A Comparison and Analysis of Immigration Waves in the United Kingdom

A Comparison and Analysis of Post-War Commonwealth Immigration, and Immigration from A8 countries from 2004 to the present

Ritgerð til BA gráðu í Hagfæði, Heimspeki og Stjórnmalafæði

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Abstract

A comparison of the political, media, and public reactions in the UK to both the Post-war Commonwealth immigration wave and current reactions to immigration following A8 accession to the EU, with a specific focus on A8 migration to the UK. The aim is to see if a pattern of backlash toward immigration in the UK transcends time or circumstances. These circumstances are examined to see if there are any common threads; such as biased media reactions, economic circumstances or political manoeuvring that may have contributed to this backlash toward immigration. Although these two periods did not evolve in the same manner there are clear similarities in how they developed and their consequences with popular opinion, a partisan press and populist politicians playing a role in both periods.

Preface

This dissertation is the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Magnús Rínar Magnússon. This dissertation is worth 14 ECTS credits. The dissertation instructor was Eiríkur Bergmann.
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Introduction

This dissertation is a comparison of political, media, and public reactions to Post-war immigration between 1948 and 1972 from the Commonwealth to the United Kingdom (UK), and the current political reactions to immigration (specifically from the A8 countries of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) to the UK from 2004 to the present. There is a focus on the lead up to the ‘Brexit’ and whether any clear ties to immigration tie in to the “Leave” vote in the Brexit referendum. Common threads in both these periods are an opening of borders to allow free movement of people to the UK and then a political and social backlash, resulting in the tightening of borders following Post-war immigration and the current wave of immigration potentially facing the same reaction.

The research question of this dissertation is:

What similarities are there in the political, press, and public reactions to the current A8 immigration wave from 2004 to the present, and that of the Post-War immigration wave from 1948 until 1972? Can these similarities explain the anti-immigration rhetoric in the lead up to the Brexit vote?

The historical context of any event is important to comprehend, so as to be able to accurately define why an event developed as it did in addition to what future consequences may arise from it. Therefore, to be able to understand the Brexit and reactions to immigration one must have a point of comparison. As the UK has in recent history had a wave of immigration from the Commonwealth that arose from the free movement of people that slowly tapered due to political and social reactions to immigration this provides an excellent point of comparison to see if these waves of immigration and the reactions to them have a common cause, attributing factors or set of circumstances; such as pressures of public opinion on policy or economic circumstances. Both periods of immigration were implemented without a popular vote and may therefore be comparable in their origins in regard to how public opinion, press reactions, and political figures reacted to both periods.
This dissertation relies on academic literature, reports from both public and non-governmental sources, news sources, and academic journals for its source. It is the hope of the author that this dissertation will help to focus the context of readers of how the current reactions to immigration in the UK have developed, what factors may have attributed to this, and how the history of reactions to immigration affect the current political landscape and effects today. This is a hugely important issue to those potentially affected by a potential closing or tightening of borders in the UK and must be understood in a historical and political context so that it can be engaged with effectively.

Post-war immigration from the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth refers to the United Kingdom and its former colonies, the Balfour Declaration of 1926 (1926 Imperial Conference) declared that all autonomous communities of the British Empire (now the UK) were equal in status. Following the Second World War and the 1947 Commonwealth conference, the British Nationality Act (1948) was enacted. The Act stated that every person who possesses citizenship of the UK and the colonies (other member states of the Commonwealth) shall by virtue of that citizenship be considered a British subject. This meant that all Commonwealth citizens had the status of a British subject and could freely immigrate to the UK without any restrictions, resembling the free movement of people that is in place today within the European Union (EU).

Following the end of the Second World War and British Nationality Act (1948) a wave of immigration to the UK commenced, particularly from the Eastern Bloc country of Poland, and also from Commonwealth countries such as India (Smith, 2013, ch. 6) with Polish and Indian nationalities being the second and third highest ranking non-UK countries of birth in the 1951 census in England and Wales. Ten years later in the 1961 census these trends continued with, for example the Jamaican-born population in the UK increasing sixteen fold from 1951 and the Indian-born population consistently accounting for a large part of the total foreign born population in England and Wales in post-1945 censuses; suggesting not only continually high levels of immigration from
Commonwealth countries compared to other countries but also the impact of the British Nationality Act (1948) as these levels far exceed levels of migration from Commonwealth countries prior to 1951 (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

