

Immigration after May

What should the new Prime Minister change?

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Future...

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people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, opportunity
and identity, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain,
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I. Introduction: Immigration after May

Sunder Katwala, Director, British Future

“When I am dead and my body is opened, you shall find Calais written on my heart,” said Queen Mary I of England. The single word “Brexit” will surely dominate when the history books come to write of Prime Minister Theresa May.

Yet before that short premiership, in which she tried but failed to deliver Brexit, May was the longest serving Home Secretary for sixty years – and so the dominant figure across a decade on what has been the other most contentious political issue of our era: immigration.

Such longevity in a role notorious as a graveyard of ministerial careers is testament to May’s resilience and dutiful endurance. Yet her record on immigration was ultimately one of significant failure in both policy and politics. Indeed, it has a good claim to be one of the most consequential failures in modern British government, given how central the loss of public trust and confidence in British governments’ handling of immigration was to the 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union.

Immigration under May was, above all else, about cutting the numbers. Significant political capital was invested in a determined, dogged defence of the need to maintain the net migration target at the centre of the immigration framework, in the face of criticism from politics, business and civic society. Yet despite the pledge to cut net migration significantly, immigration rose rather than fell. Quarterly headlines about how the government was failing to keep its promises on immigration – having made a promise it could never realistically hope to keep – proved highly corrosive of public trust.

If the numbers proved stubbornly high, the response was to double-down with a tougher approach. The public do want governments to be able to demonstrate control, as well as competence, on immigration. Yet the intuition that whoever goes toughest on immigration would win the public’s trust proved mistaken in the case of the Windrush scandal. Theresa May’s Government lost a Home Secretary to the sense of public anger at a system which lost sight of the individual people it interacted with and its impact on their lives.

The approach to immigration under May was justified mainly by the need to give the public what they wanted. If the public proved unimpressed by the performance of the Government, that reflected a very closed approach, with immigration policy the jealously protected preserve of a tight group of government advisers. With

so little effort to build consensus across government, to encourage any parliamentary role or a voice for the public, it is little surprise that the sense of ownership has been so narrow.

So what of immigration after May?

Nobody wants to own a failure, so defenders of the May record and approach to immigration, inside or outside government, are now few and far between. Seizing the opportunity of a 'Reset moment' for immigration policy – and the broader public debate – depends on shifting gear, from critiques to solutions. That will depend on how the new Prime Minister seeks to shape the agenda – and how voices across politics, business and civic society seek to contribute and respond.

The Conservative leadership contest has been dominated by the Brexit stalemate – and the argument between advocates of a deal and no deal about how to unlock it ahead of the impending, extended October 31st deadline. Leadership candidates have pledged to deliver Brexit, while hoping not to lead a government defined or, indeed, engulfed by it as their predecessor's was. With immigration, unusually, not the headline-grabbing political issue that it once was, less attention has been paid to a remarkable summer of glasnost on immigration. Whatever else unites and divides the candidates across the different wings of the Conservative Party, just about all of the major contenders made moves to signal that they were, perhaps to differing degrees, looking to move the immigration debate on after Theresa May.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid has said that there is no point in setting a target that you can never meet. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said that the contribution of migration to the NHS made a compelling case for "global free movement" for doctors and nurses who the NHS sought to employ. Michael Gove, who chaired the Vote Leave campaign, championed an offer of free citizenship to EU nationals in the UK, arguing it would uphold the spirit of the commitments made during the referendum campaign and acknowledging that both the tone and content of Government policy had contributed to the unsettling anxiety felt by European citizens living here.

Of the final two candidates, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt set out his vision of Britain after Brexit in a recent Daily Mail interview, saying "at the point of Brexit we need to show the world that we're not going to change our fundamental national character, we're not going to be a country that changes from Great Britain into Little England and pulls down the shutters and says, foreigners not welcome." He added that he would review the proposed £30,000 salary threshold for skilled migrants and said "I am not a supporter of the 'tens of thousands' target." Frontrunner Boris Johnson has proposed a points-based system, combining control with an openness to skilled migration; his supporters, keen to burnish his One Nation credentials, recall that the former Mayor of London once described himself as the only politician in Britain prepared to call himself 'pro-immigration'.

These are significant symbolic as well as practical gestures towards the possibility of a new approach – but the challenge will be to craft that into a substantive and sustained agenda for reform.

Shifting public attitudes on immigration offer an opportunity. The salience of immigration has dropped and attitudes have become warmer and less sceptical. Most people are balancers, seeing both pressures and gains from immigration².

Attitudes remain mixed. People are still sceptical about the competence of governments and the scale and pace of immigration (though less intensely than before), while welcoming those who contribute to our society. Seizing the ‘Reset moment’ depends on finding a viable resolution to the Brexit crisis too.

A new Prime Minister could go with the grain of public attitudes with a less one-size-fits-all approach to migration. That could reflect the broad social and political consensus on student and skilled migration – while seeking to build pragmatic support for striking the right balances on low and semi-skilled migration, better managed and controlled, and combined with the skills strategies we need at home.

Public confidence in immigration is rooted in perceptions of how integration is going. A step-change on a positive, proactive approach to citizenship and integration would fill a vacuum in the policy agenda. That could include investment in the provision of English language classes as an essential foundation; asking business to play its part in local integration; promoting contact and tackling prejudice.

The next Government can build on the success of local engagement in the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme to maintain Britain’s traditions of protecting refugees in ways that proactively promote the integration of those making a new life in Britain. Doing so – and expanding the programme – could also help to build public confidence that Britain can and should play its part.

After May, the immigration debate can change. Immigration will continue to be a contested and controversial political issue, but politicians should not run away from engaging the public directly in the challenges they face.

The central challenge for Theresa May’s successor is how to restore public confidence in how we manage immigration and integration in Britain. That should be a goal widely shared by those across politics, business and civic society, who believe that immigration makes a positive contribution to Britain. The record of the last ten years offers many lessons in how not to secure public trust. It is time to move on and make the changes that can restore public confidence in how we make immigration work fairly for everyone.

2. What can Conservatives learn from May on immigration?

James Kirkup, Director, Social Market Foundation

*And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ozymandias* is often taught to schoolchildren, who read it as a warning about the fragility of human power. Conservatives should study it now and ensure they take an opportunity to learn from Theresa May's mistakes on immigration.

If there was one issue that helped Mrs May become, for a short time, a figure of "cold command" over her party, it was immigration. As Home Secretary and then Prime Minister, she was the senior figure at the top of the Conservative Party who consistently took the hardest line on the issue. By the mid-point of the 2010-2015 Coalition Government, David Cameron would privately concede that all of his ministerial colleagues no longer believed in the Conservatives' "tens of thousands" target, with the solitary exception of Mrs May.

After succeeding Mr Cameron in No 10, Mrs May stuck to that pledge even though she was once again alone in Cabinet in thinking it wise.

She also framed her entire Brexit strategy around her conviction that most of the electorate would always demand the hardest line possible on migration: the starting premise for the "red lines" she set out in the autumn of 2016 was that freedom of movement must end, a condition that meant Britain must leave the Single Market.

From a short-term political perspective, Mrs May's judgement was correct and her rigidity rewarded: she did, after all, become Prime Minister and enjoy a short period of significant popularity.

That all now lies in ruins. Mrs May is leaving office, voters largely regarding her a failure even on the issue that made her. As ICM polling for this report sets out, trust in Mrs May over immigration eroded sharply: barely 18% now believe she handled the issue well.

Mrs May and her approach to immigration are crumbling into dust, but the Conservatives now have a chance to build a more sustainable and sensible migration policy on the lone and level sands she leaves behind.

To do that though, they need to draw two lessons from Mrs May's experience.

The first is that opinion on immigration is more subtle and varied than Mrs May calculated. She acted as if there was – and always would be – a solid majority of the electorate who were strongly in favour of more restrictive policy and rhetoric.

Mrs May's mistakes were several here. She mistook the vocal and committed minority – a fifth of the electorate, say – who are strongly opposed to immigration for a majority. In that, she overlooked the softer opinions of those in the middle of this debate, whose worries about immigration have been easing since the early years of this decade (around the time Mr Cameron began ramping up his rhetoric against immigration in fear of Nigel Farage's Ukip, as it happens). She also failed to see that the salience of immigration can go down as well as up. Voters used to see it as one of the most important issues in politics. Now they don't.

Exactly why remains somewhat unclear: are concerns relaxing because voters now believe the UK has greater scope to control migration? Or has a fuller political debate about the role of immigration in modern Britain's economy and society simply changed some minds? In this context, it doesn't matter. What matters is that Mrs May was wrong to build her platform on the salience of anti-immigration sentiment as if it was solid rock.

The second lesson is about honesty in political conversation. The "tens of thousands" target was a case-study of dishonesty and misperception. Conjured up because it sounded clear and simple and like it would satisfy what was imagined to be public appetite on the migration issue, almost none of those who promoted it actually believed it was either a sensible or a practical policy. Even Mrs May, its last lonely defender, never truly pressed to actually achieve it: even while free movement was in place, she could have dramatically restricted non-EU migration in an effort to drive net migration below that arbitrary level of 100,000. That she did not suggests that even she didn't believe it was worth paying the economic, social and perhaps diplomatic price that would be required to deliver on that promise.

Instead of an honest conversation with voters about the merits and costs of immigration, and the consequences and practicality of different migration policies, Mrs May oversaw a prolonged exercise in over-promising and under-delivering. It is not hard to trace a line between that record on immigration and the return to the political fore of Nigel Farage.

Perhaps Mrs May's successors will be tempted to frame their migration policies with Mr Farage and his supporters in mind, in

much the same way she did. But a Conservative Party that doubled down on anti-immigration messaging would risk repelling the degree-educated, urban and socially liberal Remain-leaning voters it needs to build the sort of electoral coalition that is a necessary condition of a sustainable Commons majority.

On the other side of the ledger, the Conservatives would be taking a greater gamble, entering an unwinnable auction of promises with Faragist populism.

For the recent history of Conservative politics over immigration shows that feeding the beast merely deepens its appetite. Mr Cameron steadily ramped up his promises and rhetoric over immigration from around 2012, hoping to see off Mr Farage. That strategy culminated in an EU referendum that followed on from an attempt to renegotiate Britain's EU membership, in which Mr Cameron set out what he saw as fundamental problems over free movement, then demonstrated his inability to solve them.

The Conservative path to sustainable politics and policy over immigration will not be as seductively easy as conjuring up more doomed promises. But can that be a worse choice than repeating the mistakes of Mr Cameron and Mrs May and hoping for different results?

There are signs that the party is willing to learn. The “tens of thousands” pledge will not long outlast Mrs May, though what the overall aim of migration policy will be under the next Conservative leader remains unclear.

None of this is to argue that the Conservatives should simply embrace a starkly liberal view of migration and ignore those voters who remain opposed to it. That would also play into Mr Farage's hands. If belief in British “control” at the border helps allay concerns about migration as a whole, delivering meaningful control – both in and out – should be a priority. For those voters who are concerned about what they believe to be immigration's impacts on public services – especially local ones – more accurate data on population levels and flows would be a good start to establishing a framework of policy that commands confidence. Might this mean considering some form of ID card scheme, or at least a German-style local registration regime? Such things may be necessary to win permission from the electorate for an immigration system that keeps Britain relatively open to the world.

