

THE POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION

*The surprising lessons of the 2015 General Election and
what they mean for new party leaders*

*Sunder Katwala and Steve Ballinger
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Future...**

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Kean House

6 Kean Street

London

WC2B 4AS

Authors:

Sunder Katwala and Steve Ballinger

Editor: Steve Ballinger

Design: Naisha Hussain

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.

www.britishfuture.org

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7632 9069

Twitter: @BritishFuture

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Did immigration decide the election?

Immigration looked set to be one of the decisive issues in the 2015 General Election.

UKIP's dramatic victory in the 2014 European election, after a campaign focused predominantly on immigration, was followed by high-profile defections to the party and by-election victories, keeping Nigel Farage's party in the headlines. David Cameron's net migration target, and his failure to meet it, ensured that voters received a regular reminder of the issue every three months when the ONS published new immigration statistics. New crackdowns and tougher measures, announced each quarter in response to the figures, only heightened the public's sense that the Government hadn't got a grip. Ahead of the general election campaign, immigration polled consistently in the top three issues that voters cared most about, alongside the economy and the NHS.

One look at the newspaper headlines today reveals that the issue has not gone away. Net migration was back with a vengeance in May, and again in August when it reached record levels. The refugee crisis across Europe, and closer to home in Calais, has brought asylum back into the public debate – both positively, in the public's humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis, and negatively, with migrants referred to as 'swarms' and even as 'cockroaches'.

Yet during the election campaign itself, much of the public debate on immigration fell strangely silent. Offered an opportunity to put their views and policies on immigration to the nation, most politicians kept their heads down. The exception was UKIP, who maintained their focus on the issue - but most of the public didn't like what they had to say. Nigel Farage's polarising rhetoric proved unpalatable to most of the public, who hold more nuanced views. For the duration of the election campaign, immigration had a much lower profile – and less of an impact on the result – than many had anticipated.

* * *

The Conservatives won a majority victory despite the party's record and reputation on immigration. With David Cameron's flagship policy of reducing net migration in tatters, Conservative strategists succeeded in reducing the profile of immigration as an election issue, focusing instead on economic recovery, leadership and security in uncertain times.

This proved highly successful in winning the votes that the Conservatives needed, exactly where they needed them. So the conventional wisdom - that David Cameron's party had no chance of a majority, or perhaps of retaining office at all, if UKIP's "revolt on the right" was not squeezed below 10% - was proved wrong.

Partly, UKIP took votes from all parties, not just the Conservatives. What has been less noticed in post-election analysis is how much David Cameron had to broaden the tent and win new voters to secure his majority. Up to 3 million people who had not voted Conservative in 2010, including many ex-Lib Dems and an increasing share of ethnic minority

voters, put their cross by the Tory candidate's name on polling day.

There wasn't just one winner on polling day. The party that gained most seats in the 2015 General Election was not the most anti-immigration party but the party that voiced the most positive approach to immigration. It was not the SNP's inclusive, welcoming and (moderately) liberal approach to managed migration that won them 56 of the 59 Scottish seats. That did, however, form part of the party's narrative about a new Scotland and it clearly proved no barrier to an historic landslide in a country with a distinct discourse, though only mildly less sceptical public attitudes to immigration, than the rest of the UK. The Survation findings show that a broad majority of Scots thought that UKIP overstepped the mark in campaigning on immigration – but that many also thought the major parties too often ducked the issue.

Labour didn't lose the election on immigration but on political leadership, economic credibility and having too narrow a pitch to persuade voters that they deserved to return to office. Labour could not persuade voters in either Scotland or England that they would stand up for their interests, or deal fairly with competing political demands in a United Kingdom in flux.

The party worried over what it should and should not say about immigration, agonising over how to appeal to both 'left behind' voters and to cosmopolitan voters in big cities and university towns who might be attracted by the Greens. Shadow Cabinet members disagreed in public about who would or wouldn't drink from a coffee mug with Labour's immigration message on it.

The party found it hard to talk confidently to the public about its approach to the issue. Labour candidates felt more confident talking about how fair rules in the workplace could prevent exploitation and undercutting. But too often they sounded as if they hoped to change the subject, back to jobs, housing or the cost of living, whenever issues of immigration, integration, identity or Europe came up.

New leader Jeremy Corbyn has shown little evidence so far that this approach will change. Asked about immigration, he has suggested that the party should talk about the economic and cultural benefits of new arrivals, rather than directly address public anxiety about numbers and the scale of immigration. Like new Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, who told a British Future hustings that he would be 'un-nuanced' in his positive position on immigration, the challenge for both leaders will be to reach beyond their cosmopolitan supporters in London and university towns, who will like their liberal approach, and engage voters right across Britain.

UKIP did talk about immigration as much as possible – and sought to make it the issue of the election. This won them votes: immigration was more important than being anti-EU in securing almost four million votes for Nigel Farage's party. Yet they were disappointed to go into the election with two seats and to come out of it with one.

The failure to achieve the more significant breakthrough reflected public doubts about UKIP's tone of voice on immigration. UKIP provided a voice that many of its supporters thought had been missing for too long from mainstream politics – but it also put most voters off, even those who were sceptical about the pace and scale of immigration and the impact of EU free movement.

The Survation findings for British Future show that a majority of voters at the end of the campaign feel that UKIP was both too loud and too divisive; that the party was not firm enough on keeping extreme voices out; and that it talked too much about immigration and too little about the other issues facing Britain.

Almost everywhere that UKIP hoped to win a seat, its candidates hit a “purple ceiling” of one in three votes. The sole exception was Douglas Carswell in Clacton, whose more optimistic and inclusive vision of what the party should stand for, together with his local popularity, secured a broader appeal and a seat in Parliament.

So what are the lessons of the 2015 General Election for the politics of immigration?

The public politics of immigration are more complex than most people think. Immigration is a big issue – but it isn’t necessarily going to trump issues like the economy or political leadership in a General Election or a referendum on the EU.

Immigration is also a polarising issue, because there are two large minorities of voters with opposing instincts about immigration. While most voters are somewhere in between, none of the parties has yet spoken confidently to this public desire for politics to find the common ground.

In this report, we look at the challenges facing politics as a whole in restoring trust on immigration, and why parties across the political spectrum face significant challenges to engage the public and secure support for their respective approaches.

The findings cast doubt on the prevailing view in both major parties that talking about immigration in an election will be ‘all pain and no gain’ and hence best avoided. Staying quiet on one of the three most salient issues for voters is a risky strategy – one that is likely to corrode public trust and push anxious voters towards populist options just to get the issue on the agenda.

It is also an unsustainable approach. The Conservative attempt to avoid highlighting immigration during the 2015 campaign was assisted by a considerable degree of cooperation from newspapers sympathetic to David Cameron’s re-election effort, despite dissatisfaction with his immigration record. It’s already very clear that this stance is not going to continue now the election campaign is over.

After a surprisingly quiet election, immigration is back in the headlines. Just weeks after he faced sharp criticism over rising net migration figures, the Prime Minister was under pressure to offer protection to more refugees fleeing the war in Syria – demonstrating the nuance within public opinion on different forms of migration. The wider refugee crisis across Europe, including in Calais, remains unresolved, as does David Cameron’s net migration headache. Free movement will be a central issue in the EU referendum debate, and the EU reform debate that will precede it, not least because it is currently one of the only ways that most people feel any tangible impact of Britain being in the EU.

It is clear that immigration will play a major role in the politics of this parliament, just as it did in the last. Decision-makers face difficult policy and political challenges. But public trust is unlikely to be repaired or restored by quarterly announcements of new crackdowns and controls, timed in the hope of overshadowing the release of each set of immigration figures.

The government was elected because voters understood the value of its long-term thinking about the economy. If it is serious about reducing net migration, it will need to treat immigration similarly, offering the public a long-term plan to meet its self-imposed target.

Rebuilding trust on immigration depends on steering a middle course: one which does not dismiss or duck immigration concerns and which avoids stoking them up with tough rhetoric and unkept promises. There are big challenges and important trade-offs in managing immigration well. It is time that politicians tried to engage the public in how to make those choices.

The EU referendum may be a good start. The British public will get a chance to decide whether we stay in the club or not – but proper public engagement on immigration will require politicians to show greater trust in voters on this issue than they did during the 2015 campaign.

There has been much talk of the need for a proper debate on immigration in the UK. It's no longer credible to say that it's a debate we're not allowed to have. But when the General Election offered an opportunity to fully engage the public in a nuanced debate, the major parties went quiet, leaving the polarising voices of UKIP and the Greens shouting at each other from the sidelines. They hoped the issue would go away and, for a few weeks in May, it did. Now it's back.

2. Cameron's New Majority Coalition

Why failing on immigration didn't stop the Conservatives winning in 2015

The Conservative Party's first majority election victory for almost a quarter-century was unexpected – and not only because the opinion polls got it wrong. David Cameron became the first post-war Prime Minister to serve a full term in office and then increase his party's share of the vote. That seemed particularly unlikely as UKIP mounted one of the highest profile political insurgencies in recent British politics, particularly taking on the government over immigration as well as Europe

Yet the Conservative campaign still proved effective at winning the votes the party needed, in the places that they needed them. Winning in politics is ultimately about numbers and, while some voters deserted the Conservative Party, Cameron won more votes than he lost. The replacement of the Conservative “deserters” to UKIP with two to three million new ‘joiners’ – former Liberal Democrats and ethnic minority voters backing the Conservatives for the first time – reinforces a long-term shift in the Conservative vote towards the centre ground of public attitudes on immigration.

David Cameron was no longer trusted by voters with the strongest anti-immigration views – but he won the support of millions of others who cared more about the economy, and in any event were more relaxed about immigration.

How immigration went from a political advantage to headache

David Cameron clearly did not win this General Election on the issue of immigration.

Immigration had been an asset for the Conservative leader when campaigning for office from opposition in 2010. Then, his party had enjoyed an 38% lead over the Labour government as the best party on immigration. The Conservative leader could echo public concern about Labour's failure to predict or prepare for the large-scale migration from Eastern Europe after 2004. He could be confident that his alternative – reducing net migration to ‘tens of thousands’ – would be popular.

Five years later, the electoral politics of immigration looked very different for the Conservatives. The net migration target was missed spectacularly. The government tried to suggest that it had reduced the numbers – but this fell apart as non-EU migration rose too. Ministers regularly announced new legislation and hoped that headlines about tough measures would show they were getting a grip. Yet trust in the government continued to fall, reaching similar levels to those in the last Labour government.

In early 2015, the Conservatives changed strategic tack. Tough messages about controlling immigration seemed to have done more to stoke up support for UKIP than to quell it. Voters were sceptical about their record on immigration. Instead, they sought to minimise its prominence as an election issue, offering a consistent appeal based on economic recovery, leadership and security in uncertain times. In Survation’s post-election poll for British Future, just 3% of Conservative voters said that “best policies on immigration” was the main reason for the Conservative victory.

Figure 1: What is the main reason people voted for David Cameron’s Conservative party?

	Conservative Voters
Cameron best candidate for Prime Minister	47%
The economy	27%
Afraid of the SNP	15%
Trust on the NHS	4%
EU referendum	2%
Best policies on immigration	3%
Another reason	2%

Clearly, David Cameron didn’t win this election on immigration. So how did he survive a significant political revolt among a section of his voters to win despite it? The answer is that he constructed a new majority coalition for the Conservatives.

Cameron’s new majority coalition

What has been underappreciated in the post-election analysis is just how much David Cameron had to expand the Conservative tent, in order to win a majority victory despite the many votes he lost to UKIP on immigration and Europe.

The rise in the Conservative vote share by 0.8% from 36.1% to 36.9% of the total vote may look rather modest. The Conservatives won 11,334,576 votes – a net gain of just over 600,000 votes on the party’s May 2010 result.

But these net gains reflect a much greater churn of voters than that.

For one thing, not all of David Cameron’s 2010 voters were available to him in 2015. There are currently half a million deaths per year in Britain – or 2.5 million since the 2010 General Election. Not all of those who died will have been voters, of course, but the Conservatives are hit slightly harder by the political demographics of death, being the most popular party among over-65s. A reasonable estimate is that around 750,000 of those who voted Conservative in May 2010 had died by the time of the 2015 vote.

UKIP’s additional three million votes came from a wider cross-section of the political spectrum than many people perhaps realised. Nevertheless, they are likely to have included at least one to one-and-a-half million people who voted Conservative in 2010.

