

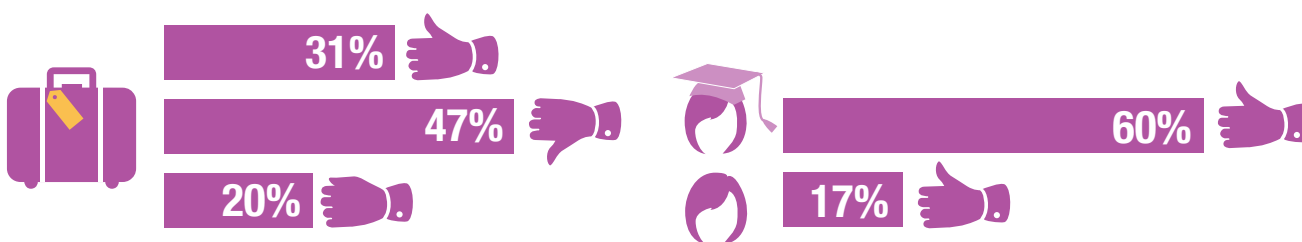
Immigration

A nation divided?

The British view that current immigration levels are too high is well established and stable. This chapter delves deeper into public opinion to examine how the public perceive the economic and social impact of the largest wave of migration in British history, and how differing views about these impacts colour people’s perceptions of specific migrant groups and their motives for coming to Britain. It also considers views about the best policy response to immigration, particularly in terms of access to benefits, and how these views vary between groups. It concludes by drawing out the key lessons for policymakers, and the tension between responding to those with the most negative views, particularly in the context of the growth in support for the UK Independence Party, and the risk of alienating voters with more pro-migration views.

Deep divides in public opinion

A large majority in Britain would like to see immigration levels reduced, but this figure masks considerable diversity of opinion about the impact that it has had on Britain’s economy and culture.

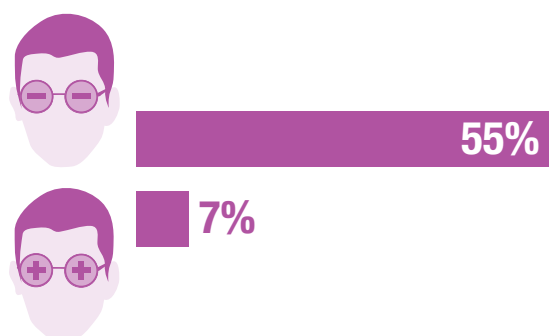


31% think that immigration has been good for Britain’s economy and 47% think it has been bad. 20% think it has been neither good nor bad.

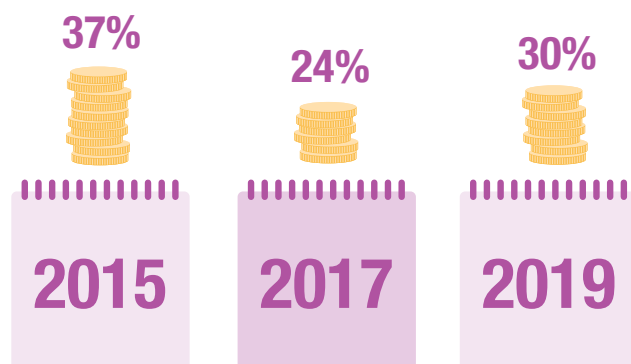
The most economically advantaged are far more positive than average about immigration. 60% of graduates think immigration has benefited Britain economically, compared with 17% of those with no qualifications.

Migrants and welfare benefits

Different sections of the population have different mental pictures of migrants and the reasons they come to Britain. They also have very different views about whether and when migrants should be allowed to access welfare benefits:



Among those with the most negative view of the impact immigration has had on Britain, 55% think the main reason migrants come to the country is to claim benefits. Among those who have the most positive view of immigration, only 7% see this as the most common reason for immigration.



37% think that EU migrants who are working and paying taxes in Britain should be able to access the same benefits as British citizens immediately or after one year. 24% think they should have access after three years and 30% after five years or more.

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Introduction

Immigration has been a contentious issue in Britain for most of the past fifteen years. Historically high rates of settlement in Britain have been accompanied by widespread public concern, leading voters to consistently name immigration as one of the top issues facing the country (Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014). In an effort to respond to widespread public concern, the Conservative Party committed to reducing net migration to “tens of thousands” ahead of the 2010 general election, and has pursued a range of restrictive reforms in government in an effort to achieve this goal. These have included changes to the rules on student migration, limiting the educational options to foreign students and their employment options in Britain on graduation, changes to family reunion migration rules, new income requirements for those looking to bring dependants into the country, and changes to labour migration rules limiting the number of work permits issued to non-EEA workers looking to migrate to Britain (Gower and Hawkins, 2013; Robinson, 2013).

