



Ipsos MORI

SHIFTING

GROUND

REPORT #1

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION
IN THE LONG TERM AND DURING
ELECTION CAMPAIGNS



Contents

1 Executive Summary	1
2 Introduction	3
3 Changing attitudes to immigration.....	4
A The long term	4
B Immigration as an Election Issue	10
Conclusion.....	24

1 Executive Summary

The key aim of this study was to examine how British attitudes towards immigration have changed over the long term and during election campaigns. Using both existing data and a unique new study interviewing a longitudinal panel of respondents on their attitudes to immigration throughout and after the 2015 general election campaign, we find:

- The importance of immigration as an issue facing Britain on the Economist/Ipsos MORI Issues Index reached record levels in 2015, with 56% of the public mentioning it in September; this is the highest level ever recorded for the issue since the series started in the 1970s.
- Four in ten people (41%) said their views on immigration have changed since the 2010 election and of these individuals, the large majority (86%) have become more worried.
- There is a growing generational divide since the early 2000s with older generations becoming much more concerned about immigration than younger generations.
- In the early 2000s, newspaper readership was the best predictor of how likely people were to see immigration as an important issue. This has changed in recent years with political allegiance now the best predictor.
- Over the course of the past three general elections the issue of immigration has become increasingly important in determining people's vote. However, it still remains a second order issue with the economy and healthcare consistently taking the lead.
- Although the long term data shows that immigration has become much more of a salient issue during successive general elections, our longitudinal study showed little evidence that election campaigns themselves shift public views on immigration.
- Indeed, immigration attitudes seem remarkably stable at an aggregate level – but this hides much greater churn in views among individuals, which our longitudinal survey uncovers.
- Most notably, the longitudinal survey shows a huge amount of churn in the people who say they want immigration numbers to increase. We may have expected this to be a stable core of more liberal, open respondents, but in fact it is a less stable group than those who want numbers decreased. Only four in ten (41%) of those who said they would like to see the number of immigrants coming to Britain increased in February held the same position in June, while over a third (36%) changed their mind to say they wanted the number reduced.

- The media and political communications seem to have played a minimal role in the immigration discussion in the lead up to the 2015 general election. Only 29% of the public noticed any discussion of immigration during in the last month of the campaign, and the impact on attitudes appears to have been minor.
- The exception to this seems to be UKIP, where coverage of immigration solidified the positive views of their supporters, in contrast with the pattern seen among supporters of other parties. The relative lack of focus on immigration from the main two parties therefore seems to have been the right political decision.
- There is a continuing trend towards polarisation in opinion on immigration. Nearly four in ten (37%) people say we are talking about immigration too little, but 27% say we are talking about it too much and 28% about the right amount. This is a big increase in the proportion saying “too much” since 2011, when only 11% said we were talking about it too much. We are still not getting the conversation right for the majority. Instead we’re increasingly seeing groups solidifying at either end.

These tensions have only just started to develop, and will come into much sharper focus in the UK and across Europe in the coming months, as the refugee crisis continues to play out, and the UK’s EU referendum keeps immigration control firmly in peoples’ minds.

We will therefore be continuing our longitudinal study throughout 2016, to measure how immigration attitudes change, shifting the ground for the key political decisions of our time.¹

¹ We would like to thank Unbound Philanthropy for their continuing support of our longitudinal study.

2 Introduction

In 2014 Ipsos MORI released Perceptions and Reality: Public Attitudes to Immigration, which offered a comprehensive review of existing data and allowed for a more complete picture of public perceptions towards immigration. This report builds on that information but also details the results from a unique new longitudinal survey conducted during, throughout, and after the 2015 General Election campaign, allowing us to track changes in immigration attitudes at the individual level.

The new primary research that this report focuses on is a five-wave longitudinal panel study. The research was conducted via the Ipsos MORI online panel with British adults aged 16+ years. The first wave of the study was conducted with 4,574 respondents (fieldwork completed from 25 February to 4 March 2015) which allowed us to look at smaller sub-groups, including followers of all key political parties. The response rates for subsequent waves of the survey were relatively high, as outlined in the below table:

Wave number	Fieldwork dates	Number of respondents	Response rate
1	25 February – 4 March 2015	4,574	-
2	27 March – 7 April 2015	3,770	82%
3	30 April – 6 May 2015	3,023	80%
4	26 June – 2 July 2015	2,698	89%
5	15 – 19 October 2015	1,941	72%

Quotas were applied in the first wave to achieve a representative sample of the population across Great Britain including age, gender and region. Each of the subsequent waves was then weighted to reflect these quotas.

This report is the first release in a series of three which will focus on immigration and attitudes towards the European Union in addition to a report on the recent refugee crisis.

We would like to thank Will Somerville and Unbound Philanthropy for their support through the duration of this project as well as the many other contributors who helped influence and shape our research.

3 Changing attitudes to immigration

The key aims of this study were to explore how public attitudes towards immigration change over the short and long term, by re-analysing our archive of survey data and through a unique new large-scale survey, tracking 4,574 individuals over the course of an election campaign and beyond. The results show that there has been a significant increase in salience over the long term and important changes in how this relates to other views and the political landscape. However, our evidence suggests that there has been relatively little change in opinion over election periods, including in 2015.

A The long term

1. Salience of immigration is at record levels...

Our long term trends show that concern about immigration has risen dramatically in the last couple of decades. Throughout 2015, it was either the most important or second most important issue facing Britain on the Economist/Ipsos MORI Issues Index. In September 2015, 56% of the public mentioned immigration as among the most important issues facing Britain. This is the highest level of concern about immigration we have recorded since the series started in the 1970s. It is also the highest score we have recorded for any issue over the last three years, since 56% mentioned the economy in August 2012. While the rise in concern in 2015 was partly driven by the refugee crisis, it seems to have been predominantly driven by the scale of immigration more generally and the desire to see numbers reduced, as we explored in the October survey².

As we first highlighted in our 2014 report³ "Perceptions and Reality", the long term trends also show that concern is closely related to net migration levels, as you can see in Chart 1 below. We have now also overlaid the level of media coverage in the same period and again this shows a very strong relationship with net migration figures.⁴ Indeed, it seems clear that the steep rise in net migration preceded the increase in media coverage, which in turn preceded the sustained increase in concern about immigration.

It's also interesting that media coverage of immigration continued at a similar pace and then rapidly increasing level following the economic crisis in 2008/9, while net migration figures and the Issues Index measurement of immigration concern fell away, see Chart 1. For the Issues Index, this is simply because concerns about the economy were top of mind and swamped all other issues in this period. But the switch of media coverage from a lagging to leading variable is more interesting. This may just reflect the fact that net migration is a flow measure, and media coverage will be affected by the stock: that is,

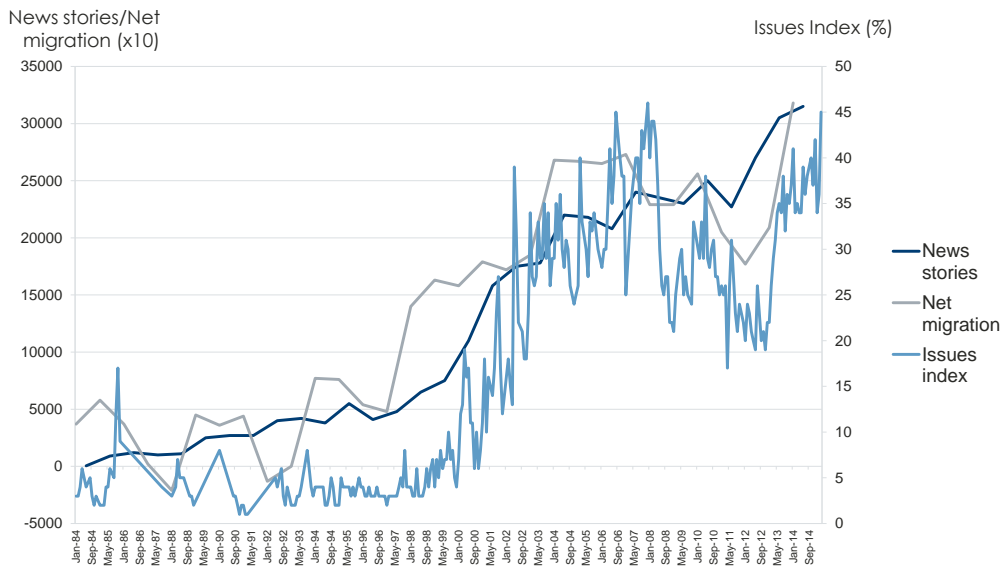
² <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3646/Level-of-concern-about-housing-is-highest-in-40-years-though-immigration-still-dominates.aspx>

³ <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/publications/1634/Perceptions-and-Reality-Public-attitudes-to-immigration.aspx>

⁴ Data on media coverage produced by LexisNexis and originally published in the Mirror on 4 May 2015. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/ampp3d/immigration-general-election-issue-started-5633680>. The data refer to the number of all UK print articles mentioning "immigrants", "immigrant", or "immigration".

discussion of the pressures that immigration was bringing will be affected by previous years' migration levels, not just current flows.