The British Nationality Act 1948 followed the Second World War during a time where greater levels of immigration to the UK were already in place from soviet territories such as Poland, with the addition of immigration from Commonwealth countries this created a wave of immigration to the UK in much larger numbers than had been recorded before as previous waves were much smaller, more poorly documented and often eventually assimilated into society as seen with the Huguenot immigration wave in the 17th and 18th centuries (Baker, 1998). Following the British Nationality Act 1948 a Commonwealth citizen could enter freely and live in the UK until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 that greatly restricted regulations regarding immigration, through amending the qualifications required of a Commonwealth citizen and the powers of immigration officials to deny entry or restrict the time period or occupation of the citizen. However, under subsection 3 of Part 1 of the Act (1962) it is mentioned that refusal of admission to the UK shall not be exercised if the Commonwealth citizen looking to enter the UK has a voucher from the Ministry of Labour and National Insurance for Northern Ireland or if the citizen is in a position to support himself through employment. There were however exceptions made for the „wife, or a child under sixteen years of age, of a commonwealth citizen who is a resident of the United Kingdom” (Commonwealth Immigrants Act, Chapter 21, 1962). This effectively restricted immigration to those who received vouchers or had already secured employment before entering the UK.

During the second reading of the bill to the House of Commons then Home Secretary Rab Butler of the ruling Conservative Party (Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, House of Commons Debate, 1961) argued immigration from the Commonwealth must be controlled as the Commonwealth at the time amounted to a quarter of the world population and that the trend of immigration from Commonwealth countries (that largely started due to the British Nationality Act 1948) would not stop or even abate. Butler argued that these restrictions in immigration were required due to overpopulation and population density with the UK population increasing by 2.5 million people in the ten years before his
speech in 1961 and that immigration was starting to become a key factor with Butler stating that the total number of immigrants between 1955-1961 accounted for half a million people of this population growth, roughly 20 per cent of population growth in the period. This does however fail to account for the size of the foreign born population already in the UK, as according to the Office for National Statistics the foreign born population was already over 2.1 million people in 1951 and accounted for 4.2 per cent of the total population in the UK (Rendall & Salt, 2005).

What Butler failed to mention was that the Conservative Party's stance on immigration was also a response to public opinion at the time and that an “overwhelming number of English people would like to see these immigrants return to their own countries” as bluntly stated by MP Cyril Osborne of the Conservative Party during a House of Commons sitting in 1965 (Immigrants to United Kingdom, House of Commons Debate). Osborne’s comment reflected the changing stance of the Conservative Party to immigration and preceded Enoch Powell’s infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech that effectively stated the same in much harsher and inflammatory terms and caused a much larger reaction.

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 was signed into law in March of that year. It further reduced rights of Commonwealth subjects to immigrate to the UK to those who themselves, a parent or grandparent was born in the UK, a naturalised person in the UK, became a citizen of the UK through adoption or became a citizen of the UK through the British Nationality Act of 1964. This effectively restricted immigration as it denied future entry that would have been previously available to Commonwealth citizens. The background to this Act was the possibility of over 200,000 Asian Commonwealth citizens potentially immigrating to the UK from Kenya following uncertainty over their right to stay in Kenya (Lattimer, 1999). The 1968 Act was then superseded by the Immigration Act 1971 that further restricted immigration, specifically that of primary immigration whereby the head of a family will immigrate to improve their economic conditions and then send for their family to join them. This restriction can be seen in the Act under who has the right of abode being further limited to those who already have citizenship or have a direct claim to entry through heritage or marriage (Immigration Act 1971, Part 1, Section 2, 1971), this shows that although the act did not place undue restrictions on spouses or
children joining their families that have already immigrated to the UK it effectively limited new primary immigration through further restricting the criteria for immigrants who would be allowed entry to the UK.

