



How to talk about immigration (briefly)

*A summary of British Future's new pamphlet,
'How to talk about immigration'*

NOVEMBER 2014

**British
Future...**

How to talk about immigration – briefing

This briefing provides a summary of the key findings and arguments in **How to talk about immigration**, a new pamphlet from British Future.

How to talk about immigration sets out British Future’s understanding and analysis of public attitudes to immigration and the issues of integration, identity and opportunity that inform the immigration debate. It seeks to suggest new ideas for further discussion and to offer our vision of an approach to immigration that is principled, practicable and capable of securing public support.

The 140-page pamphlet, available at www.britishfuture.org, contains new polling and draws on three years’ research and analysis, including extensive deliberative research across the country from Glasgow, Leeds, Bolton and Nottingham to Coventry, Cardiff, Cheltenham and Southampton.

1. How to understand the public if you want to talk to them (page 10)

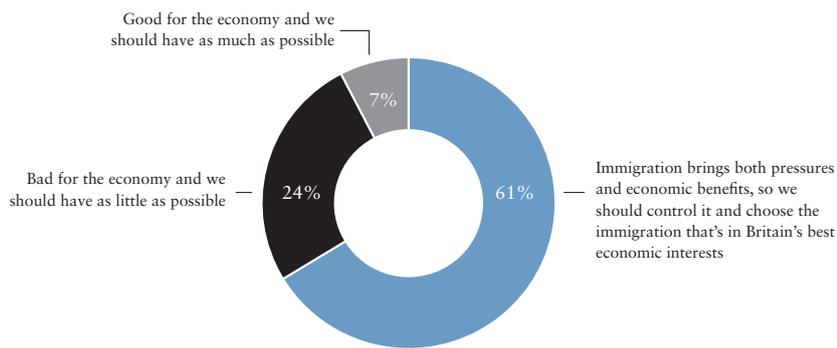
Many people assume that the public is hostile to immigration, and that whoever talks toughest is most likely to connect with them. **How to talk about immigration** argues that this view is mistaken.

Instead, while we find ‘rejectionist’ and ‘migration liberal’ minorities among the public, each making up around one quarter of the populace, most people are in neither of those groups – they are the ‘anxious middle’, somewhere in between.

- The **rejectionist minority** has a much older age profile. It includes many who left school at 16. This group would close the borders, or even send all migrants back.
- The **liberal minority** has a younger, more ethnically mixed profile. They are more likely to be graduates and to live in London or another big city. They are happy with current levels of migration and some view a borderless world as an attractive ideal.
- The **‘anxious middle’** represents around half of Britain. Made up of a broader cross-section of society, they hold pragmatic and nuanced views about immigration, and would seek to manage the pressures brought by immigration while securing its benefits too.

The anxious middle may be unimpressed at how governments have handled immigration but most do not have anti-migrant views. They worry about the pace of change and the impact of large numbers of new arrivals on housing, the availability of jobs and the cultural ‘feel’ of their local areas. But at the same time, they recognise the economic benefits for employers of being able to hire the skilled workers they need and for our universities being able to attract bright international students who pay fees here. They also feel pride in Britain’s long tradition of protecting refugees.

Figure 1: The public remains moderate on immigration and the economy

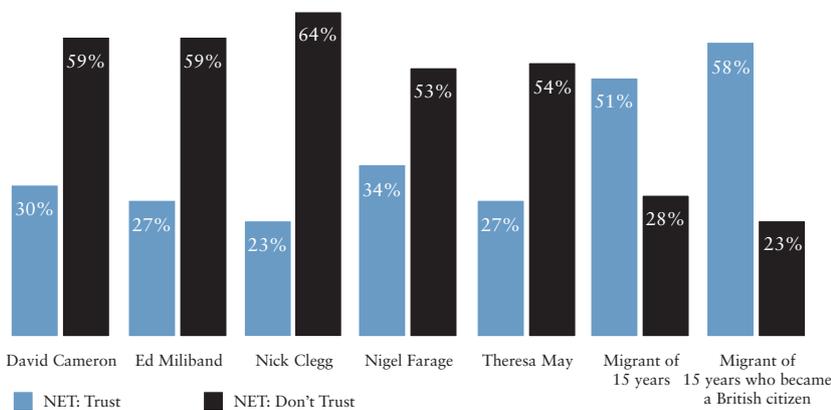


ICM for British Future 11–13 July 2014, representative sample of 2,029 British adults aged 18 and over in GB online.

If public opinion is not as toxic as many believe, public trust in politicians when they talk about immigration is worryingly low, right across the political spectrum.