Chart 1: News stories about immigration, those mentioning immigration as an issue and net migration over time



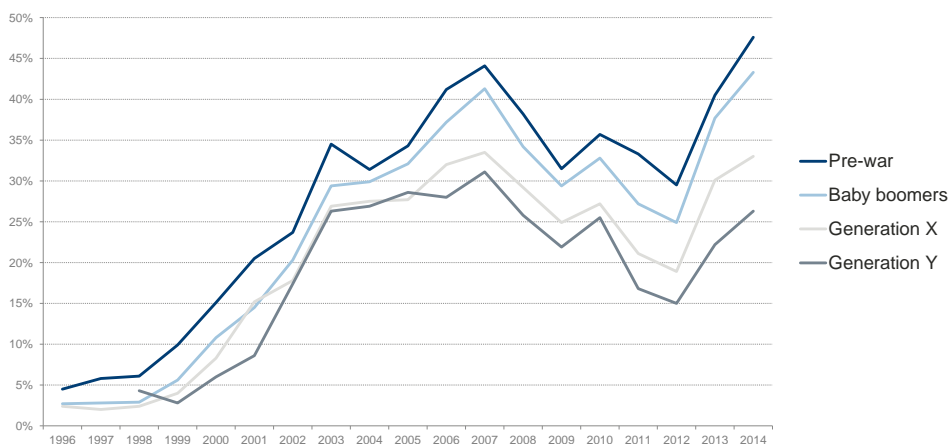
Source: LexisNexis; ONS; Ipsos MORI

2. ...but who is concerned is shifting

As well as growing concern overall, our long term trends show that there are changes in who is concerned about the issue. In particular, in the early 2000s there was relatively little difference between the oldest and youngest generations on concern about immigration, but in the last few years there is a growing generational divide with older generations having become much more concerned than younger generations, as shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2: Immigration as an issue facing Britain by generation

What would you say is the most important issue/other important issues facing Britain today?
RACE RELATIONS/IMMIGRATION



Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

3. ...and views are polarising

For many years, there was a perception among sections of the public that immigration was a taboo subject, where highlighting concerns would be interpreted as racist or prejudiced⁵. This in turn led to frustration that politicians and other elite, cosmopolitan groups were ignoring an issue that had real importance to a large proportion of the population. Immigration was, in some ways, a strangely unifying issue across this politically disparate group, with a majority of the public regularly saying we weren't talking about immigration enough.

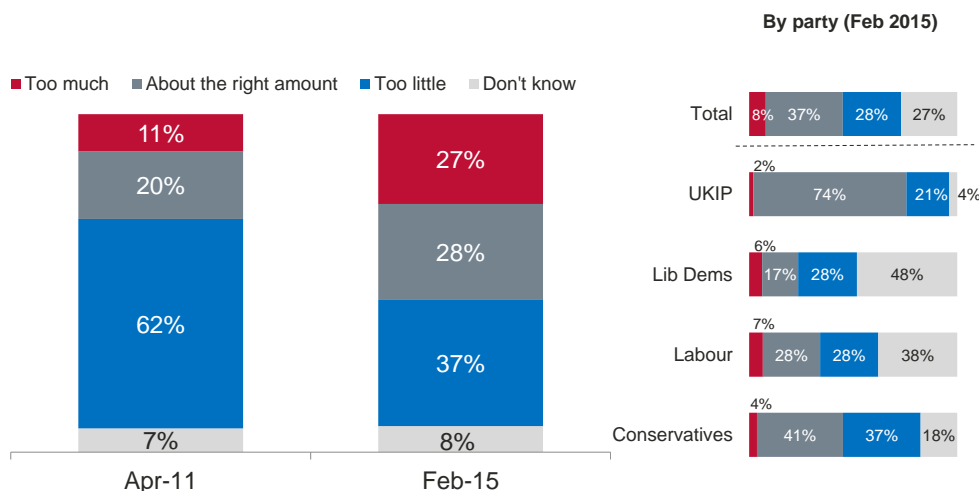
This has shifted in recent years, with the majority of people saying we are discussing immigration more now than at the time of the 2010 election; 57% say more and only 10% say less.

But this is not leading to a happy medium, where people think we are getting the discussion right – instead views are polarising. For some there is an appetite for even more discussion, as nearly four in ten (37%) say we are still talking about immigration too little, but 27% now say we are talking about it too much and 28% about the right amount. This is a big increase in the proportion saying “too much” since 2011, when only 11% said we were talking about it too much then. See Chart 3.

And this has a strong political basis: nearly half of Lib Dem and Green supporters think we're talking about immigration too much now (48% each) compared with 38% of Labour supporters and 18% of Conservatives – while only 4% of UKIP supporters think this.

Chart 3: Attitudes on how much immigration has been discussed in Britain

Generally speaking, do you think that the issue of immigration has been discussed in Britain too much, too little or about the right amount over the last few years/months?



Source: YouGov, April 2011; Ipsos MORI, Mar 2014, Dec 2014, Feb 2015

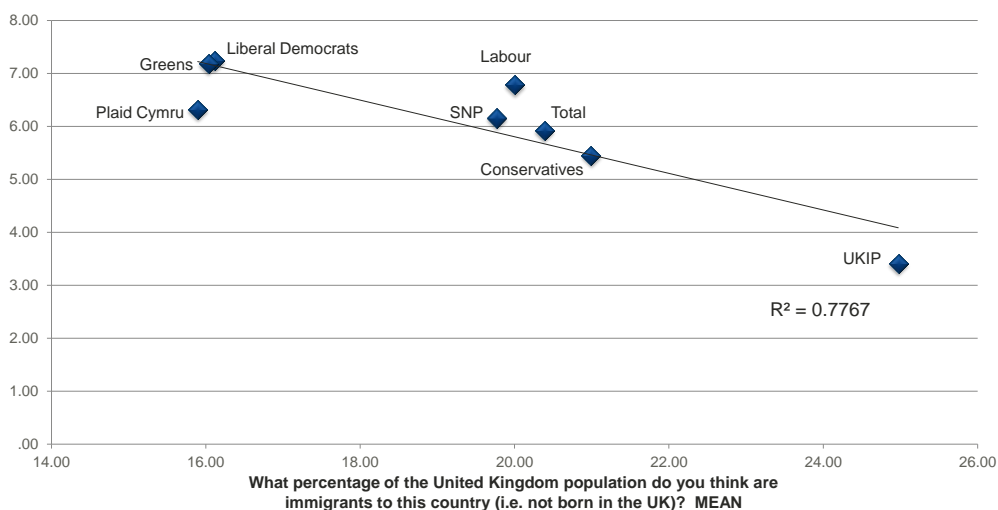
⁵ <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/243/Immigration-Poll.aspx>

4. There is still massive overestimation of the scale of immigration – but this doesn't always relate to higher levels of concern

Despite the perception that we're talking about immigration more, this doesn't mean people are any more accurate on immigration facts. People still massively overestimate the number of immigrants to Britain, and this varies between supporters of different parties in a way we might expect: on average, in our study, people thought that 21%, of the UK population is foreign born when the latest official estimate is around 13%⁶. But this runs from an estimate that 25% are immigrants among UKIP supporters, Conservatives thinking 21% are, 20% for Labour supporters, 19% for SNP supporters, with Lib Dem and Greens both on 16%. This rank order closely reflects how likely each group is to see immigration as a problem, with more worried groups thinking the immigrant population is higher, as Chart 4 shows.