Intense policy and enforcement activity brought an initial fall in migration inflows, but in the past year migrant arrivals have rebounded as migration from the EU, which the government has little power to restrict, has risen sharply (Office for National Statistics, 2014). At the same time, public concern about the issue has rebounded, reflecting not just the increased numbers but a renewed voter focus on this issue as anxieties about the economy have receded (Ipsos MORI, 2014).

Polling over the past decade has consistently found that large majorities feel immigration levels are too high. The British Social Attitudes data are no exception to this trend. We asked:

Do you think the number of immigrants to Britain nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little or reduced a lot?

77%
of people want
immigration reduced

In 2013, 77 per cent of people want immigration reduced “a little” or “a lot”, with 56 per cent wanting a large reduction. Both figures are up sharply on 1995 (when they stood at 63 and 39 per cent respectively) but are largely unchanged since 2008 (Ford et al., 2012). The British view that current immigration is too high is well established and stable. In this chapter, we delve deeper into public opinion to examine how the public perceive the economic and social impact of the largest wave of migration in British history, and how differing views about these impacts colour people’s perceptions of specific migrant groups and their motives. We then consider views about the best policy response to immigration, particularly in terms of access to benefits, and how these vary between groups. We conclude by drawing out the key lessons for policy makers, and the tension between responding to those with the most negative views, particularly in the context of the growth in support for the UK Independence Party (UKIP), and the risk of alienating voters with more pro-migration views.

Overall attitudes to immigration: persistent concerns, deep divides

We begin by looking at public views about the overall economic and cultural impact of immigration. To assess this we asked the following two questions:

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely bad and 10 is extremely good, would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain's economy that migrants come to Britain from other countries?

And on a scale of 0 to 10, would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries?

31%
think immigration has
been good for the
British economy

As Table 5.1 shows, the balance of opinion is negative in both cases, but attitudes vary considerably. Thirty-one per cent think immigration has been good for the British economy, while 35 per cent believe it has enriched British culture. Another fifth think the economic and cultural impact of immigration has been broadly neutral. In all, therefore, around half of the public feel that immigration has not had negative economic or cultural effects. The other half of the public take a much more negative view: 47 per cent think immigration has had a negative economic impact, while 45 per cent think it has undermined British cultural life. It is worth noting that the views of immigration critics are more intensely held – 18 per cent regard the cultural and economic impact of immigration as being very negative, compared to the 6 and 3 per cent respectively who take the most positive view of its impact. If we compare these figures with the earlier finding that 77 per cent of people would like to see immigration levels reduced it is clear that those who would like to see less immigration include people who do not necessarily think it has been bad for Britain.

Table 5.1 Views about the economic and cultural impacts of immigration on Britain

Economic impact	%
Very good (9–10)	3
Good (6–8)	28
Neither good nor bad (5)	20
Bad (2–4)	29
Very bad (0–1)	18
Don't know/refuse	1
<i>Net score</i>	-16
Cultural impact	%
Strongly enriched (9–10)	6
Enriched (6–8)	29
Neither enriched nor undermined (5)	19
Undermined (2–4)	27
Strongly undermined (0–1)	18
Don't know/refuse	2
<i>Net score</i>	-11
<i>Weighted base</i>	3244
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3244

The Net Score (in italics) for economic impact is calculated by subtracting the percentage answering "very bad" or "bad" from the percentage answering "very good" or "good". The Net Score (in italics) for cultural impact is calculated by subtracting the percentage answering "strongly undermined" or "undermined" from the percentage answering "strongly enriched" or "enriched". The Net score (in italics) may not always reflect the percentage figures in the table, due to rounding

These overall figures suggest more diversity of opinion about immigration than is commonly assumed – while the balance of opinion clearly favours the sceptics, whose views are more intensely held, a lot of people are positive about immigration or see its impact as neutral.

60%

of graduates think immigration has had beneficial economic consequences for Britain

Of course, these aggregate statistics will mask wide social divides. Views about migration are likely to be influenced by a wide range of factors, including a person's social position, their ideological values more generally and their own experience of migration (which will vary considerably, as migrants are unevenly distributed both geographically and socially). Table 5.2 focuses on two of the key social factors which we might expect to be associated with attitudes to migration – social class and education – and not surprisingly reveals significant social divides. The most economically secure and higher status sections of society – the professional middle classes and degree holders – are very positive about both the economic and cultural impact of immigration, while all the groups in less privileged positions within the social hierarchy are more negative. Those in the most precarious positions – unskilled manual workers and those with no educational qualifications – are the most intensely negative about immigration's effects.[1] This is particularly true with regard to education; while 60 per cent of graduates think immigration has had beneficial economic consequences for Britain, the same is true of 32 per cent of those whose highest qualification is at A level or equivalent, and just 17 per cent of those with no qualifications at all. Another way of comparing groups is via their net score, which is the difference between the proportion in a group who take a positive view of immigration and those who take a negative view. This varies from +38 (among graduates) to -45 (among those with no qualifications), showing a huge gap in the balance of opinion between the university educated and those who left school at the earliest opportunity.