No party leader is trusted by more than 35 per cent of the public. All are more distrusted than they are trusted. Only 27 per cent of people trust the Home Secretary when she talks about immigration, but 54 per cent don't. Yet 51 per cent trust a migrant who has been here for 15 years, while just 28 per cent don't. Public trust rises to 58 per cent if the migrant has chosen to become a British citizen.

Figure 2: “How much do you trust the following people if or when they talk about immigration?”



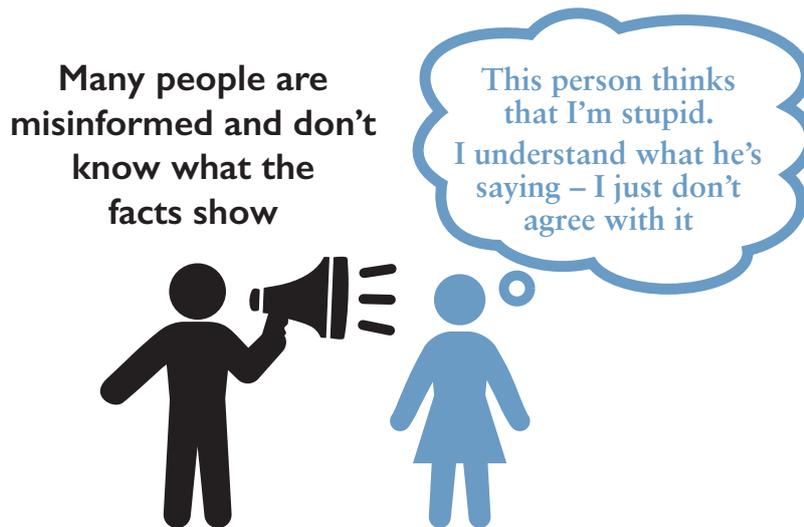
ICM for British Future 17–19 October 2014, representative sample of 2,001 British adults aged 18 and over in GB online.

SCOTLAND'S MODERATE MAJORITY (PAGE 21)

Scotland has a more welcoming public debate. Public attitudes are mildly less sceptical and it will be important to engage Scotland's anxious middle to maintain support as migration rises.

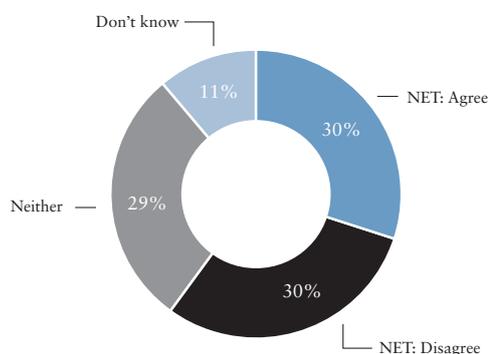
2. How not to talk about immigration – lessons for migration liberals (page 25)

British Future’s deliberative research shows that many pro-migration arguments appeal to few people beyond existing liberals, and risk actively hardening attitudes *against* immigration among the persuadable ‘anxious middle’. ‘Myth-busting’ exercises can boost the morale of those already onside but they struggle to persuade others, especially as official migration statistics are widely mistrusted – because people don’t believe the system works.



The central problem with trying to ‘just give people the facts’ is that it offers a textbook example of *how not* to have a conversation. What the migration advocate believes they are saying is often not what is heard by the person they are talking to.

Figure 3: The public is unconvinced by fact-based arguments that immigrants put more money into Britain than they take out



ICM for British Future 11–13 July 2014, representative sample of 2,029 British adults aged 18 and over in GB online.

This chapter presents evidence that alternative approaches can unlock broad majority support to secure the benefits of managed migration, and for offering a fair deal for both citizens and for migrants who come here.

WHY PRO-MIGRATION BUSINESS VOICES NEED TO LEARN A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE (PAGE 40)

Business advocates use messages designed for elite policy advocacy. These often fail to connect with the “anxious middle”.

The task for “pro-migration” liberals is to understand that they must think and sound different if they want to connect with people who live their lives outside of the boardroom or lecture theatre. They need arguments that connect with people who feel anxious about the economic effects of immigration on themselves, their families, their jobs and their towns and cities.

Given the importance of public politics for migration policy, effective public messages, delivered by well-chosen messengers, have the potential to unlock untapped public support and make a more significant impact on public and political debate. More work needs to be done on designing those messages, and identifying effective and trusted advocates.