David Cameron's net gain of 600,000 votes in 2015 therefore depended on his winning the support of around 2.5 to 3 million voters who didn't choose the Conservatives in 2010. Some will have been older voters, some returning to the Conservatives for the first time since John Major's surprise victory in 1992, while many will have been voting Conservative for the first time ever.

Cameron's biggest source of new support was from people who had voted Liberal Democrat in 2010. The Conservatives succeeded in persuading significant numbers of pro-Coalition Lib Dems that, in the particular conditions of May 2015, it was more important to re-elect David Cameron than it was to ensure another coalition.

He also achieved his party's best ever share with ethnic minority voters, with perhaps as many as half a million or more non-white Britons voting Conservative for the first time. Ipsos MORI's How Britain Voted analysis suggests that David Cameron more or less broke even with the gains and losses he made among white British voters: a significant share of the net gain in the Conservative vote will therefore have come from new ethnic minority support.

Finally, the Conservatives won some new support from new entrants to the electorate. The Conservatives do less well with younger voters than older voters, but picking up a share of the first time vote is obviously crucial to the long-term health of the party.

These are not mutually exclusive categories. The Lib Dems appear to have lost about two-thirds of their ethnic minority voters, who will have defected both to Labour in inner city seats and to the Conservatives, especially across southern England. A fifth of those eligible to vote for the first time were not white. And these will not be the only Conservative 'joiner' votes: the party did even better with voters over 65, for example, and will have picked up some older voters from Labour and the Lib Dems.

How Tory 'joiners' are shifting the balance of the Conservatives

These three significant groups of Conservative 'joiners' all have two significant things in common. Firstly, they tend to represent growing rather than shrinking sections of the future electorate, in contrast with the long-term profile of the anti-migration 'left behind' vote, which is strongest among older voters who left school at 16. Secondly, they all see the world very differently from the Conservative "deserters" who left the party for UKIP – and they will all tend to shift the party's support in a more liberal direction.

These voters backed David Cameron on the themes of the 2015 Conservative campaign – the economic recovery and the leadership of a stable government – and could well have found it easier to come across to the Conservatives because the party was not pursuing a vocal strategy to win back UKIP voters over immigration.

The combined 'joiner' effect is to offer a gradual but significant recasting of the Conservative electorate, which now has a different balance on questions of immigration and identity. Over time, this is being reinforced by a long-term generational shift: first time Conservative voters born in the mid-1990s will take a more liberal attitude to social

issues, including cultural aspects of the immigration debate, than, for example, their own grandparents.

These intergenerational factors would be further reinforced if the ‘joiner’ and ‘deserter’ party effects of the 2015 election were to be sustained over time, with the Conservatives holding on to Lib Dem and ethnic minority switcher votes without winning back most of those who have gone to UKIP.

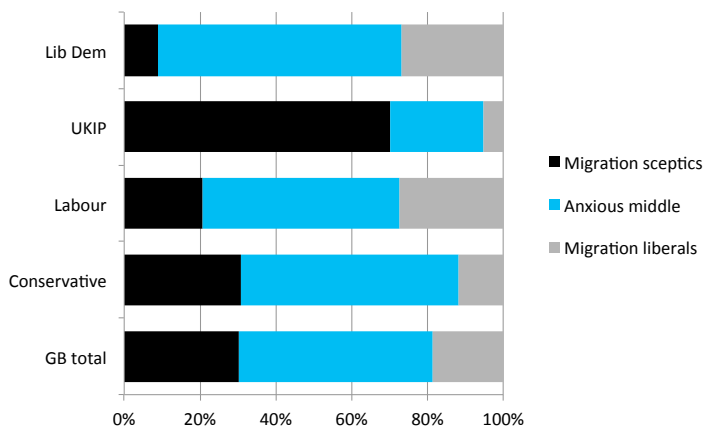
The ethnic minority Conservative joiners do have distinctly more positive attitudes to immigration. This has been explored in depth by Bright Blue’s series of reports on attitudes to immigration, and is further reinforced by these Survation findings.

Many Lib Dem-Conservative switchers, for example, in South-West England, will not have been among the most liberal of Lib Dem voters, but they will also on balance contribute towards a liberalising shift in the Conservative electorate.

The Survation poll asked voters to rank the contribution of immigration on a 0-10 scale – and captures this long-term shift in the Conservative electorate towards the middle ground on immigration. Strikingly, David Cameron’s new Conservative majority coalition is not to the right of the general public on attitudes towards immigration.

Rather, the responses of Conservative voters mirror those of the wider public, with a broadly similar mixture of rejectionists (who scored immigration 0-2), liberals (8-10) and the ‘anxious middle’ (3-7). The Liberal Democrats and Greens occupy the liberal flank, while UKIP occupy the opposing pole. The Labour electorate is a coalition of moderate sceptics and liberals, but is more liberal than the general public.

Figure 2: 2015 vote by attitude towards immigration



Success in politics is about maintaining broad electoral coalitions – and the ‘joiners’ cannot always expect the Conservative party to reflect their views on every issue. Nor can the Conservatives necessarily be confident that those who switched to the party in May 2015 will necessarily stick with them in the 2020 election.

But David Cameron’s success in broadening his appeal to moderately liberal new Conservatives explains how his government could survive the UKIP revolt over immigration. His successors will have to work out how far the party can try to win former supporters back without sacrificing the new support that made the 2015 majority victory possible.

3. How Labour failed to find its voice on immigration

“Appalling” is how new Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, then a little-known backbencher, described the party’s red mug with the slogan ‘Controls on immigration’, launched as part of its election merchandise, which came to symbolise the Labour Party’s difficulty in working out what the party should say about identity and immigration before the 2015 General Election (1).

He was not alone in this position. Leadership rival Liz Kendall reportedly wanted to “smash them to the ground” (2) a position also backed by shadow business secretary Chuka Umunna, thus creating something of a split in the Shadow Cabinet with Labour frontbenchers disagreeing publicly about whether they would drink from it. Shadow chancellor Ed Balls said he was keen to get hold of one for his constituency office. The strongest criticism came from senior left-wing backbencher Diane Abbott, now shadow minister for international development, who said: “This shameful mug is an embarrassment. But the real problem is that immigration controls are one of our five pledges at all.”

So why did Labour produce its immigration mug? The official party response to the argument was that the mug was one of a series featuring its five election pledges. Given the party’s nervousness about how it was perceived on immigration, it could hardly leave it out of the mug collection.

Labour’s manifesto put forward a range of detailed immigration policies, seeking to strike a balance between arguing that immigration is ‘important to Britain’s future’ and also that it needed to be ‘properly managed’. The party accepted that it had ‘got things wrong’ on immigration in the past – and would respond to the ‘legitimate concerns’ that people had. The focus was on ‘fair rules at work’, based on the argument that the undercutting of local workers’ conditions and wages was ‘one of the things that worries people most about immigration’. Labour’s main proposal on integration was to introduce a requirement for public sector workers to have minimum standards of English. The party argued for more border guards, while also proposing an end to indefinite detention, with shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper arguing that “Immigration and asylum rules need to be enforced, but they must also be humane”.

Labour’s problem was not that it lacked policy on immigration - it was that it lacked confidence in finding its own authentic voice to tell voters about it.

“Controls on immigration” is not a distinctively Labour message or argument. The party’s slogan didn’t seek to capture or sum up why Labour felt its approach to immigration was right or preferable to those of its rivals. This meant that Labour failed to make its core argument: that the Conservatives were not controlling immigration effectively or paying enough attention to its impacts on people’s jobs, while UKIP’s tough approach risked leaving the fairness out altogether.

Had the slogan been ‘Control immigration fairly’, it would have spoken to the type of policy that the party was putting to the electorate. Yet fears that voters would interpret fairness as code for putting the interests of migrants first, given the party’s history and reputation as being

pro-migration, meant that fairness was left out of the message.

This struggle to find and articulate a confident and authentic message on immigration was further hampered by the party having little to say about free movement within the EU – the form of immigration that most voters were talking about.

The party's opposition to a referendum on the EU made it difficult to get a hearing from voters who were concerned with the scale of East European migration. If the party had supported a referendum, Labour candidates could have explained that they believed EU membership was, on balance, a good thing; and that free movement, combined with efforts to alleviate its impacts, was a price worth paying for being in the club. Voters who disagreed would get to make that choice for themselves in a referendum. Instead, candidates seemed to be telling voters that they were wrong about EU immigration and so couldn't be trusted to make the choice about Britain's place in the EU.

The Survation poll findings offer little evidence that Labour turned off voters by being too tough on immigration, save perhaps for a very small niche of its core supporters. Critics of the immigration mug on social media were not particularly representative of the party's electorate. The new research suggests that Labour could have spoken more about immigration during the election campaign without fear of alienating its own supporters – particularly if it did so confidently and with an authentic message that embodied the party's values.

Overall, only 10% of voters thought Labour talked too much about immigration, while 44% thought the party should have said more. 46% thought that Labour talked about immigration 'about the right amount'.

The party got the balance right for most Labour voters, too – 59% of those supporting the party thought it talked the right amount about immigration, while a third thought it had said too little. Just 7% said the party had talked too much about the topic.

It was the same among ethnic and faith minorities, with only a few feeling that Labour talked too much about immigration. Only 12% of British Muslim respondents said so; and both black and Asian voters were three times as likely to say that Labour said too little about immigration than too much. Majorities thought that the party got the balance right.

The party's focus on fairness in the workplace may have been more effective with Labour voters, whose concerns about immigration were more about its tangible impacts on work, housing and public services. Other voters whose primary concerns were cultural – about the pace of change to Britain – may have just heard someone on the doorstep trying to change the subject.

Some in the party argue that this means Labour should make a more full-throated, unabashedly pro-migration case. Interestingly, this view is shared by two wings of the party who have been at each other's throats all summer: the New Labour right of the party, associated with former prime minister Tony Blair, and the insurgent left of the party,

which has been mobilising around Jeremy Corbyn's leadership bid. While the Blairites and the Corbynites may disagree over issues like electability, the market, foreign policy and much else, on immigration they find common ground, if for somewhat different reasons.

Blairites see higher levels of immigration as part of the globalized, open Britain that they seek to promote, while the Labour left focuses more on opposing discrimination and pursuing an internationalist approach. Yet both conclude that they would be comfortable with higher levels of immigration.

This rather sets them at odds with most of the public, who would prefer it to be a little lower. And where both camps get it wrong is their approach to convincing the public that they're right.

On immigration, and the linked issue of Britain's membership of the EU, Blairites are uncharacteristically reticent to engage with the concerns of the median voter, declaring that they are misinformed about immigration and globalization and should simply face up to the realities of the modern world.

Blairites have responded to public anxieties by bombarding people with facts about the positive impact of migration on GDP, and 'myth-busting' arguments about the pressures brought by immigration. Yet there is now a strong body of qualitative and quantitative studies of public attitudes demonstrating just how unlikely this type of advocacy is to convince anybody who doesn't already agree. The evidence isn't believed – and the 'they are good for us' economic case turns out to be far too instrumental and transactional to engage people anyway.

The Labour Left's desire to have a clear and principled pro-migration stance is less about economics and more about social values. Their challenge, however, is how to secure support from the party's traditional supporters for these anti-discrimination norms – particularly among those core working-class supporters who may feel more economically threatened than others by immigration.

For the Labour Left, their focus on values can manifest itself in the dismissal of voters who disagree as being motivated by xenophobia. The linked argument that concern with immigration peaks at times of economic insecurity, when people look for a scapegoat, runs counter to research into public attitudes: anxiety is higher now, for example, when the economy is doing relatively well, than it was in the depths of the economic downturn.

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When Jeremy Corbyn responded to UKIP's victory in the EU elections by suggesting that its voters may have been motivated by racism, he effectively labelled 4.3 million voters as racist. This may be true of a very small minority, but the vast majority of Britons, including UKIP voters, do not hold racist views – as evidenced by the collapse of the BNP and other racist parties in Britain. Many of those who supported UKIP in the EU elections will have been protest voters, open to supporting one of

the more mainstream parties when it comes to choosing a Prime Minister, and will have been further alienated by his comments.

It is often suggested that Labour's problem is that the party's supporters take diametrically opposed views of immigration, and that it is hard to reconcile these. Yet any party or coalition with broad enough support to govern the country will have to win support from those who are confident about social and cultural change, and those who are much more uncertain and anxious.