Table 5.2 Views about the impact of immigration on Britain, by social class and education[2]

	Economic impact				Cultural impact					
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<i>Net score</i>	Positive	Neutral	Negative	<i>Net score</i>		
All	31	20	47	<i>-16</i>	35	19	45	<i>-10</i>		
Social class										
Routine manual	%	22	21	55	<i>-33</i>	%	23	20	54	<i>-31</i>
Lower supervisory/technical	%	16	24	59	<i>-43</i>	%	22	17	59	<i>-37</i>
Self-employed	%	27	20	51	<i>-24</i>	%	28	23	47	<i>-19</i>
Intermediate	%	26	21	53	<i>-27</i>	%	33	19	46	<i>-13</i>
Professionals/managers	%	45	19	35	<i>+10</i>	%	48	17	35	<i>+13</i>
Education level										
No qualifications	%	17	21	61	<i>-45</i>	%	17	23	56	<i>-39</i>
O level/GCSE/CSE	%	17	21	61	<i>-44</i>	%	19	20	59	<i>-41</i>
A level	%	32	22	45	<i>-13</i>	%	36	21	43	<i>-7</i>
Higher education below degree	%	28	22	49	<i>-21</i>	%	35	17	47	<i>-12</i>
Degree	%	60	16	22	<i>+38</i>	%	65	13	22	<i>+43</i>

The Net Score (in italics) is calculated by subtracting the percentage with a negative view of the impact of immigration from the percentage who have a positive view. The Net score (in italics) may not always reflect the percentage figures in the table, due to rounding

 **Those most likely to be directly exposed to migration in their daily lives have much more positive views**

While socially marginal groups worry the most about the impact of immigration, those most likely to be directly exposed to migration in their daily lives have much more positive views. As Table 5.3 shows, Londoners, those with migrant heritage, and those with migrant friends (all of whom are more likely to have regular direct contact with migrants) have more positive than negative views about immigration's effects. The most intensely negative views are found among the oldest voters, and those with no migrant friends. For example, 17 per cent of those aged 70 and over think immigration has had a positive impact on Britain's economy, while 53 per cent think it has had a negative impact – compared with 36 per cent and 40 per cent respectively among the 18–29 age groups. There are hints here that it is often those most removed from direct experience of immigration who find it the most threatening.

Table 5.3 Views about the impact of immigration on Britain, by age, migrant heritage, region and number of migrant friends^[3]

	Economic impact					Cultural impact				
		Positive	Neutral	Negative	<i>Net score</i>		Positive	Neutral	Negative	<i>Net score</i>
All	%	31	20	47	<i>-16</i>	%	35	19	45	<i>-10</i>
Age										
18–29	%	36	21	40	<i>-4</i>	%	40	19	38	<i>+2</i>
30–39	%	40	16	43	<i>-3</i>	%	44	18	36	<i>+8</i>
40–49	%	34	21	45	<i>-11</i>	%	38	17	45	<i>-7</i>
50–59	%	27	17	54	<i>-27</i>	%	30	17	51	<i>-21</i>
60–69	%	29	20	50	<i>-21</i>	%	29	28	50	<i>-21</i>
70 plus	%	17	29	53	<i>-36</i>	%	21	24	54	<i>-33</i>
Migrant heritage										
Migrant	%	51	26	20	<i>+31</i>	%	53	26	17	<i>+36</i>
Migrant parents	%	43	22	34	<i>+9</i>	%	50	17	33	<i>+17</i>
Native born, native parents	%	27	19	53	<i>-26</i>	%	30	18	51	<i>-21</i>
Region										
London	%	54	22	22	<i>+32</i>	%	55	20	24	<i>+31</i>
All other regions	%	28	20	51	<i>-23</i>	%	31	19	48	<i>-17</i>
Migrant friends										
Several	%	50	22	27	<i>+23</i>	%	53	20	25	<i>+28</i>
One/a few	%	33	22	43	<i>-10</i>	%	39	19	41	<i>-2</i>
None	%	18	18	63	<i>-45</i>	%	19	18	61	<i>-42</i>

The Net Score (in italics) is calculated by subtracting the percentage with a negative view of the impact of immigration from the percentage who have a positive view. The Net score (in italics) may not always reflect the percentage figures in the table, due to rounding

The underlying distribution of attitudes revealed in this table suggests a deep divide between the politically and socially dominant social groups, and those in regular social contact with migrants, and the rest of the British population. Middle-class professionals, graduates and Londoners (the groups who tend to dominate British political and social institutions) all tend to be more positive about immigration, while majorities of most other groups are negative. This divide may

explain the commonly made claim that the ‘ruling classes’ are out of touch on the issue. Political and social elites may sincerely find the intense negative sentiments about immigration found among other groups hard to comprehend, because these are sentiments they rarely encounter in their everyday experience, and which run strongly counter to their own views on the issue.

