as forms of exclusion when they also seek to define what makes a 'good' citizen (Harries 2015; Meer 2015). This needs interrogating in multiple ways, including taking account of which actors have the power to define a locality *and* how others respond. The project will develop knowledge about the relationship between local and national understandings of citizenship and accountability in the context of state restructuring.

One of the key driving principles underlying devolution is the weight placed on the notion of citizen rights and responsibilities. Increasingly, central government is emphasising the need for *local* communities to become more capable of dealing with "*their*" own issues (Wilson 2015). This project will attend to the stress on issues being owned at a local level and on the implication this has for citizenship. But, it will also examine how devolved authorities work with or against this proposition, taking account of how well-represented ethnic minorities are in local decision-making. Preliminary research suggests that marginalised communities are the least well-resourced to respond to localist 'active citizenship' expectations (Featherstone et al. 2012), although there is still little empirical research that details how the devolution agenda has affected ethnic minority communities.

## AIMS

The project will examine the effects of devolution on ethnic minorities in different parts of Britain. It will do this in three key ways. First, it will explore the concrete effects of shifts in policy commitments, including funding mechanisms on ethnic minority communities and their capacity to organise. Second, it will investigate how organisations representing the needs of ethnic minorities have responded to these changes. And, third, it will explore the ideological discourses underlying devolution that shape forms of inclusion/exclusion and contribute to shifting narratives of nationalism and understandings of citizenship. This project will examine how devolution is operationalised, but also how it has been engaged with. In doing so, it will investigate whether policy has been reinterpreted at the local level in progressive or subversive ways, as research from the US suggests it might (Jones et al. 2014).



## METHODOLOGY

This project will consider specific examples of devolution to national governments (in Scotland and Wales) and to regional authorities (in Manchester). It will explore how these examples have often been imagined as alternative forms of localism when, in each nation/region, the devolved authorities present themselves as potential spaces for 'progressive localism' (Harries 2015; McGeever and Virdee 2015).

Methods to be used include interviews with community workers and workers in local, regional and national governments, focus groups with young people and ethnographic work with organisations that represent ethnic minorities.

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