Chart 4: The impact of immigration on Britain vs. estimation of migrant population in Britain by political party

On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on Britain? (0 is "very negative", 10 is "very positive") MEAN



Source: Ipsos MORI polling; nationally representative sample of 4,574 British adults 16+ (Feb-March 2015)

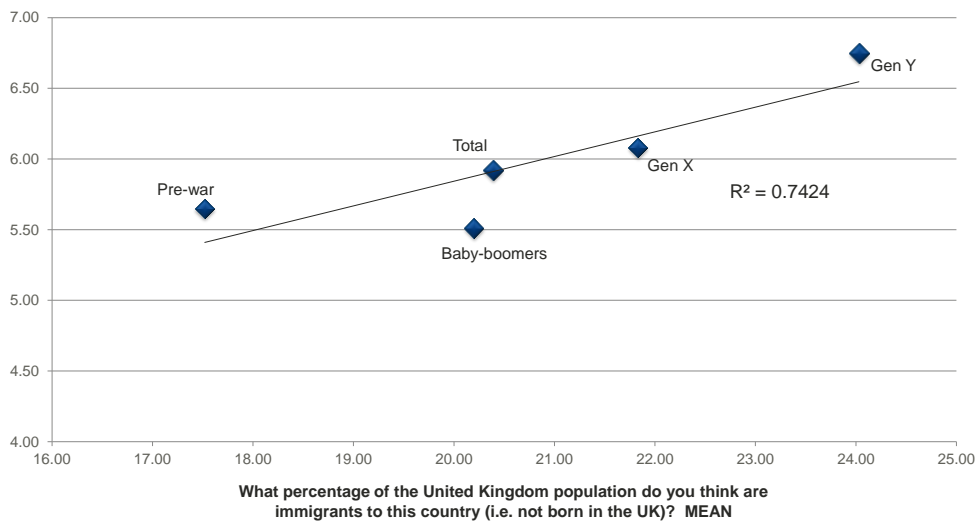
We may expect to see similar correlations between misperceptions of the scale of immigration and concerns about immigration on other demographic variables. But this isn't always the case - overestimating the number of immigrants isn't always related to greater concern. The pre-war generation (those born before 1945) are the most concerned about immigration among all age groups, but they also have the most accurate view of the scale of the immigrant population (they guess at 17%), while the youngest generation, Generation Y, are least concerned but most likely to overestimate the scale of immigration (24%), as illustrated in Chart 5. This may just relate to who these groups come into contact with – that is, the younger generation generalizing from their (on average) more urban, diverse experience.

However, it helps make the point that correcting misperceptions and myth-busting using facts about the real scale of immigration is likely to be ineffective in reducing concern.

⁶<http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censusstatisticsforenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

Chart 5: The impact of immigration on Britain vs. estimation of migrant population in Britain, by generation

On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on Britain? (0 is "very negative", 10 is "very positive") MEAN



Source: Ipsos MORI polling; nationally representative sample of 4,574 British adults 16+ (Feb-March 2015)

5. Party politics has caught up with immigration concern

Over time, immigration has also become a more political issue. Throughout much of the 2000s, newspaper readership and where you lived were the best predictors of how likely people were to think immigration was an important issue in our statistical models - with what political party you supported largely absent.

But this has changed markedly in recent years, with political allegiance⁷ now being the most important predictor of concern about immigration.

This change is supported by our CHAID and regression analyses. These statistical techniques identify which groups are most/least concerned and the key demographic and behavioural factors related to concern about immigration.⁸

For example, in Chart 6 our regression model shows that in 2004, political allegiance barely featured as a driver of concern about immigration. Instead the top four most important factors were all related to which newspaper you read. If you read the Daily Mail, Daily Express or the Sun, you were significantly more likely to think that immigration was an issue, even after controlling for other factors in the model, such as differences in the age and class profile of readers. Similarly, if you read the Guardian, you were significantly less likely to think immigration was an issue.

However, by 2014, the picture is very different. Chart 7 shows that at one end of the spectrum, not surprisingly, UKIP supporters are by far the most likely to think that immigration is an issue, even after controlling for differences in their demographic

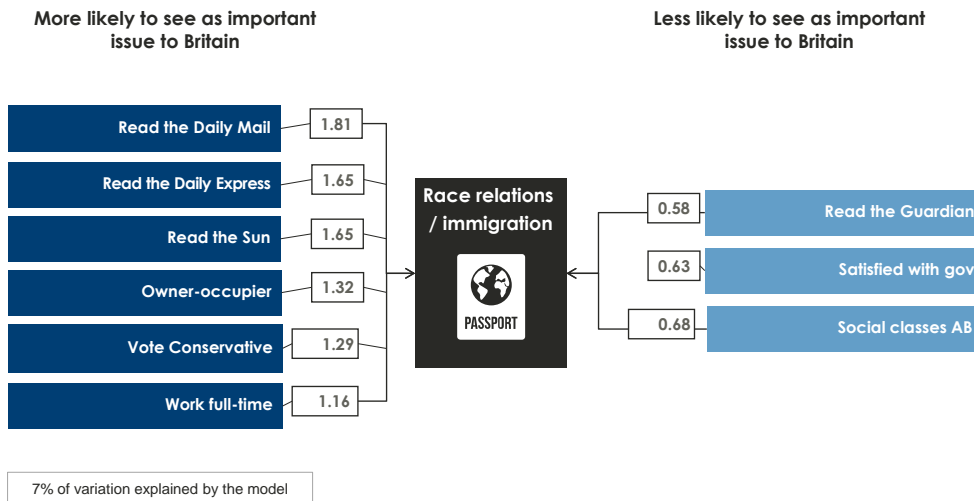
⁷ Although it should be noted that there is a strong correlation between political allegiance and newspaper readership.

⁸ CHAID stands for CHi-squared Automatic Interaction Detection, it is a multivariate analysis method that allows researchers to investigate relationships within the data. CHAID was used to determine which various sub-groups hold similar views on immigration. More information is available within the technical note.

profile. At the other end of the spectrum, Green Party supporters are the least likely to be concerned. Whether you vote Conservative (more likely to be concerned) or Labour (less likely to be concerned) also appear as key factors in the model.

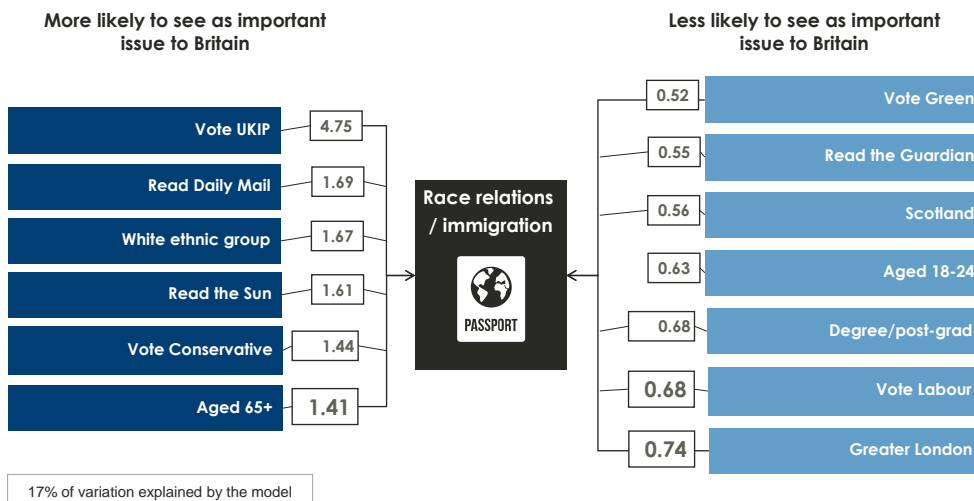
In some ways, then we can view politics as finally catching up with the level of concern and importance people were putting on immigration as an issue.

Chart 6: CHAID analysis of likelihood to see immigration as an important issue and newspaper readership



Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index, Jan-Oct 2004

Chart 7: CHAID analysis of likelihood to see immigration as an important issue and political party support



Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index, Jan-Oct 2014

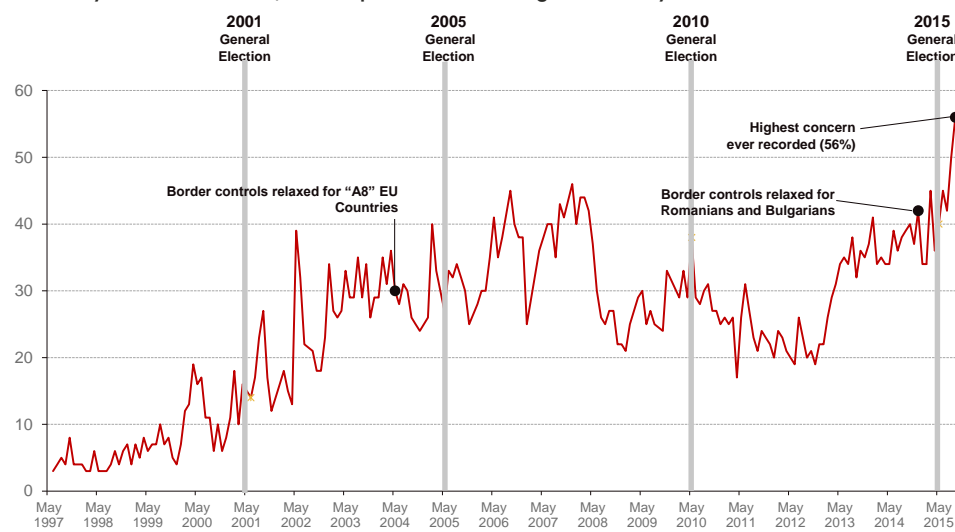
B Immigration as an Election Issue

1. Immigration seems like it should be an important election issue

So it is clear that concerns about immigration have increased significantly over the longer term and between elections. In our study, four in ten people (41%) said their views have changed since the 2010 election, and of these individuals the large majority (86%) have become more worried, as shown in Chart 9.