There is also a much better Conservative story to be told about immigrants who come to work and settle in the UK. A Conservative Party truly intent on celebrating patriotism and hard work would seek to open a new national conversation about citizenship, celebrating industrious immigrants as the best of British. Wrap them in the flag and make them yours. There are lessons to be learned here from places including Canada, but Scotland isn't a bad place to start your studies: Ruth Davidson can help.

Talk more about the fact that not everyone who is in the UK is here with permission, and instead of simply chasing headlines with more doomed promises and ugly slogans (remember Mrs May's "Go Home or Face Arrest" vans?), explain the options to voters, and their costs: more of the "hostile environment" that caused such public concern? The alternatives to seeking the involuntary return of illegal migrants are either to permit them to stay or to seek more voluntary returns, perhaps by greater use of financial support and incentives. All of these options have costs and limitations and will require addressing voters and their concerns over immigration much more frankly than Mrs May ever did.

It is even possible that immigration could provide a route back to a better Conservative relationship with business, which also needs a better story to tell on this issue. Both the party and the leaders of British industry should learn from the coalition of US state and municipal leaders and business figures who make up the New American Economy project, which details – and celebrates – the contribution migrants make on a local level. (The most hard-headed Conservatives might be interested to learn that the project's founders include Rupert Murdoch.) An approach should be explored where business that sees economic advantage in an open immigration policy shares more of those gains with the UK workforce. That could be in the form of more support for skills and education services, with a regional dimension. More immigration means more apprenticeships, perhaps?

The most important thing Mrs May's successors should take from the ruins of her premiership is a determination not to repeat her fundamental misjudgement over immigration, either in duplicate or in reverse. She thought concern about immigration was rock solid, a fixture at the top of the public's priority list. She was wrong, but it would be equally wrong to assume that immigration's current absence from the agenda is a permanent situation. There are many reasons for immigration to rise up that list again.

Will ending free movement – which meant the UK could effectively ignore the immigration status of millions of foreign nationals – push questions about illegal immigration back into the public conversation? Should Britain strike trade deals with a country such as India, what degree of control over Indian immigration will it give up in return? Outside some of the EU's systems of control, how will Britain deal with the next great wave of migration from sub-Saharan Africa? Will an ageing population make it vital to recruit even more young labour from abroad?

Voters will always have questions over immigration. Conservatives need new answers.

Immigration after May

We asked voices from across politics, civic society and business for their answers to two key questions: 'What did May get right and wrong on immigration?' And 'What should the next PM do differently?' Their responses are featured throughout this report.

Nicky Morgan MP (Conservative):

"As Home Secretary Theresa May rightly realised that immigration does need to be controlled and she was prepared to challenge all the loopholes in the system. The harder part is balancing this with also developing an immigration system which allows families to be reunited, refugees the ability to find peace here, students to study and thrive here, employers to find the employees they need and the system to know when someone has overstayed their welcome and for them to be dealt with fairly and promptly. Our next PM needs to develop that balanced system and, in particular, to give back to 3m EU citizens the security they lost in 2016."

Afzal Khan MP, Labour Shadow Immigration Minister:

"Theresa May was the architect of a cruel and ineffective immigration system, which will reverberate through the lives of my constituents for generations.

Her failures on immigration are too many to list. She failed on refugees, on citizenship, on fees and on human rights. She dismantled appeal rights and made the immigration system so complex and expensive that it is almost impossible to navigate. She resisted resettling refugee children even when the Dubs amendment compelled her to.

Front and centre in her legacy is the hostile environment, which culminated in the Windrush crisis. Theresa May cut the border force, and turned teachers, nurses and landlords into immigration officers. There is no evidence that the hostile environment has driven lower levels of illegal migration. There is a wealth of evidence that it directly causes discrimination.

The next prime minister must immediately dismantle the hostile environment. We need full compensation for the Windrush generation, and a new approach to EU citizens to make sure no one is left behind. Then, the challenge is to establish an evidence-led immigration system, driven by the needs of our economy rather than scapegoating migrants."

Dr David G. Green, Director, Civitas:

"Theresa May was responsible for one of the of the biggest policy failures of the last century and for one of the greatest injustices of recent times. She failed to meet her own net migration target of 100,000 and unjustly promoted the deportation of many people of West Indian origin who had arrived here with their parents and who had every right to be treated as British citizens."

3. What does the public think? And what do they want now?

Steve Ballinger, British Future

ICM surveyed a nationally representative sample of 2,016 GB adults for this report from 31 May to 3 June 2019. We asked people what they think about Theresa May's record on managing immigration as Home Secretary and Prime Minister, and about some of the policies she pursued. We also surveyed the extent to which the public trusts May and other politicians on this issue; and then looked forward to the priorities for May's successor, examining people's preferences for future immigration policy and flows of migration to the UK.

For a politician who set out her stall, both as Home Secretary and Prime Minister, as someone who would be tough on immigration in the belief that it would be popular with voters, the findings illustrate the failure of this strategy. Just 18% of the public - and only a quarter (25%) of those who voted for her in the 2017 General Election - agree that May did a good job managing immigration. 36% of those 2017 Tory voters actively disagree. Not all of the public mistrust falls at May's door, however, with harsh public verdicts on the Government's competence on immigration and politicians' leadership on the issue more generally.

(Note: for clarity we have excluded 'Don't know' and 'Neither agree nor disagree' answers from these tables, so percentage scores will not total 100. The questions did not necessarily appear in this order to respondents).

1. "Theresa May did a good job managing immigration as Prime Minister and Home Secretary."

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 18%	Agree: 25%
Disagree: 47%	Disagree: 36%

2. "On the whole, I feel that the Government has managed immigration into the UK competently and fairly."

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 13%	Agree: 13%
Disagree: 55%	Disagree: 55%

3. “Politicians have shown strong leadership on immigration.”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 13%	Agree: 13%
Disagree: 62%	Disagree: 69%

The National Conversation on Immigration in 2018, the biggest-ever public consultation on immigration, which surveyed nearly 20,000 people including in face-to-face meetings in every UK nation and region, revealed a striking lack of public trust on immigration. Little has changed over the last year, as our ICM poll found when it asked respondents how much they trust politicians on this important issue. The results highlight the extent to which trust and confidence have been undermined. While Theresa May is trusted on immigration by just 24% of the public and distrusted by 46% - a net trust score of minus 22 - she is not alone. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn fares worse, for example, distrusted on immigration by 56% of the public. Conservative leadership front-runner Boris Johnson is distrusted by 49% on immigration and trusted by 22%; his leadership rival Jeremy Hunt is distrusted by 41% on immigration and trusted by 13%. Sajid Javid and Dominic Raab fared somewhat better, with net trust scores of minus 16. Nigel Farage is distrusted by 48% of the public on immigration, trusted by 28%, a net score of minus 20.

Our ICM survey was taken by 179 ethnic minority respondents, a small sample but one that does enable comparison between the trust ratings of different politicians. Trust ratings tend to be lower among the overall UK population than among ethnic minority respondents. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn bucks this trend, with a low trust rating overall on immigration but a net positive rating among ethnic minority voters: reflecting the Labour Party's lead among ethnic minority voters overall and also that ethnic minorities tend to be less sceptical about the pace of immigration.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid, the first British Asian to hold the post, also fares better with ethnic minority voters than with white voters. He has a lukewarm trust rating overall, with half of voters not taking a view, but his positive trust score among ethnic minority voters (+9) matches that of the Labour party leader. Boris Johnson's trust rating with ethnic minority voters (-19) is negative but, in this poll, is somewhat better than with the overall population (-27). One possibility is that the polarisation of the Brexit referendum since 2012 is less intensely felt among ethnic minorities than among white British voters.

4. “For each of the following politicians, please tell us how much, if at all, you trust them on the issue of immigration.”

	Trust		Distrust		Neither trust nor distrust		Net trust score (trust minus distrust)	
	All GB	BME	All GB	BME	All GB	BME	All GB	BME
Theresa May	24%	29%	46%	44%	24%	17%	-22	-15
Vince Cable	21%	24%	33%	24%	28%	31%	-12	0
Dominic Raab	15%	20%	31%	22%	29%	30%	-16	-2
Sajid Javid	18%	32%	34%	23%	31%	31%	-16	+9
Nigel Farage	28%	22%	48%	44%	17%	21%	-20	-22
Nicola Sturgeon	20%	30%	43%	23%	22%	25%	-23	+7
Boris Johnson	22%	20%	49%	39%	21%	27%	-27	-19
Jeremy Hunt	13%	21%	41%	23%	29%	32%	-28	-2
Michael Gove	14%	19%	46%	35%	24%	27%	-32	-16
Jeremy Corbyn	19%	37%	56%	29%	18%	23%	-37	+8
Tony Blair	16%	25%	55%	36%	21%	27%	-39	-11
Diane Abbott	11%	23%	51%	24%	22%	32%	-40	-1
Tommy Robinson	8%	14%	52%	38%	16%	24%	-44	-24
Migrant of 15 years	24%	32%	20%	14%	34%	32%	+4	-18

Restoring trust

Our research also looked ahead to what May’s successor should do to help restore public trust in the Government on immigration. The public gives little credence to the idea that the net migration target of less than 100,000 will be met within the next five years, with just 13% of people thinking that this is likely. The survey suggests that most people would prefer a different approach, with six in ten members of the public (60%) agreeing that the net migration target should be replaced with separate targets for different flows of migration. Strikingly, support for replacing the

net migration target with separate targets is strongest among 2017 Conservative voters, 72% of whom would support such a policy, with just 8% opposed; and with 70% of Leave voters, compared with 56% of Remain voters.

5. “Last year net migration - the difference between the number of people moving to the UK from another country and those leaving the UK to live elsewhere - was 258,000. The government’s target figure for net migration was less than 100,000. Do you think the Government is likely to meet the net migration target in the next five years?”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 13%	Agree: 11%
Disagree: 65%	Disagree: 69%

6. “The Government should replace the net migration target with separate targets for different types of immigration, like skilled workers and low-skilled workers.”

All GB public	2017 Conservative voters	2016 Leave voters	2016 Remain voters
Agree: 60%	Agree: 72%	70%	56%
Disagree: 10%	Disagree: 8%	8%	12%

We also found strong support for more public consultation on the issue of immigration – including a Migration Day in Parliament when politicians are held to account on their promises. Some 62% agree that the public should be consulted more on immigration and other important national issues, rising to 67% of 2017 Conservative voters. The results suggest an annual ‘Migration Day’ in Parliament could be a popular way to hold politicians to account, with six in ten people (60%) agreeing that the Government’s performance on migration should be reviewed on such a moment each year.

Six in ten respondents (60%) also told us that they would be more confident in the Government’s ability to manage migration if it pursued better ways of dealing with the local impacts of migration on housing and public services – suggesting that continuing and even expanding the current ‘Controlling Migration Fund’ would be popular, including with two-thirds (66%) of 2017 Conservative voters.