It is possible for niche parties – such as the Greens or UKIP – to represent the cultural views of a tenth or a fifth of the electorate. Any party seeking to win significant numbers of seats, particularly in different parts of the country, will have to have a broader coalition than that. The Conservatives in 2015 did not retain their voters who were most anxious about immigration, but were more successful than many have realised in broadening their support among the more culturally confident.

It is hard to see how Labour could, in any circumstance, make a significant shift towards a more UKIP-like policy on immigration, at least not while retaining its support for membership of the EU and free movement within it. There is little appetite for such a stance among the party elite and MPs, not to mention its younger, more cosmopolitan voting base. Labour does seem bound to remain a broadly pro-migration party, whose instinct is to defend the positive cultural and economic contributions which immigration can make to Britain.

The challenge for Jeremy Corbyn, and his new Shadow Home Secretary Andy Burnham, is how to do so effectively.

Their starting point should be drawing a clear distinction between the legitimate concerns of the 'anxious middle' and those of the rejectionist minority who are viscerally anti-migration – and responding not with dismissal or changing the subject, but by engaging people with principled and pragmatic solutions. Burnham hinted at this instinct during the leadership hustings, when he said he could understand the concerns of Labour supporters in areas that have experienced high immigration and have seen little support from Brussels nor Westminster to help deal with its impacts.

Labour's social democrats also appear able to strike the right balance between managing the pressures brought by immigration while acknowledging its benefits – yet have mainly presented their responses in hard policy terms, failing to understand that much public anxiety is rooted in softer questions of culture, identity and belonging. The 'Blue Labour' movement, conversely, which proposes a much tougher stance on immigration, speaks to these cultural anxieties with understanding and empathy but has offered little in the way of constructive policy to answer the questions faced by modern Britain. Somewhere between the two may be found a response that balances principles and pragmatism in a language that people understand.

Over the next five to ten years, immigration looks set to remain relatively high and Labour will not be able to offer much lower levels in the short-term. Yet it should be able to find more to say about how to manage immigration pressures fairly. The party may, for example, be able to develop a longer-term argument about reducing the demand for unskilled workers, to complement its 2015 focus on fairness in the workplace.

Labour should also have considerably more to say about integration. While it will struggle to please everybody, on integration issues there is more common ground than most think between voters who are sceptical about cultural change and those who are positive about it.

Ensuring and encouraging people who do come here to become ‘one of us’ – learning the language, becoming part of the community, working hard and paying taxes - could form part of a positive vision for modern Britain that is rooted in Labour values: a Britishness based on fairness, hard work, support for the NHS and on the equality of opportunity that comes with access to English language learning.

Labour can and should have more to say in response to voters’ concerns about immigration, and will need to find its own, authentic voice in which to do so. The need to connect with voters on the issues that matter to them is not just about a cynical, focus-group-driven bid to win elections – it is important in order to secure the democratic consent for policy that underpins social cohesion. To succeed in this, Labour will need to be more comfortable in articulating to those voters a vision of the kind of Britain it would like to see.

4. The Purple Ceiling

Why talking too much about immigration puts voters off

UKIP made the political weather on immigration during the last Parliament. Having campaigned to get Britain out of the European Union for over a decade, Nigel Farage's decision to make immigration UKIP's core issue helped to propel the party to victory in the 2014 European elections. UKIP also broke into the House of Commons, thanks to the defection of two Conservative MPs. Much of the latter half of the Parliament saw the Conservatives, and then Labour, debate and try out a range of strategies to try to check the party's appeal, often with mixed and rather limited success.

UKIP's anti-immigration campaign did win votes for the party. Its 2015 result was impressive in historical perspective: 3.8 million votes (13%) was the strongest ever General Election result for a party that had not won any seats at the previous election. Though it won only one seat in the House of Commons, UKIP finished second in 120 constituencies, creating the possibility of establishing a sustained presence in several areas in future local and national elections.

Yet 2015 was undoubtedly also a disappointment for the Eurosceptic party, which went into the campaign with two MPs and came out of it with only one.

Party leader Nigel Farage had often been the dominant political personality of the previous two years, yet he failed to win a seat in his chosen Kent constituency of Thanet South. The defeat of Conservative MP Mark Reckless in Rochester and Strood will make it much harder for UKIP to attract future defections, removing a source of potential pressure during the EU renegotiation process. David Cameron's majority victory, rather than the hung parliament which many had anticipated, suggested to many Conservatives that UKIP's bark had been worse than its bite.

UKIP strategists had been confident of securing at least four to six seats, and to compete seriously for a dozen or more constituencies. The failure to achieve a more significant breakthrough largely reflected public doubts about UKIP's tone of voice and approach to immigration. The party provided a voice that many of its supporters thought had been missing for far too long from mainstream politics – but it also put most voters off, including many voters who are sceptical about EU free movement and the scale of UK immigration but who found UKIP's campaigning on these issues too divisive.

The purple ceiling: why UKIP's hopes of a breakthrough were frustrated

Why didn't UKIP win more seats? Clearly, the party got a raw deal from the first-past-the-post electoral system, and so found unusual allies in Greens, Liberal Democrats and other electoral reformers in arguing

that a different system would be fairer.

Any new or smaller party needs to overcome the credibility threshold and persuade people they are not a wasted vote, nationally or locally.

The SNP persuaded Scots that a General Election didn't need to be about voting for a party that could provide a Prime Minister. The Greens, like UKIP, sought to persuade voters in a handful of target constituencies that they could get into the local race, and have a real chance of winning.

But UKIP found a different problem in the constituencies that were its best prospects. Where the party could show that it could win, most voters didn't want them to. That was an important reason why the electoral system treated UKIP badly.

In Survation's national poll for British Future, 14% of those who did not vote UKIP said that they had considered or would consider voting UKIP. Just over a quarter of the entire electorate were tempted to vote UKIP. But two-thirds of non-UKIP voters said they could never vote for the party.

This anti-UKIP majority meant that, in the constituency races where UKIP was competitive, a majority of voters hoped to see them lose. The party hit a ceiling of one in three votes, able to mobilise its EU "out" and migration sceptic core vote, but unable to reach beyond it sufficiently to win its target seats.

Figure 3: How UKIP failed to be first past the post

	UKIP Share of the Vote	Position	Margin of victory/defeat	Additional votes needed to win
Clacton	44%	1st	+ 9	+ 3,437
Boston and Skegness	34%	2nd	- 10	- 4,336
Thurrock	32%	3rd	- 2	- 974
Thanet South	32%	2nd	- 6	- 2812
Heywood and Middleton	32%	2nd	- 11	- 5229
Castle Point	31%	2nd	- 20	- 8934
Rochester and Strood	31%	2nd	- 14	- 7133
Rotherham	31%	2nd	- 22	- 8446
Dagenham & Rainham	30%	2nd	- 12	- 4980
Rother Valley	28%	2nd	-16	- 7297

The sole exception was Douglas Carswell in Clacton, whose distinctly optimistic, inclusive and locally rooted vision of what the populist party should stand for provided a broader appeal and secured him enough votes to be elected.

This 'purple ceiling' effect meant that UKIP's hopes of winning seats often depended on there being a 3-way contest, where a third of the vote could just see them squeeze through. In constituencies where a high profile UKIP campaign made the party one of two potential winners, such as Grimsby, the results were much less close than most observers had predicted.

Too much immigration?

In a word, the reason that UKIP didn't win more seats was...

.....immigration.

For most UKIP voters, Nigel Farage was saying what they wanted to hear on immigration, pretty much how they wanted to hear it. Yet that was also what prevented UKIP broadening its appeal beyond its core vote.

The Survation findings for British Future show that, by the end of the campaign, most voters believed that UKIP had talked too much, too loudly about immigration and that the party should have paid more attention to other issues. Crucially for UKIP, that majority includes large numbers of voters who are sceptical about the European Union, and about the scale and pace of immigration, not just those who take a strongly different view to Nigel Farage.

Figure 4: Did UKIP talk too much, too little or about the right amount about the following topics during the recent general election campaign?

	Immigration	Economy	NHS	Europe
Too much	51	9	9	39
About right	39	41	44	46
Too little	10	50	47	15

Just under four in ten said that UKIP had talked too much about Europe, but 46% felt they had said about the right amount about this, and 15% had wanted to hear more. Voters did feel that UKIP should have had more to say about the economy and the health service.

Figure 5: Did UKIP talk too much about immigration? (by party)

	Overall	UKIP voters	Conservative Voters	Labour voters	Lib Dem voters
Talked too much about immigration	51	8	48	63	72
About right	39	80	43	26	26
Talked too little about immigration	10	12	8	11	2

Dangerous and divisive? Or a valuable voice, up to a point

There has been much discussion of UKIP's "marmite" appeal. It is certainly true that the party polarises opinions – striking a strong chord with its core "left behind" voters by offering a world-view that is strongly opposed by the most cosmopolitan voters.

That world-view certainly fails to appeal to ethnic minority voters too. As we explore in Chapter 8, "The new floating voters", 55% of ethnic minority respondents feel the party can fairly be described as 'racist'. That this is a majority view among ethnic minority Britons shows that the party has a lot more work to do to ensure that its commitment to being open to Britons of all ethnicities and faith is understood and trusted.

Overall, respondents to the Survation survey do say it is unfair to call the party 'racist', by a narrow margin of 43% to 40%. Serious UKIP voices will find that rather too narrow a margin of acquittal, and will want to redouble their efforts to show the party is an inclusive one. Half of that 40% say they would reduce immigration levels, so the finding cannot be dismissed as the marginal view of a Guardian-reading cosmopolitan fringe

who find any and all discussion of immigration toxic.

The authors believe, and have consistently argued (3), it is both unfair and unhelpful to label UKIP as a ‘racist’ party, in a way that would be accurate for a pariah party like the BNP. Unlike the BNP and the French National Front, whom UKIP have sensibly shunned, the party does not have extremist roots. It was founded to get Britain out of Europe, a legitimate cause. An anti-EU party that campaigns to end EU free movement will attract both legitimate voices for that cause, and some with more virulent and toxic motives. The party’s reputation has been damaged by the frequency with which a minority of parliamentary and council candidates have made extreme statements. It has acted to expel such voices from the party, but there is a broad public consensus that UKIP needs to be more proactive in rooting out those who damage its reputation.

Party leader Nigel Farage spoke of his pride in the number of black and Asian candidates standing for UKIP as a ‘clause four moment’ for the party. However, Farage showed questionable judgment in suggesting, in the spring of 2015, that Britain’s anti-discrimination legislation should be scrapped. Though Farage’s argument was that Britain had moved on so much that anti-discrimination legislation was no longer necessary, this clumsy mis-step, though retracted overnight, is the type of intervention that risks exacerbating UKIP’s problem in securing trust.

Several other UKIP spokespeople have a strong and consistent record of speaking out strongly against racial prejudice, including immigration spokesman Steven Woolfe and the party’s first MP Douglas Carswell, who made a major speech at a British Future event setting out why the party rejected the legacy of Enoch Powell. These significant voices shaping the party’s future identity may be less well known to voters who don’t follow politics closely

The party should heed their advice that UKIP has much to gain by demonstrating its desire to be inclusive. UKIP should believe it can gain much more than 2% of the ethnic minority vote that it gained in 2015. There is a plausible argument that a significant proportion of Britain’s ethnic minorities could be natural Eurosceptics, attracted by a patriotic democratic appeal which values Britain’s Commonwealth links more strongly than those with Brussels – but they may not vote ‘out’ in a referendum if UKIP and the broader Eurosceptic movement does not kill off the perception that its aim is to bring back the Britain of the 1950s, rather than to forge a confident future outside the EU.

The Survation poll also captures an important nuance: that there exists a significant middle group of voters who are ambivalent about UKIP.

Several ‘anxious middle’ voters saw positive features in UKIP’s populist challenge to the mainstream parties, yet they remain uncomfortable about how UKIP does this, because it risks crossing the line and failing to keep prejudice out of debates about immigration.

What should concern UKIP supporters about these findings is that this criticism, that it is bringing prejudice into the debate, is held by most voters and is clearly not confined to the one in four who are broadly content with current levels of immigration. Large sections of the electorate, who would like to see controlled and reduced immigration but without political debates crossing the line into anti-migrant prejudice, think UKIP need to do more to observe the boundaries of acceptability. While UKIP’s own supporters strongly reject negative characterisations of the party, most

do agree that the party should do more to ensure it does not field extreme candidates.