3. When talking isn't enough: why migration sceptics struggle with public opinion too (page 42)

Migration sceptics have a confident public voice – often shaping the immigration agenda. But those who advocate much lower levels of immigration also struggle to produce a workable approach that could win public support. They face three big challenges:

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- **Numbers:** Migration sceptics who believe net migration should be between zero and 40,000 a year face the difficulty of persuading future governments to adopt a much lower target than the one this government has found impossible to meet.
 - **Policy:** Just as a ‘balanced budget’ group would be expected to produce its tax and spending plans to achieve their goal, a ‘balanced migration’ group, seeking immigration at the level of emigration, should be expected to set out a plan to achieve the goal too.
It would certainly be necessary for the UK to leave the EU in order to achieve net migration levels below 50,000 in the next Parliament or two, but an EU exit would be insufficient without the missing details of a post-EU migration policy.
 - **Public consent:** A proper plan would help the public to grapple with the real world trade-offs too: most would like reduced immigration, but achieving much lower levels would mean cutting some migration flows with broad public support.

4. How to talk about immigration without being racist (page 51)

It isn’t racist to talk about immigration – as long as you talk about it without being racist. In the Britain of 2014, it should be possible to achieve what most people want: an open and honest debate about immigration which does keep racism and prejudice out. This requires a broad consensus on three core points:

- Firstly, that most public concern about immigration isn’t racist – as the British Social Attitudes data reported in this chapter demonstrates – but that there is a toxic, prejudiced minority too.
- Secondly, that engaging with legitimate concerns about immigration is an essential foundation for protecting social norms against racism with majority support, and marginalising prejudice.
- Thirdly, that the way we talk about immigration in the Britain of 2014 should make sense to Britons of every colour and creed, rather than sharply polarizing people along ethnic lines in any direction.

The European election debate about racism and UKIP failed to meet these tests, with important lessons for both sides. UKIP’s critics were shrill and too quick to accuse the party of being racist when most of the public did not feel it had been. While this reassured liberals who would never consider supporting UKIP, it carried little weight with those who were thinking about voting for them – in fact it may have increased the party’s ‘outsider’ appeal.

When Nigel Farage did cross the line, however, with comments about Romanians that were widely criticised for stigmatising an entire nationality, UKIP faced much more effective challenges, including from *The Sun* newspaper, whose ‘The Sun Says’ editorial nicely captured Britain’s anti-prejudice norm: “*It is not racist to worry about the impact of millions of migrants on Britain. It is racist to smear Romanians for being Romanian.*”

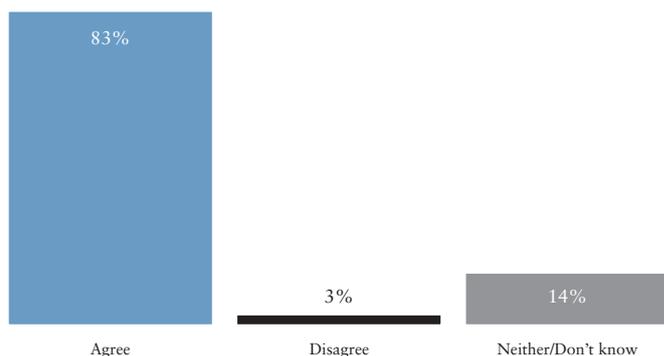
5. Why integration matters: how to make the ‘new us’ work (page 61)

How do people become “us”? Integration matters to people’s attitudes to immigration because their confidence in how we handle integration now affects how they think we will handle immigration in the future.

There are distinct integration issues in different places. A long-standing sense of entrenched segregation in some northern towns presents the challenge of re-establishing contact. Concerns about the pace of change, in areas of rapid population growth, require a focus on fairness in allocating resources. And the anxieties of those in relatively homogenous coastal towns, who fear being left behind, suggests that the issue of identity for the white majority has tended to be neglected in integration debates.

Those with quite different views on immigration can often find much common ground on integration questions. British Future’s research demonstrates a very broad consensus on what Britain expects from migrants who come here – and on a commitment to fairness and treating those who join the club – and play by its rules – as full and equal members of it.

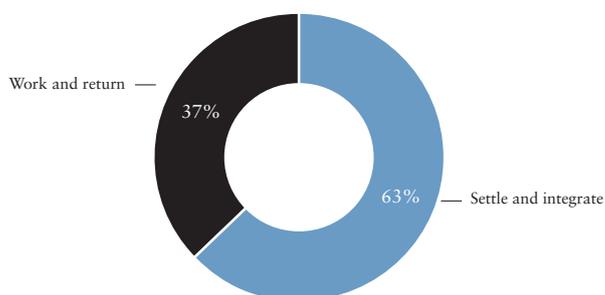
Figure 4: *“To belong to our shared society, everyone must speak our language, obey our laws and pay their taxes – so that everyone who plays by the rules counts as equally British, and should be able to reach their potential.”*



Britain Thinks for British Future, 16–17 March 2013, representative GB sample of 2,032 adults online.