Over the post-war period Commonwealth immigration became more limited in scope and more highly regulated leading to less mass immigration as tighter controls were placed on incoming immigrants. Despite this there were changes in the composition of the population with the number on non-UK born Commonwealth peoples increasing in the era with a tripling of Indian-born UK residents and growth of non-UK born populations growing in the hundreds of thousands growing over one million between 1951 (the first census in the post-war era) and 1971 (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

Political reactions – Enoch Powell’s Rivers of Blood Speech

Enoch Powell’s speech in 1968 (Powells, 1968) was incendiary to the political establishment for going against what the leadership of both the major parties (Labour and Conservative) argued for regarding immigration and the Race Relations Act 1968 that was then still a bill up for a second reading shortly following Powell’s speech. Powell’s speech was effectively populist and scaremongering as evidenced by his appeal to the “common man” through stories of constituents and common people that supported his argument, and also in his comparison of the threat of Nazi Germany in the 1930’s to the UK to immigration of the era. It is also noteworthy that Powell claimed the threat of Nazi Germany at the time was ignored by unnamed forces in the media and the parallels he draws to immigration and media reactions at the time of the speech. This clear case of appeal to fear to exploit fear and anger to further his views was so effective as it largely reflected the mood of the nation as data shows that a few years earlier, between 1963 and 1966, there was a clear majority of people (over 80 per cent) who believed that too many immigrants had been allowed to enter the country (McLean, 2001, p. 114). Powell’s speech argued that the Race Relations Act would favour immigrants over the indigenous population of the UK through poorer public services, laxer standards for immigrants in the workforce, and force the white indigenous population to have to rent or sell housing to immigrants. This, along with his assertion that the majority of immigrants had no
wish to integrate created a clear picture that the Race Relations Bill would harm the white UK-born population and go against its interests.

Powell’s speech did lead to a political backlash leading to the then Conservative Party leader to sack Powell from the Shadow Cabinet in the opposition government. This led to mass demonstrations in support of Powell with headlines in the newspapers of the day showing a notable level of support from the working class (Express & Star, 2016). Enoch Powell became very popular with the working class but also polarised any subsequent debates on immigration as his famous speech has often been cited in criticism or praise of a person’s political stance toward immigration. This can be seen today with praise for Theresa May from modern editorials in papers such as the Telegraph (Heffer, 2016) or condemnation of Nigel Farage’s Brexit campaign in the Guardian (Jones, 2016).

The Effects on Popular Opinion – A Backlash toward Immigration

Popular opinion toward immigration was generally negative, as seen with the popularity of shows such as Till Death Do Us Part whose main character, Alf Garnet, was a racist satire taken seriously by many. In fact, Oswald Mosley who was a noted fascist political figure with an anti-immigration stance called Powell a ‘middle-class Alf Garnet’ (Granger, 2007) in an attempt to dismiss Powell’s Rivers of Blood speech showing discontentedness from Powell’s framing of the immigration speech to include everyone immigrating to the UK rather than certain ethnic groups.

According to Full Fact (2014), a shift in public opinion from the 1960’s to the present has seen a reduction of opposition to immigration from roughly 80 per cent to roughly 50 per cent. However, as the wording of questions has changed over time it is important to note that the phrasing of the question can affect the answer. In the 1960’s the wording asked whether ‘too many have been let into the country’ while the question has shifted to whether ‘too many people living in the UK not born here’ which may partly explain whatever differences in answers. With opposition to immigration being roughly 80 per cent it may go some way to explain why the period of immigration from the Commonwealth
and why the government chose to restrict immigration from the Commonwealth in the post-war period.

The Current European Immigrant Wave

Historical Background

Freedom of movement of people is one of the four freedoms in the EU, with the others being the freedom of goods, capital, and services. These freedoms were established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 when the EU was formally founded. Free movement applies to all member states and allows all EU nationals the right to employment in any EU country. The number of member states has grown substantially, from twelve member states when the Maastricht treaty was ratified to twenty-eight member states today. Of the sixteen member states, three (Austria, Finland and Sweden) joined in 1995. In May 2004 the largest historic expansion of the EU took place with ten new member states joining. The ten new member states consisted of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, and Malta. These countries (excluding Cyprus and Malta) will here from be referred to as the A8 countries. With the growth of the EU following the addition of the A8 countries the UK saw increased immigration from A8 countries growing from roughly 250 thousand to roughly 1.7 million between 2004 and 2015 (Vargas-Silva, EU Migration to and from the UK, 2016).

The level of the foreign-born population has continued to grow and tripled as a proportion of the population from the 1950's to 2011, with levels of the foreign-born population accounting for 4.2 per cent of the population (Rendall & Salt, 2005) to 12.7 per cent of the population in 2011 (Krausova, 2014) showing a general trend increased immigration the UK. According to the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford the foreign-born population in 2011 was just under eight million (Krausova, 2014), in the same year those born within the EU was close to 2.5 million and of those that were from A8 countries there were roughly 1.1 million (Vargas-Silva, 2016) showing that although the
level and growth of the foreign-born population is notable, those from A8 countries make up a relatively small proportion of this group.