Weighing up the costs and benefits of specific migrant groups



There is clearly a deep social divide in people’s overall assessments of immigration

There is clearly a deep social divide in people’s overall assessments of immigration. These figures, however, relate to the perceived impact of immigration in the abstract – it is not clear who respondents have in mind when making these overall assessments, or how consistent this mental image is from one person to the next. This is important, because previous research has established that the public have widely differing views of different migrant groups (Ford et al., 2012), and tend to over-estimate the prominence of the groups they like least (Blinder, 2013).

In Table 5.4 we show the results of more clearly defined questions about the costs and benefits of specific migrant groups. We began by asking the following:

I would like you to think about people who come to work in Britain from other countries that are part of the European Union. Do you think the benefits these people bring, for example through working and paying taxes, outweigh the costs they bring, for example through pressures on housing and services, or do the costs outweigh the benefits?

We asked similar questions about “people who come to work in Britain from other countries that are outside the EU”, “international students from outside the European Union” and “husbands and wives coming from other countries to join their spouses who live in Britain”.^[4]

Overall views of the impact of these different migrant groups vary, though the general tendency is to take a negative view. Assessments of student migrants are the most positive: 35 per cent believe the benefits they bring to Britain outweigh the costs, 34 per cent feel the costs outweigh the benefits and 23 per cent feel the costs and benefits are about the same. Public views about spousal reunion are the most negative; only 14 per cent feel spousal reunion migration brings greater benefits than costs, while 57 per cent believe their costs outweigh the benefits.

Views about the costs and benefits of labour migration fall in between these two extremes, but are also negative on balance. Only around a fifth of people feel labour migration is of net benefit to Britain, another fifth feel the costs and benefits are about equal, while a clear majority feel Britain loses more than it gains from such migration. Views about labour migration from inside the EU (which is largely unrestricted) and from outside the EU (which is more tightly regulated) are largely identical. This may reflect general hostility to labour migration, regardless of its source, as well as low awareness of the different policy regimes that regulate migration inside and outside the EU. Previous research has shown that a majority of the public regard highly qualified professional migrants as valuable to Britain (Ford et al., 2012; Ford, 2012) and under the current points system most labour migrants from outside the EU will fall into this category.

Table 5.4 Views about the costs and benefits to Britain of different migrant groups

	Students from outside EU	EU labour migrants	Labour migrants from outside EU	Spousal reunion migrants
	%	%	%	%
Benefits to Britain are much greater than the costs	17	7	7	5
Benefits to Britain are a little greater than the costs	18	14	14	9
Benefits and costs are about equal	23	20	20	23
Costs to Britain are a little greater than the benefits	17	25	23	25
Costs to Britain are a lot greater than the benefits	17	28	30	32
Don't know/it depends/refusal	8	5	7	6
<i>Net benefit score</i>	<i>+1</i>	<i>-32</i>	<i>-34</i>	<i>-44</i>
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>2181</i>	<i>1063</i>	<i>1084</i>	<i>1097</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2181</i>	<i>1063</i>	<i>1084</i>	<i>1097</i>

The Net Score (in italics) is calculated by subtracting the percentage who think the costs to Britain of immigration are greater than the benefits from the percentage who think the benefits to Britain from immigration are greater than the costs. The Net score (in italics) may not always reflect the percentage figures in the table, due to rounding

These findings suggest that the government's policies to introduce minimum income requirements for residents looking to sponsor relatives to come to the UK are in line with public views in this area – and may help to assuage public concerns about the costs of spousal reunion. But government policy will only reassure the public if they are aware of it; widespread public ignorance about the much longer established 'points system' and the different migration regimes that relate to EU and non-EU citizens suggest this may be an uphill struggle for the government. To explore awareness of the current system governing migration we asked:

Please tell me whether you think the following statement is true or false. There is a limit on the number of work permits the government issues each year to migrants coming to Britain from outside the EU who want to come and work in Britain. Most of these permits are reserved for those with better qualifications and English language skills.

Under half (45 per cent) thought this statement was "true" (the correct answer). A similar proportion (42 per cent) thought it was false, and 14 per cent said they did not know.

As Table 5.5 shows, there is a clear relationship between people's policy awareness and their views about the costs and benefits to Britain of labour migrants from outside the EU. The first column shows the views of those who knew the answer to our question about how migration from outside the EU is governed, the second shows those who answered it incorrectly, and the third those who said they did not know. Those who are aware of the points system are much more positive than the other groups about the contribution that labour migrants make; 27 per cent think that the benefits of their migration outweigh the costs (compared with 13 per cent of those who answered incorrectly), and a further 23 per cent think the costs and benefits are about equal. Although 25 per cent think the costs of labour migration from outside the EU are "a lot greater than the benefits", this compares with 39 per cent of those who gave



Those who are aware of the points system are much more positive than the other groups about the contribution that labour migrants make

the incorrect answer to our question about how labour migration is governed. We should not read too much into this relationship, as it could be driven in part by factors like education – highly educated respondents are both more knowledgeable about policy and more positive about immigration. Despite these limitations, the relationship does suggest that greater knowledge of Britain's restrictive points system may encourage more positive views of the migrants admitted under this regime.