7. “The public should be consulted more on important national issues, like immigration.”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 62%	Agree: 67%
Disagree: 14%	Disagree: 14%

8. “The Government’s performance on migration should be reviewed every year through an annual migration day in Parliament which should involve consulting members of the public.”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 60%	Agree: 61%
Disagree: 12%	Disagree: 12%

9. What would make you more or less confident in the ability of the Government to manage migration into the UK?

	More confident	Less confident	Make no difference
Government ministers held to account and forced to resign if they make serious mistakes.	63%	6%	22%
Better ways of dealing with the local impacts of migration on housing and public services.	60%	8%	23%
Better support to help migrants integrate and become part of their local communities.	47%	11%	32%
Increasing the Home Office budget so it can employ more immigration officers and make better use of technology.	50%	9%	31%
A system where the UK Government had more control over the numbers of migrants coming to the UK.	60%	8%	23%
A simple and independent website that sets out statistics, government policy and its performance.	46%	7%	38%

Numbers

Our survey also asked people how they feel about immigration numbers at present and what approach the Government should take to different flows of immigration in the future. While around half of people would like to see overall numbers reduced (53%), it is clear that the public would be quite happy for some of it to remain at current levels or even increase. For high-skilled workers from the EU, for example, 80% of the public would prefer numbers to increase or remain at current levels. Four-in-ten members of the public would like to see an increase in high-skilled migration from outside the EU (39%).

10. For each of the following groups, please tell us whether you would prefer the number of people coming to live in the UK to increase, decrease, or remain about the same?

	Increase	Remain about the same	Decrease
High-skilled workers from EU	39%	41%	11%
Low-skilled workers from EU	8%	30%	52%
Seasonal workers employed in farms, food factories and hotels	16%	49%	24%
High-skilled workers from outside EU	39%	38%	12%
Low-skilled workers from outside EU	7%	27%	55%
Asylum-seekers and refugees	10%	29%	50%
Non-British immediate family members (eg spouses, children under-18)	11%	37%	38%
Overseas students coming to UK universities	20%	46%	10%

11. In general, do you think the amount of immigration into the UK should... (be increased/be decreased)

Be increased	13%
Remain about the same	28%
Be decreased	53%

The Brexit challenge

The National Conversation on Immigration found that there was much consensus on immigration policy among the public, but this agreement was not evident when future approaches to EU migration were part of their considerations. In 2018 there were clear differences between Leave and Remain voters. Twelve months on these divisions remain, with the public divided over how Britain should approach EU migration after Brexit. Across the public as a whole, out of the three approaches presented to them, four in ten support continued free movement of EU citizens in and out of the UK if it means a better deal for British business (39%); a third want to end free movement (32%); and just under a third would rather replace free movement with a preferential immigration deal for EU citizens as part of a deal (29%). Analysis by 2016 referendum vote shows little consensus between the two referendum tribes on a way forward.

12. If you had to pick one, please indicate which approach you would like the UK Government to take in the Brexit negotiations.

	All	Leave	Remain
If it means a better deal for British business, the UK Government should keep the free movement of EU citizens in and out of the UK and stay in the single market.	39%	17%	62%
The UK Government should end free movement with no preferential immigration deal with the EU, even if this limits the trade deal Britain can strike.	32%	51%	11%
If it means a better deal for British business, the UK Government should end free movement but offer the EU an immigration deal where EU nationals get preferential treatment to migrants from outside the EU.	29%	33%	26%

Control and compassion

While people want immigration to be controlled, they also expect it to be done with fairness and compassion. The Windrush scandal showed how governments could fall foul of public opinion when this is neglected. Nearly two-thirds of people (63%) agree that the UK's approach to refugees and asylum should be 'effective, fair and humane' so we can uphold our responsibility to offer refugee protection to those who need it. Support for a humane approach towards refugees cuts across party political divides, with 63%

of those who say they voted Conservative in the 2019 European Parliament election, 66% of Labour voters at this election, 77% of Lib Dems and 52% of Brexit Party voters in agreement (based on recalled 2019 European Election votes).

13. “We need an asylum system that is effective, fair and humane so Britain can uphold our responsibility to offer refugee protection to those who need it.”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 63%	Agree: 59%
Disagree: 11%	Disagree: 14%

Integration and citizenship

We also asked respondents about the approach that the UK should take to people who have already moved to Britain and put down roots here. Our ICM poll found that the public would support efforts to encourage settled migrants to take up British citizenship and to offer their British-born children citizenship as their birthright, with six-in-ten agreeing with citizenship reform and less than 15% opposed. Among 2017 Conservative voters, 59% are in favour of citizenship for settled migrants with just 14% opposed; and 54% agree with birthright citizenship, with 18% opposed.

14. “If someone decides to live in Britain long-term, it is a good thing if they have an opportunity to become British by taking citizenship.”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 59%	Agree: 59%
Disagree: 14%	Disagree: 14%

15. “Children born in the UK should be eligible for British citizenship.”

All GB	2017 Conservative voters
Agree: 59%	Agree: 54%
Disagree: 13%	Disagree: 18%

Immigration after May

Ed Davey MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Home Affairs:

“When Theresa May became Home Secretary she vowed to ‘restore public confidence’ in our immigration system. But in the years since, no one has done more to undermine that confidence.

Her inevitable failure to meet her arbitrary ‘tens of thousands’ net migration target, her outrageous “Go Home” vans, and the Windrush scandal created by her ‘hostile environment’ all fed into the widespread perception that immigration is ‘out of control’.

And the damage goes further. As a direct result of May’s policies, families are separated by complex visa requirements. Employers struggle to recruit the workers they need. People without documents are denied access to healthcare and housing.

Restoring public confidence requires an effective, compassionate immigration system. No more net migration target or hostile environment. Enforcement in the hands of a more accountable, well-resourced, intelligence-led Border Force instead of landlords, teachers and doctors. Detention used as an absolute last resort, with a 28-day time limit. Asylum seekers allowed to work while their cases are decided.

A future Home Secretary must also be willing to give up some power: yielding visa policymaking to the Business and Education departments.”

Stephen Hale, Chief Executive, Refugee Action:

“Can you imagine what it’s like to lose everything? Friends, your home, your possessions, and often loved ones. And then to make a perilous journey seeking safety? Theresa May’s legacy for people in this situation is a system that does huge damage to those in need of our compassion and support.

These life and death decisions are slow and often wrong. People are treated without respect, forced to endure a hostile system and to live in poverty. It’s a situation that’s getting progressively worse.

Theresa May also blocked refugee integration, abolishing programmes to support refugees to access employment and acquiescing in steep cuts to funding for English language classes. The one substantial step forward came when public pressure led her and then Prime Minister David Cameron to commit to resettling 20,000 Syrians over five years from 2015.

Her successors as Home Secretary have taken tentative steps to unravel this legacy, particularly since the Windrush scandal exposed institutional failures in Home Office treatment of vulnerable people. But there’s been no real tangible improvement in either the asylum system or in refugee integration.

There are early opportunities for a new Prime Minister. The UK’s flagship refugee resettlement programmes are on the verge of closure. A new announcement is needed by the end of 2019 and would be widely welcomed. Systemic asylum reform could make the system fairer and cheaper. Successful refugee integration would benefit us all. For all our sakes, a new Prime Minister must put this right.”

4. Numbers: Lessons of a flagship policy failure

Sunder Katwala

Immigration under May was all about numbers. The first question about immigration was how to cut it. The flagship policy was the net migration target – a promise to reduce net migration ‘from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands’.

Yet the numbers tell a story of complete policy failure. Net migration was 256,000 when May entered the Home Office in 2010. Annual net migration never fell below 177,000 (in 2012) before rising again. On the morning that the Prime Minister left office, the Office of National Statistics produced the final quarterly scorecard: net migration was 255,000.

After the referendum, EU net migration had fallen to 74,000 but non-EU net migration had risen to 232,000. The immigration flows which had been within the control of government all along were always above the target, even if there had been no EU immigration at all.

Because migration has been a polarising political issue, there have been two different accounts of the roots of this failure. One stresses the government’s failure to deliver what it promised: that it never found either the policy means nor the political will to cut net migration. An alternative take agrees that it is corrosive of trust for governments to fail to keep the promises they make – but sees making a promise that could never be kept as a recipe for inevitable failure.

The target arose from a soundbite rather than any serious policy work. Focus groups liked the idea of ‘tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands,’ often hearing a bigger promise than was being made, since few paid any attention to what ‘net’ migration meant. For a brief period in 2011-12, though achieving the target always seemed unrealistic, the view within government was that a significant reduction would at least win an effort prize for trying. Curiously, as immigration rose again, partly because of comparatively strong economic growth, efforts to defend this symbolic totem of a failed policy became more robust.

Take the high-profile, if ultimately symbolic, skirmishes over student migration. The Government set no limits on student migration – yet the Home Office fought a ferocious rear-guard action to insist students must count in the net migration target, even though removing them would have fitted public intuitions better, and reduced the margin by which the target was missed (partly because poor exit data exaggerated the student contribution to net migration). Removing students now would make a marginal difference to the figures, yet defenders and opponents of the target continued to spar.

Everybody knows that the target was a failure in numbers terms. Less attention has been paid to the absence of political accountability.

This was the Government's flagship immigration policy – but the Government never produced any strategy to go with the target. You will search in vain for a White Paper, or even a serious speech, on the case for the target, and the policy measures needed to pursue it. In addition this headline figure – the difference between those entering the UK and leaving – is estimated using the International Passenger Survey, something which statisticians have criticised from the start as an unreliable estimate of numbers³.

In contrast with the Office for Budget Responsibility, which conducts an exhaustive health-check on the Treasury's full budget, the Home Office kept the Migration Advisory Committee on a much tighter leash – able to offer rigorous, independent evidence and advice only on the deliberately narrow policy questions that Home Secretaries chose to ask it. Theresa May never asked it to research and set out the range of policy choices which could reduce net migration. A government which took its own target seriously would surely have done so.

What happened when the target was missed? More or less nothing. The ONS would release the statistics. The headline would reinforce that the government was missing its target. Typically, junior ministers would issue a press statement and give interviews expressing disappointment, and reiterating their commitment to the target. Sometimes, the Prime Minister or Home Secretary would don a high-vis jacket to join Border Force for an eye-catching photo opportunity, to distract from the numbers with a visual commitment to a tough crackdown. This was a poor substitute for formal accountability mechanisms. If inflation is above the Government's inflation target, the Governor of the Bank of England writes to the Chancellor, with an analysis of what happened, proposing measures to get back on track. The missed net migration target triggered no comparable scrutiny or accountability to Parliament. Nor, more substantively, did migration being above the Government's target trigger practical responses – such as resources going to fund public services in the places that had more migration than the Government had anticipated.

What happens next?

Scrapping the once-totemic net migration target may have become the easy bit. Theresa May's successor would not need to be a political genius to work out, after 37 consecutive quarters of missing the target, that banging your head on a brick wall 37 times in a row just gives you a bigger political headache.

The failure of the net migration target does not mean an end to targets – but there are important lessons about the point and purpose of targets in immigration policy. There is no point in

having symbolic targets which make no practical difference at all, except in signalling to the public that the Government is not in control of what it is trying to do.

It was never difficult for critics of the Government to make the case that a target that was always missed was irrational. Workable alternatives were rarer.

One negative consequence of treating migration primarily as a “culture war” issue is the lack of routine policy scrutiny that is standard in every other area of policy. If political and civic society voices call for lower taxes, or higher public spending, or reduced carbon emissions, they are expected to set out how that could be achieved – and to debate the social and economic impacts. That should be standard in the migration debate – and would present challenges for all sides.

Those in business and civic society who are advocates for the benefits of migration need to make the case for migration that benefits the economy and society in ways that can secure political and public consent. There is a consensus on highly-skilled and student migration, but a greater challenge to unlock contingent public support for migration into low and semi-skilled roles through responses to local impacts, training and integration.