It is however important to note that as with previous migrant groups substantial number of A8 immigrants arrived in 2004 or later, as exemplified by Polish-born residents of which 86 per cent arrived after accession in 2004 as documented by the Office for National Statistics (Immigration Patterns of Non-UK Born Populations in England and Wales in 2011, 2013). This quick growth in A8 population within the UK could partly explain potential backlash from populist, media, or political sources as a very small minority population has grown very quickly in a very small amount of time.

Backlash to Immigration

Despite being a relatively small proportion of immigration the UK criticism of A8 immigration has been notable in reactions from the media and political spheres. Examples of this can be widely found in UK newspapers such as The Sun, the most widely circulated newspaper in the UK as of 2015 (Ponsford, 2016), that has published stories focused on Polish criminal gangs entering the UK (Culliford, 2013) and A8 populations effectively displacing UK-born populations within UK towns (Lazzeri, 2014). This narrative of immigrants being a threat to the UK-born population has helped drive discontent and helped grow a populist backlash toward immigration in the lead up to the Brexit vote and subsequent “Leave” result.

As mentioned earlier political discussion has also featured anti-immigration rhetoric, this rhetoric has often appealed to emotion rather than fact. Nigel Farage, former UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader, led his Brexit campaign largely based on anti-immigration rhetoric that was often inflammatory as exemplified in his anti-migrant poster condemning the EU’s reaction to refugees entering the EU (Stewart & Mason, 2016). That very poster focused on regaining control of the national borders and the UK's ability to decide its own stance on immigration through cutting off the flow of uncontrolled immigration, the picture in the poster is one of migrants entering the EU where the Dublin Regulation is in force. The Dublin Regulation is an EU law regarding asylum seeking, one of its key aspects is that governments can
return people to their point of entry (that is, the first EU country they entered). A “Leave” vote has created doubt as to whether this will continue to be possible once the UK is no longer a member of the EU. There certainly are non-EU member states such as Iceland and Norway that have an agreement with the EU to fall under the provisions of the Dublin Regulation, however it is important to note that the UK will have to negotiate with the EU to be able to maintain its position under the Dublin Regulation which may prove very hard in the context of a potentially hostile negotiation with the EU. Theresa May, the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, has stated that restricting immigration will be stressed heavily in Brexit negotiations (Asthana, 2016) meaning that free trade agreements are more likely than access to the single market as access requires the four freedoms, of which the freedom of movement of people being one. This means that regulations such as the Dublin Regulation will no longer apply and although restriction of EU-born immigrants may be controlled there will no longer be protocols in place to send immigrants who entered the UK from the EU back to the point of entry to EU, therefore the UK may in its quest to control immigration from the EU in fact lose one of its key tools (the Dublin Regulation) to control immigration from outside the EU.

Political background

The Brexit refers to the current and still developing situation of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union following a nationwide referendum on whether the UK should choose to remain in the EU or to leave, the results were a narrowly won vote that the UK should leave the EU with 52% voting leave. Those who publicly spoke in favour of the Brexit, such as Nigel Farage, made immigration a key factor in the debate. In fact there were notable voices such as the Centre for European Reform predicting that if a ‘leave’ vote (Tilford, 2015) were to be the result it would be due to EU immigration rather than any other valid criticism of the European Union. Despite immigrants being a net boon to the economy with high net contributions they have become associated with negative economic conditions in the UK without any evidence that they are to blame, the economic recession beginning in 2008 that cut real wages of low-
waged UK-born workers might seem to be a more accurate origin of any economic woes and fears that seem to have been misplaced toward immigration.