Figure 6: Positive attributes of UKIP's populist challenge

	Agree	Disagree	Net (General)	UKIP voters
An important new voice just saying what most people think	44	33	+11	+90
Bravely outspoken	51	34	+17	+76
Saying things others don't have the courage to say	58	28	+30	+87
Mainly a mainstream party with a right to their view	41	29	+12	+81
Should not change their approach even if some people think they go too far	38	32	+6	+78

Figure 7: Concerns about UKIP as a divisive party

	Agree	Disagree	Net (General)	UKIP voters
Need to do more to ensure they don't have candidates with extreme views	64	8	+56	+32
Risk bringing prejudice into debates about immigration	58	22	+36	-65
Says things they shouldn't say	51	33	+18	-49
Mainly a dangerous and divisive party	50	29	+21	-84
Racist	40	43	-3	-88

The dilemma of the UKIP general election campaign was that the party needed to broaden its appeal to succeed, yet depended on the profile which came from speaking out controversially.

There appeared to be a tension between two different ideas of UKIP's strategy

The party manifesto presented the image of a modernised, professionalised party, stepping up into prime-time. It consciously promoted a UKIP team – countering claims the party was a one-man band – and made much of having its policy pledges independently costed and audited. The overall tone was surprisingly policy-heavy for a “populist” party. The immigration section reflected a conscious effort from party spokesman Steven Woolfe to present a balanced agenda which took policy challenges seriously, in a tone that contrasted with Nigel Farage's much criticised comments on Romanians at the end of the 2014 European election campaign. This included calls for an Australian points-based system, a commitment to the 1951 refugee convention, removing international students from the migration target, and a pledge that EU citizens currently in the UK would be allowed to stay after an exit vote.

The problem for the UKIP modernisers, such as deputy leader Suzanne Evans and economic spokesman Patrick O'Flynn, was that few voters read manifestos, and only highly engaged voters could name more than one UKIP politician. And the modernising strategy was not the approach taken by Nigel Farage during the TV leaders debate addressing the biggest public audiences of the campaign.

Instead, Farage sought to stand out as the man prepared to say things that others wouldn't, for example his focus on HIV positive migrants when questioned about the challenges facing the NHS.

Nigel Farage's campaign was pretty much pitch perfect for the voters that UKIP won - but the Survation poll findings capture how far the public response to UKIP, both positive and critical, remains dominated by perceptions of its charismatic and polarising leader.

The strategic question for UKIP is whether it would benefit or not from a broader appeal.

It might be that losing has become the new winning in British politics. The SNP made a major advance in Scottish politics in the wake of a referendum defeat. The Labour left has responded to a disappointing General Election defeat by mobilising a level of support inside the party that had not been seen for thirty years or more. UKIP too could find a niche and a voice as a party of the "left behind" – and could expand its appeal, particularly among some Labour voters in the north, if it is the only significant political force on the 'out' side of an EU referendum.

So the party could potentially extend this appeal to voters with similar views, up to a ceiling of around 20-25% of the electorate. Without a change in the electoral system, however, it is difficult to see what this achieves. Four million votes is a significant, personal political achievement for Nigel Farage but it seems likely that the 2015 result may reflect the peak of what his strategy for UKIP can achieve.

For UKIP's rivals, these findings suggest that there are plenty of voters who want the other parties to engage more fully and confidently with issues of immigration, integration and identity – and that the suspicion remains that most politicians would rather duck these issues if they could. But the findings show that voters are not looking for the other parties to become UKIP imitators. They would prefer them instead to find their own voice on issues like immigration and integration.

5. The Liberal case for staying nuanced on immigration

‘Fear and grievance have won, liberalism has lost’, said an emotional Nick Clegg, outgoing Deputy Prime Minister, as he announced his resignation as party leader on the morning after a devastating general election night for his party. The Liberal Democrats had lost two-thirds of their vote, collapsing from 23% to 8%, with the party retaining just eight of their 57 Commons seats.

The Lib Dems had expected a tough election, but hoped that their distinctively internationalist, pro-European outlook could help them retain a core of liberal support, and that the reputations of their incumbent MPs would help them to cling on locally against the national tide. While most in the party continued to believe they had been right to take their first chance to enter government for almost a century, few had anticipated that the Faustian price to be paid would be the reversal of four decades of hard-fought advance, building up the liberal centre since the mid-1970s.

The party lost heavily on three fronts: it lost 10 seats in Scotland as the SNP tide swept all before it; it lost 12 seats to Labour, losing constituency contests in London along with losses in Manchester, Cambridge, Bradford, Birmingham, Bristol and Norwich, as left-leaning, anti-coalition supporters in the cities deserted the party. And the scale of the defeat was sealed by the Lib Dems losing 27 seats to the Conservatives, with many Lib Dem voters, content with the party’s record in government, responding to a highly uncertain election by deciding it was more important to keep David Cameron in office than to make sure his Coalition partners could keep a check on the Tory right.

The Lib Dems were less successful than they had hoped in securing support from voters who shared the party’s liberal outlook on questions like Europe and immigration. Survation’s findings for British Future show that the party won around 12% of those in the pro-migration ‘liberal minority’, not much higher than their 10% share of the ‘anxious middle’ who hold more mixed views on immigration. It is not surprising that only 2% of voters with strongly anti-migration views voted Lib Dem, while one in three voted UKIP. But pro-migration voters were twice as likely to vote Conservative, and almost four times as likely to vote Labour, than to support the Lib Dems.

Figure 8: How did the parties do among voters with different views of immigration?

National vote		Pro-immigration voters	Anxious middle voters	Anti-immigration voters
37%	Conservative	24%	42%	39%
31%	Labour	45%	31%	21%
13%	UKIP	4%	6%	31%
8%	Lib Dem	12%	10%	2%
4%	Green	6%	4%	2%
5%	SNP	7%	5%	4%

Why didn't the Lib Dems achieve a better result with the most liberal voters? In 2015, voters who shared the party's liberal views on identity issues strongly opposed other aspects of their record in government. Age was a particularly important factor here. In particular, the party did especially badly with students and first-time voters. Our Survation poll gives them just a 4% share of 18-22 year olds, showing that the party's liberal pitch entirely failed to lean into the significant intergenerational rise of more liberal attitudes.

This reflects a dramatic reversal of what had happened in 2010. The Ipsos MORI "How Britain Voted" studies show the Lib Dems winning the support of 30% of 18-24 year olds in 2010, with an even three-way split between Labour, the Conservatives and the Lib Dems. By 2015, with the party defending its record in a Coalition government, including an infamous U-turn on tuition fees, Ipsos MORI shows a collapse to 5% of 18-24 year olds, with the Lib Dems falling behind UKIP among the youngest voters.

Lib Dems will very much hope that 2015 will prove as bad as it gets. It might intuitively be thought that, once a party has seen its support fall to 8%, those left would be a hardy band of loyalists. However, the Survation findings show that the party is least likely to have anything resembling a 'core vote'. 70% of those who voted Lib Dem in 2015 suggested they might vote for a different party in future, compared with less than half of Labour, Conservative or SNP voters. Only 13% of Lib Dem voters were confident they would not be changing their mind in future.

Figure 9: "I voted for them in 2015, but I could change my mind in future"

I voted for this party in 2015 but may change my mind in the future	Agree	Disagree	Net	Neither agree nor disagree
Lib Dem	70%	13%	+57	17%
Green	64%	17%	+46	19%
UKIP	57%	23%	+34	20%
Labour	46%	35%	+11	19%
Conservative	36%	44%	-8	21%
SNP	34%	52%	-18	15%

Can immigration help boost the Lib Dem recovery?

Tim Farron won the party leadership contest in July, elected against rival Norman Lamb by a party membership swelled by more than 7,000 people joining the ranks in response to the election defeat. The new leader, speaking shortly before the result was announced, told a British Future identity hustings that he intended to take an "un-nuanced" position in favour of immigration:

On the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, he called for “an EU solution”, but one in which Britain is more “muscular” in terms of leadership and offering places for refugee resettlement, saying “I don’t know what our fair share is, but it’s a darn sight more than we’re taking now.”

Strikingly, Farron argued that the case for the Lib Dems being unambiguously positive about immigration was not just one of principle, but a pragmatic case about electoral strategy too.

“First of all we have to be un-nuanced in our positivity about immigration because there’s no room for a party on 8% to be anything other than un-nuanced. No one else is going to argue for immigration in the way that we do. Is it possible to be popular? Maybe. Part of what we need to do is regain trust as a party, so you deliberately go out there and you say things that are morally right and piss off 75% of people. I don’t care about that, because my objective is to get up from 8, through the teens, into the twenties and re-establish our party, and you do that by taking tough positions that nobody else will take”.

Farron has a good case that it will make sense politically for the Liberal Democrats to speak up in defence of the EU, immigration, the Human Rights Act and other contested liberal causes, including where they may have to defend unpopular positions.

But his argument against nuance risks going too far. It would be a mistake for the party to go so far as to welcome or even to seek majority opposition to its positions, or to measure the purity of its principled position by the scale of opposition to it. Ultimately, that would be a far too unambitious agenda for liberals on immigration, when the task should be to seek to extend support, and to make a liberal case that most people might respond to.

While the Lib Dems may well need to climb back gradually from 8% of the vote, there are also pressing reasons for the party to want its case to extend beyond the most liberal niche of the electorate.

If the party is to recover seats as well as votes it will need to reach out beyond the historic areas of liberal strength, the South-West and the Celtic fringe. Its past successes have not been centred in the most liberal cosmopolitan parts of the country, and the eight seats it retains cover a wide geographical spread. The party has done better in Yeovil and Fife, Bath and Winchester than in competing for the metropolitan liberal vote in Manchester and north London. It will again want to seize any opportunity to contest by-elections across middle England, as it famously did in seats like Orpington, Eastbourne and Newbury in the past.

In 2015, the party did not fare much worse among ‘anxious middle’ voters than among those with the most pro-migration views. One in four ‘anxious middle’ voters said they would consider voting for the party, while pro-migration voters were just as likely as those in the anxious middle to say they could never vote Lib Dem.

Figure 10: Would you consider voting Liberal Democrat?

	Of all non Lib Dem voters	Pro-migration voters	Anxious middle	Anti-immigration voters
I did consider Lib Dems in 2015	23%	30%	25%	16%
I would never vote Lib Dem	51%	47%	46%	64%

On Europe too, the Lib Dem vote is rather more mixed than many might suspect, as the Survation research shows. Lib Dem voters are indeed more pro-European than the average voter – but one in five Lib Dems is more likely to vote ‘out’, while only a quarter are certain they will vote for the UK to remain in the EU.

Figure 11: Voting intention on the EU referendum

	Firm In	Lean In	Firm Out	Lean Out	Don't know
Lib Dem voters in 2015	25%	48%	15%	3%	9%
All voters	16%	31%	28%	12%	13%
LD Difference	+9	+17	-13	-9	-4

“I want the British people to know who we are: that we are a party that is generous-spirited, outward-looking, internationalist and anti-nationalist - and therefore we will lead the campaign to keep Britain in the European Union”, Farron told the British Future hustings. However, Lib Dems can offer little added value to the ‘In’ campaign if the party’s contribution offers a Europhile mirror of UKIP’s case, connecting mainly with those who have already decided they are firmly in. While Nigel Farage polarises opinion, the problem with Nick Clegg’s pitch in his 2014 televised debates with Nigel Farage was that the Lib Dem leader was less successful in reaching beyond his base than his UKIP rival. So, the LibDems need to work out how they can best contribute to building a majority coalition for Britain’s place in the EU.

The Lib Dems will undoubtedly remain a broadly pro-migration party. The party does not tend to seek reductions in the current levels of immigration to the UK. It is an advocate of EU free movement as a positive benefit of being part of the European club, positive about the benefits of skilled and student immigration from outside the UK, and committed to the UK playing a greater role in the European refugee crisis. It would not be credible for the party to claim to have a goal or plan to reduce migration.

A liberal and democratic party should, therefore, accept that it faces a significant and important challenge to seek to build up public confidence that the UK can manage high levels of immigration well, in a way that is both welcoming to those who come to contribute to our economy and society, and committed to a fair deal for existing citizens too. . These were themes of the party’s immigration review, chaired by Andrew Stunnell MP during the last Parliament.