Those in politics and civic society favouring significant reductions in immigration should start to engage seriously on policy – by proposing an achievable target and indicating how it could be met. Migration sceptic voices – such as the ‘Balanced Migration Group’ of MPs who argue for policy to target zero net migration – have rarely done this. A group arguing for the elimination of budget deficits would naturally be asked for its tax and spending proposals. A useful way to ‘normalise’ immigration debate would be to focus not only on the tone of discourse, but for advocates of lower migration to be asked ‘how’ – so that policy-makers, politicians and the public could consider the options and trade-offs involved.

One reason the net migration target failed was because a number was picked first, without then ever finding policies to meet it afterwards.

After May, there is an opportunity for the next Prime Minister and Home Secretary to do things the right way around. Governments undertake comprehensive spending and defence reviews, but have never taken a strategic approach to immigration, exploring the pressures and gains, the needs of the economy, the challenges of integration and the concerns of the communities where the pace of change has been fastest, to inform the policies and targets it sets.

Targets can take different forms: they can bite in the form of strict quotas or they can be an overall guide to the intentions of policy, so that governments can be held accountable for their overall performance.

A sensible approach would see a government choose to set immigration targets that cover those flows of immigration which are within its control, and which it is seeking to limit or reduce.

Such a process would lead the next Government away from a one-size-fits-all net migration target – replacing it with a different set of measures, with a focus on selectivity over low and semi-skilled migration, reflecting public priorities and concerns.

The failed net migration target has corroded public trust. It will only be rebuilt if there is much greater political and public accountability in what replaces it.

Immigration after May

Ryan Shorthouse, Director, Bright Blue:

“Let’s start with the good: the introduction and expansion of the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) for Syrian refugees, which the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration recently stated is on track to achieve the target of 20,000 resettlements by mid-2020.

Theresa May should have been more generous, considering the gravity of the crisis in Syria and the response of other comparable countries, and granted more places on the VPRS. But credit where its due: in contrast to Germany’s welcoming of asylum applicants already in Europe, the VPRS selected and admitted refugees directly from the region, via the UNHRC, ensuring the most vulnerable – women, children, those with disabilities – were prioritised.

There’s a long list of the bad. But what was particularly pernicious was the introduction of a new, minimum salary threshold of at least £18,600 per annum for Brits who wanted their foreign spouses and children resident outside the EEA to live with them in the UK. This was a bar on the highest of human emotions, love – and only for those who Theresa May said she was going to do more for, those who are ‘just about managing’.

The next Prime Minister should stop determining eligibility for entry into this country – for family or work visas - on salary thresholds alone. They penalise those who have or will contribute enormously to this country, despite being on a modest income.”

Stuart McDonald MP (Scottish National Party):

“Theresa May always appeared to be on top of her Home Office brief and is clearly very capable. But that makes her pursuit of wicked, discriminatory, unevidenced migration policies all the more disgraceful. An endless list of hateful policies flowed from her ludicrous obsession with the nonsensical net migration target – the horrendous hostile environment; cuts to asylum support; appeal rights destroyed; extortionate fees; families split apart; Universities undermined. This list goes on. Even the rare welcome policy on her watch – such as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme – appeared to happen despite her, rather than thanks to her.

She refused to countenance any discussion about the urgent need for Scotland – and other parts of the UK – to have different rules and policies. Ultimately the hype around her target, and her problematisation and politicisation of migration, helped clinch victory for ‘Leave’ in 2016; so the fact that the ensuing mess has forced her from office will attract little sympathy from observers of her immigration policies. Her successor should roll back on virtually everything she introduced, argue for free movement, and introduce differentiated immigration rules across the UK. Future policy should be driven by evidence, with respect for rights at its core”.

5. Control, competence and compassion matter

Jill Rutter, British Future

In 2017 and 2018 British Future, together with HOPE not hate, undertook the National Conversation on Immigration, the largest ever study of public attitudes to immigration. It showed a range of public opinion in the UK. A relatively small number of people dominate the online debate, usually those with the most pro- or anti-migration views. But the majority of people lie in the middle of a spectrum of views; they are what we termed ‘balancers’ who have concerns about migration, but also see its gains.

The National Conversation on Immigration visited 60 towns and cities across the UK where we undertook guided conversations with groups of local residents. While there were many local differences in the issues that they raised, there were many common themes, too. People want migrants who come here to make a contribution and they want migration to be competently controlled; but they also want migrants to be treated with compassion⁴.

The treatment of the ‘Windrush generation’ received much media coverage towards the end of the National Conversation on Immigration. This was a group of people who had entered the UK legally, worked hard and made a contribution. Through no fault of their own they found themselves in the position of being undocumented: some of the Windrush group were subsequently detained and deported. The Home Office has commissioned an independent inquiry and is providing compensation for the victims. But to members of the public, the Windrush scandal confirmed their view that the Home Office lacked both competence and compassion.

Calling Theresa May heartless is arguably unfair. During her time in power she led work to stamp out modern slavery, passing legislation in 2015 and setting up a taskforce to coordinate Government action. In 2013 also introduced procedures to protect stateless people living in the UK. The Government also brought 20,000 Syrian refugees to the UK through the Vulnerable Persons resettlement Programme, an initiative which has now been extended for a further year. Yet these initiatives were overshadowed by the Windrush scandal, and a failure to get to grips with Home Office under-performance.

EU citizens were victims of a badly-performing immigration system. Until the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme early this year, those who wanted paperwork to show they had settlement rights – the ability to live in the UK without time limits on their stay – were required to apply for Permanent Residence (PR). Since 2015 it has also been necessary to apply

for PR if a citizen of an EU country wanted to take up British citizenship. But since 2006, nearly 26% of applicants for PR have had their applications refused or declared invalid⁵, most often because of incomplete documentation, an absence, or breaks in comprehensive sickness insurance⁶. The application form that was 85 pages long undoubtedly contributed to the high rate of refusal. This debacle affected over 164,000 people and undoubtedly damaged EU citizens' trust in the Home Office.

High-profile policy failures of an underperforming department damage public confidence in the ability of the Government to manage migration. Over-promising on immigration control, then failing to deliver has the same effect, too. Just 13% of people surveyed by British Future felt that the Government had managed immigration competently and fairly and the same proportion (13%) believed that politicians have shown strong leadership on this issue⁷.

As Home Secretary and then Prime Minister, Theresa May's time in office coincided with the Home Office seeing large reductions to its budget and staffing. Cuts undoubtedly contributed to poor performance, but this was not the only factor behind the mistakes and delays of this department. Theresa May inherited a Home Office that John Reid, one of her predecessors, labelled 'Not fit for purpose.' In all her years in office she did not get to grips with the operational failures of her department. Although there has been greater investment in IT since 2016 and the design of the EU Settlement Scheme is a step in the right direction, the Home Office is still dogged by errors and backlogs.

Asylum-seekers are the group which suffered most from the Home Office's poor performance. Unable to work or study English at a concessionary fee, the operation of the asylum system leaves many applicants in limbo, forced to rely on state benefits, at a reduced level, for years. Just 21% of asylum applicants get a decision in six months. In mid-2018 some 88,848 asylum cases remained unprocessed, of which 35,011 dated back more than three years. Some people wait much longer, with 17,212 asylum cases now the responsibility of a Home Office team called the 'Older Live Cases Unit' set up to deal with asylum cases which were first lodged before March 2007⁸.

Even among asylum-seekers who receive a quick decision on their application, there may be further delays due to poor decision-making and a lengthy appeals system. In 2018, 67% of asylum-seekers who received a decision on their cases were refused⁹. Many of those who have been refused go on to appeal to an Immigration and Asylum Tribunal. Some 43% of asylum appeals were upheld in 2018¹⁰, with the appellant allowed to stay in the UK. However, the appeals system is subject to considerable delays: the average length of time for an asylum appeal to be concluded by a First Tier Asylum Tribunal, for the financial year 2017-18, was 24 months.

Errors and delays in asylum-determination take a huge toll on the individuals concerned, as well as incurring costs to wider society in terms of lost tax revenue and spending on appeals and asylum support. Unfortunately, these institutional failures rarely make the news, which means that media coverage is not able to hold ministers to account.

There is recognition among senior officials that the current situation needs to change, not just for asylum-seekers but for those who apply for visas, settlement and citizenship too. The operation of the EU Settlement Scheme shows that the Home Office can be transparent and address problems when they occur. But there is still much need for improvement, particularly to the asylum system. Greater investment in staff training and IT is needed. British Future has previously recommended that the Home Office budget for asylum determination should be merged with the Ministry of Justice budget for asylum appeals, so as to incentivise high-quality initial asylum decision-making, and to reduce lengthy and costly appeals.

The Home Office needs to combine efficient immigration control with fairness to those who use the system. Achieving a balance between the two is challenging and it could be argued that Theresa May failed on both counts. But there is public support for such a balance. Polling for British Future finds that nearly two-thirds of people (63%) agree that “Britain needs an asylum system that is effective, fair and humane, so that Britain can uphold its responsibility to offer refugee protection to those that need it.” A future Prime Minister will need to prioritise improving Home Office performance, but must remember that compassion is a value which almost everyone upholds.

Immigration after May

Caroline Lucas MP (Green Party):

“Theresa May’s legacy on immigration has been a race to the bottom, first as Home Secretary and then as Prime Minister. From her cruel and misguided decision to create a ‘hostile environment’ for illegal immigrants flowed a litany of appalling errors of judgement: the ‘Go Home’ vans driving round London, the injustice meted out to the Windrush generation, the mistreatment of those in immigration detention, the foot-dragging over child refugees stranded in Calais – the list goes on.

All of these happened on her watch. She has vilified migrants, generating a toxic atmosphere which almost certainly contributed to the Leave vote in the referendum. It seems apt that her failure to deliver the Brexit which her rhetoric helped bring about, should lead to the failure of her premiership.

The next prime minister needs to look at the huge contribution migrants make to our society and economy and address the failure of this Government’s austerity policies, which have allowed right-wing populists to pedal the myth that immigration is behind the pressure on public services. The reality is migrants keep many of our public services going. That is what the next prime minister should be saying.”

Joseph Owen, Associate Director, Institute for Government:

“Huge Cabinet battles over policy. Parliament sidelined on big decisions. A focus on slogans as much as strategy. As Home Secretary reshaping the immigration system and as Prime Minister grappling with Brexit, Theresa May’s approach seemed hard-nosed at first but ended up with a reputation of failing to compromise and failing to see the wider effects of her policy.

Being Home Secretary is a hard job and May lasted well beyond any of her predecessors, no mean feat. Her priority was control – whether more restrictions over who could come to/stay in the country or stronger influence over policies and processes. An incoming Home Secretary and Prime Minister can change key immigration policies, but it will be harder to erase the wider influence Theresa May had on the Home Office.

The problems in parts of the current immigration system are as much about the operations than the policy. A new Home Secretary must achieve what many have attempted – building the department’s reputation as a competent operation. The status of EU citizens will put that directly in the spotlight - post-Brexit enforcement poses a much bigger headache for the department than salary thresholds.

But the first big question will, inevitably, be that target. Theresa May’s single headline objective was hitting the 100,000 figure. Her fixation on reducing net migration saw her shift from restricting entry to increasing removals through hostile environment enforcement measures. Just as Brexit meant Brexit, target meant target. In the end, she left government without achieving either.”