Chart 8: Immigration as an important issue over time

What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?

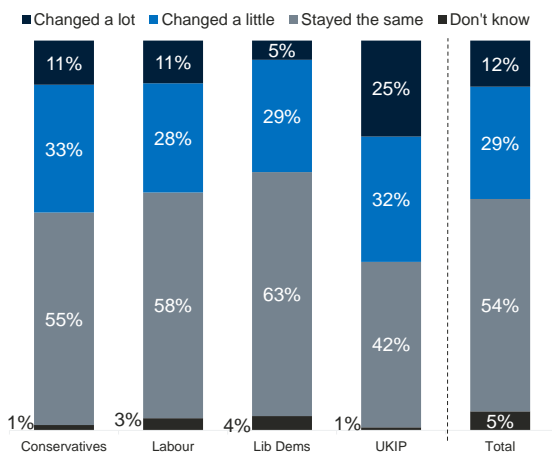


Base: representative sample of c.1,000 British adults age 18+ each month, interviewed face-to-face in home
* Up until Sept 2014 the code was race relations/immigration/immigrants

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

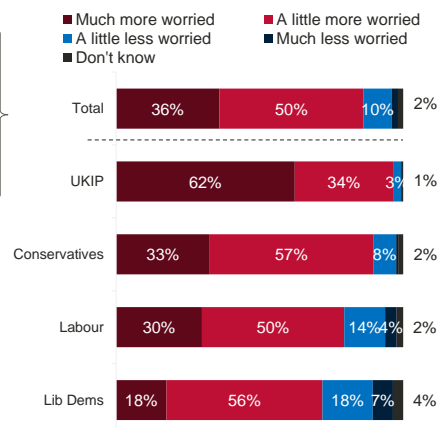
Chart 9: Changes in views on immigration and level of concern

Thinking back to the last general election in 2010, since then would you say your views on immigration have changed a lot, a little, or stayed the same?



Source: Ipsos MORI; nationally representative sample of 4,574 British adults 16+ (Feb-March 2015)

And would you say you have become more or less worried about immigration since 2010?



Base: those who say their views have changed a lot or a little, 930 British adults 16+ (Feb-March 2015)

According to Ipsos MORI's Political Monitor (see Table 1) immigration was not mentioned as one of the top issues in helping voters decide how they would vote in the 1997 and 2001 General Elections – while healthcare and education were the top two most important issues followed by others such as law and order, and pensions.⁹ This ties in with analysis by Shamit Sagar. In 2003¹⁰ he explained that the lack of focus on immigration among parties was because it had not been of high enough concern to voters for political parties to experience reward or punishment for it at the ballot box. This has certainly become more the case since then, as the table suggests, with it first appearing in the top 5 in 2005, and moving up to 4th in the last two elections.

Table 1: Top five most important cited issues that influence voters

	April 1997	June 2001	April 2005	March 2010	April 2015
1	Healthcare	Healthcare	Healthcare	Managing the Economy	Healthcare
2	Education	Education	Education	Healthcare	Managing the Economy
3	Law and Order	Law and Order	Crime and ASB	Education	Education
4	Unemployment	Pensions	Pensions	Immigration	Immigration
5	Pensions	Taxation	Immigration	Taxation	Housing

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor; preceding survey to each election

So while it remains a 'second order' issue (particularly to the economy and healthcare), the gap between immigration and traditional big ticket issues has certainly closed, as is suggested by findings from our new longitudinal survey. In our post-election survey in June, the economy (mentioned by 22%) and healthcare (19%) were still cited by more Britons as their top issue at the ballot box. However, immigration was next, with 15% saying it was the single most important issue for them when it came time to deciding how to vote. When we asked our respondents to cite *all* the issues which were important in deciding how they voted healthcare was on top mentioned by nearly two in three (64%) Britons while half (49%) said the economy and 45% said immigration was one of their issues.

As we would expect, there were stark differences between supporters of political parties on whether immigration was a top vote-deciding issue. Just over half (52%) of all UKIP supporters said that immigration was their top issue in deciding who they voted for. This compares to just 15% of Conservative voters and 7% of Labour voters.

Of course, we need to be cautious when interpreting findings from questions that ask people how they decided on an action, as we are very poor at unpicking our motivations. Our longitudinal study for the BBC which followed c1,800 voters over the course of the election showed that while people said that asylum and immigration was set to be a key issue for them at the ballot box (41% of people thought it would be very important in helping them to decide which party to vote for), after the election only 7% cited it as the

⁹ Data available at <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/54/Importance-Of-Key-Issues-To-Voting.aspx>

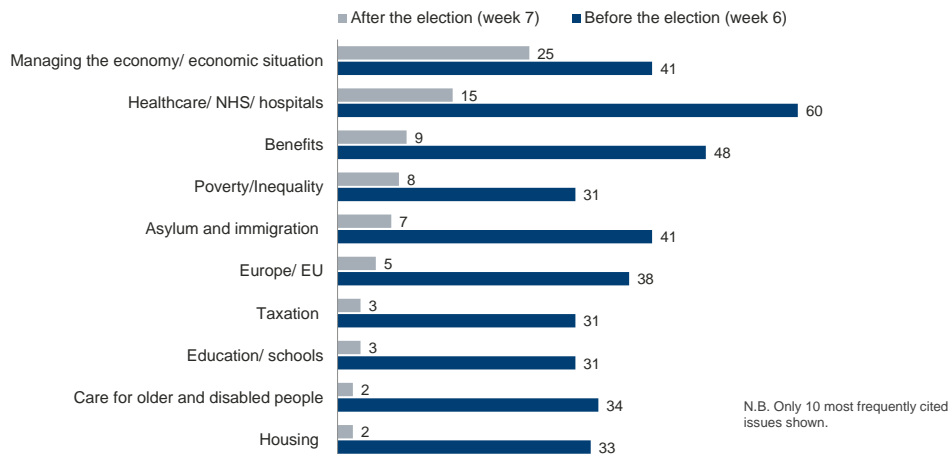
¹⁰ Sagar, Shamit (2003), Immigration and the politics of public opinion, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 74, pp 178-194.

single most important issue in helping them to decide which party to vote for, as shown in Chart 10. When people looked back, the economy was clearly the number one issue, picked out by twice as many people as healthcare, even though healthcare was the most selected issue before the election.¹¹

Chart 10: Top issues in determining votes in the 2015 General Election

Before: Looking ahead to the next General Election, which, if any, issues do you think will be very important to you in helping you decide which party to vote for?

After: Thinking about the General Election, which single issue was most important to you in helping you decide which party to vote for?



Base of British adult community members 18-75 surveyed online:
Week 6 – 1,085, Week 7 – 1,042

Source: BBC Ipsos MORI Election Uncut
Community

2. But there is little evidence that views shift during election campaigns...

So there has been a clear increase in the salience of immigration as an issue over the course of the last five general elections. However, there is little evidence of election campaigns themselves shifting views significantly, as suggested in Chart 11.

Looking at our Issues Index for each general election campaign period since 1997, it shows that during the 1997 election period, concern about immigration was very low (less than five per cent) and this did not change in the three months prior to the election or the month after. By the 2001 election period, salience had increased, but again there was very little change over the election period itself.

Similarly, during 2005 the issue became more prominent, reflecting the increase in immigration from Eastern Europe in the early 2000s. However, during the election campaign of that year, salience did not change much and actually fell slightly towards the end of the election campaign and during the month afterwards.

This is despite Michael Howard putting immigration control at the heart of his campaign, saying that “it is not racist to talk about immigration”, a positioning that chimed with

¹¹ Ipsos MORI's Election Uncut work can be found at: <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/election2015/electionuncut.aspx>. Note the part of the explanation for the difference could be the shift from any important issue to the single most important issue – but this still provides a different perspective on the relative importance of issues.

much of the public. But the campaign message that the Conservatives were pushing was widely criticised – including from within the party itself. The issue was seen as a potential turn-off to voters and analysis by Wlezein and Norris¹² shows that while immigration was high on the agenda at the beginning of the campaign, its salience as an issue declined before Election Day.

In the run up to the 2010 election, the main parties said relatively little about immigration but during the campaign it was frequently mentioned as an issue that politicians were confronted about on the doorstep, and it was an issue that was discussed at length during all the election debates, where all the parties pointed towards some form of restriction on immigration. However, the defining moment of the campaign on immigration came when Gordon Brown referred to pensioner Gillian Duffy as a “bigoted woman” when she challenged the then Prime Minister on immigration.¹³ Analysis of the British Election Study¹⁴ by Don Flynn, Rob Ford and Will Somerville showed that it was the campaign event most recalled by voters.