The nuanced approach that the report took to the pressures and benefits of immigration should be developed, rather than jettisoned.

A commitment to seeking to rebuild public confidence in Britain's ability to manage immigration better could be pursued by the party in three ways.

Farron could usefully acknowledge that there is a strong liberal case for ensuring that we have an immigration system that is both effective and humane. The party should speak up for the principle of protecting refugees, and be strong advocates of a welcoming approach, in a way that both mobilises liberal activism and appeals more broadly to the majority instinct that Britain should maintain its tradition of being a country which offers protection to those who need it. Combining the principled case for protection with an active interest in successfully promoting contact and integration at a local level would help here.

A party that is broadly supportive of the benefits of economic migration should prioritise practical measures to handle the local pressures of immigration effectively. Lib Dems should support the proposal to directly link levels of local funding for public services to population flows, so that the tax contributions made by migrants to the UK are linked to the provision of local services where they are most needed.

Finally, while Liberal Democrats have been champions of the cultural benefits of diversity, they have paid less attention to constructing a liberal account of what makes integration work. This could include the promotion of an inclusive sense of national identity, and an account of the importance of shared understandings of the responsibilities of common citizenship in our diverse society.

The Liberal Democrats may face a long road to political recovery after the shock of the 2015 general election, but the party does have some long-term opportunities in a society which is, over the generations, becoming gradually more rather than less liberal. A confident, broad and popular liberal case would set itself the challenge of preaching beyond the liberal tribe in Britain today. To do that, the party should recognise that it is possible to be principled, liberal and nuanced on immigration.

6. Less a Green surge than a ripple

The Greens were the only party led by a migrant, in Natalie Bennett, who had been born and raised in Australia before coming to Britain in 1999 and settling here. The Green leader warned against the demonization and scapegoating of migrants, saying that she spoke on this issue “as a migrant [and] someone who loves this country for the tolerance it has shown those arriving on its shores”. It was fairly rare for Bennett’s Australian origins to form part of either the positive or critical reviews that she received during the 2015 campaign.

The Green Party hoped to win votes by appealing to the cosmopolitan and internationalist, pro-migration pole of the public immigration debate, those voters looking for a more progressive alternative to Labour or the coalitionist Liberal Democrats. Being unequivocally pro-immigration went alongside an alternative economic agenda, challenging austerity and cuts. The party understood that this was an appeal to a minority segment of the electorate but hoped that it would generate sufficient support among the most cosmopolitan quarter of the election to prompt a ‘Green surge’ at the ballot box.

Given that the party was not realistically seeking to appeal to everybody, it is not surprising that our Survation poll finds that just over half of the electorate thought the Green party didn’t say enough about immigration. The Greens also appear to have found it challenging to reach a significant swathe of voters on the other main issues of the election.

Figure 12: Did the Greens talk too much or too little about the key issues of the election?

	Immigration	Economy	NHS	Europe
Too little	51%	49%	45%	49%
About right	43%	44%	49%	44%
Too much	7%	7%	6%	6%

If hopes of a “Green surge” were not fully realised, there was at least a ‘Green ripple’, giving the party its best ever General Election result. The Greens won over a million votes, 3.8% of the national total, marking a quadrupling of their 2010 performance. Caroline Lucas comfortably retained their single Westminster seat. But what some commentators called a ‘UKIP of the left’ strategy fell considerably short of emulating the support and impact of UKIP at the opposite pole of the debate.

The Greens faced the important challenge, as a small party in a first-past-the-post election, of persuading voters that they could be competitive in constituency races, or that an expressive vote for a smaller party was more important than voting for a party seeking to form the government. However, the Survation poll results suggest several further reasons why there was less support for the party’s bold appeal to cosmopolitan values than Green activists and strategists might have hoped.

While Green voters were strongly averse to the UKIP campaign’s messages on immigration, only a minority of Green voters saw the Conservative, Labour or Lib Dem campaigns as having an excessive focus on immigration.

Figure 13: What Green voters thought of the different parties on immigration

	Green	UKIP	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	SNP
Talked too little about immigration	27%	15%	39%	40%	50%	8%
About right	71%	22%	42%	33%	44%	70%
Talked too much about immigration	3%	63%	19%	27%	6%	23%

(Sample: 136 respondents who voted Green in 2015)

In the Survation poll, one in five Green voters felt that Labour talked too much about immigration – so they were twice as likely as other voters to think so – but Green voters were more likely to say that Labour had said too little about the issue, or got it right. While some respondents might mean that Labour should have spoken up more positively for the benefits of migration, the Green vote itself covered a broader spectrum of views of immigration than some might anticipate. This suggests that only a minority of Green voters were motivated by the party having a distinctive position on immigration.

Green hopes of making major gains on immigration perhaps underestimated the extent to which Labour and the Liberal Democrats retained a reputation as broadly pro-migration parties, including with Green voters. Moreover, in areas that seemed most promising for a Green appeal, such as university towns and cities, the Labour, Lib Dem and Conservative candidates usually took a pro-migration line, reflecting more liberal views in these constituencies. The Bristol West constituency, for example, saw an unusual three-way battle between the Lib Dem incumbent, Labour and the Greens, with all three contenders making a distinctively pro-immigration case.

Ed Miliband and Labour retained high levels of trust on immigration with ethnic minority voters in particular. The Survation poll suggests that the Green Party also did as well with ethnic minority as with white voters, winning 5% of the non-white vote. That is a striking finding, since the Green party has been candid about its struggles with ethnic diversity, fielding fewer ethnic minority candidates than UKIP. This support among minority voters largely reflects the increased diversity of the young, metropolitan and student electorate: one in five first time voters in 2015 were non-white.

A broader shade of green

The Survation poll suggests that the party had a potential market of up to a quarter of the electorate, of whom a tenth seriously considered giving the party their support. 7% of those who did not vote Green say they strongly considered voting for the party, while 22% of respondents say they considered doing so. Half of voters are clear that they did not consider voting Green.

This potential Green support was related to the party's views on immigration – but perhaps not as closely as some might think. Of the pro-migration quarter of voters, one in three considered voting Green and 14% of non-Green voters with pro-migration views strongly considered

supporting them. However, most pro-migration voters did not consider supporting Natalie Bennett's party.

Figure 14: I considered/would consider voting Green in 2015
(among those who didn't vote Green)

	Immigration liberals	Anxious middle	Anti-immigration
Agree (strongly)	23% (7%)	36% (14%)	14% (4%)
Disagree (strongly)	50% (36%)	37% (24%)	63% (50%)
Neither agree nor disagree	27%	27%	24%

The pro-migration quarter of the electorate was twice as likely to strongly consider voting Green, but potential Green support is not confined to those with distinctly pro-migration views. Almost a quarter of 'anxious middle' voters and over a tenth of those with anti-migration views say they did give some consideration to voting Green, showing that potential supporters do not always share the party's cosmopolitan outlook.

New Challenges

The Green party faces a different political context after the 2015 general election than it might have anticipated. Following the election of Tim Farron by the Liberal Democrats, and Jeremy Corbyn by the Labour party, it may be harder for the Greens to claim to be unique in offering an internationalist position on immigration, with several party leaders voicing an unambiguously pro-migration agenda.

The Green strategy in 2015 was to appeal to voters who felt left out or demotivated by the moderation of major parties, seeking the broad support necessary to govern. The party may face a surprisingly different context in this Parliament. Across the key themes of its anti-austerity, pro-immigration and environmental agenda, the Green Party may now find itself in the unusual position, for a so-called 'fringe' party, of competing with one of the major parties, the Corbyn-led Labour party, for very similar political space.

The Green Party will continue to be an internationalist, pro-migration voice in public debates, as it has shown in its vigorous support for "welcome refugees" campaigns. That campaign has mobilised a greater breadth and intensity of pro-migration public activism – with broad support from across the political spectrum as a result. While it may make the electoral and political tactics more difficult, forming part of these broader alliances could prove rather better for the causes that the party is championing than being a lonely voice making the positive case for immigration.

7. How different was Scotland?

The public desire for a ‘Goldilocks’ debate on immigration

There was no single British General Election result in 2015.

Only the Liberal Democrats achieved a consistent performance – albeit an abject one – across England, Scotland and Wales, as Professor John Curtice has noted. There were two big winners of the General Election, though with contrasting methods of victory: an SNP avalanche that tore up the election record books and rewrote the Scottish political map; and the precision targeting which saw the Conservatives pick off the seats they needed for an overall majority.

Labour did remain ahead in Wales, where an unusually distinctive election result has gone almost unremarked outside the principality. Labour won its second-lowest post-war share of the vote (36.9%), with the Conservatives enjoying their best performance for thirty years (27.2%), and UKIP taking 13.6% of the vote to knock Plaid Cymru, the party of Wales, into fourth place on 12.1%.

Scots had previously treated different elections as distinct contests – backing Labour in the 2010 Westminster general election before awarding the SNP a majority for Holyrood in 2011. That changed in 2015, with the SNP winning nine out of ten votes from those who had voted Yes to independence, and one in ten of those who had voted no.

Figure 15: How Scotland Voted: General Election 2015

How Scotland Voted: General Election 2015	
SNP	50% - 56 seats
Labour	24% - 1 seat
Conservative	15% - 1 seat
Lib Dem	8% - 1 seat
UKIP	2%
Greens	1%
Others	0.3%

How different is Scotland?

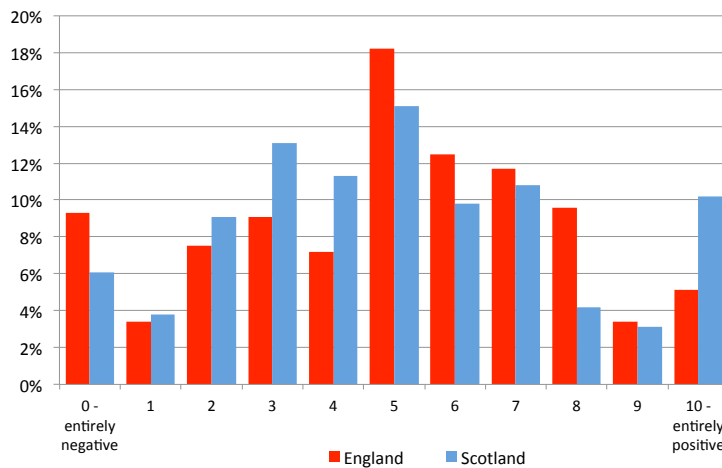
While Scotland has a distinctly more welcoming political and media discourse on immigration, it was not the SNP’s inclusive, welcoming and (moderately) positive approach to managed migration that won popular support. This did, however, form part of the party’s narrative, about a new Scotland, and clearly proved no barrier to an historic landslide.

The SNP took a measured, pro-immigration stance in its election manifesto, advocating the combination of ‘effective immigration controls’ while remembering that those who have come to Scotland ‘make a significant contribution to our economy and our society’. In arguing for ‘sensible immigration policies that meet our economic needs’ the SNP said its priority would be to seek the reintroduction of post study work visas for international students.

In the televised leaders debate, Nicola Sturgeon sought to directly challenge UKIP leader Nigel Farage, arguing that he should “put the bogeyman to one side and debate these issues for real”. UKIP found it much harder to win support in Scotland, taking just 1.6% of the vote there, compared to 14% in Wales and England. UKIP did win over 10% of the Scottish vote in the 2014 European elections, though again this was around a third of their GB-wide share.

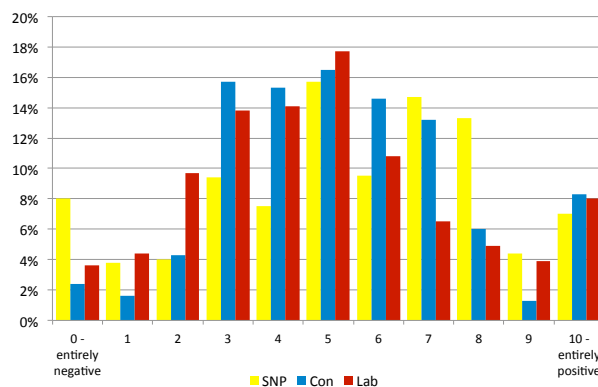
Several studies have shown that public attitudes in Scotland are mildly less sceptical about immigration, but they are not dramatically different to the rest of the UK. Levels of immigration are lower in Scotland. The 2001 census showed that just under 370,000 people (7%) of those resident in Scotland were born outside of the UK, though this had nearly doubled since 2001. Attitudes towards the EU are also a little warmer. The Survation post-election poll confirms a broadly similar spread of views on immigration North and South of the border when Scots are asked to rate the contribution of immigration on a 0-10 scale.