6. Public trust and democratic accountability

Steve Ballinger, British Future

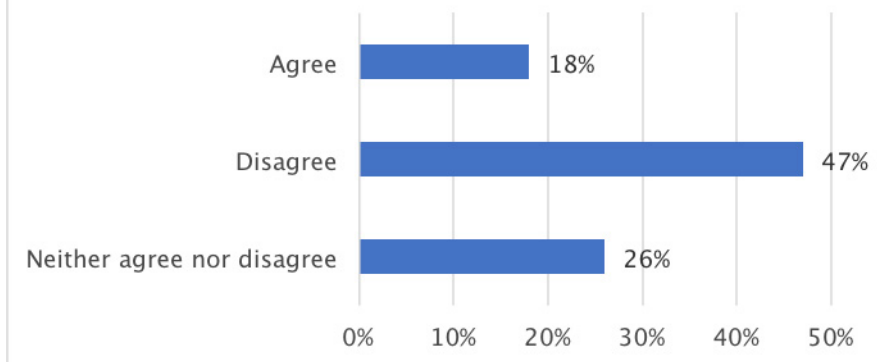
It was strangely fitting that Theresa May should announce the date of her resignation as Prime Minister on the same day that the Office for National Statistics published its quarterly net migration figures. For the 37th time in a row the statistics showed May's failure to come close to meeting a net migration target that defined her approach to immigration as Home Secretary and as Prime Minister.

By the end, as cabinet colleagues including Home Secretary Sajid Javid refused to commit to keeping the target, May was a lone figure, remaining steadfastly wedded to a promise that could never be kept. As May announced her departure outside Number 10 the ONS figures showed that annual net migration from outside the EU alone – the migration over which the Government could exercise control – was at 232,000, more than double the 'tens of thousands' target.

The impact on public confidence in the Government's ability to manage immigration, when a manifesto promise that drives all other policy on immigration is repeatedly broken, cannot be underestimated. Every quarter the sense that migration was 'out of control' was further reinforced. As ministers tried to counter this with announcements of new crackdowns, 'Go Home' vans and tougher rules on everything from students to who could open a bank account or rent a flat, it only exacerbated the sense of crisis. Like the net migration target itself, these responses were more often symbolic than pragmatic. The review of the 'Right to Rent' scheme by Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration David Bolt, for example, concluded that it was largely ineffectual¹².

Only 18% of those polled by ICM for this report agree that 'Theresa May did a good job managing immigration as Prime Minister and Home Secretary,' while 47% disagree. And just a quarter (24%) of those polled for this report said they trust Theresa May on immigration, while 46% say they distrust the outgoing Prime Minister – though it is worth adding that no other politician received a positive trust score either.

Fig 4.1 "Theresa May did a good job managing immigration as Prime Minister and Home Secretary"



A further irony of focusing immigration policy on such a blunt measure of numbers – all those coming in minus all those departing – was that few members of the public believed the figures anyway. Scepticism and lack of trust in the figures was a recurrent theme of our conversations with the public in the National Conversation on Immigration¹³. They may have been right not to believe them, too: estimates of the number of international students overstaying their visas, for example, which strongly influenced policy towards student migration, were shown to be vastly inflated.

May's mistake was to confuse voters' preference for immigration to be sensibly managed with a desire for all immigration to be reduced at all costs – and to assume that the tougher she went, the more people would like it. British Future's research over several years¹⁴ has shown that public opinion on immigration is much more nuanced: people would like to see reductions in some flows of immigration but would also prefer much of it to remain as it is, or even to increase: particularly high-skilled migration and people filling vacancies in particular sectors, such as health and social care, agriculture and construction.

Numerous research studies have shown a gradual, positive shift in attitudes towards immigration over the last few years¹⁵. The immigration debate remains polarised – particularly online where hardened voices 'for' and 'against' compete in an angry shouting match – but between those extremes, where most of us sit, attitudes have become warmer. Against this backdrop, Theresa May increasingly appeared to be stuck in the past, refusing to move on from a 'get tough' approach that may have held broader appeal when she first moved into the Home Office in 2010.

Yet if attitudes towards immigration have shifted, those towards the Government, and its ability to manage immigration competently and fairly, have not. Just 13% of those polled by ICM for this report agreed that "On the whole, I feel that the Government has managed immigration competently and fairly." People still lack confidence in the Home Office's ability to get a grip. How could trust and confidence be restored?

When British Future and HOPE not hate travelled around the country for the National Conversation on Immigration asking people what approach they thought Britain should take to immigration after Brexit, we were struck not only by the public's lack of trust in the Government on immigration, but also by their sense that they were never asked what they wanted. Giving the public a say on the future direction of immigration policy – rather than presuming to know what they think – could go some way to rebuilding depleted confidence. It is an approach that was used effectively in Canada and the National Conversation on Immigration showed that it would be perfectly feasible in the UK.

Voters on both sides of the referendum divide have had their trust in politicians undermined in recent years. Our ICM poll found that 63% of people would feel more confident in our immigration system if Government ministers were held to account and were forced to resign if they make serious mistakes. Some 60% of the public would support a 'Migration Day' in Parliament each year, similar to Budget Day, when ministers could be held to account against a three-year plan for migration, based on advice from the Migration Advisory Committee, that replaces the net migration target. Public engagement, based on the National Conversation model, would feed into Migration Day to help ensure that voters' views were reflected back to decision-makers. Some 62% of people feel that the public should be consulted more on important national issues like immigration. Increasing democratic accountability on this issue would help to address the legacy of unkept promises on immigration under Theresa May – and should underpin the approach that is taken by her successor.

Immigration after May

Lord (David) Blunkett, Home Secretary 2001-2004 (Labour):

“What did Theresa May get right? The only thing as far as I can see that May managed to achieve in her six years as Home Secretary was the deals with countries such as Jordan to allow the repatriation of those who had committed offences and were suspected demonstrably to be involved with terrorism, who had previously not been removed from the country because of their claim on human rights grounds against removal.

What did she get wrong? Patently to see all forms of inward migration as a threat and to articulate this through the infamous phrase ‘hostile environment’, which was then purveyed through her officials into the ether. Her stance on continuing to reiterate that it was possible to get migration into the country below 100,000, and to include full-time students in the calculation, was a classic indication of stubborn, narrow and damaging thinking.

In future, those in charge should secure the confidence of the people with rigorous and humane implementation of security whilst arguing for and implementing imaginative embracing of talent from across the world and refugees with a clear justification (through the UNHCR) to need asylum.”

Steve Double MP (Conservative):

“As the longest serving Home Secretary in five decades, Theresa May introduced important changes to modernise and secure our borders as well as streamline our immigration system. However as Prime Minister, Theresa May misjudged the mood of the country by overemphasising the ending of free movement of people in her Brexit negotiations. The approach from 10 Downing Street has come to be one of ‘as long as we stop free movement, people will view that as delivering on the 2016 referendum’. But the notion of ‘control over our borders’ has moved away from a debate around migration to one focussed on the border down the Irish Sea and the integrity of the Union. Regaining sovereignty over our own laws and trade has instead become a more important issue for the British people.

Instead of viewing Brexit as a challenge to be overcome, a future Prime Minister and Home Secretary should consider it as a genuine opportunity to reset the national conversation on immigration and to revamp our immigration system. It is right that as we leave the EU we do take back control of our borders. But having control over our own immigration policy is not the same as stopping immigration. We should be able to manage immigration in a way that suits our own economic and social needs and concerns, while having a compassionate approach to those fleeing war, persecution and oppression.”

7. Getting it right locally

Jill Rutter

Immigration is a national issue that the public sees through a ‘local lens’. In situations where migrants struggle to integrate or where rapid population change leads to pressures on public services, it is much harder to secure public consent for the migration that our economy needs.

Poverty and insecure work make it more difficult to get public support for migration, too. Across the UK, resentment and fear of migration tends to be concentrated in areas of deprivation, such as post-industrial and coastal towns.

As someone in possession of a geography degree, Theresa May was aware of North-South economic divides and the importance of the ‘local’. Her ‘burning injustices’, the Race Disparity Audit and, most importantly, her Industrial Strategy reflected her desire to address these divisions. But delivery of the strategy was disrupted by Brexit. Similarly, Theresa May’s record on ‘local’ immigration issues is a case of a glass half full. In November 2016, the Government launched a new ‘Controlling Migration Fund’ for local authorities in England. This effectively replaced Labour’s Migration Impacts Fund, introduced in 2009 but scrapped by the Conservatives in 2011. Over a four-year period this fund will provide £25 million each year to enable local authorities to address some of the local impacts of migration. Evidence suggests that the money is making a difference and has helped dissipate some local tensions and pressures associated with migration. Councils have spent the money on a wide range of initiatives, including improved regulation of the private rental sector, community mediation and English language conversation clubs for migrants who work long hours.

The current Controlling Migration Fund comes to an end in 2020. It is essential that May’s successor allocates money to enable this important work to continue after this date and considers expanding the scheme further. British Future’s polling highlights the importance that the public places on dealing with the local impacts of immigration. Some 60% of respondents in our ICM research feel that better ways of dealing with the local impacts of migration on housing and public services would make them more confident in the Government’s ability to manage migration¹⁶.

Social integration is also important in communities experiencing demographic and social change. Where long-standing residents have social contact with new migrants, they base their views about each other on these everyday interactions, rather than what they read in the press and online. Theresa May’s record on social integration is again a case of a glass half full. For adults, the workplace is where we meet others. Theresa May’s Government took action to identify and address lower levels of labour market

participation in some ethnic minority groups. But regulations prevent asylum-seekers from working, something campaigners for integration want to change¹⁷.

Local authorities are key to driving integration forward, but May's tenure has coincided with large and sustained budget cuts. In many parts of the country staff cuts and low morale have stopped councils from giving integration the attention that it needs.

In February 2019, the Government published the Integrated Communities Action Plan, the first integration strategy for any part of the UK¹⁸. This commits the Government to a programme which includes improving English language provision in England and initiatives to encourage children of different backgrounds to meet and mix. Five local authorities – Blackburn and Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest – have been identified as Integration Action Areas and they will be piloting new work.

Extremism, hate crime and prejudice are the ultimate barriers to integration. On these issues, Theresa's May's record is very mixed. The number of police officers in England and Wales fell by over 20,000 between 2010 and 2018¹⁹ which has made the task of combating extremism and hate crime more difficult. Insufficient pressure has been put on social media companies to moderate online content and to take down comments that contravene hate speech guidelines. Although there are many good community-based initiatives to combat hate crime and prejudice, their coverage is patchy across the UK. Action to combat prejudice suffers from a lack of leadership and joined-up strategy within central government and locally, too.

Integration is key to getting the public consent for the immigration that our economy needs. During May's time in office progress was made towards national strategies. The Integration Action Plan (covering England) is a step in the right direction, but critics see it as too little and too late. Expanding the good work started under the Integration Action plan must be a priority for May's successor: including the expansion of English language learning, increasing social contact and tackling hate crime.

8. Putting citizenship on the agenda

Jill Rutter

Over 123,000 people became British citizens in 2017 – people who migrated to the UK and now call this country their home. Although it might sound counter-intuitive, citizenship is popular with the public, even those people who want to see reductions in the number of migrants²⁰.