Table 5.5 Views about labour migrants from outside the EU, by knowledge of Britain's non-EU work permit policy

	Correct answer to work permits question	Incorrect answer to work permits question	Don't know	Difference correct-incorrect
	%	%	%	
Benefits to Britain are much greater than the costs	11	3	5	+8
Benefits to Britain are a little greater than the costs	16	10	10	+6
Benefits and costs are about equal	23	19	18	+4
Costs to Britain are a little greater than the benefits	21	24	19	-3
Costs to Britain are a lot greater than the benefits	25	39	31	-14
Don't know/it depends/refusal	4	6	18	-1
<i>Weighted base</i>	246	218	84	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	247	211	88	

Table 5.6 shows how people's views of specific migrant groups relate to their overall views about immigration. To do this, we put people into one of four groups, depending on their answers to the two questions about the economic and social impact of immigration on Britain shown in Table 5.1.[5] According to this classification, around a third of the population (34 per cent) have positive views about immigration, a fifth (17 per cent) have neutral ones, just under a third (30 per cent) have somewhat negative views and a fifth (20 per cent) have very negative views. The rows then show their views about the relative costs and benefits to Britain of the specific groups of migrants we have already considered. Two things are immediately apparent. Firstly, there is a broad consensus over the relative merits of the different specific migrant groups, irrespective of a person's general views about immigration. Students are seen as being of the most benefit to Britain, and spousal reunion migrants of the most cost, with labour migrants (regardless of origin) falling in between. Secondly, overall assessments about the impact of immigration strongly predict views about specific migrant groups. The liberal third of the population who see immigration in general as positive for Britain are extremely positive about student migration (which 51 per cent see as being of benefit and only 10 per cent as being a cost, a net benefit score of +41), somewhat positive about EU and non-EU labour migration (38 and 35 per cent see each group as being of benefit, with net benefit scores of +8 and +6 respectively), and mildly negative about spousal reunion (21 per cent think it benefits Britain, with a net benefit score of -12). Those who have neutral overall assessments of migration are mildly positive about the benefits of students (36 per cent see them as benefiting Britain, with a net benefit score of +11), but are negative about the other migrant groups. Those who have negative overall assessments about the impact of migration, around half of the population and split in the final two columns of the table between the somewhat negative and

 **Overall assessments about the impact of immigration strongly predict views about specific migrant groups**

the strongly negative, believe the costs of all four specific migrant groups **always** outweigh the benefits, typically by lopsided margins. The intensity gap observed in general attitudes to immigration is visible again here – those who are positive about immigration in general regard three of the four migrant groups as being modestly beneficial for Britain; those who are negative about immigration regard all four migrant groups as very costly for Britain.

Table 5.6 Views about different migrant types, by overall views about impact of immigration on Britain

	Overall view of impact of immigration on Britain			
	Positive	Neutral	Somewhat negative	Strongly negative
Students from outside the EU	%	%	%	%
Benefits to Britain outweigh costs	51	36	22	15
Neutral/depends/don't know	28	39	32	23
Costs to Britain outweigh benefits	10	25	46	62
<i>Net benefit score</i>	+41	+11	-24	-47
EU labour migrants	%	%	%	%
Benefits to Britain outweigh costs	38	12	12	9
Neutral/depends/don't know	33	36	19	10
Costs to Britain outweigh benefits	30	52	69	81
<i>Net benefit score</i>	+8	-40	-57	-72
Non-EU labour migrants	%	%	%	%
Benefits to Britain outweigh costs	35	19	13	11
Neutral/depends/don't know	36	37	18	10
Costs to Britain outweigh benefits	29	44	69	79
<i>Net benefit score</i>	+6	-25	-56	-68
Spousal reunion migrants	%	%	%	%
Benefits to Britain outweigh costs	21	17	9	9
Neutral/depends/don't know	47	30	18	11
Costs to Britain outweigh benefits	33	53	73	80
<i>Net benefit score</i>	-12	-36	-64	-71
<i>Weighted base</i>	1070	550	928	625
<i>Unweighted base</i>	992	549	972	660