Figure 16: Immigration 0-10 scores, Scotland and England.



By party, SNP voters are mildly more pro-migration than Scottish voters for other parties. There remains, however, a minority of more migration-sceptic SNP voters, particularly among those with a ‘Scottish not British’ identity, reflecting the views of some long-standing supporters of Scottish independence prior to the modernisation of the party from the 1990s that broadened the party’s appeal.

Figure 17: Scotland 0-10 immigration scores by party



Scots want to hear politicians talk about immigration - especially if they're not from UKIP

British Future's 'How to Talk About Immigration' suggested that Scots were "particularly likely to take the middle ground view that there are both pressures to manage and benefits to be secured from immigration". This 'moderate majority' feature of Scottish attitudes is again captured in the new post-election poll findings from Survation.

Asked about the general tone of the immigration debate during the election, we find a strikingly mixed and ambivalent picture.

Many Scots were worried that the election debates risked stirring up prejudice: a concern held by 48% of Scots, while 20% disagreed.

Yet even more Scottish respondents were concerned that politicians in the campaign had been 'scared to talk about immigration for fear of offending sensibilities'. 59% agreed that had happened – and only 13% disagreed.

Voters were ambivalent about whether the immigration debate had become 'dangerously overheated' or had, overall, been 'sensible' and not risked crossing over into prejudice. Three out of ten Scots supported those characterisations of the debate and three out of ten disagreed with them, with a similar proportion somewhere in between.

These responses suggest a Scottish desire for a "Goldilocks" debate on immigration – not too hot to stir up divisions, but nor too cold to debate the pressures that need to be addressed. Many felt the 2015 election failed to get the temperature right.

The reasoning behind those mixed responses to the election campaign as a whole becomes clearer when we look at views of how specific political parties talked about the issue of immigration.

Many Scots clearly feel that some politicians overstepped the mark while others risked ducking the debate. Most Scots believe that UKIP talked too much about immigration and risked crossing the line into prejudice, but many did want to hear the other parties talking more about immigration.

Most voters tended to think the SNP paid about the right amount of attention to the issue – but more than a third of Scots thought that the Conservatives, Labour, Lib Dems and the Greens all said too little about immigration in the 2015 campaign. The idea that Cameron or Miliband was stoking concerns about immigration was very much a minority view in Scotland.

Figure 18: Did Scots think each party talked too little or too much about immigration in the election campaign?

	Too much	About right	Too little
UKIP	62%	29%	9%
SNP	11%	58%	31%
Conservative	21%	43%	36%
Labour	10%	46%	44%
Lib Dem	9%	44%	48%
Green	7%	45%	48%

That desire to hear politicians, from parties other than UKIP, speak more about immigration could reflect an appetite to hear more about the benefits as well as the pressures of immigration, with some respondents concerned that the positive counter-view about the contributions of immigration was not being sufficiently voiced.

Yet it was Scots with sceptical views about immigration that gave this response more frequently. 6 in 10 of them wanted to hear more discussion of immigration issues from Labour and the Lib Dems, compared to just 3 in 10 of those with liberal views on immigration.

While Scots may have broadly similar views of immigration to other Britons, they are currently considerably more sceptical about whether UKIP are making a constructive contribution to political debate on the issue. Most Scots fear that the party risks bringing prejudice into debates about immigration.

While English respondents who share some of those concerns also tend to see UKIP as a significant new political voice playing a constructive democratic role, this remains a minority view among Scots, who continue to question the mainstream credentials of the Eurosceptic party. A third of Scots say that they see UKIP mainly as ‘an important new voice who are just saying what most people think’ - a minority, though one that goes well beyond the very small proportion of Scots who voted for the party in 2014 or 2015.

Stronger suspicion of UKIP’s voice and contribution

Figure 19: Positive views of UKIP in Scotland

	Agree	Disagree	Neither	Scot Net	English net
Mainly a mainstream party with a right to their view	28	39	28	-11	+15
I see UKIP as an important new voice just saying what most people think	31	45	21	-14	+14
UKIP should not change their approach even if some people think they go too far	27	39	28	-12	+8

Figure 20: Negative views of UKIP in Scotland

	Agree	Disagree	Neither	Scot Net	English net
I see UKIP as a dangerous and divisive party	63	17	17	+46	+18
UKIP risk bringing prejudice into debates about immigration	68	13	17	+55	+34
‘Racist’ is a fair description of UKIP	52	30	n/a	+22	-3

English and Scottish respondents both, on balance, share concerns about UKIP's impact on debates about immigration, but there is much broader agreement about this among Scots. A slim majority of Scots say that 'racist' is a fair description of UKIP, though 30% of Scots say that this is unfair, while English respondents would acquit the party on this, by 43% to 40%.

The negative Scottish reaction to the 2015 UKIP election campaign presents some important challenges to campaigners for Britain to leave the European Union in a referendum. Strikingly, 44% of Scots who are negative about the EU and 61% of those who are on the fence feel that UKIP talked too much about immigration in the campaign, as do 78% of pro-EU Scots.

So a "better off out" campaign that wants to win Scottish votes – which may be indispensable to winning a majority for a British exit, or indeed to maintaining the UK while doing so – almost certainly needs to strike a rather different tone from that which Scots felt David Coburn and Nigel Farage offered them in UKIP's 2015 general election campaign.

Euroscptics need to broaden their arguments beyond immigration to get a hearing in Scotland– but Scots would also like to hear other parties engage more confidently with the challenges of managing rising immigration effectively.

8. The new floating voters

Why the ethnic minority vote is increasingly up for grabs

The ethnic minority vote has moved from the margins into the mainstream of British General Elections. With around one in ten votes being cast by non-white Britons, any party that wants to win an election needs to win votes from voters of every ethnic background.

As most British voters became less partisan over the last few decades, ethnic minority voters stood out as retaining considerably higher levels of partisan identity and allegiance, particularly to the Labour party, than their fellow citizens. In 2010, Conservative strategists noted that ‘the number one driver of not voting Conservative is not being white’.

The Conservatives won only around one in six ethnic minority votes in 2010 and this ‘ethnic gap’ hit their prospects in enough marginal seats to prevent the party winning an overall majority. The party found that it struggled to win upwardly mobile ethnic minority voters who had a similar socio-economic background to other Conservative voters, or those whose views of key issues, such as tax, spending and the economy, or social issues such as the role of the family, were closer to the right than the left.

As the ethnic minority vote continues to grow, one of the big questions in British electoral politics is how far ethnicity will remain a significant driver of political choice – or whether ethnic minority voting might begin to converge with broader voting patterns, splitting more evenly between the parties, based on socio-economic factors or views of the major issues of the day. There is now growing evidence that a large and growing number of ethnic minority voters can also be seen as ‘floating voters’ whose votes are up for grabs between parties and candidates.

How quickly this develops will depend both on social changes – including economic opportunity, integration and identity in British society – and also on the political choices that party leaders and candidates make in seeking to win support from Britons of every ethnic background. Striking the right balances to find the common ground on immigration and integration will be important to achieving that. Research shows that ethnic minority voters are more positive about the contribution of immigration to Britain – and that they will be repelled by arguments that present immigration as an existential, cultural threat to British identity. But ethnic minority Britons don’t want politicians to keep quiet about immigration out of fear of stirring up a controversial issue: rather there is an appetite to hear politicians talk more about constructive ways to manage the pressures of immigration and to secure its benefits to Britain.

Ethnic minority voting in the 2015 General Election

The Survation/British Future poll, the first full survey of ethnic minority voting since the general election, suggests that the Conservatives achieved their strongest ever performance with ethnic minority voters in 2015.

Figure 21: Ethnic minority vote share by ethnicity

	Asian	Black
Labour	50%	67%
Conservative	38%	21%
Lib Dem	5%	3%
UKIP	2%	1%
Green	4%	5%

The poll finds that Labour won the largest share of the ethnic minority vote on 52 per cent, with the Conservatives on 33 per cent. The Liberal Democrats and the Greens secured five per cent each, with UKIP on 2 per cent.

It also finds increasing differentiation within the ethnic minority vote. Labour had a much stronger lead with black voters – by 67 per cent to the Conservatives’ 21 per cent – while the Tories took 38 per cent of the Asian vote with Labour on 50 per cent.

British Muslim respondents voted Labour by 64 per cent to 25 per cent and ethnic minority Christians preferred Labour by 56 per cent to 31 per cent. Yet our poll finds the Conservatives ahead with Hindu voters – by 49 per cent to 41 per cent.

Figure 22: Ethnic minority vote share by religion

	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Sikh
Labour	56%	64%	41%	41%
Conservative	31%	25%	49%	49%
Lib Dem	4%	4%	7%	4%
UKIP	2%	1%	1%	1%
Green	4%	5%	1%	4%

The survey also suggests a significant regional dimension to the ethnic minority vote in 2015. Labour retains a considerably stronger lead in the North (60 per cent to the Conservatives’ 26 per cent) and Midlands (60 per cent to 28 per cent) but the parties were close to neck-and-neck in southern England, where the Conservatives took 40 per cent to Labour’s 43 per cent. Labour’s share of minority votes in London was 54 per cent, with the Conservatives winning just over one in three votes (34 per cent).

Figure 23: Ethnic minority vote share by region

	London	Midlands	North	South
Labour	54%	60%	60%	43%
Conservative	34%	28%	26%	40%
Lib Dem	5%	3%	7%	8%
UKIP	2%	2%	2%	2%
Green	4%	6%	5%	7%

Labour appears to have won ethnic minority votes in the wrong places to make a difference in electoral terms, advancing in safe seats while slipping in marginals. The Runnymede Trust notes that around half of the ethnic minority population lives in seats that are more than one-third ethnic minority, while half do not. In the most ethnically diverse seats the Labour vote went up, as it did in other Labour heartland safe seats. Yet the Conservatives were particularly successful in targeting voters in marginal constituencies – and appear to have become increasingly confident of competing for the growing number of ethnic minority votes in marginals with middling levels of ethnic diversity, particularly in areas where voters have felt the benefits of economic recovery.

In Watford, where a quarter of voters are non-white, the Conservative vote was up nine per cent, turning a three-way marginal in 2010 into a majority of nearly 10,000. The growing Conservative vote in increasingly ethnically mixed towns, such as Bedford, Crawley, Milton Keynes, Reading, Swindon and Wycombe, suggests a similar story – with the Conservatives able to find more than enough new voters to outweigh those who deserted the party for UKIP.

Up for grabs: the increasing ethnic minority floating vote

This evidence of long-awaited Conservative progress with ethnic minority voters has been greeted with cautious optimism by party strategists and thinkers, though warnings against complacency are equally common. The Survation poll findings suggest that they should be heeded.

The Conservatives were successful in advancing with ethnic minority voters, as those who preferred David Cameron as Prime Minister and didn't want to risk the economic recovery found themselves following that logic to a Conservative vote. The poll suggests that these may often have been 'Cameron voters' as much as Conservative voters, and that the party has further work to do if it is to retain these votes or extend its appeal among minority voters.

Most ethnic minority voters who backed the Conservatives in 2015 say they might not do so again in future. 54% of those who voted Conservative in 2015 say they could well change their minds in future, while 17% disagree. 47% of Labour ethnic minority voters say they could change their minds, while 32% disagree.

There is also scope for the Conservatives to expand their support further. 29% of ethnic minority voters who did not support the Conservatives say that they considered doing so in 2015.

Overall, however, the Labour party appears to have a stronger core of committed support and a bigger pool in which to fish for future votes. 48% of minority voters who didn't vote Labour would consider doing so. Labour may also still be trying harder at grassroots level: a majority 52% say that Labour contacted them during the 2015 campaign, while 40% recall contact from the Conservatives.

Most ethnic minority Britons (54%) believe that the Labour party tries to treat people from all ethnic backgrounds fairly – but only 29% currently say that is true of the Conservative Party. For Conservatives, continuing to shift this perception is likely to be crucial to expanding the party's potential support.