Most people prefer migrants to put down roots, learn English and take citizenship than stay for a short time then leave. In a survey undertaken for British Future in 2018, 61% of people felt it was better when migrants commit to stay in Britain, put down roots and integrate, against the 39% who felt that it was better for migrants to come for a few years then return home²¹. The churn of temporary migration is disconcerting and most people want to know their neighbours. In this respect, Theresa May was out-of-step with public opinion: in her first major immigration speech she announced that she would break the link between migration and settlement²². In the six years that May was Home Secretary, it became more difficult to extend Tier 2 work visas, the route that most skilled workers from outside the EU use to enter the UK.

May's time at the Home Office also coincided with major increases in fees. Application fees for settlement (Indefinite Leave to Remain) and citizenship increased at a level well over the rate of inflation and now present a major barrier that stops or delays people taking up citizenship. While it costs the Home Office £272 to process a citizenship application, adults are charged £1,330 for their application in the UK, compared with €255 in Germany and \$AU180 in Australia. There are also charges for the *Life in the UK* (citizenship) test and the citizenship ceremony. As migrants from outside the EU need to have Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK before they become a British citizen, it now costs a family of two adults and two children over £15,000 to gain citizenship in the UK.

Much modern citizenship policy derives from the British Nationality Act 1981, though there have been many changes since then. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 introduced the requirement for citizenship ceremonies, the *Life in the UK* citizenship test and English language requirements. Despite regular legislative amendments, the Government has not set out a clear articulation of the aims of citizenship policy.

A change of Prime Minister presents an opportunity to rethink citizenship policy, with clear aims which should include integration. As a country we should be in favour of citizenship and government ministers should welcome those who have chosen to make Britain their home.

The 2018 Immigration White Paper proposed a temporary migration scheme for people coming to do low-skilled work in the UK. Migrants from ‘low risk countries’ would be granted a 12-month visa which they would be prevented from extending at the end of the year²³. Outside of student exchange and au pair schemes, this is the first time in history that the UK has proposed a ‘guest worker’ scheme. If implemented, this would inevitably act as a disincentive for migrants to integrate. It would also increase population churn in parts of the UK which rely on migrant workers to fill low-skilled jobs in social care, hospitality, food and farming. In future, all migrant workers should have routes to settlement and British citizenship, which should act as a lever to encourage integration.

Nearly four million EU citizens are now being invited to apply for permanent residence in the UK under the EU Settlement Scheme. These are mostly people who came here to work and then chose to make Britain their permanent home. Until November 2015 they could become British citizens after five years’ residence in the UK. Since then, there has been a requirement to have 12 months’ Permanent Residence or Settled Status on top of these five years. The Government should reverse this change and make a citizenship offer to EU citizens who arrive in the UK before 31 December 2020. If they have five years’ continuous residency and meet the other requirements for British citizenship – good character, English language and knowledge of life in the UK – they should be offered citizenship at cost price of £300, or indeed for free, as Michael Gove has proposed as part of his bid to become Leader of the Conservative Party²⁴.

The Government is planning to review the content of the *Life in the UK* citizenship test to place greater emphasis on shared British values. It should use this opportunity to look at other ways that citizenship could aid the two-way process of integration. Citizenship ceremonies could, for example, be held in iconic locations and involve local residents so as to welcome new citizens as full members of their new communities.

Immigration after May

Tim Thomas, Director of Labour Market and skills Policy, Make UK:

“UK manufacturers hire non-UK workers to fill skills gaps which they can’t plug from the domestic workforce, whilst investing heavily in UK workers. But the recent history of UK immigration policy from the time the current Prime Minister was Home Secretary was one where business felt excluded from a debate framed around control, cost, burden and caps, but not contribution and value to the UK economy of non-UK workers.

After the enlargement of the EU post-2004 and without adequate control measures which the UK chose to shun, net EU migration to the UK rose rapidly and Theresa May as Home Secretary was left to react to rising disquiet which ultimately played into the 2016 referendum. But the control measures targeted at non-EU workers since this time have too often hampered employers in recruiting new skills to the UK which it will need for the future in science, digital and new, emerging technologies.

Looking ahead, if the UK ultimately holds the ambition to be a globally focussed trading nation, then it will need to accept that hand-in-hand with this goes a new, open immigration policy, moving away from restrictions based on skill level and salaries and towards broader relationships with other nations who will want and need access to the UK labour market in exchange for the economic benefits of global trade the UK aspires to.”

Satbir Singh, Chief Executive, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI):

“When it comes to immigration, Theresa May’s offences as Home Secretary and Prime Minister are countless and the costs have been immeasurable. From the enforced separation of families and the practice of indefinite detention, to the ill-conceived and racist Hostile Environment strategy, her decisions have led to the loss of lives and livelihoods for thousands of people who seek nothing more than the right to live and die with dignity and whose only ‘crime’ was being born elsewhere.

Her legacy will be defined by the enduring images of ‘Go Home’ billboards in neighbourhoods like mine and of elderly members of the Windrush generation being handcuffed and shipped back to the Caribbean or left to die on the streets of London. For much of May’s tenure, the prevailing wisdom appears to have been to assume that persecuting migrants, stirring up fear and division and disregarding evidence, decency and the rule of law to ‘get the numbers down at any cost’ will pay greater political dividends than the hard work of building a fair immigration system in which both migrants and non-migrants can trust.

May’s downfall, and the crisis presently engulfing British politics, ought to serve as a warning to future governments about the costs of rejecting consensus, humanity and competence in favour of division, dogma and fear. By consistently choosing the latter, Theresa May has inexorably created a hostile environment not only for migrants, but for herself.”

9. Bridging Brexit divides

Sunder Katwala

“Brexit means Brexit” said Theresa May, during her bid to become Prime Minister in 2016, though both Parliament and public remain deadlocked on how to deliver that simple pledge in the real world. How far did Brexit mean immigration? It is quite probable that there would not have been a referendum on EU membership at all without successive governments losing public confidence in how immigration was handled in the decade after the enlargement of the EU in 2004 – and almost certainly not a 52% vote to leave the European Union.

May made three big decisions about immigration and Brexit.

Firstly, she advocated staying in the European Union in the referendum campaign, as a very reluctant Remainer - undoubtedly despite immigration, not because of it. Implicitly, May decided that free movement was a price worth paying for security cooperation and other benefits of EU club membership. Yet had she won that argument, it would surely have confirmed that her signature immigration policy – the net migration target – would remain forever outside the Government’s control. The incoherence of campaigning to stay in the EU having renewed a flagship immigration pledge that was incompatible with EU membership led Downing Street to insist that Remain campaigners should try not to talk about immigration at all in the referendum campaign. Instead, they attempted to change the subject back to the economy if it came up.

Once the referendum argument was lost, it was less surprising that Theresa May saw Brexit primarily in terms of immigration control. May’s long-time advisor Nick Timothy, credited with being the co-creator of the ‘red lines’ which shaped the Government’s negotiating strategy, was later to criticise his former boss for the primacy she gave to immigration. “If you believe people voted for Brexit to control immigration and you fear it brings only economic downsides, it becomes an exercise in damage limitation,” he wrote. However, the belief that the referendum result required the end of free movement was widely shared among most Conservative and Labour MPs in the aftermath of the vote.

May’s natural instincts on immigration were reinforced by her tendency to over-compensate for having cast her own ballot with the 48%. This was especially clear in her standing alone in Cabinet to veto a unilateral guarantee to EU nationals already in the UK. Boris Johnson, shortly before joining her Government, cast a rebellious vote in favour of a Labour opposition motion for a unilateral guarantee, arguing that it was what the victorious Leave campaign had promised. There were later gestures – such as abolishing the £65 registration fee for the settled status scheme – but the opportunity to set a different tone had been missed.

ICM's research for this report shows there is potential for consensus on many aspects of immigration policy – but that this breaks down over Brexit itself, with a continued polarisation along referendum lines. The future of immigration from the EU will now depend primarily on broader choices about the overall Brexit settlement – a deal, a no-deal exit, or further delays before the key decisions are made.

Immigration slips down the 'To Do list' of the new Prime Minister

What Brexit means for the future of immigration remains a central issue. Yet a surprising irony of the post-referendum debate is that public attitudes have softened on migration, while also becoming more polarised on Brexit itself. Few would have predicted that concern about immigration would fade as the political headlines became dominated by arguments about customs, trade tariffs and the Northern Irish border.

The shape of immigration beyond Brexit will not be among the most immediately pressing issues for May's successor as Prime Minister this summer and autumn, given that they are unlikely to reopen the question of single market membership. The debate about immigration after Brexit is largely about striking the right balances in a future domestic system from 2021 onwards. Until the Brexit stalemate is resolved the new immigration system, imagined in the 2018 White Paper, remains a hypothetical one.

Only if Brexit happens could the debate move on to the details of a new system. There is already pressure for more flexibility on the £30,000 income threshold, particularly for health, social care and other sectors. The Government's proposals for more temporary migration – limiting visas to 12 months – would also come under scrutiny. Increasing the level of churn and pace of change would surely make integration more difficult.

There would be a bigger political headache if the UK left without a deal. In theory, the UK could impose new immigration controls immediately. In practice, it would be impossible – and a recipe for chaos, which would wreck the successful administration of the Settled Status scheme. Since those already in the UK will not need to have applied for, or documented, their status until the end of 2020, new controls on new arrivals would be unenforceable, since employers and landlords will not be able to tell the groups apart on the basis of an Italian or Polish passport. Post-Brexit arrivals will not go on to automatically acquire permanent settlement rights five years later, but the UK Government will have little option but to explain to a confused public why, even after leaving without a deal, something that looks very much like free movement would continue for a couple of years.

Immigration challenges for soft Brexiteers and Remainers

Immigration and free movement are now a bigger immediate challenge for those hoping for the softest possible Brexit, through single market membership in the EEA, or seeking a second referendum to Remain in the EU.

How to secure public support for free movement remains probably the single biggest challenge they face. While a full-throated case for the benefits of free movement will resonate with convinced Remainers, particularly pro-EU graduates, a future referendum campaign would need to make the case for free movement in ways that could engage those who were sceptical and unpersuaded in 2016.

Pro-Europeans have argued for a focus on the UK's failure to apply existing rules on free movement properly. That could have some practical value. Registration schemes are commonplace across the EU, and could form part of a package to manage local changes more effectively. But those hoping this might be politically transformative are likely to be disappointed. Politicians consistently over-estimate the reassurance offered by symbolic micro-policy reforms, while the National Conversation on Immigration found that the public invariably never hear about such measures. Similarly, the types of reforms – an 'emergency brake' on free movement – may well generate public scepticism about whether these changes are either negotiable or particularly meaningful.

Ultimately, those defending political positions will have to make the case that free movement is part of the package on offer – and that it could be managed better than it was after 2004. Rather than over-promising on what the UK government might be able to negotiate with EEA and EU members, a more realistic focus would be to substantially increase efforts at home, such as funding for local impacts, training and skills strategies, and English language and integration.

In a Remain or 'soft Brexit' scenario, this would lead to less change to free movement than the public was expecting from the 'reset moment' of the 2016 referendum. Securing public and political consent would represent a significant challenge – but it is how pro-Europeans could also learn the lesson of making promises that can be kept.