So what should we do? Views about migration policy

We have found the same deep and uneven divide in general **and** specific views of migrants. A third of the public see immigration as moderately beneficial in general, and sees student and labour migration as valuable for the country. Around half regards the impact of immigration as negative, and all specific forms of immigration as being costly for Britain. How does this social divide translate into views about the specific policies that politicians of all parties must formulate to address public concerns and bridge this divide in attitudes? We focus here on the issue of migrant access to the welfare state, which was a highly salient part of the public debate about immigration when the survey

was conducted in 2013. At that time there was intensive discussion about the consequences of the forthcoming lifting of restrictions on Bulgarian and Romanian migration to Britain on 1st January 2014, and concern about ‘benefit tourism’ – the worry that large numbers of migrants from these poorest EU countries would be attracted to Britain by the offer of state welfare benefits. Currently there is little evidence that benefit provision encourages migrant inflows or imposes significant costs on the British state, and several academic analyses of the topic have concluded that migrants are not a drain on welfare resources as they are less likely to claim benefits than native born Britons, and more likely to work (Vargas-Silva, 2013; Dustmann and Frattini, 2013). Despite this, anxieties about the issue are widely held, prompting intense discussion about policy reforms to restrict migrant access to benefits. This is more difficult to achieve with regards to EU migrants, as curbs on the provision of benefits risks falling foul of EU law defining the rights of workers moving across borders (although the extent of these rights is still being debated).

The salience of the welfare benefits issue to the public became clear when we were developing the immigration questions for the survey. One of the new questions we tested asked people about what they perceived to be migrants’ main motives for coming to Britain. Initially we offered as possible responses the motives recorded in official statistics – work (split into EU and non-EU), study, spousal reunion and asylum. However, when testing the question prior to the main survey we found that many people favoured a motive that was not on our list: the desire to claim welfare benefits. We decided to carry out a survey experiment to test whether prompting for the issue of ‘welfare tourism’ influenced the responses we got. We did this by randomly splitting the sample in half and giving one half the list of motives for immigration based on official statistics (recording welfare benefits as the main motive if this was spontaneously offered) and the other half the same list with “welfare benefits” added as one of the response options. The wording of our question was:

Migrants come to Britain for many reasons and from many places. Which one of the reasons on the card do you think is the most common reason for migration to Britain?

The options shown on the card, and the results obtained, are shown in Table 5.7. Three important findings emerge. Firstly, and in line with previous research (Blinder, 2013), there is a large gap between the motives most frequently recorded in official statistics and those which loom largest in public opinion. International Passenger Survey statistics record study (176,000), work within the EU (129,000) and work from outside the EU (43,000) as the largest sources of long term migration (defined as for over 12 months) (Office for National Statistics, 2014). However, students are far less salient in the public image of migration: only 7 to 8 per cent of our respondents named study as the most common motive for migration depending on which version of the question was asked. Around half named labour migration as the main motive – most pointing to workers moving within the EU (40 to 43 per cent) rather than arriving from outside the EU (10 to 13 per cent). Two motives loom far larger in the public imagination than they do in the statistics: asylum was named as the main motive by 10 to 17 per cent, although the most recent asylum statistics show inflows of 24,000, a small fraction of those for student and labour migration. Welfare also featured heavily as a motive – 8 per cent named it spontaneously when it was not listed as an option for them to choose, and 24 per cent chose it as the main motive for migration when it was

Concerns about ‘benefit tourism’ are strongly concentrated among those groups with the most negative views about migrants

offered with the other choices. Secondly, perceptions about migrants’ primary motives are closely tied to people’s views about the effects of immigration. A large majority of those who are positive about immigration, and a modest majority of those who are neutral, see work as the main motive for migration, particularly workers moving from elsewhere in the EU. Those with negative views of migration are much more likely to see migrants as motivated by a desire to claim benefits, or to claim asylum in Britain. Thirdly, concerns about ‘benefit tourism’ are strongly concentrated among those groups with the most negative views about migrants. Only a small minority of those who are neutral or positive see this as the primary motive for migrants, even when it is listed as a response category. But the issue looms large for those with strongly negative views of immigration: 22 per cent spontaneously named it as the main motive for migration, while when it was included on the list of response categories, over half (55 per cent) picked it, overwhelming all the other options on offer.

Table 5.7 Views about most common reason for migration to Britain, by overall views about impact of immigration on Britain

	Overall view of impact of immigration on Britain					All
	Positive	Neutral	Somewhat negative	Strongly negative		
Benefits not offered as response option	%	%	%	%	%	%
Coming to work from inside EU	56	43	39	27	43	
Coming to work from outside EU	15	12	15	11	13	
Refugees coming to claim asylum	9	18	22	25	17	
Study in British universities	10	11	7	5	8	
Husbands and wives coming to join their partners	5	6	6	6	6	
Coming to claim welfare benefits (offered spontaneously)	2	5	7	22	8	
Benefits offered as response option	%	%	%	%	%	%
Coming to work from inside EU	55	44	38	13	40	
Coming to work from outside EU	12	11	11	7	10	
Refugees coming to claim asylum	7	9	11	17	10	
Study in British universities	13	7	5	1	7	
Husbands and wives coming to join their partners	3	4	7	7	5	
Coming to claim welfare benefits	7	18	25	55	24	
<i>Weighted base</i>	516	259	463	308	1546	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	481	261	484	319	1545	

These findings show that different sections of the British population have very different mental pictures of migrants: those who are positive about immigration see them as driven by a desire to work, while those who are most negative see them as primarily attracted by a desire to claim benefits.