Simon Tilford (2015) of the Centre for European Reform, a pro EU think-tank, mentioned that Britain does not bear the burden of immigration within the EU alone; Britain in fact has lower net-inflows of EU immigrants than other leading EU countries such as Germany or Spain. There is however heavy competition between the UK-born population and immigrants for resources such as housing and public services, this competition for such resources may seem driven by an unsustainable number immigrants from the EU but may in fact be a national problem of failing to address the root of these issues. To blame EU immigration for these issues fails to account for the fact that EU immigrants are a net-contributor to public finances in the UK and therefore cannot be classified as a drain on a system that they contribute more toward than they take out, framing immigration as a negative economic factor deflects blame and accountability from austerity measures that heavily contribute to the very problems immigration is blamed for. The failure of public housing projects has seen increased competition for housing regardless of immigration, the same can be said for other public services such as schools or health services and framing pressures on public finances on immigration draws attention and criticism away from government policy. It could therefore be concluded that issues of immigration have allowed former and the current government to shift any discussion and hostility away from government policy and toward immigration.

The Brexit

There was a longstanding campaign by UK Independence Party for the United Kingdom to exit the European Union as it is founded on the very premise of Euroscepticism. UKIP is a right-wing party that has its origins in the Anti-Federalist League that was founded around the single issue of Euroscepticism. It was later renamed and took on a wider right-wing platform toward political issues. It wasn’t until Nigel Farage became party leader that UKIP began to gain a following. UKIP has not been successful in national elections standing in every general election since 1997 and only gaining one Member of Parliament in 2015. However, UKIP has had greater success in the European Parliament elections
gaining three seats in 1999, twelve seats in 2004, thirteen in 2009, and 24 seats in 2014. The number of seats available from the UK shrank from 87 to 73 in the time period with UKIP gaining 27.5 per cent (or 4,376,635 votes) of the vote (BBC, 2014). Their growing success in the European Parliamentary elections generally reflected a growing anti-EU opinion among the public.

Reacting to this growing Euroscepticism, both from the public and within the Conservative Party, David Cameron first considered holding a referendum regarding EU membership in 2012 (BBC, 2012), this however did not develop until Cameron was re-elected Prime Minister in the 2015 general election. Cameron gave an election pledge of holding a referendum on European Union membership (Mason, 2014) that he upheld following pressure from his own party and UKIP (who in the 2015 general elections gained over 12 per cent of the vote but only one Member of Parliament due to a fragmented base) leading eventually to a “Leave” result in the 23 June referendum.

Since 2010 public opinion on whether the UK should leave the EU or remain has rocked repeatedly between leave and remain. Since 2010 YouGov has polled the UK public regarding how they would vote if a referendum on EU membership were to be held (2013), between 2010 and 2013 no clear consensus can be observed although those would vote “Leave” more often command a majority. In the following years until the referendum on 23 June 2016 votes for “Leave” and “Remain” continued to rock quite heavily becoming a little more stable following David Cameron’s announcement on 20 February 2016 of the 23 June 2016 date when the referendum would be held (BBC, 2016). Following his announcement the opinion polls showed the “Remain” vote gaining a relatively steady majority with poll trackers showing a “Remain” majority on the eve of the referendum (Financial Times, 2016).

The Brexit campaigns on both sides (“Remain” and “Leave”) used rhetoric based both on fact and emotion with campaign groups on the same side of the issue at times contradicting each other’s stance. An example of this could be seen in the two largest “Leave” groups, Vote Leave and Leave.eu, reacting in a contradicting manner to the “Remain” talking point of the cost of leaving the EU for each household. According to the “Remain” campaign the Brexit would cost each household £4,300 a year, Vote Leave chose to directly engage this talking point with economic counterpoints while Leave.eu instead argued that the price
of £4.300 should be considered a bargain (Waterson, 2016). However, both Vote Leave and Leave.eu campaigns agreed regarding the desire to control immigration and the UK’s borders. Vote Leave argued that EU’s immigration systems and laws made the UK more vulnerable invoking the threat of terrorism and overburdened public services (Vote Leave, 2016). Similarly Leave.eu invoked immigration as a leading reason for leaving the EU, Leave.eu stressed the effects migration has on social housing (Leave.eu, 2016) without mentioning that the source they cited found that the reduction of the number of social housing accounts for the majority social housing woes showing how bias crept into anti-immigration arguments from the Leave side.

Following the Brexit result of Leave anti-immigration rhetoric has continued to play a key role in political manoeuvring. David Cameron stepped down as Prime Minister following the Brexit result, Theresa May replaced him in the role and has argued that immigration will be a driving force in EU negotiations to leave (Asthana, 2016). This emphasis on EU immigration will almost certainly curtail immigration from A8 states, it will however not stem those immigrants from outside the EU who accounted for approximately half of migrants to the UK in 2014 (Blinder, 2016) suggesting that focusing solely on EU immigration will fail to focus on immigration as a whole.