Immigration after May

Charles Clarke, Home Secretary 2004 –2006 (Labour):

“Theresa May got just about everything wrong in relation to immigration:

She adopted the duplicitous target of reducing net migration to the UK to fewer than 100,000. This was not in the power of the government to achieve (under her stewardship net migration actually increased).

She abolished the Identity Card system which was a central mechanism to help identify illegal migration and to give citizens confidence in the governance of migration.

She did nothing to help reduce migration into the EU by strengthening European policing coordination against human traffickers and smugglers.

She failed to apply current EU rules to establish a worker registration system, like other EU states do, to require migrants to prove that they are either working, actively seeking work or self-sufficient. If not they can be removed after three months.

She failed to tighten migration controls by reforming the posted workers directive.

She insisted on including students in the overall immigration figures, massively damaging British universities and the economy.

She created the regime of fear which led to deep individual injustices such as those in the Windrush cases.

She demoralised her staff by cutting resources for enforcement of migration controls and dishonestly scapegoating the civil servant Brodie Clark to protect herself from her own errors.

And she failed to establish a focused migration impact fund to help local communities manage the impact of rapid population change.

A future Prime Minister and Home Secretary should go back to basics on immigration control and correct all of these errors.”

Immigration after May

Marley Morris, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR):

“Theresa May’s reputation as a steely, unswerving politician is perhaps best encapsulated by her uncompromising approach to immigration policy. Her time in office saw stringent new rules on nearly every element of the immigration system, from the closure of the post-study work route for international students to the roll-out of ‘right to rent’ checks as part of the hostile environment.

The human costs of her policies have been well-described. But perhaps her most comprehensive failure was one of strategy – she struggled to develop a coherent account of the role of immigration for the UK, beyond a single-minded desire to reduce numbers. Rather than working with other departments to develop a joined-up system, she repeatedly clashed with ministers over students, refugees, and – most recently – the UK’s post-Brexit policy for EU citizens. Ironically, her unyielding approach did not even succeed on its own terms: net migration is now at the same level as it was when she became Home Secretary in 2010.

Her successor will need to seek a more consensual and strategic approach to immigration policy. There is an opportunity to re-centre the system on addressing the UK’s economic weaknesses, in order to help unlock productivity growth, boost exports and rebalance our economy. Establishing a cross-departmental taskforce to coordinate migration and skills policy post-Brexit, alongside securing a fair funding settlement on integration, would be a promising start.”

10. From critiques to solutions

Steve Ballinger

In many ways it is remarkable that Theresa May's approach to immigration – centred as it was on hitting one key target, which was missed again and again – was allowed to continue for as long as it did. Opposition parties and migration advocates opposed the net migration target, as did business and the university sector. By the end of May's tenure in Downing Street, so did much of the cabinet. Why was none of them successful in forcing a change of approach?

The Labour Party, caught between the rock of its Brexit-voting heartlands and the hard place of its growing support among metropolitan liberals, continued to duck the question of immigration throughout much of Theresa May's time as Home Secretary and Prime Minister. Ever since Gordon Brown's damaging 'Bigoted woman' gaffe in 2010 after meeting voter Gillian Duffy, immigration was seen as too tricky an issue to engage with²⁵.

Labour Party activists struggled to answer voters' concerns about immigration when they were raised on the doorstep. That came, in part, from a nervousness that engaging with such concerns could be perceived as racist or prejudiced – but also from a lack of leadership from the top of the party. While Theresa May looked at opinion polls showing immigration as one of the public's top three concerns and concluded that reducing numbers at all costs was the route to electoral popularity, so Labour voices looked at those same figures and decided that the safer option was to pivot away from the issue to talk about housing or the NHS.

Both were mistaken. Public attitudes are more nuanced than the black-and-white picture that politicians took from the tabloids. Most people think that immigration brings pressures to Britain, particularly in places that have experienced rapid change, but that it brings benefits too. They welcome the contribution that migrants make to our economy, our culture and to public services like the NHS. When British Future and HOPE not hate went around the country talking to members of the public about immigration, we heard stories of people thanking migrant nurses and doctors for treating them or their families – often in the same breath as worrying about whether queues at the doctor's surgery were due to population increases.

Ed Miliband's 2015 General Election campaign did realise that it could no longer avoid the question of immigration but ended up in a massive internal argument – about a slogan on a mug. The problem was that 'Controls on immigration' – one of four campaign promises printed on a series of promotional mugs – never sounded like an authentically Labour message: it was offensive to the left,

unconvincing to the right. ‘Controlling immigration fairly’ – with some clear policies explaining how they would do it – might have stood more of a chance.

On EU migration the Blairite wing of Labour made the mistake of telling the public it was wrong on immigration, bombarding voters with facts and figures about its positive impact on GDP and then hoping they would change their minds. In that respect they had much in common with business voices who adopted a similar ‘myth-busting’ approach – which numerous studies have shown to be ineffective and even counter-productive²⁶.

Before, during and after the EU referendum, the approach of business – which needs migration to fill both high-skilled and lower-skilled jobs – was to make the financial case for immigration. Their arguments rang hollow with voters, who could see little reason why percentage rises or falls in GDP would impact on their own lives. And they struggled to overcome the perception that this was a self-interested argument: ‘immigration may be good for you but why does that make it good for me?’

Universities took a similar approach, focussing on the financial benefits that international students bring to the UK economy, but macro-economic arguments were never likely to convince a Home Secretary and PM who felt that anti-immigration feeling among the public was a more important metric. Yet the majority of voters think international students are good for Britain and for the towns and cities where they study. ICM research for British Future in 2017, for example, found that three-quarters of the public preferred to maintain the number of international students coming to Britain or to increase it. Amplifying public opinion and contesting May’s understanding of public attitudes turned out to be more effective – and led to a consensus among most senior ministers that the UK should do more to encourage international students to study here. If May’s successor decides to pursue such a liberalising line, on students and elsewhere, he or she will find the winds of public opinion blowing in the right direction.

Civic society advocates for a more liberal migration policy made a similar mistake in disregarding the importance of public opinion in convincing politicians of the case for change. They were too often convinced that the public was outright hostile to immigration – perhaps one of their few points of agreement with the former PM – and while they rightly harnessed public support for refugees after the harrowing picture of Alan Kurdi hit UK front pages, they failed to spot the space for engagement and persuasion in the political centre ground, restricting strategy instead to the mobilisation of already-onside support. More recent campaigns, such as *Lift the Ban*²⁷, *Families Together*²⁸ and *Let Refugees Learn*²⁹, have sought to engage further with public opinion.

The Windrush scandal also illustrated how the views of the public differed to those perceived by Mrs May. Voters do expect immigration to be controlled, but with competence, fairness and compassion. Windrush showed the Home Office demonstrating

none of those qualities. People respect the contribution that migrants make to the economy and to the public services that employ them – yet here was a case of people who had been working and contributing for years but, through no fault of their own, the state’s response was unfair and lacked any compassion.

Sajid Javid, who assumed the role of Home Secretary after his predecessor Amber Rudd was sacked over Windrush, has vowed to learn the lessons from that scandal. The next Prime Minister must be sure to do the same. Windrush showed how a coordinated response could snowball into a national scandal that dominated the headlines and forced the Government to change its approach. Advocates focused not on numbers, nor policy or legal appeals, but on individual people, the stories of the contribution they had made to the UK and the unfairness with which they had been treated. That made it quite different from much of the campaigning against Theresa May’s immigration policies. The Government has been forced to learn lessons from Windrush - migration advocates can do so too.

11. Challenges for opposition parties

Jill Rutter

The next Prime Minister has the opportunity to put in place an immigration system that works for employers, is fair to migrants and receiving communities and commands public trust and support. Achieving this is a challenging task for any Government. But opposition parties have policy challenges too, discussed below. They will also need to hold the Government to account on its performance.

There is some evidence that over the last three years in the UK, attitudes to immigration have become somewhat warmer and the subject has become less salient as an issue of public concern³⁰. Experts suggest that this softening is being driven by both ‘reassurance’ and by ‘regret’. Brexit provides reassurance for those who want greater control over the free movement of EU citizens to the UK. Regret, on the other hand, may have been driven by a more open discussion about immigration since 2016. Talking with friends and family may have made people more aware of the benefits that immigration has brought to the UK.

The Government and opposition parties need to consider how they respond to this warming of views, now and in their manifesto commitments. As noted in previous chapters, many of the candidates in the Conservative leadership contest have stated that they would break with Theresa May’s approach to immigration. They have proposed scrapping the net migration target; making it easier for international students to come to the UK; and offering EU citizens currently living in the UK a free route to British citizenship. Opposition parties should press the Government to make these commitments become actual policy.

Labour

Individual parties also have their own unique challenges when it comes to immigration and integration. The Labour Party has continued to struggle, finding it difficult to articulate an authentic voice and policy on this issue that unites supporters in Leave-voting towns and Remain-voting cities. As shown in previous chapters, the public’s trust of Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott on immigration is extremely low. The leadership of the Labour Party has also said almost nothing on integration, despite the concerns of its voters and the importance of social contact in dispelling public concerns about migration.

If Labour is to unite Leave- and Remain-voting supporters it needs to return to its core values of fairness and equality. This means rejecting the framing of the immigration debate as an ‘open

versus closed' choice, instead setting out approaches to equal opportunities and to integration which bridge that divide. British Future polling finds that Labour voters want an effective, fair and humane immigration system, which balances compassion and control.

Localised perceptions shape views about immigration at national level. And if local pressures – such as those on housing or school places – are not seen to be managed, no amount of national-level arguments about migrants' contribution to GDP or tax revenues are going to change people's minds. Labour voters want the Government to deal with the local impacts of immigration and to promote integration. The party needs to respond to these views.

The Liberal Democrats, the SNP and the Greens

Those who vote for these three parties tend to reflect the views of Remain voters, particularly in relation to the immigration issues where there is least public consensus – future approaches to migration from the EU. If it means a better deal for British business, majorities of Lib Dem, SNP and Green voters are willing to accept continued free movement or an immigration system that offers a preferential deal to those from the EU. In British Future's new ICM research 68% of those who stated that they would vote for the Liberal Democrats in the next general election and 63% of those who would vote SNP said that they supported the continuation of free movement from the EU if it meant a better deal for British business. Just 39% of the overall adult population felt the same³¹.

The views of Lib Dem, SNP and Green Party supporters opens up the space for parliamentarians and councillors from these parties to be bolder on immigration and integration nationally, in the devolved administrations and in local government. Members of these parties need to be energetic in holding the Westminster Government to account. While voters from these three parties have few concerns about migration from the EU, they differ very little from Labour and Conservative supporters in their views on integration. In the survey that formed part of the National Conversation on Immigration, 95% of those who voted Lib Dem and 86% of those who voted SNP in 2017 agreed that migrants needed to learn English in order to integrate and become successful members of their new communities, with 88% of the overall adult population holding this view³². Some 91% of Lib Dem voters and 89% of SNP voters agreed that councils should take firmer action against rogue landlords, compared with 76% of the overall population³³. The overwhelming majority of Lib Dems and SNP voters also want business to take a more active role in integration; they support the provision of more English language classes for migrants and refugees; and they agree with programmes to increase social contact between children from different social backgrounds³⁴.