Many people clearly regard migrant access to welfare as an important part of the immigration debate, but how do they think the state should respond? To assess this we asked people the following question:

Thinking about migrants from other countries in the European Union who are working and paying taxes in Britain. How soon, if at all, should they be able to access the same welfare benefits as British citizens?

Half the sample were randomly assigned this question about EU migrants, whose rights to British welfare benefits have been the focus of recent debate, and the other half were asked about migrants from outside the EU, whose access to welfare was already more restricted and who have not featured so prominently in discussion. The options shown on the card, and the results obtained, are shown in Table 5.8. It shows that the divide in views about the overall impact of immigration drives an important divide in relation to policy responses. If we split the policy options on offer into two categories: 'open' (granting migrants access to benefits in a year or less) and 'restrictive' (restricting access to benefits for five years or more) we find that the positive third of the population favours an open approach by a large margin; the proportion who favour an open approach outweigh those who favour a more restrictive one by some 38 percentage points. Meanwhile, the negative half favours a restrictive approach; among those who are strongly negative 63 per cent favour a restrictive approach, and just 18 per cent an open one. Those with neutral views are evenly split.



The problem for policy makers is that a large majority of the public would favour a more restrictive approach to EU migrants than is currently possible

We also find some willingness to adopt a more liberal approach towards EU migrants than to those from outside the EU – the balance of opinion overall is slightly in favour of open policies for EU migrants, and restrictive policies for non-EU migrants. This pattern is replicated among all the sub-groups of our sample, suggesting the notion that EU migrants have a right to somewhat more favourable treatment is widely shared. The problem for policy makers is that a large majority of the public would favour a more restrictive approach to EU migrants than is currently possible. Even in the pro-migration third, a majority favours imposing a qualification period of at least a year, while in the more restrictive sections of the public the majority preference is for a waiting time of three years or more. Currently, EU migrants can access most benefits within a matter of months, and it would be difficult to square the restrictions favoured by most respondents with the demands of EU law.

Table 5.8 Views about qualification period for full welfare benefits, by overall views about impact of immigration on Britain

	View of the overall impact of immigration				
	Positive	Neutral	Somewhat negative	Strongly negative	All
EU migrants	%	%	%	%	%
Immediately	27	13	8	4	14
After 1 year	29	19	25	14	23
After 3 years	24	28	25	19	24
After 5 years	12	23	28	25	21
After 10 years	4	9	8	19	9
Never	2	5	4	19	6
Don't know	1	3	2	1	1
<i>Open (1 year/immediate)</i>	56	32	33	18	37
<i>Restrictive (5 years or more)</i>	18	37	40	63	36
<i>Net open-restrictive</i>	+38	-5	-7	-45	+1
<i>Weighted base</i>	544	260	479	319	1602
<i>Unweighted base</i>	505	261	496	341	1603
Non-EU migrants	%	%	%	%	%
Immediately	23	15	7	3	13
After 1 year	23	25	19	8	19
After 3 years	26	23	28	17	24
After 5 years	20	16	25	29	22
After 10 years	4	9	13	19	10
Never	1	8	7	24	9
Don't know	2	4	1	1	2
<i>Open (1 year/immediate)</i>	46	40	26	11	32
<i>Restrictive (5 years or more)</i>	25	33	45	72	41
<i>Net open-restrictive</i>	+21	+7	-19	-61	-9
<i>Weighted base</i>	544	260	479	319	1602
<i>Unweighted base</i>	505	261	496	341	1603

The net open-restrictive score (in italics) may not always reflect the percentage figures in the table, due to rounding

Conclusions: the political dilemma of immigration

Our review has revealed an important division in views of immigration. At one pole are those who accept it as an integral, and usually valuable, part of British social and economic life, and who favour a pragmatic and broadly liberal policy framework. The highly educated, middle-class professionals who dominate the political parties as well as other key social institutions fall into this group, which constitutes about a third of the public. At the other pole are the sceptics, who account for around half of the population. They strongly oppose immigration at current levels, and feel it is doing severe economic and social damage to Britain. They tend to oppose all forms of immigration, which they see as economically and socially costly, and favour much more restrictive policies. Many people in this group – around a fifth of the public as a whole – feel very strongly about the issue.