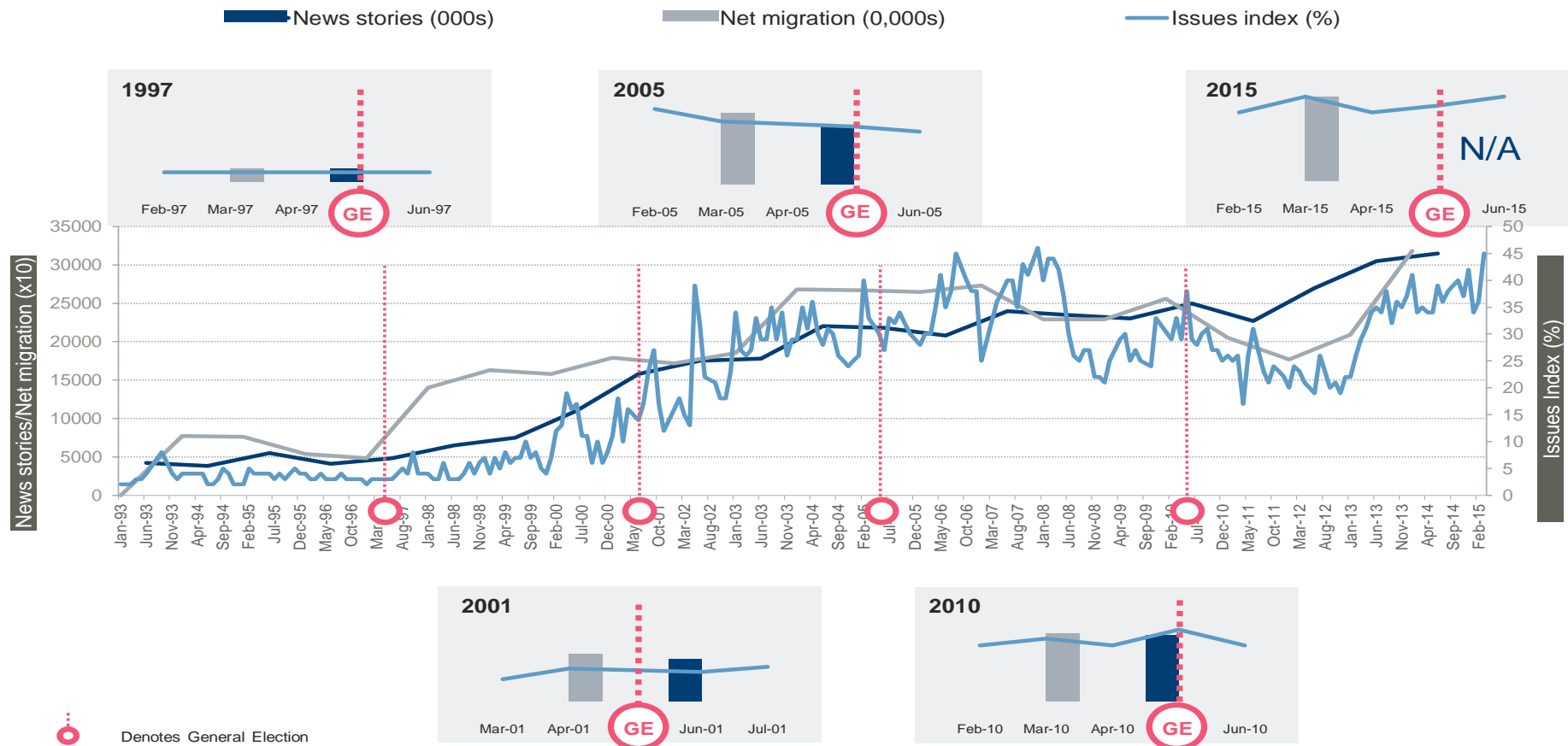
And this does seem to fit with shifts in salience, with immigration reaching its highest level of concern in May (the month of the election) before decreasing again the month after - from 38% to 29%.

¹² See Christopher Wlezein and Pippa Norris, 'Whether and how the campaign mattered', in Christopher Wlezein and Pippa Norris, *Britain Votes 2005* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

¹³ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/apr/28/gordon-brown-gillian-duffy-transcript>

¹⁴ <http://www.renewal.org.uk/articles/immigration-and-the-election/>

Chart 11: Changes in immigration as an important issue and media coverage over election campaigns: 1997-2015



Source: Based on LexisNexis annual data published in the Daily Mirror April 2015; ONS; Ipsos MORI

3....and this includes the 2015 election – although there were greater shifts at an individual level

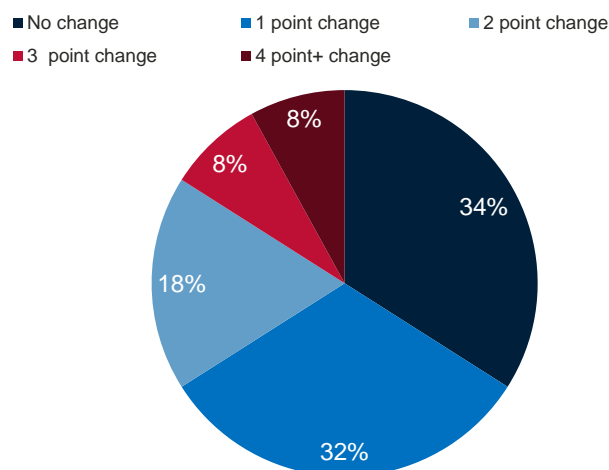
It appears there was a similar story of little change in immigration attitudes during the 2015 election campaign. First, our Issues Index shows that concern was at 45% in March 2015, and fell to 36% in April, just before the election then rose to 40% in May just after the election.

And even on our larger, more detailed longitudinal survey we found that views on nearly all aspects of immigration remained pretty stable at the aggregate level. We asked respondents to rate the overall impact of immigration on Britain using a 0-10 scale (0 being very negative and 10 being very positive). The mean score was 6.0 in wave 1 (February) decreasing only very slightly after the election to 5.9 in June.

However, the benefit of a longitudinal approach is that we can also examine how individual respondents changed their views, called “gross change” (as opposed to “net change” which looks only at how the aggregate findings move). This shows greater variation, with just one in three (34%) picking the exact same score on the impact of immigration in June as they did in February. However, most people did not shift far, with 50% changing their score by between 1-2 points, and only 16% changing by 3 points or more.

Chart 12: Individual level shifts in attitudes about the impact of migration on Britain

On a scale of 0 to 10, has migration had a positive or negative impact on Britain? (0 is “very negative”, 10 is “very positive”)



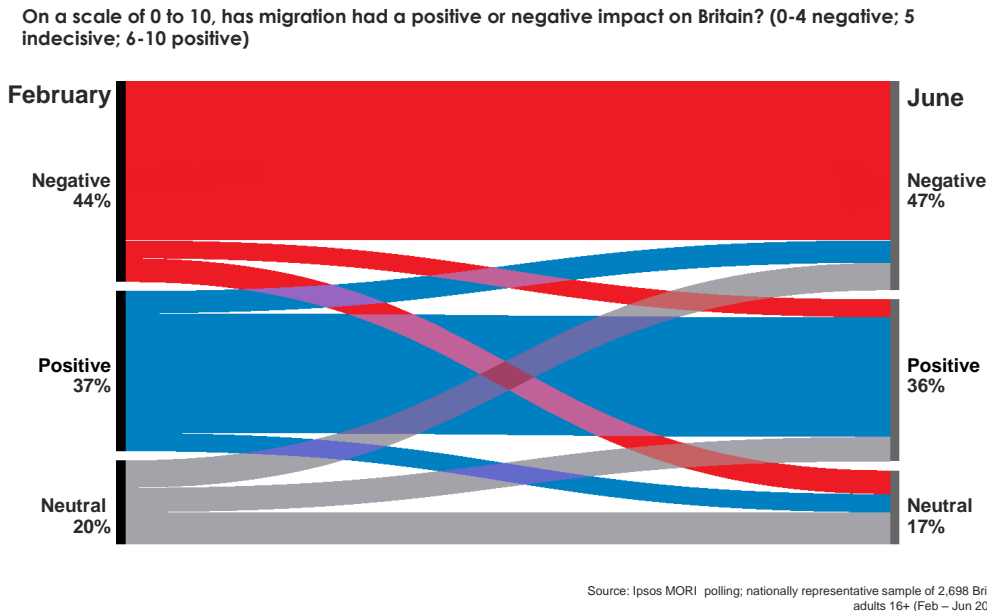
Source: Ipsos MORI polling: nationally representative sample of 2,698 British adults 16+ (Feb – Jun 2015)

And, as indicated by the very consistent mean score, this change was very balanced, with nearly equal numbers of people moving to being more negative and more positive.