Potential causes or attributing factors

Media reactions

It is important to account for the influence the media has in shaping public opinion on matters such as the EU, immigration or other such contentious issues. According to Carey and Burton (2004) the British press notably influences the attitudes of its readers due to being highly partisan and biased in its reporting. This influence is however limited as it tends to reinforce partisan preferences of its readers i.e. if a reader is already against immigration and his choice of press source is also anti-immigration it will strengthen his position, this influence is also greatly strengthened when a reader’s political party also sends the same message as the press regarding an issue. With the “Leave” vote winning
with a very narrow majority of 52% of the vote it is important to consider the influence the media can have on the result.

The Sun is the most widely circulated newspaper in the UK and as previously mentioned took a clear “Leave” stance regarding the referendum. The effect of both effectively lobbying for the “Leave” result and clear anti-immigration rhetoric with an “us or them” tone as seen in articles following the vote that focused almost exclusively on immigration (Griffiths & Sabey, 2016) is therefore likely to have influenced its readers in either adopting or strengthening already held anti-immigration beliefs. Other popular newspapers such as the Telegraph have published think pieces that clearly favour the “Leave” result describing it as a victory for democracy (Heffer, 2016), despite a voter turnout rate of only 72.2 per cent (Dunford & Kirk, 2016), meaning that over a quarter of eligible voters did not take part in the vote. Some unsurprising voting trends emerged, such as older voters turning out in proportionally greater numbers than young voters. The impact of media bias may prove to be important in regard to older voters as printed newspaper demographics tend to skew toward older readerships, as can be seen in the case of the Telegraph where 63 per cent of readers are over the age of 55 (Taylor, 2014).

In the same manner that the British press influences its readers today, this effect is likely to have been more pronounced in the post-war era of Commonwealth immigration when there was less competition from other forms of media, such as 24 hour television news networks or online publications. Front pages that showed popular support for anti-immigration rhetoric as exemplified by Enoch Powell is therefore likely to have helped drive public opinion. Headlines such as “Dockers in ‘Powell is Right’ March” (Express & Star, 2016) following Powell’s Rivers of Blood speech is likely to greatly influenced public opinion as readers saw a political figure associated with the Conservative Party reflect their own anti-immigration stance.

As Carey and Burton (2004) concluded in their research, when the same message is presented by both a reader’s political party and their newspaper these effects are considerable. In both discussed waves of immigration this happened. Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech gave editorial biases in the press more weight as he was at the time a serving Member of Parliament. This same scenario also appeared in the lead up to the Brexit with notable political
figures such as Nigel Farage (serving as a Member of the European Parliament) and Boris Johnson (an MP for the ruling Conservative Party) campaigning for a leave vote in the Brexit and at times leaning on anti-immigration rhetoric to support their views. Although the impact of the interplay of political and press agreement on the Brexit vote in regards to immigration has not yet been quantified its importance cannot be underestimated as with such a close result of only 52% voting Leave and winning the vote, even limited effects may have had a decisive impact on the final result.

Economic circumstances (Scapegoating and Facts)

![Gross Domestic Product: Year on Year growth: CVM SA %](chart.png)

Gross Domestic Product: Year on Year growth: Chained Volume Measures. 1949-2015
(Office for National Statistics, 2016)

In the post-war period Annual GDP growth fluctuated between 1.1 per cent and 6.3 per cent between years but stayed positive over the entire period, average GDP growth in this period was 3.3 per cent. Despite the UK GDP growing for the entire period there were relatively wild swings between years as can be seen in image 1 with swings of up to 5.2 per cent between years suggesting that GDP growth for the period was relatively volatile, this becomes especially clear
when compared to more modest but steady GDP growth seen for the last fifteen years with the exception of a dip following the global financial crisis triggered by Subprime mortgaging in the USA. From 2004 GDP growth has been relatively steady with a peak of 3.1 per cent in 2014 and a low of -4.3 per cent in 2009. Average growth over this period was 1.5 per cent, notably lower than the post-war period. However, growth remained more stable in comparison to the post-war period, with the exception of GDP shrinking following the global financial crisis. Although the period provides a larger variance of GDP growth than the post-war period growth fluctuated less and growth was steadier in comparison to the stop-start pattern of growth of the post-war period.