Many will be surprised to discover that most people prefer migrants to stay, settle and become British, rather than working here for a while and then return home.

Figure 5: Some migrants come to Britain to work for a few years and then return home; others make their lives here and settle in Britain. When migrants do come to Britain, which of the following options do you think is better?



ICM for British Future 11–13 July 2014, representative sample of 2,029 British adults aged 18 and over in GB online.

IS MUSLIM INTEGRATION DIFFERENT?

Challenges of Muslim integration and how to tackle high levels of anti-Muslim prejudice effectively are discussed on page 71.

6. How to get the politics right: unlocking the moderate majority for managed migration (page 78)

Pro-migration liberals need to broaden their appeal to move beyond their defensive and unsuccessful attempts to influence migration politics. But the ‘less migration’ coalition, though broader, is inherently unstable: those who want to reduce the pace of change while keeping the benefits too have little in common with ‘shut the border’ rejectionists.

How to talk about immigration argues that a ‘moderate majority’ coalition of support, *combining* liberals and moderate reducers, is the best shot at a principled, workable and politically viable approach to managing migration in the UK. It sets out five steps for a ‘moderate majority’ political strategy:

1. **We are allowed to talk about immigration** – and we should. Legitimate debate about immigration should not be closed down, while a firm line should still be taken about prejudice.
2. **Engage anxieties with constructive responses** – don’t dismiss them as irrational, nor stoke them up either.
3. **Keep the promises you make** – by only making promises you can keep.
4. **Don’t be afraid to disagree** – immigration should be a ‘normal’ issue in politics, not one that is too hot to handle. Calls to take immigration above party politics would be counter-productive, given concerns about an elite consensus. An effective politics requires a public consensus, not an elite one.

5. **Be authentic** – each party needs to offer constructive answers that fit with its voice and values. Page 88 provides advice for each major party on the challenges it faces.

WHY A 'GET TOUGH' MESSAGE COULD COST ETHNIC MINORITY VOTES (PAGE 83)

People with a family history of immigration are more positive about both the economic and cultural impacts of migration. Ethnic minority Britons want to manage the pressures that migration can place on jobs and services, but they do not see immigration as a cultural threat to Britain. Political messages about immigration making areas 'unrecognisable' are only likely to alienate minority voters.

7. So what about Europe? The free movement conundrum (page 94)

The Prime Minister has placed EU free movement at the heart of his renegotiation strategy over Britain's place in Europe. Yet all sides of this debate face central, unanswered questions.

- Pro-European advocates of free movement need to show how they can secure public consent for free movement and continued EU membership.
- Pro-membership 'renegotiators' need to set out what reforms are both desirable and possible – and what the limits of achievable reform are.
- Mild Eurosceptics who see fundamental changes to EU free movement rules as a 'red line' need to set out the strategy that could secure allies to achieve this.
- Hardline Eurosceptics who 'just want out' need to make clear what 'out' would look like. The unanswered question remains: what economic and migration deals would the UK have after Brexit?

For the Prime Minister, kicking the details of renegotiation into the long grass could be dangerous when trust on immigration and Europe is so low. This risks turning the EU renegotiation into a kind of conjuring trick, with a sceptical audience unconvinced that he really can pull a rabbit out of the hat.

David Cameron should adopt a more open strategy about the content and challenges of his renegotiation plans. Supporters of free movement should engage too: discussing the rules of the club shouldn't be off-limits to its members, whether they're keen to stay in or get out.

One policy option might be for the UK government to propose a new EU-wide 'Free Movement Impacts Fund' divided, each year, in proportion to the flows of EU migrants to each member state on condition that resources are allocated directly at local level.

8. How to make migration work for Britain

– The key policy challenges for managing migration fairly (page 99)

How to talk about immigration proposes that policy responses should meet key ‘public interest’ tests of **competence**; of **fairness** to both citizens and migrants; of **identity**, reflecting who we are and how people get to become ‘us’; and of **democracy**, in giving people a voice in the key decisions. The pamphlet proposes that we should:

1. Fix the system: invest in an immigration system that is effective, fair and humane

More than 100 million people cross our borders each year for business, tourism and study. Yet we allocate just 0.2 per cent of public spending to our immigration system. We suggest ring-fencing the immigration budget in the next Parliament and increasing transparency and parliamentary scrutiny of decision-making.

2. Set sensible limits to migration and make promises you can keep

Targets should apply to migration flows that the government can control and that it is in Britain’s interests to contain, at levels that can be achieved. In replacing the missed target it would be sensible, therefore, to set a target for non-EU immigration, making clear the policies and controls required to meet that target.