Over a third of non-white Britons say the Conservative Party has not yet done enough to reach out to ethnic minority voters, while only 16% say this about Labour. Black, Muslim and mixed race voters are most likely to think that the Conservatives have not done enough to reach out to ethnic minorities.

Figure 24: Do parties try to treat people from all ethnic backgrounds fairly?

All ethnic minority respondents	Does try to treat all fairly	Hasn't reached out to enough minorities	Too favourable to minorities	Don't Know
Conservative	29	36	18	17
Labour	54	16	12	18

Figure 25: "Conservatives have not done enough to reach out to ethnic minorities"

Mixed Race	40%
Black	41%
Muslim	35%
White	24%

How far do ethnic minority voters think differently about immigration?

The historic differences in ethnic minority voting patterns arose in large part from the politics of immigration and race relations during the decades when those issues were mostly conflated. Enoch Powell had given his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech to oppose the first anti-discrimination legislation, calling for the voluntary repatriation of as many Commonwealth immigrants as possible. The political fallout entrenched a strong perception that Labour was broadly 'on the side' of ethnic minority Briton in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The Conservatives were seen as more distant, ambivalent and internally divided, with some prominent party figures voicing highly sceptical views about the contribution of minorities to British society.

Our Survation poll following the 2015 General Election shows how this voting bloc is now fragmenting, and up for grabs as never before.

While the future is highly unpredictable, the one certainty is that the days of a one party monopoly of the ethnic minority vote are surely gone forever. It is unlikely that any party will ever again hope to win 75% to 80% of the vote, and certainly not to do so regardless of how their broader political fortunes waxed or waned, as the Labour party did in securing a similarly overwhelming share of the ethnic minority vote in both 1983 and 1997, while other voters responded rather differently to the party of Michael Foot and Tony Blair. That will never return, given that it is inconceivable that the Conservative party will resurrect the race politics of Enoch Powell.

Whether Labour maintains its slimmer lead or the Conservatives erode it further, or indeed other parties compete for these votes, will depend on what the parties do to earn the support of ethnic minority voters.

The fall in party allegiance is at least in part a product of economic, educational and cultural integration into the norms of a more sceptical democracy. It gives ethnic minority voters more electoral power if several parties are competing actively for their votes. While there is increasing awareness that the days of an ethnic minority bloc vote are long gone, rather little detail is known. There has been a lot of focus on the diverging patterns of Asian and black voters, or Hindus and Muslims, but considerably less is known about how other factors - region and place, levels of education and whether voters are employed in the public or private sectors - may prove just as significant. Ethnic minority voters are, on average, much younger, but little is known about the generational shifts between minority communities.

Jeremy Corbyn's party may offer a more vocal anti-racist and pro-equality argument, which may resonate and reconnect with those who feel that the party has slipped into seeing ethnic minorities as a 'core vote' that can be taken for granted. The new leader's ambition to expand the electorate by appealing to non-voters should also pay attention to under-registration of ethnic minority voters, as well as among young people more generally, though the party will reap an electoral benefit only if this has an impact outside its inner city strongholds into marginal seats held by the Conservatives.

There is also a very significant opportunity for the Conservative party to seal the deal with its first time ethnic minority voters. The party of George Osborne and Sajid Javid may well appeal more strongly to different non-white voters than Jeremy Corbyn. If educationally and economically successful ethnic minority voters believe that the Labour party has positioned itself almost entirely on the side of protecting the underdog, those who do not identify as themselves as being in need of that support may follow the C2 voters of the Thatcher era in seeing a switch of political allegiances as a 'trading up' part of upward mobility in British society.

The Survation findings offer clear evidence that ethnic minorities do think more positively about immigration than most voters. There are some migration sceptics from ethnic minorities but most non-white Britons think very differently about immigration than the most 'left behind' voters who hold strong cultural as well as economic fears about immigration.

But the research also casts doubt on the idea that ethnic minority voters have views that are incompatible with those of other citizens, especially the 'anxious middle' who recognise both the pressures and benefits of immigration to Britain. There is little evidence to suggest that politicians would risk losing ethnic minority support if they respond to public anxieties about immigration with constructive ideas about managing the pressures and benefits of immigration to Britain. There is little evidence to suggest that politicians would risk losing ethnic minority support if they respond to public anxieties about immigration with constructive ideas.

- Ethnic minorities are distinctly more positive than white voters about the contribution that immigration makes to Britain. The majority of non-white Britons are part of the ‘anxious middle’, seeing both pressures and gains from immigration, but lean towards seeing both the economic and cultural gains of immigration as outweighing the costs.

Figure 26: What do ethnic minorities think about immigration?

	Rejectionists	Anxious middle	Liberals
White	23%	63%	15%
Asian	6%	59%	35%
Black	3%	64%	33%

- Ethnic minority Conservatives are the most pro-migration Conservative voters. Non-white Conservatives are not quite as positive about immigration as ethnic minority Labour voters, but they are warmer toward immigration than the median Labour voter. Overall, non-white Conservatives hold a similar mix of views on the gains and pressures of immigration to Lib Dem voters

UKIP was distinctly unsuccessful with ethnic minorities – winning one in 50 votes, compared with one in six votes among white Britons. UKIP did win around 60,000 ethnic minority votes – but 3.8 million of its 3.88 million votes came from white voters. The Survation poll shows that 15% of ethnic minority voters say that they did or would consider voting for UKIP, but two-thirds of non-white Britons say they would never vote UKIP.

By 70% to 8%, non-white voters thought that UKIP ‘risked bringing prejudice into debates about immigration’, with 65% of ethnic minority respondents saying they regarded the party’s contribution as ‘dangerous and divisive’. 29% of non-white Britons regard UKIP as an ‘important new voice’ saying what most people think.

Ethnic minority voters could be attracted by arguments for selective and restricted immigration – such as an Australian-style points system – but it is clear that Nigel Farage’s arguments, about immigration making Britain “unrecognisable”, repelled most ethnic minority voters and made it impossible for them to consider the party, even as his sentiments resonated with some other sections of the electorate.

Farage has said that “the only people who think UKIP are racist are white people, middle class white people”(3), arguing that this is part of the “self-loathing” of the liberal elite. The Survation poll found otherwise - a majority (55%) of ethnic minority respondents think the party can fairly be described as ‘racist’, while 22% disagree and 24% don’t know. This clearly demonstrates that the party has some way to go before non-white Britons concur with the UKIP leader that the party is a moderate and inclusive voice on race.

This aversion to UKIP does not mean that ethnic minority voters do not want to see politicians talk about immigration. Ethnic minority Labour voters are particularly positive about immigration – but the Survation poll findings do not find any evidence to support the view that Labour’s approach to immigration in 2015 was too tough for them. Across ethnic and faith minority groups, only around one in ten voters suggested that Labour talked ‘too much’ about immigration, while significantly larger numbers of

non-white voters feel that Labour had too little to say about immigration. Most non-white voters thought the party got the balance about right in its 2015 campaign.

Figure 27: Did Labour talk too much or too little about immigration?

	White (British)	White (other)	Mixed	Asian	Black
Too much	10%	13%	11%	11%	8%
About right	43%	66%	55%	58%	59%
Too little	48%	21%	34%	31%	33%

Why ethnic minorities still trust politicians on immigration

Ethnic minority voters go somewhat against the political zeitgeist in being rather more inclined to trust politicians on immigration than their fellow citizens – though non-white Britons do make an exception for UKIP’s Nigel Farage.

For ethnic minorities in 2015, the political leader who ethnic minorities trusted most on immigration was Labour leader Ed Miliband, while it is also striking that there were positive responses to leading figures across the party political spectrum, with David Cameron, Boris Johnson and outgoing Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg all winning net positive ratings.

The politicians most trusted on immigration by ethnic minorities appear to be those who speak about the benefits as well as the pressures of immigration. Home Secretary Theresa May, who tends to take a tougher line, was regarded less positively than her Conservative colleagues. However, the Home Secretary divided opinion among ethnic minority Britons pretty evenly – perhaps suggesting an appreciation that she has a difficult job to do. While the Home Secretary scored a +2 net rating, she did not join Nigel Farage in being mistrusted on immigration by most ethnic minority voters.

Figure 28: Who do ethnic minority voters trust on immigration?

	Trust	Distrust	Ethnic minority net trust	General population net trust
Ed Miliband	59	29	+30	-12
Boris Johnson	50	35	+15	-7
David Cameron	52	38	+14	+10
Nick Clegg	45	40	+5	-8
Theresa May	41	39	+2	-1
Nigel Farage	27	61	-34	-10
Migrant of 15 years	68	17	+51	+33
Migrant of 15 years who is a British citizen	74	13	+61	+51

9. Beyond the election: challenges for a new Parliament

After a period of comparative quiet on immigration during the election campaign, immigration is firmly back in the headlines. Having avoided talking about immigration, where possible, on the campaign trail, the re-elected Prime Minister immediately took “personal control” of the issue, within three weeks of the election.

The occasion was the quarterly net migration figures, which rose in May and then hit an all-time high in August, as the government found itself further and further from its pledge to reduce the numbers to ‘tens of thousands’.

Within weeks, the Government then found itself responding to public pressure to be more welcoming to refugees. Debate around the Syrian refugee crisis shifted dramatically in early September, catalysed by the publication of a photograph of Aylan Kudi, a three-year-old child who drowned off the coast of Turkey.

Most UK newspapers carried the photograph in sympathetic front-page stories about refugees, including outlets such as the Daily Mail and The Sun that have tended towards a more sceptical stance on immigration. There was considerable mobilisation of liberal pro-migration sentiment, with hundreds of thousands signing a petition calling for more action from the UK government. An unusually broad coalition of political support urged further action, with strikingly few public voices willing to speak out in opposition to the UK resettling more refugees from Syria.

As the campaigns gear up to fight the EU referendum, perhaps the dominant issue of this Parliament, the question of how prominent immigration will be, both to the Prime Minister’s renegotiation and reform agenda and to the campaign for leaving the EU, has also hit the headlines once more. It appears clear that while immigration may have briefly ‘gone away’ as an issue during the election, it is unlikely to do so again.

‘Refugees Welcome’ - how do we keep it that way?

On 7 September, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by the end of this Parliament, adding that the UK has a “moral responsibility” to do more to help those living in refugee camps in countries bordering Syria.

There are some important lessons for those seeking to maintain the momentum of the ‘Refugees Welcome’ campaign, and for the Government as it implements the Prime Minister’s commitment to increased resettlement.

The response to the Syrian refugee crisis represented a significant shift in public, media and political discourse on refugee and asylum issues, as thousands of Britons were moved to press for humanitarian action. It would be unwise, however, to interpret this as a shift in overall attitudes to immigration, on which public opinion remains as nuanced as before.

There has always been a substantial level of public support for the basic principle for refugee protection. The change in media and political discourse has provided space for pro-migration advocates to become more confident and vocal, and a challenge for them will be to maintain this momentum, particularly if the immigration debate becomes focused on the negative numbers frame again when new ONS immigration figures come out in November, if not before.

That said, many people will have been drawn to take action - whether through a mouseclick, attending a rally or offering a place for refugees to stay - who would not ordinarily speak up for the rights of refugees. Like the broad political coalition that helped press the Government to respond, campaigners should view this broad public coalition, of migration liberals and members of the ‘anxious middle’ who also hold concerns about the impacts of immigration, as influential and worth preserving.

Responses to the resettlement announcement focusing entirely on the negative - that the UK’s response was paltry compared to that of some other countries - will have held little appeal to this group, and will appear counterintuitive to those who feel that numbers are already rather high. Polarising on party political lines is also deeply unhelpful: far better to welcome the breadth of cross-party support for the basic principle of refugee protection. Billy Bragg and Jeremy Corbyn’s rendition of Labour’s ‘Red Flag’ anthem at the ‘Refugees Welcome’ rally will have immediately made attendees who don’t share those party politics feel not very welcome at all. Perhaps the themetune to the Archers or Match of the Day would have been a more unifying choice.

As Syrian refugees start to arrive in the UK under the new scheme, it is important that the Government draws on the well of public sympathy and willingness to do something to help. Resettlement should not just be the job of local government alone, but could actively involve the communities that refugees are joining, together with voluntary sector organisations with the relevant expertise. Effective coordination between national and local government will be important to getting integration right, but ensuring that those members of the public who want to offer assistance are given opportunities to make a useful contribution could contribute positively to outcomes for refugees, and help to sustain support for a welcoming approach, locally and nationally.