These two periods differ greatly in patterns of growth as well as general growth levels, although both periods do on average maintain growth over the period. It is therefore not possible to argue that such differing economic conditions can in itself explain any backlash or negative reactions to immigration. Both periods saw growth of both GDP and levels of immigrants in the UK, although immigrants may have become more visible in the UK over both periods it is important to note that it is generally accepted migration positively affects economic growth and tax revenues (OECD, 2014) meaning that immigration is likely to have positively contributed to GDP growth.

The Effects of Immigration on GDP and Economic Growth

Post-war

Although there is a dearth of evidence regarding the economic effects of immigration in the post-war era logic can be applied to suggest that immigration had a net positive impact on economic growth in the UK. Immigrants currently tend to be younger than the native population, if one holds that to have also been true in the post-war era then immigrants help fill those jobs that the native-born population cannot. There was a great deal of rebuilding following the destruction of the Second World War meaning that a larger labour force could better meet the demand for labour and theoretically the economic upheaval following the war would be greatly aided by the non-native born population that grew to
number in the millions. Additionally, it must be considered that as argued with current immigration that immigrants are generally of working age and therefore likely to contribute economically while using fewer public services (and their associated costs) than the native population that was a much wider age range.

Current period

Incoming migrants to the UK have little effect on GDP with less than 1 per cent impact on GDP when contributions from migrants are compared to the cost of public services they consume, although this impact differs between migrant groups (Vargas-Silva, The Fiscal Impact of Immigration in the UK, 2016). In the analysis of the effect of immigration on GDP migrants have been defined as foreign-born residents. Despite having little impact on GDP there is disagreement over whether the fiscal effects of immigration are positive or negative, according to Vargas-Silva's (2016) briefing government reports have found a slight but positive net annual fiscal contribution (NAFI) from immigration compared to a negative contribution as presented by MigrationWatch UK, a slightly controversial non-governmental organisation concerned with immigration. The NAFI is the ratio between migrants’ contributions such as taxes compared to the costs of public services the group receives.

Reports from the Home Office (a governmental body) and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), an independent think-tank, found immigration in general had a small but positive NAFI in the period of 1999-2004 of an average of 1.1 per cent. This is compared to MigrationWatch UK who in the same period argued a negative NAFI ratio of -3 per cent. This difference is largely down to how children of mixed households (where one parent is UK-born and the other foreign-born) are counted whereby the Home Office and IPPR have associated those children with the UK-born population while MigrationWatch UK argued that the cost of services provided to these children should be split between the UK-born and foreign-born groups.

Further research by Dustmann, Frattini, & Halls (2010) specifically into the effect of A8 migrants to the UK correlated with the findings of the Home Office and IPPR. They reached the conclusion that since EU enlargement in 2004
migrants from A8 countries who arrived after the enlargement and stayed long enough to be eligible to receive benefits were 59 per cent less likely to claim benefits and 57 per cent less likely to live in social housing than the UK-born population. Dustmann et al (2010) reached the conclusion that over the period studied (2004-2009) A8 immigrants made a positive NAFI in each year studied despite such factors as a budget deficit, the primary reason for this is that A8 immigrants had a higher rate of participation in the labour force, paid a higher proportion in indirect taxes, and made less use of benefits and other public services compared to the UK-born population.

The reason A8 migrants to the UK have such a high rate of participation in the labour force is partly due to the age of these migrants with the average age of A8 men in the UK being 26 years compared to 38 years for UK-born men. This is also true for women with an even larger age gap of 15 years with A8 women being an average 25 years old compared to 40 years old for UK-born women. The effect of the age difference is notable when one considers the labour participation rate of A8 migrants is notably higher than the UK-born population with 95 per cent of A8 men and 80 per cent of A8 women compared to 83 per cent for UK-born men and 75 per cent for UK-born women.

This high rate of labour force participation and low use of benefits or other public services by A8 migrants means that any criticism of these migrants being a drain on the system or costing more than they contribute to the economy are false when looked at from a wider perspective, despite this there are examples of the media cherry-picking facts and figures without context to support already decided conclusions despite common arguments against immigration such as migrants being a drain on public services being incorrect, an important point as A8 migrants accounted for roughly one-third of the increase of the foreign-born population in the period 2004-2009 (Dustmann, Frattini, & Halls, 2010).