The four nations of the UK have never had proper integration strategies, although the Integrated Communities Action Plan, covering England, is a small step in the right direction. Like Labour, the Lib Dems, SNP and the Greens have been quiet in the integration debate, critiquing the tone and balance of Government engagement and challenging cuts to English language provision, but doing less to set out their constructive integration agenda. Yet they have the power to act. If the UK does end up with a ‘Norway Plus’ or ‘Common Market 2.0’ type of Brexit, either temporarily or permanently, therefore retaining free movement, dealing with the local impacts of rapid population change and promoting integration will assume much greater importance. Regulating the private rental sector, taking action against the undercutting of employment conditions, English language provision and initiatives to promote social integration will all play an important role in securing public consent for the immigration that employers need.

Local government plays a key role in pushing forward integration. The Liberal Democrats hold power in 49 councils across the UK and the SNP in 14 councils, as the majority party, in minority administrations or in coalitions. This gives them a significant opportunity to take action.

The Brexit Party

The youngest addition to the political system surprised many commentators when it came first in the 2019 European parliamentary elections after securing 30% of the vote, albeit on a 37% turnout. The party now has three minority ethnic MEPs, the largest number of any political party represented in the European Parliament. Its leader, Nigel Farage, has deliberately distanced himself from the overt anti-Muslim prejudice of UKIP, which he has called the “new BNP”. He has stated that the policies of his former party mean that it cannot secure more than 750,000 votes³⁵. Yet the Brexit Party remains a political party with only one policy. A major challenge for Farage and his party is to maintain party discipline, particularly if it wants to recruit council candidates, and to resist the pressure to use immigration as a dog whistle.

Increasing accountability is a responsibility for all

Home Office under-performance characterised Theresa May’s time in office and contributed to low levels of trust in the immigration system. Under-investment in staff and technology explain some of the delays and mistakes made by this department. But ministers and officials have not always been held to account for Home Office underperformance. Increasing the levels of scrutiny of this department would be a major incentive for change.

Currently, there are a number of mechanisms which enable the Home Secretary to be held to account. As well as the work of individual parliamentarians, the Home Affairs Select Committee, the National Audit Office and the Independent Chief Inspector

of Borders and Immigration have a scrutinising role. Yet accountability is weak and this undoubtedly contributes to under-performance.

The complexity of immigration law makes it difficult for MPs to keep track of policy. The Home Office has made more than 5,700 changes to the Immigration Rules since 2010, with these changes laid before Parliament with little or no explanation. There are strong arguments for publishing Immigration Rule changes in draft form, with accompanying explanatory notes, before they are laid before Parliament. In the long term, the Government might consider setting up an independent organisation that works like the existing Social Security Advisory Committee, an independent statutory body that scrutinises the proposed secondary legislation underpinning the social welfare system.

As we have argued before, an annual Migration Day in Parliament, similar to Budget Day, would also help increase accountability. Introducing new structures to improve the scrutiny of the Home Office will require concerted action from all the opposition parties. New bodies are not a substitute for the diligence of MPs, who need to increase their scrutiny of the EU Settlement Scheme and the asylum system. This is a role that all members of opposition parties must undertake.

Immigration after May

Syed Kamall, Conservative MEP for London 2005-2019 and former Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament:

“Outside the EU, we should create a fairer immigration system based on the needs of the British economy rather than crude caps on non-EU migrants. There are basically three types of immigration system that treat applicants fairly. We could ban all immigration, but that would not be good for our economy. We could have an open-door system, but when the Blair government did this, it created a backlash and saw an increase in support for the National Socialists BNP. For me the fairest immigration system would be to treat all applicants equally, regardless of where they come from, then focus immigration policy on filling job and skills vacancies.

I would prefer a points-based system where the criteria are clear and regularly reviewed, say every 6 months, as certain sectors fill their skills gaps while others open up, employing new technology to help us. With the advent of big data, AI could scan jobs boards, university applications and economic performance in moments and assess skills shortages. Automation could also simplify visa applications and skills assessments, making a points-based review not only fairer but straightforward. We should also have a humanitarian asylum policy to welcome a number of genuine refugees fleeing persecution or war.”

Immigration after May

Nazek Ramadan, Director, Migrant Voice:

“Theresa May’s time as Home Secretary was marked by a series of unjust policies that continue to ruin the lives, families and futures of people in this country.

It was during those years that the Home Office introduced the “go home” vans, the salary threshold that forces families to live apart, the end of legal aid for immigration cases, the “deport first, appeal later” approach, the extraordinary ramping up of visa and citizenship costs, sowed the seeds of the Windrush scandal, and made the devastating decision to strip more than 35,000 international students of their visas without scrutinising the evidence against them, a failure detailed in a recent National Audit Office Report.

During Theresa May’s time as Prime Minister, despite pledging to ‘make Britain a country that works for everyone’, the toxic hostile environment that demonises migrants, punishes the innocent and turns ordinary citizens into unwilling border guards became even more entrenched.

Any future Home Secretary must make it their urgent task to dismantle this hostile environment and to truly make this country one that works for everyone, whether you were born here or not. Any future Prime Minister must back that mission, in both words and actions.”

David Goodhart, Head of Integration Hub and Demography Unit, Policy Exchange:

“Britain’s border is in far better shape than the headlines suggest thanks in part to Theresa May, as Home Secretary 2010-2016, ending the “laissez-faire” border era of the 1990s and 2000s—symbolised by the abolition of exit controls. Notable successes included: more efficient screening of the 2.6m visas issued every year with visa overstaying much reduced thanks to more intense vetting of visit and student visas; the introduction of the Biometric Residence Permit for those from outside the EU who are here for more than six months; the widespread use of E-gates; and intense and largely successful collaboration with airlines over Advanced Passenger Information.

On the debit side: there is nothing wrong in principle with an immigration target but the net immigration target was the wrong one: the target should have focused on those granted permanent residence. The over-zealous application of the so-called hostile environment led to the Windrush scandal: this anomaly should have been picked up and stopped far earlier but equally the principle of an internal border partly policed by employers, landlords and public service managers is essential to any immigration system with high flows of people across the border without the right to stay permanently and should have been more vigorously defended.

The next Home Secretary needs to grant all eligible EU citizens automatic British citizenship; introduce a new immigration target based on permanent residence (excluding EU citizens for the next five years); introduce a much more accurate system of counting those arriving and leaving; and re-open the debate about the need for a national citizen identification system.”

12. After May: recommendations for the next Prime Minister and Home Secretary

Theresa May's Government was preoccupied with trying to meet the net migration target. With immigration policy largely focussed on reducing numbers, then later derailed by Brexit, there has been little detailed thought about how the UK might achieve an immigration system that is fit for the 21st century.

Immigration will certainly be a priority issue for the next Prime Minister. Theresa May's successor will need to put in place an immigration system that works for employers, is fair to migrants and refugees and which also secures public trust and support. These are British Future's recommendations – for the next Prime Minister and Home Secretary, and others to come – to help achieve these aims.

1. Break the Brexit deadlock and set out the detail of the future immigration system

The delays to Parliament agreeing a Withdrawal Agreement have slowed down major policy decisions and left employers and universities in a state of continued uncertainty. It is essential that the next Prime Minister takes rapid action to resolve the Brexit deadlock and to set out in legislation the detail of a future immigration system.

This should include a change of approach towards international students. The UK's universities are an international success story and the public is in favour of student migration. Universities need immediate clarity on the fee status of EU students after 2020. We should promote the UK as a destination for international students, with the aim of increasing their numbers and spreading the benefits that international students bring more widely across the UK.

2. Prioritise building public trust: do not over-promise then fail to deliver

Public confidence in the Government's ability to manage immigration is very low and the public feels that their views have been ignored. Over-promising on immigration control then failing to deliver has dented public trust, with the failure to meet the net migration target symbolising much that has gone wrong.

The Government should scrap this target and replace it with a three-year migration plan. Building public trust in the immigration system should be one of its explicit aims. If the Government decides to include numeric targets in its plan, these should be based on evidence and treat different types of migration differently.

The three-year migration plan should be reviewed every year in Parliament at an Annual Migration Day, preceded by public engagement. The Migration Advisory Committee should coordinate an official National Conversation on Immigration, with its findings fed into an Annual Migration Day in Parliament.

3. Invest in an immigration system that works and prioritise improving the performance of the Home Office

Errors and delays have a high personal impact on migrants and asylum-seekers. High profile policy failures can also increase public mistrust in the immigration system. The Home Office remains an under-performing department. There needs to be an open and honest political debate about the resources that the Home Office needs to deliver on its aims and to improve its performance.

The Government should support high quality and speedy asylum decision-making through investment in Home Office staff and IT. The Home Office budget for asylum determination should be merged with the Ministry of Justice budget for asylum appeals, so as to incentivise high-quality initial asylum decision-making, and to reduce lengthy and costly appeals.

4. Encourage the uptake of citizenship

It is good for integration when migrants want to become British citizens and the acquisition of citizenship is something that we should all welcome. The public does not support temporary migration or 'guest worker' regimes and prefers it when migrant workers learn English, take part in community life and become British citizens. In future, all migrant workers should have routes to settlement and British citizenship, which should act as a lever to encourage integration.

Over 3.5 million EU citizens are now being invited to apply for permanent residence in the UK under the EU Settlement Scheme. The Government should make a citizenship offer to EU citizens who arrive in the UK before 31 December 2020. If they have five years' continuous residency and meet the other requirements for British citizenship – good character, English language and knowledge of life in the UK – they should be offered citizenship at cost price of £300 or, better still, at no cost at all.

The Government is planning to review the content of the citizenship test. It should also conduct a broader review of the purpose of citizenship policy, looking at whether the process and

fees act as a barrier preventing eligible people from becoming British citizens. Citizenship ceremonies should involve local residents so as to welcome new citizens as full members of their new communities.

5. Make immigration work at a local level

Immigration is a national issue that people see and experience locally. Encouraging social integration and dealing with the local impacts of rapid population change will help secure public consent for the migration that our economy needs.

Employment and English language both underpin integration. Asylum-seekers should be allowed to work if their case has not been decided within six months. All adult migrants should have access to English classes, with low-income groups able to study at a reduced rate and formal teaching supplemented by conversation clubs and televised lessons on Freeview TV.

Social integration needs to be a policy priority in all four nations of the UK and in all local authority areas. The Government should encourage a much wider range of institutions – employers, education, civil society and faith organisations, the arts and sport – to see it as their responsibility to increase social contact across ethnic, faith, class and generational divides.

In England, funding has been made available to help local authorities deal with some of the impacts of rapid migration. This money - made available through the Controlling Migration Fund – has been used to improve regulation of private rental housing, relieve pressures on accident and emergency departments and address community tensions and hate crime. It is essential that the Controlling Migration Fund is extended after 2020 and consideration should be given to expanding the scheme.

13. Notes and references

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14. Acknowledgements and About British Future

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About British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank and registered charity seeking to involve people in an open conversation which addresses their hopes and fears about immigration and integration, identity and opportunity, so that we feel confident about Britain's Future.

These debates, from EU immigration and refugee protection to integration of people from different faiths and backgrounds, remain noisy and polarised. But since British Future's founding in 2012, we have developed a unique understanding and expertise on public attitudes to these issues in the UK, through in-depth qualitative and quantitative research. We have found that there is a surprising amount of common ground among the public on which they can agree.

British Future engages people's legitimate concerns and offers constructive solutions in response. We believe we can build a broad consensus among the public and opinion-formers for reforms to immigration and integration policy that work for everyone.

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.

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