3. Increase democratic accountability and engage the public in the choices and trade-offs that have to be made

In the style of the Chancellor’s Budget an annual **Migration Day** report, by the Home Secretary to the House of Commons, would report on migration flows, the government’s targets and future policy recommendations, providing a focal point for public scrutiny, discussion and advocacy from all sides.

4. Give the public the responsibility to decide about Europe

Since EU free movement rules significantly constrain future national migration policies, a referendum on EU membership is foundational to establishing greater public ownership of Britain’s immigration choices. 16–18 year olds should vote in a future referendum, as they did in Scotland.

5. Ensure British workers aren’t undercut and migrant workers aren’t exploited

Improved enforcement of employment rights and the minimum wage can benefit British citizens and migrants alike, and would be likely to secure wide public support.

6. Spread the pressures and the benefits of immigration more evenly around Britain

Public spending needs to be more responsive to localised population changes. There is a crucial long-term bargain to be struck between population pressures in the south-east and the rest of the country's desire to share more fully in economic growth. Regional migration policy has limited scope in a country the size of the UK, but we propose that the UK and Scottish governments explore a small pilot experiment, perhaps focused on recent graduates with relevant skills needed in the NHS and education system.

7. Welfare benefits: make contribution matter and welcome contributors as club members

We support the reform of child benefit rules so it cannot be claimed for children outside the UK. Public engagement in transparent housing allocation rules is also important locally.

8. Stop immigration rules keeping British families apart

Alongside continued action to root out sham marriages, a review of the family migration rules should take both partners' earnings into account, and should set the income threshold at a level where a full-time worker on the minimum wage would qualify.

9. Make English language the keystone to integration

Governments should aim for universal fluency in English. English language lessons should be available free at the point of use, via a loan scheme. The government should work with universities to make facilities available for local English language teaching, and to promote volunteering and mentoring projects.

10. Encourage migrants to become British – and celebrate it when they do

Migrants who have been here for five years should be encouraged to take up citizenship. Citizenship ceremonies should be both symbolic and practical: helping new Britons to register to vote and promoting civic engagement opportunities, from engaging in local voluntary projects to becoming blood donors. Public celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta should include citizenship ceremonies around Britain in places of particular local resonance.

About British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, opportunity and identity, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

Since British Future's founding in 2012 we have conducted research on public attitudes to these issues in the UK, projecting our findings publicly to inform national debate.

Our attitudinal research has contributed to national discussions on issues including immigration from the European Union; attitudes to international students in the UK; Englishness and what it means to the English; the hopes and fears of first-time voters; and racism, discrimination and national identity in modern Britain.

We have also:

- Contributed to key public debates in the national media, appearing on BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 Television, across BBC Radio and in articles in every national newspaper.
- Held events at Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat party conferences.
- Launched the 'Voice of a Generation', a one-year joint project with the Mirror to employ a young, non-graduate apprentice reporter at the Daily Mirror, specifically tasked with investigating and reporting on the most pressing concerns of young people in the run-up to the 2015 election.
- Hosted a "Festival of Englishness" with the IPPR to celebrate and discuss Englishness in politics, sport, literature and comedy.
- Worked with civic groups across different faiths to promote a peaceful and respectful response to the murder of corporal Lee Rigby.
- Held a "funeral for fascism" to celebrate the British public's rejection of the BNP at the ballot box and with it the demise of fascism as an electoral force in Britain.

Other publications from British Future



International Students and the UK Immigration Debate, October 2014

An investigation into public attitudes to international students, the largest category of non-EU migration to the UK.



Voice of a Generation, May 2014

Exploring the most pressing concerns among 17–21 year-olds in the run-up to the 2015 general election.



EU migration from Romania and Bulgaria: What does the public think? December 2013

Looking at public perceptions of EU migration and attitudes to EU migrants already living in Britain.



From Minority Vote to Majority Challenge,
September 2013

Analysis of the growing importance of the ethnic minority vote in the UK



Do Mention the War: Will 1914 matter in 2014,
August 2013

Examining public attitudes to the First World War centenary and its relationship with national identity.



Integration Consensus 1993–2013: How Britain changed since Stephen Lawrence,
April 2013

Assessing how much people think attitudes to race and discrimination have changed in twenty years since Stephen Lawrence's death.



This Sceptred Isle,
April 2012

Exploring public attitudes to identity, inclusion and immigration in Britain

The full 140-page pamphlet **How to talk about immigration** is available from **British Future** or as a free download from www.britishfuture.org

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