This is seen in Chart 13, where we have grouped respondents into three categories (0-4 negative; 5 neutral; 6-10 positive). This shows that among those that held negative views about immigration’s impact on Britain in February 2015, eight in ten (80%) still held a negative view after the election in June, while 9% switched to saying that the impact of immigration on Britain has been positive. Of those who viewed the impact of immigration

positively in February, three-quarters (74%) continued to say the same in June, while 14% had switched to say immigration has had a negative impact on Britain.

Chart 13: Individual level shifts in views about the impact of migration on Britain, Feb-June



4. And there were other important and less balanced changes at an individual level

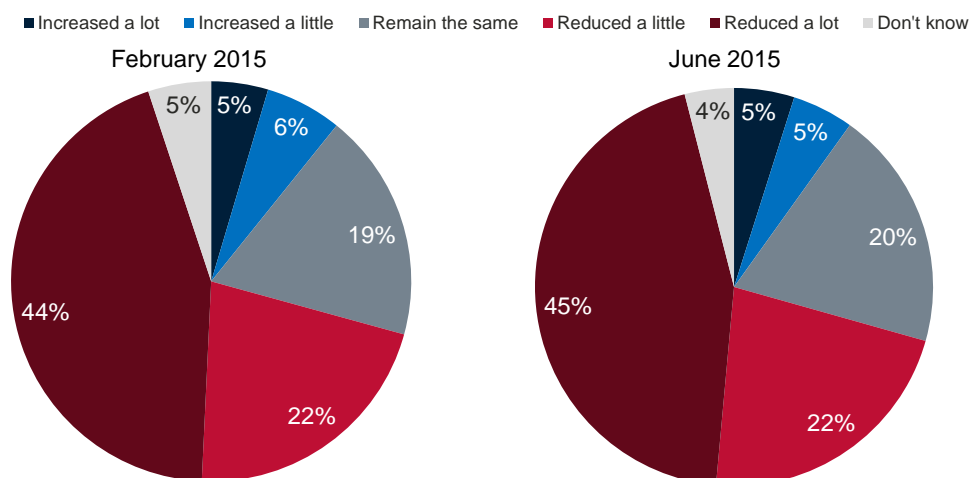
However, other measures show more change and less balance in the nature of change at an individual level, particularly on the question that asks whether immigrant numbers should be reduced, increased or remain the same.

First, at an aggregate level, comparing data from June and February shows that there was again no change in the proportion of people saying that immigration to Britain should be reduced or increased. In February, 66% said they would like the number of immigrants coming to Britain to be reduced compared with 11% who wanted to see numbers increased¹⁵. In June the figures were 67% and 10% respectively. At first glance, this would suggest that the extent to which people hold 'restrictive' or more pro-migration views are fairly fixed.

¹⁵ It's worth noting this is a slightly lower percentage saying "reduce" than we typically see consistently in surveys such as British Social Attitudes Survey or Transatlantic Trends over recent years, where c75% is more normal.

Chart 14: Aggregate changes in desired level of immigration into Britain

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



Source: Ipsos MORI polling; nationally representative sample of 2,698 British adults 16+ (Feb – Jun 2015)

But this hides a much greater level and very interesting pattern of change at an individual level.

In particular, only four in ten (41%) of those who said they would like to see the number of immigrants coming to Britain increased in February held the same position in June, while over a third (36%) changed their mind to say they wanted the number reduced. On the other hand, the large majority of those who originally said they want the number of immigrants to be reduced continued to believe this in June (86%), while only 6% changed their opinion to say the number should be kept 'as is' and another 6% changed their opinion to wanting the number increased.

Chart 15: Individual level changes in desired level of immigration into Britain

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



Source: Ipsos MORI polling; nationally representative sample of 2,698 British adults 16+ (Feb – Jun 2015)

So this “increased immigration” group is not a stable core of people with consistently more open attitudes to immigration, as we might have expected. There is much more churn hidden behind the consistent finding that around one in ten are actively in favour of more immigration, which provides something of a challenge for pro-immigration campaigners.

And there may also be an indication of a campaign effect within this change, with Labour supporters making up a significantly larger proportion of the group who moved from “increase” to “reduce” over the election period. One in three (32%) of those who changed their mind from wanting an increase in numbers in February to a reduction in levels in June voted Labour in the general election, compared with only 21% who voted Conservative, 10% Liberal Democrat, 5% UKIP and 15% who say they did not vote. This over-representation of Labour voters may reflect the increased emphasis the party put on restrictive measures during the campaign. This is backed up by analysis of supporters going in the other direction: those who moved from wanting immigration reduced to wanting it increased were more likely to be Conservative than Labour supporters (35% versus 27%).

However, the overall picture is still of a relatively “quiet” election for immigration in political party campaigns – and this was mirrored in media coverage of the issue.

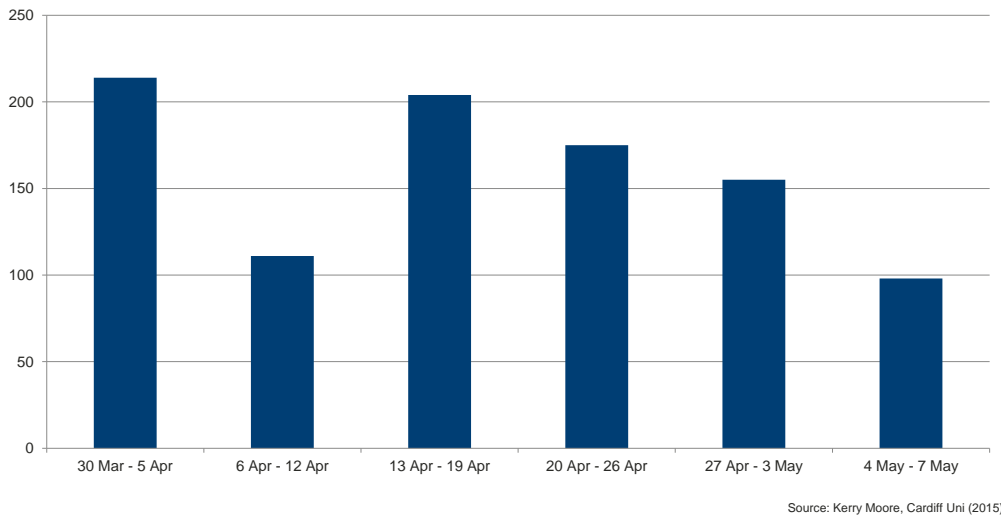
5. The media did not focus on immigration in the 2015 election

The impression of a relatively quiet election on immigration in the media is supported by analysis by Dr Kerry Moore (2015)¹⁶ which shows that newspaper coverage of the issue declined in the four weeks leading up to the election, as shown in Chart 16. The increase in coverage during the 13-19 April is likely to be explained by disaster in the Mediterranean where a boat carrying around 700 migrants and refugees sank.

¹⁶ Moore, Kerry 2015. Immigration coverage and populist cultural work in the 2015 General Election campaign. In: Jackson, Daniel and Thorsen, Einar eds. UK Election Analysis 2015: Media, Voters and the Campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics, Bournemouth, UK: The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, pp. 20-21

Chart 16: Number of news stories covering immigration during the 2015 General Election campaign

Nexis UK search of national newspaper headlines, lead paragraphs and indexing using search terms: immigration/migration/asylum/refugee

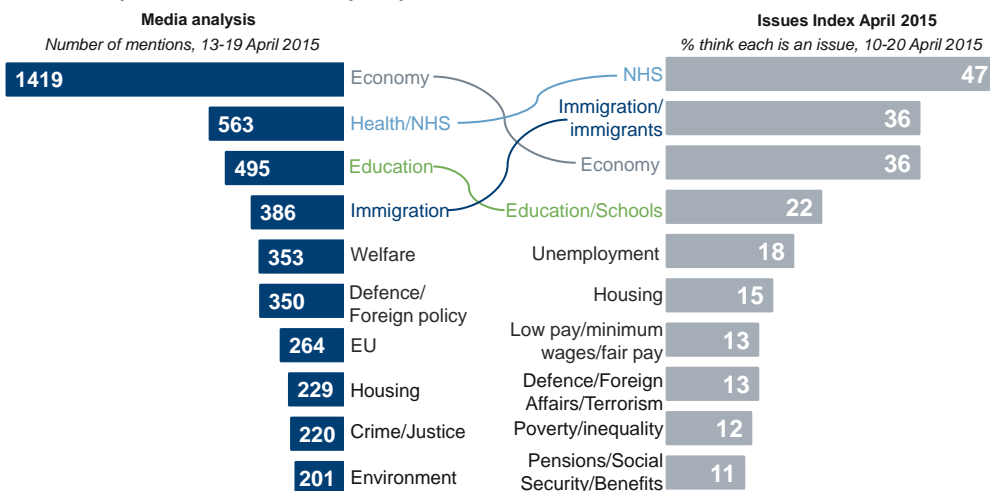


This is also reflected when comparing our Issues Index with media coverage in online news-sites, as measured by Election Unspun at the Media Standards Trust¹⁷. The analysis shows that the issues that were top of the index at the time of the election were the NHS and immigration, but the economy dominated coverage, and immigration was below where you might expect from this rank order, in fourth place, behind education.