This ought to be an approach that can appeal across the political spectrum. For Conservatives, civic engagement in welcoming and integrating refugees could be a good example of what the ‘big society’ was trying to aim for. For Labour, a positive approach to integration could helpfully inform the party’s approach to the refugee crisis. Outgoing shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper made a highly influential intervention in September, calling successfully on the government to expand its resettlement programme. Cooper has agreed with new leader Jeremy Corbyn that she would now act as a party envoy on the British and European response to the refugee crisis. The taskforce could play an important role in championing the involvement of citizens in resettlement plans, and contribute to building cross-party support for how this could have a central role in local welcoming plans.

The numbers headache

The quarterly immigration figures have become a regular reminder to the public of the Government’s failure to meet its net migration target. For the Government, there is a need to build greater public trust in its ability to handle the issue. Yet to date it has offered the public no public plan or road-map towards achieving its headline target on net migration.

It will surely want to remedy this. The worst way to make immigration policy across this Parliament would be to fail to set out any coherent overall policy towards the target and, instead, to respond with another set of new controls whenever the quarterly immigration statistics show an increase. That would be akin to trying to control and eliminate the budget deficit without a Comprehensive Spending Review, and instead making a few unannounced new moves every few months to lop a bit more off Culture or Environment, or perhaps Education or Defence. If that would be no way to run spending policy, it is also no way to make the “difficult long-term decisions” on immigration that the Conservative manifesto discusses.

The Prime Minister and Home Secretary should start by announcing a Comprehensive Immigration Review, which takes a 360-degree look at the options available to the government and involves not just the policy stakeholders from every side of the debate but the general public too in the choices that ministers face.

A Comprehensive Immigration Review

As the Prime Minister has noted, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) exists to offer credible and independent advice to the government, to help it to make informed choices about its policy goals and to ensure there is strong and robust public policy evidence to inform Parliamentarians, the media and the public too.

Now that David Cameron has a majority to pursue his policy, the Home Secretary and Prime Minister should request that the MAC:

- Advises the government on the policy options that could enable annual net migration to fall to the government's target of 'tens of thousands', during this Parliament and/or the next.
- Sets out the best available evidence on the potential economic, social and cultural gains and risks of pursuing these policy options; as well as their compatibility with the UK's international commitments and obligations.
- Engages the full range of interested stakeholders and the public themselves to ensure their views about the potential benefits and costs of particular measures to control and reduce immigration further help to inform the government and Parliament about which choices to pursue.

The MAC should collect and publish the best evidence about how the target could be met. It could join forces with the Home Affairs Select Committee to hold public hearings to inform the debate, and to interrogate a range of responses. This should include those groups who successfully pressed for the Conservatives to retain their net migration target – such as the Balanced Migration Group of Parliamentarians, pressure groups Migration Watch and Population Matters, who can present their plans for meeting the target – as well as those who want to defend the gains of managed migration, such as employers, universities, the NHS and cultural bodies, who will have an opportunity to set out their case for why Britain is better off when people contribute skills that we need, and to offer clearer plans to deal with the impacts of high immigration levels, and to engage a sceptical public with the case for managing the pressures so as to keep the gains.

With public trust on immigration so low, however, this should not be a process that just takes place in Westminster. A comprehensive immigration review should directly engage the general public by holding public hearings outside Westminster, or engaging a 'citizens jury' – to offer their verdicts on which choices they would and would not be prepared to make..

There may turn out to be more common ground on some issues than many people expect.

The need for more resources for the immigration system to be effective and fair can unite those with different views on numbers. There is also a great deal of potential for agreement on the need to develop a coherent integration strategy to ensure that those migrants who do settle here learn English and become part of their local community.

A Comprehensive Immigration Review would be a sensible way to move the debate on from whether and how we can talk about immigration. Instead, it could help to establish how we actually want to resolve the trade-offs and choices that face not just David Cameron and his government, but the British public too.

After Cameron - which Conservative future on immigration?

For the Conservatives and centre right, the next big question is what the 2020 Conservative manifesto will say about immigration. Repeating the broken ‘tens of thousands’ pledge, mildly downgraded to an ‘ambition’, seemed something of a sticking plaster solution in 2010 – and it left ministers hoping to avoid the topic where possible. If net migration as currently measured were to remain a good deal above 200,000 across this Parliament (as appears considerably more likely than not), then it would be extremely difficult to credibly make the same pledge, and to hope that it might be third time lucky. The Conservative-led government’s reputation on immigration had already fallen to levels comparable to that of the outgoing Labour government. While the target remains in place, without progress being made towards it, then the quarterly public reminders that the government can’t do what it promised seem bound to erode public trust further.

The challenge of creating a practicable, politically viable and intellectually coherent centre-right politics of immigration is significant. What would a politically viable exit strategy from the current target look like? That the pledge was repeated, despite considerable scepticism inside as well as outside government about its practicability, showed that insufficient energy, time and political capital has gone into exploring this question. That probably cannot be avoided this time around. It may well make sense – both in terms of the substantive policy content, and as a matter of political sequencing too – to address the question fully once the result of the EU referendum is known.

It will then surely become a challenge that candidates for the next Conservative leadership contest will have to address. As that party contest, within the next three years, will also have the task of choosing the country’s next Prime Minister, candidates will have to engage MPs and the party selectorate with the case they will want to make to the country in 2020.

That will be an intriguing political contest. It seems likely to set the current Home Secretary, the vocal champion of the current policy – and a tougher regime to meet it – against rival candidates who have, rather more quietly, taken a different view on key policy questions such as EU free movement, international students and skilled migration.

The challenge to Home Secretary Theresa May would be to set out a credible case that the current target could be combined with a practicable, politically and economically viable agenda which could credibly pursue the current target, or perhaps a modified version of it. Other candidates, most notably the current favourite, Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, and possible candidates such as London Mayor Boris Johnson, Business Secretary Sajid Javid, or backbench contenders such as Owen Paterson or Liam Fox, have all in different ways taken a somewhat more liberal approach to immigration policy. They will be weighing-up whether and how they can make an attractive political case for an alternative, which both the party and the country would support.

It remains to be seen whether these potential candidates to lead the country, who take a somewhat more liberal view of immigration, will find the confidence to set it out - or whether they will believe that the ‘safety first’ option in a party contest is to converge on a position similar to that of Theresa May. But that is not a challenge that should be confined to the leadership candidates. Whether they have the political space to do so may also depend on how other opinion formers help to create it, and define a modern centre-right approach to the policy and political challenges of immigration.

This Conservative government is, politically, in a much stronger position than anybody would have anticipated ahead of an uncertain General Election. Its surprise majority victory has been combined with political convulsions affecting its main political opponents, which appear to give the Conservatives a significant opportunity to reshape the centre-ground of British politics. Conservative politicians and thinkers have shown a good deal of confidence when it comes to the economy, to work and welfare, and to public services. The 2015 campaign showed that the modern right demonstrates much less confidence when it comes to immigration – leading to its reluctance to discuss an issue on the campaign trail which many party strategists seemed to concede is “a UKIP issue”. The current net migration target was founded on the belief that it would be possible to offer a return to the ‘normal’ levels of net migration of the early 1990s, but that has not proved possible. Immigration remains the area on which the centre-right has perhaps most work to do on what its future political and policy offer should be.

How could business voices engage positively in the immigration debate?

This parliament could well see increased conflict between government and business over immigration policy. Quotas for skilled migrants, which were unfilled in the last Parliament, look set to bite much more often in this one. The government, with few policy options to control EU immigration, and with non-EU net migration well above the overall target on its own, is now looking at hardening policy further towards skilled migration, leading to concerns from many quarters, most vocally the tech sector and the NHS, about the impact on their ability to fill skills gaps. The departure of the pro-migration Liberal Democrats from government has also shifted the political veto points. It remains to be seen how far this might trigger a more active effort from pro-market Conservatives to defend skilled migration, as has been the case in the recent Cabinet split over the value of student migration.

How should economic advocates of the benefits of migration respond to a tougher context? Existing approaches will bring diminishing returns. Business advocates have presented evidence about the economic gains of migration and argued that these need to be protected from the public politics of immigration. Advocacy has typically involved combining detailed policy submissions, scrutinising new restrictive proposals, with the general argument that the net migration target is broken, irrational and damaging to economic growth. This approach may mitigate the impact of specific restrictive proposals, but it is insufficiently engaged with the challenge of how to influence the policy framework.

The challenge to business is to make its public arguments in a way that can get a hearing beyond the boardroom and the financial press, to public audiences that include the anxious middle as well as the economically confident and culturally secure. Business also needs to think about the political challenges of seeking to influence a shift in the policy framework. There is an increasingly broad consensus that the net migration has not worked. But that will not be enough to bring about change, unless critics of the target can propose viable alternatives to it that make both economic and political sense. It is unlikely that the answer to a broken target would be to abandon targets altogether.

Rather than calling for the economics and politics of migration to be kept separate, business advocates need to engage in an active search for constructive alternatives - proposing achievable targets which do defend the economic gains of migration and keep Britain open for business, while working out how economic actors can also contribute to constructive and practical proposals that can respond to public concerns about the pressures of migration.

Can new leaders avoid the same old arguments?

For the opposition parties, the Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn and the Liberal Democrats under Tim Farron may now adopt a rather clearer and simpler pro-migration public argument. On some issues, such as the principle of Britain playing its part in protecting and welcoming refugees, this could resonate quite broadly, so that principle and good politics combine.

On broader immigration issues, however, it is highly questionable as to whether an un-nuanced case for immigration is the most effective way to defend the gains it brings to Britain. Parties with a broadly pro-migration public reputation are always going to struggle to be trusted on the issue by those with the toughest anti-immigration attitudes. With voters whose top priority is getting the numbers down and leaving the EU to make that possible, parties that don't take those positions will have to accept that there are some people they can not reach.

That still leaves plenty of space, however, for the self-styled progressive parties to make a positive argument for immigration – but one that does not duck the challenge of securing majority public consent for how Britain can handle the levels of immigration we currently have. With the 'anxious middle' of the British public, paying considerably more attention to constructive responses to public concerns about how to manage the pressures of immigration should be an essential part of a politics that takes rebuilding public confidence and consent seriously.

It is this offer to the public – of a sensible, grown-up debate that acknowledges their legitimate concerns and offers practical solutions – that was lacking from the 2015 General Election. This may seem surprising, given the salience of immigration as an issue for voters both before and after the election. Yet it is, in fact, far closer to 'business as usual' in the immigration debate. Politicians from the main parties have consistently failed to offer the majority of the public the debate that they want. Those with more pro-migration views, including the Labour Party, have ducked the issue or changed the subject, equating concerns about the pressures of immigration with xenophobia or racism; their Conservative opponents have responded to public pressure with an unkept promise on net migration, and new 'crackdowns' each quarter to distract attention from their failings.

And so most of the noise in the immigration debate, during the election campaign and outside of it, has come from the anti-migration voice of UKIP, while other parties seemed to concede the issue entirely. For most voters, this means they didn't like what they heard. The majority in Britain is not 'pro' or 'anti' immigration – they are the 'anxious middle', worried about the pace and scale of immigration to Britain and its impacts, but aware of the benefits it can bring and generally positive about migrants themselves.

What we did not find out in this election is what happens when you give this majority group the immigration debate that they want. Not a toxified debate tinged with xenophobia, nor one which ducks the challenges of high migration, but a debate in which politicians engage and discuss voters' concerns about immigration, without stoking up prejudice or pandering to those with more extreme views, and offer their party's response to them. One suspects that were this to happen, politicians would not find a debate that is 'all pain and no gain' for them; they would find more balanced and reasonable views than they currently expect.

10. Notes and references

Unless otherwise stated, polling was conducted by Survation for British Future and surveyed 3,977 adults online across Great Britain from 8-14 May 2015, including 2,067 ethnic minority respondents and 1,056 respondents in Scotland. Survation is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

Ethnic minority sample sizes: total 2,067; voters 1,588; Asian 833, black 364, mixed/multiple race 269; Christian 512, Muslim 373, Hindu 223, Sikh 62, not religious 353; England 1,490, North 214, Midlands 298, London 527, South 451.

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.

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British Future...

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank

British Future
Kean House
6 Kean Street London, WC2B 4AS
Tel: 020 7632 9069
Fax: 020 7632 9061
www.britishfuture.org
info@britishfuture.org