Our review has revealed an important division in views of immigration

This social divide creates problems for policy makers for three reasons. Firstly, any policy which satisfies those on one side of the divide will anger those on the other side of the divide. Secondly, policy makers and the interest groups they deal with regularly tend to be drawn heavily from the liberal end of the spectrum, creating a potential for disconnect and distrust between a more liberal political class which accepts immigration and an electorate among whom many find it intensely threatening. Thirdly, in many areas of migration policy, constraints on current policy mean it is more liberal than even the most pro-migration parts of the public would like, generating widespread public discontent which is hard to address. For example, EU rules make it very hard for the government to restrict migrant numbers, or regulate migrant access to the welfare state, in accordance with the wishes of most of the public.

This combination of persistent public anxiety, the disconnect in attitudes between political elites and voters, and constraints on policy makers' ability to respond have helped to fuel the rise in support for UKIP, who have been most successful among those who are most anxious about immigration. This is clear in Table 5.9 which shows the proportions identifying with different political parties among the four groups we have considered throughout this chapter. Among those who are strongly negative about immigration, 13 per cent identify with UKIP, compared to just 1 per cent among those with positive views of migration (see also Ford and Goodwin, 2014). While Labour are relatively weaker among anti-immigration voters than among pro-immigration voters, both of the big two parties have reasons to worry about UKIP competition, as large numbers of the most anti-immigration voters also identify with each of these parties. The Liberal Democrats have the least to fear from UKIP competition, as they prosper among the pro-migration section of the electorate, where UKIP are absent, and have virtually no identifiers among the strongly negative respondents.



Among those who are strongly negative about immigration, 13 per cent identify with UKIP

Table 5.9 Party identification, by overall views about impact of immigration on Britain

		Liberal Democrats	Labour	Conservatives	UKIP	None	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Positive	%	11	38	20	1	15	1068	990
Neutral	%	5	35	27	4	19	550	549
Somewhat negative	%	4	28	28	5	19	927	972
Strongly negative	%	2	28	22	13	25	626	660
All	%	6	33	25	5	18	3171	3171

The emergence of UKIP is generating a dilemma for policy makers in the governing parties. Although UKIP competition creates a short-term demand for restrictive migration policies, such policies in turn may cause problems for them in the longer run. Advocating strongly restrictive immigration policies risks alienating the more liberal third of the population, and given constraints on policy and high political distrust, may not convince the most anti-immigration voters anyway. Moreover, long-term demographic change is moving society in the opposite direction, because the most pro-migration social groups – university graduates and professionals – are steadily growing, while the most anti-migration groups – unskilled manual workers and those with no qualifications – are in sharp decline.^[6] This is the political dilemma of immigration: there is a clear, and intense, demand for action on the issue from

one section of the electorate, a demand politicians ignore at their peril. Yet responding to the concerns of the voters worried about immigration today risks alienating the rising sections of the electorate whose political voice will become steadily louder in elections to come.

Notes

1. Here we summarise people's views about the economic and social impacts of migration (the two scales shown in Table 5.1). For each scale, those whose score was above the neutral point were rated "positive", those whose score was equal to neutral were rated neutral, and those whose score was below the neutral point were rated "negative".
2. Bases for Table 5.2 are as follows:

Views about the impact of immigration on Britain, by social class and education

	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>
Social class		
Routine manual	911	903
Lower supervisory/technical	269	277
Self-employed	298	287
Intermediate	466	479
Professionals/managers	1168	1165
Education level		
No qualifications	577	690
O level/GCSE/CSE	727	715
A level	577	496
Higher education below degree	341	328
Degree	750	714

3. Bases for Table 5.3 are as follows:

Views about the impact of immigration on Britain, by age, migrant heritage, region and number of migrant friends

	<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>Unweighted base</i>
All		
Age		
18–29	629	429
30–39	565	524
40–49	563	550
50–59	548	542
60–69	486	578
70 plus	447	616
Migrant heritage		
Migrant	431	335
Migrant parents	304	261
Native born, native parents	2543	2648
Region		
London	429	325
All other regions	2815	2919
Migrant friends		
Several	780	663
One/a few	1159	1129
None	1295	1428

4. The question wording for international students read simply “overall do you think the benefits for Britain of international students from outside the European Union outweigh the costs they bring, or do the costs outweigh the benefits?”
5. For this analysis we use a measure that combines people’s views about the economic and social impacts of migration (that is, the two measures shown in Table 5.1). Those whose average score on the two scales was above the neutral point were rated “positive”, those whose combined score was equal to neutral were rated neutral, those whose average score on both scales was equivalent to a somewhat negative score on each individual scale were rated “somewhat negative” and those whose average across the two scales was equivalent to strongly negative scores on both were rated “strongly negative”.
6. In 1989, 7 per cent of British Social Attitudes respondents were graduates, and 44 per cent had no qualifications. Now graduates (25 per cent) outnumber those without any qualifications (20 per cent). Meanwhile, the proportion of people in professional and managerial jobs has increased from 35 to 37 per cent, accompanied by a drop from 37 to 29 per cent in the proportion in semi-skilled or unskilled manual work.

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