Chart 17: Top issues facing Britain vs. media coverage

Issues Index: What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?

Election Unspun: media content analysis by the Media Standards Trust



Source: Media Analysis <http://electionunspun.net/>; Issues Index Base 982 British adults 18+, 10th – 20th April 2015

¹⁷ http://mediastandardstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Election_Unspun_July_2015.pdf

And when asked directly in our longitudinal survey, only 29% of the public noticed any discussion of immigration in the last month of the campaign. And even among those that did notice stories, relatively few felt they had much impact on their views – although people said it was more likely to make them more negative than more positive. One in ten (10%) said they made them feel more positive about immigration versus two in five (39%) who said they made them feel more negative, with half saying it did not shift their views.

However, this picture of a minor negative impact is less clear when we compare how views changed among those who remember seeing media coverage and those who do not. In fact, there appears to have been a slight positive shift. For example, of those who said they recalled a news story and said immigration had a negative impact in February, 17% had switched to having positive views in June – compared with 9% of those who could not recall a news story and switched from negative sentiment about immigration to positive. This highlights the difficulty in ascribing a causal effect to media coverage. However, across all measures, it seems clear that the media did not have a major impact.

Further, very few of those who recalled seeing immigration news stories said they had an impact on how they felt about the party they support. The major exception to this, however, was among those voting UKIP, where eight in ten (80%) said they felt more positive about their party as a result of the news stories (with 47% saying *much* more positive).

6. The main two parties did not focus on immigration either

Of course, the relative lack of media focus on immigration will partly be a function of the focus of the political campaigns. Reflecting what we've just seen on how media coverage of immigration particularly reinforced support for UKIP, the main two parties were aware that they had little to gain from making immigration a focus, and their campaign communications therefore focused primarily on the economy (particularly for the Conservatives) and the NHS (particularly for Labour), which the media reflected¹⁸.

This is supported by analysis by Dr Martin Moore¹⁹, who describes immigration as “the subject the candidates chose not to talk about during the UK Election 2015” based on the issues the candidates talked about on social media. Of course, as we saw earlier, the emerging refugee crisis and in particular the tragedies in the Mediterranean made a straightforward discussion of immigration control more difficult and nuanced. But even without that tragic context, immigration had become a difficult subject for the two main parties.

The Coalition government's record on immigration was poorly rated (as was the previous Labour government's) with six in ten (61%) dissatisfied with how the government was dealing with immigration in March 2015, and only 12% satisfied. Among Conservative supporters 45% were dissatisfied, rising to 94% among UKIP supporters. Satisfaction

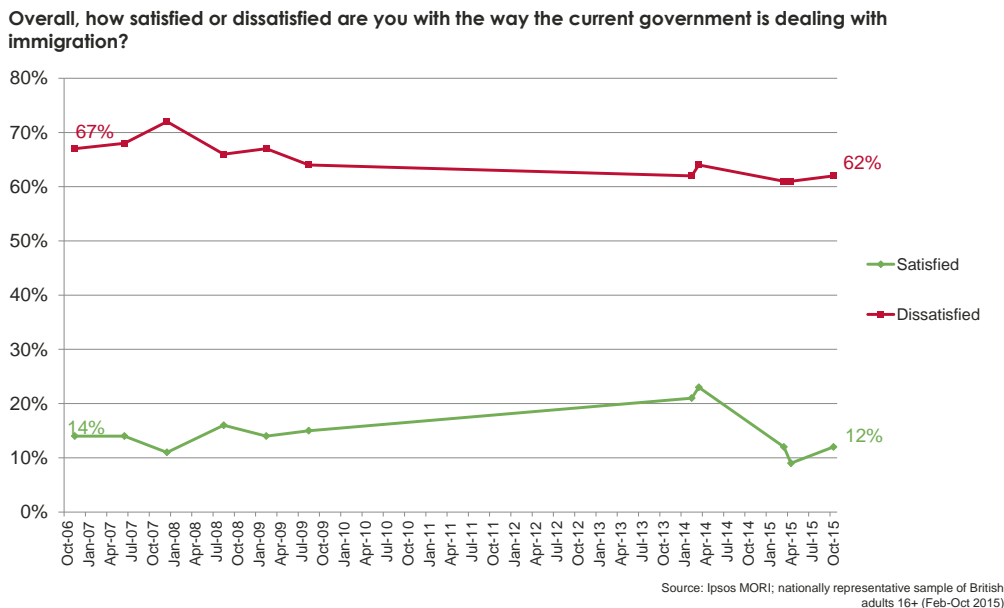
¹⁸ <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/MST-Election-2015-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://blogs.kcl.ac.uk/policyworkers/immigration-the-subject-candidates-chose-not-to-talk-about-during-uk-election-2015/>

levels also barely shifted over the course of the study (from 9% satisfied and 61% dissatisfied in June to 12% satisfied and 62% dissatisfied in October). These are similar to levels to those recorded for Labour back in 2007, as Chart 18 shows.

For those who became more dissatisfied with the government over the study, their reasons were split between the Government's inability to demonstrate they can reduce the number of migrants coming into Britain as well as its response to the refugee crisis.

Chart 18: Satisfaction with Government's dealing with immigration over time



Immigration had traditionally been a policy area where the Conservatives had an advantage over Labour. However, as British Future explain²⁰, the fact that it missed its targets on bringing net migration down to the tens of thousands meant that the immigration went from 'a *political advantage to headache*', with the party losing credibility with large sections of the public.

Labour's attempts mark out a position for itself during the campaign also backfired, particularly with the 'Controls on immigration' campaign mugs²¹, which sharply divided the party and attracted widespread criticism. It highlighted the difficulty for the party in reconciling the public's desire to see tougher immigration controls with its traditionally more pro-migration stance.

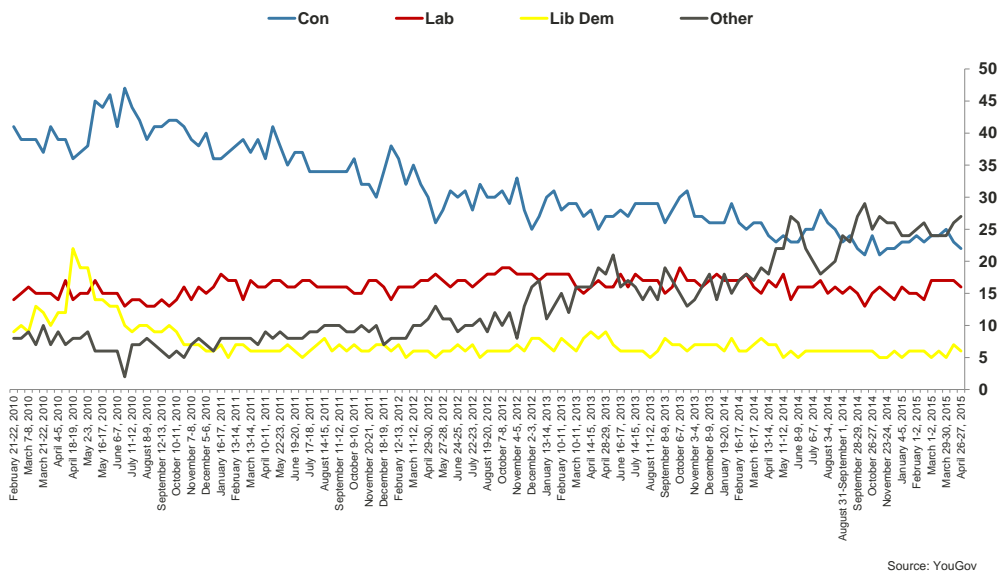
And these challenges are seen in the long term trends on which party has the best policies on immigration. In May 2010, just prior to the General Election, YouGov found the Conservatives to be the most favourable party to handle immigration mentioned by 38% of the public compared to just 15% saying Labour, 19% saying the Liberal Democrats and 9% saying some other party. By April 2015, just prior to the General Election, the number saying the Conservatives were the best party on immigration

²⁰ Katwala, Sunder, and Ballinger, Steve (2015), The politics of immigration: The surprising lessons of the 2015 general election and what they mean for the new party leaders, London: British Future

²¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3016965/Time-cuppa-limit-migrants-Labour-party-sparks-row-souvenir-mug-promising-controls-immigration.html>

dropped to 22%, while Labour remained low on 16% and the Liberal Democrats on 6%. Those mentioning some “other” party, however, increased to 27%.²² It is important to note that the question did not prompt for UKIP specifically who are instead brought into the umbrella of “other” party.²³

Chart 19: Party which has the best policies towards immigration over time



Source: YouGov

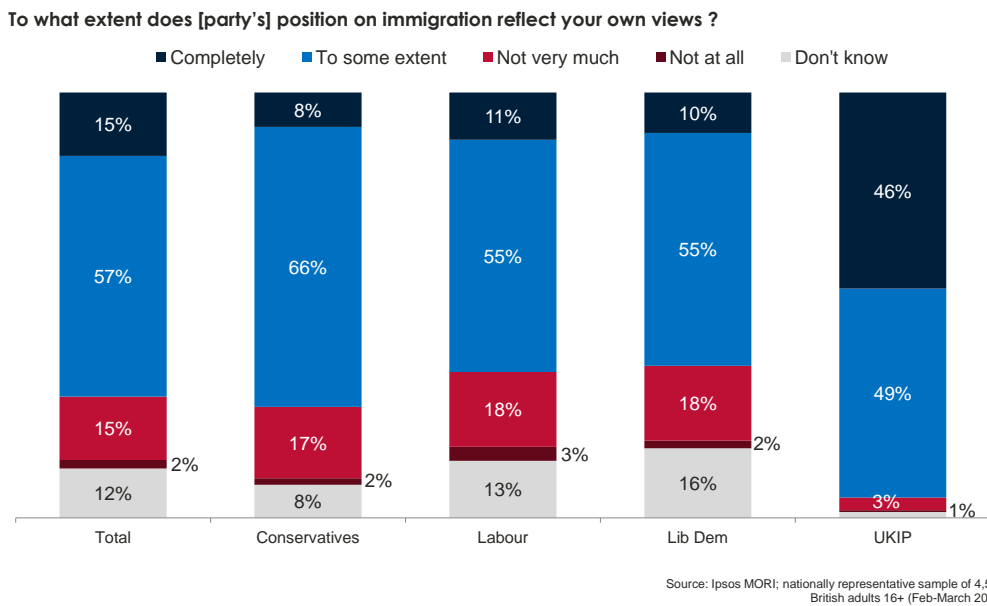
And further questions in the study outline how immigration had become a threat for the government and the Conservatives in particular. For example, the Coalition's handling of immigration was seen as no better than the previous Labour government: only 27% felt the Coalition government's handling of immigration was better than the last Labour government, while 26% said it was worse, with the rest saying both were the same.

More generally, the challenges facing parties is seen in the fact that only a small minority of the public (15%) think the policies from the party they support completely reflects their own views on immigration. This varies significantly by political allegiance, with only 8% of those who voted Conservative in the General Election thinking that their party completely reflects their views, rising to 46% for UKIP voters.

²² <https://yougov.co.uk/publicopinion/archive/9277/>

²³ Ipsos MORI began prompting for UKIP for this question in 2013 although it is not tracked as regularly as Yougov. In September of 2013, 11% said UKIP was the best party on asylum and immigration and this had increased to 20% by April 2015.

Chart 20: Extent which one's own party position reflects personal views on immigration

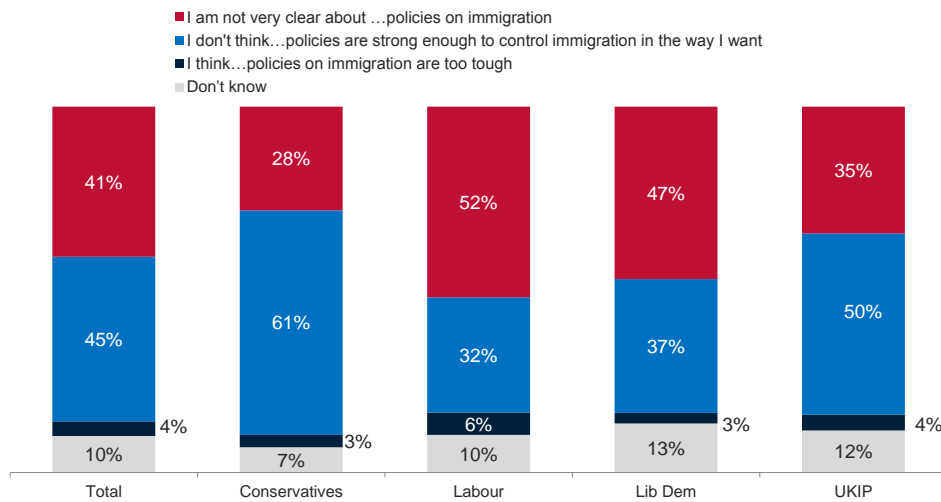


And the reasons why the public think the parties don't reflect their views on immigration are different for each. As shown in Chart 20, for the Conservatives, their supporters do not think their policies are tough enough, while Labour supporters do not think their party's policy is clear. Conservative policies are relatively clear to their supporters, with only 28% saying they are not – but 61% say they are not strong enough. It is a very different pattern for Labour, with over half (52%) of their supporters not clear what the policies are, and only 32% thinking they are not tough enough. It seems that Labour's lack of confidence in their position confused their supporters.

But the real challenges of communicating a clear position on immigration that reflects the stringency of control the public would like are reflected in the variations on this question for UKIP. Despite strict control of immigration being a mainstay of their campaign, among the half of UKIP supporters who say UKIP policies do not completely reflect their views, 35% say they are still not clear what they are, and half do not think they are strong enough.

Chart 21: Attitudes towards party's position on immigration

On the topic of immigration, you said that the policies of [PARTY] do not completely reflect your views. Why did you say that?



Base: all who say the party they intend to vote for does not completely reflect their views on immigration

Source: Ipsos MORI; nationally representative sample of 3,129 British adults 16+ (Mar-Apr 2015)

Conclusion

Immigration is a political paradox. There is no doubt it has been a key factor in changing the political landscape in the UK, most notably with the rise of UKIP. But it's a more wide-ranging shift than that: as our analysis of the key determinants of concern about immigration shows, politics has finally caught up with a genuine public concern that the media were reflecting much better than political parties. The political spectrum in the UK is now much more aligned to immigration concern, from both restrictive and permissive ends – it has undoubtedly shaped our politics.

But immigration has failed to spark any big shifts during general election campaigns, including in 2015, despite an expectation that it might, given UKIP's success in the 2014 European elections. This will be largely because, while the political spectrum is more aligned with public focus on the issue, the two main parties still have significant issues with their immigration policy position, seen by many as unclear, unconvincing or both. The Conservatives have lost credibility and Labour remains muddled – and there is relatively little that is distinctive from the other's position. This means there was little to be gained by either from an immigration focus, and they therefore both worked to concentrate attention elsewhere. The tragic circumstances of the Mediterranean crossing disasters also made the issue more difficult to discuss and separate from the on-going humanitarian crises.

However, there are two shifts that are worth noting, one at a micro or individual level and the other more across the whole population.

First, our individual level analysis has shown that those in favour of increased immigration are not the stable, consistently liberal group we might have pictured. They are in fact subject to a lot of churn, with fewer than half of them staying of this mind during the few months of the study. Pro-migration campaigners do not have that stable

core to rely on that they may have imagined, and pro-immigration views that appear set are much more fleeting and contingent at an individual level than they may appear from simple polls.

And second, more generally, we're seeing a polarisation in opinion as our more open discussion of immigration develops. While most people recognise we are talking about it more, we are still not getting the conversation right for the majority. Instead we're increasingly seeing groups solidifying at either end – we're still not talking about it enough or we've focused on it too much. These tensions have only just started to develop, and will come into much sharper focus in the UK and across Europe in the coming months as the refugee crisis continues to play out and the UK's EU referendum keeps immigration control firmly in peoples' minds.

We will therefore be continuing our longitudinal study throughout 2016, to measure how immigration attitudes change, shifting the ground for the key political decisions of our time.²⁴

²⁴ We would like to thank Unbound Philanthropy for their continuing support of our longitudinal study.

Bobby Duffy
Managing Director
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
Bobby.Duffy@ipsos.com

Kully Kaur-Ballagan
Research Director
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
Kully.Kaur-Ballagan@ipsos.com

Glenn Gottfried
Research Manager
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
Glenn.Gottfried@ipsos.com

For more information

Ipsos MORI
3 Thomas More Square
London E1W 1YW

t: +44 (0)20 7347 3000
f: +44 (0)20 7347 3800

www.ipsos-mori.com
www.twitter.com/IpsosMORI

About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute

The Social Research Institute works closely with national governments, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its c.200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methodological and communications expertise, helps ensure that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.