Wage deflation and immigration

Another part of the debate concerning the economic effects of immigration is wage deflation. Wage deflation has been decreasing but media reactions only focus on wage deflation on the UK-born population without
considering the context of it lowering. Media reporting on wage deflation in relation to immigration has generally been negative in some prominent UK newspapers, such as the Telegraph. Dominiczak and Spence (2015) wrote for the Telegraph an article that focused on the fact that immigration does cause wage deflation in certain job markets, they cite the Bank of England report (Nickell & Saleheen, 2015) that does indeed find that a 10 per cent proportional increase in immigrants is associated with a roughly 2 per cent decrease in pay. Dominiczak and Spence’s article fails to report this in context as seen by the leading headline “Mass migration driving down wages offered to British jobseekers” in comparison to the relatively benign 0.5 per cent fall in wages in semi- and unskilled labour markets. They also fail to present the relatively small percentage increase in immigrants in those markets in context, only citing 0.5 per cent wage deflation while not mentioning that this suggests only a small increase of roughly 2.5 per cent in immigrants in those labour markets. Clear bias can be seen in how only facts that support their argument (that immigration causes wage deflation) are presented but not their context, Dominiczak and Spence (2015) also quote the chairman of Migration Watch, an anti-immigration think-tank without presenting either a counter argument or even stating the think-tank’s position, suggesting a position of authority for the chairman in these matters without mentioning his anti-immigration agenda.

This same bias can be seen in The Sun’s reporting with its discussion of immigration on wages. Steve Hawkes (2016) wrote the headline “Migrants Cause Lower Pay – Soaring rise in immigration ‘has cost blue collar Brits £450” and in his article states that this is since 2009. The headline become relatively meaningless when introduced in context as it works out to less than 65 pounds a year, roughly 18 pence a day. The minimum wage in 2016 is £6.95, meaning that the lowest paid worker in the UK effectively loses less than two minutes of pay per day. This shows how bias is present in press reporting in the UK, especially in the context of the Sun officially supporting the Leave campaign (Hughes, 2016) and having a history of anti-immigration rhetoric. Especially in the wider of context of why wages have stagnated or deflated, where there was greater wage deflation due to other factors than immigration and that a fall in migration over a period of a few years will do little to stop this (Clarke, 2016).
Conclusions

Although it cannot be said that both immigration waves evolved in the same manner there are clear parallels between them, as seen when the effects of media bias are seen shaping public opinion and subsequently policy. In the era of Commonwealth immigration this reached a zenith during Enoch Powell’s speech where his arguments became, to a degree, fear mongering to drive the public debate toward ever greater restrictions on immigration. In the same manner it became clear that during the Brexit process following an ever expanding EU population, fear became a key tool to frame policy as exemplified by the invoking of fears of terrorism and a non-UK born unintegrated population in the UK. In fact, Enoch Powell’s spectre seems to still hang over immigration issues in the UK with Nigel Farage’s admiration of Powell becoming a talking point prior to the referendum (Hope, 2014) and Theresa May being likened to Powell in a positive light by “Leave” supporters (Heffer, 2016).

Both waves of immigration do seem to share the fact that they were introduced without direct input from the public, through the British Nationality Act following the Second World War and the emergence of the single European market with no direct input from the public. In both cases this seems to have caused a predictable backlash of public opinion driven partly by distorted economic reporting in the press, a generally biased and partisan press, and politicians appealing to populism. Distorted reporting of the economic reality of immigration created a misunderstanding of the economics behind immigration, whereby quantifiable and verifiable facts regarding the boon that can follow immigration were misreported and misframed to drive an already decided editorial truth. Examples of this can be seen in how newspapers such as The Sun willingly present statistics in such a light that conclusions may be drawn without considering the full context of those statistics, this problem is no less representative of political forces such as the “Leave” campaigns that willingly framed structural policy issues such as public housing as an immigration issue despite only being a contributing factor rather than sole cause of those issues.

There does indeed seem to be a repeated pattern of the government opening the UK up to immigration without direct public support, followed by a
backlash that over the following years or decades either undoes or restricts these immigration measures. This happened following the British Nationality Act in 1948 and seems to be repeating itself once again following the Brexit, where during the Brexit campaign the debate was heavily centred on issues of immigration that continues to play out as the UK governments figures out how it will negotiate its exit from the EU, minimise any economic harm and still appease those voted “Leave” through curbing EU immigration.
Bibliography


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