

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

The Politics of Immigration, Asylum and Ethnic Diversity

READER'S GUIDE

This chapter analyses why, when and with what effects immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity have at times been emotive, controversial and combustible issues in British politics. The capacity for controversy stems from links between immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity and four basic political questions: first, the power and authority of the British state to regulate access to its territory; second, the state's ability to determine access to important social and political institutions such as the welfare state, labour market and national citizenship; third, political participation and representation by immigrants and their descendants; and, fourth, the impact of supranational and international developments such as European integration and international human rights laws on British politics. Through these questions immigration raises questions about who 'we' are, the kind of society in which 'we' would like to live, and the links between the UK and other parts of the world.





Introduction

In February 2003 Tony Blair appeared on BBC2's *Newsnight* programme. The numbers of asylum-seekers entering the UK had been dominating the news agenda for weeks and Mr Blair knew full well that the programme's presenter, Jeremy Paxman, would want to grill him on this topic. The 2002 asylum statistics showed that 110,000 people had sought asylum in the UK, compared to 32,500 in 1997 when New Labour took office. A bold statement of the Government's intention to allay public anxiety was required, decided Mr Blair, who declared that: 'I would like to see us reduce it [the asylum figures] by 30 per cent to 40 per cent in the next few months, and I think by September of this year we should have it halved'. Yet, the fact that by September 2003 this target was attained did little to soften the tone of the debate about asylum or immigration more generally. The same thing happened during the 2005 General Election campaign when Mr Blair was asked by Jeremy Paxman whether he knew how many illegal immigrants were in the UK. He responded by saying that he did not know and that no Government could know the precise number. Critics led by the Conservative opposition alleged that these events showed a Government that had lost control of the immigration system. Indeed, immigration was a key Conservative campaign theme at the 2005 General Election (Geddes and Tonge 2005). The Conservatives alleged that the immigration figures were at best unreliable or at worst fiddled, the immigration system was a shambles, and that the Government was losing control of immigration. From the other side of the fence, civil liberties and pro-migrant organisations protested that immigration and asylum rules were too draconian and breached national and international human rights standards. While all this was going on, the Government looked nervously over their shoulder at the lurking menace of extreme right-wing Parties such as the British National Party eager to play on anti-immigration sentiment.



Why the anxiety?

Why do immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity induce such anxiety? There are historical and political explanations for this. Historically, while Britain has been shaped by migration, there tends not to be the self-understanding as a nation of immigrants that prevailed in settler societies such as the US, Australia and Canada (on Britain's immigration history see, for example, Holmes 1988; Winder 2004). The second explanation focuses more specifically on four issues that are fundamental to the study of politics and that will be this chapter's main focus. These are:

- *State power*. The regulation of immigration at its most basic is about state power and authority as British Governments strive to regulate the numbers of people entering Britain. Immigration goes to the heart of debates about the sovereign power, authority

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and capacity of the British state and the ways in which these change as Britain's place in the world changes.

- *Membership and citizenship.* The conditions governing access by immigrant newcomers to key social and political institutions such as the labour market, the welfare state and national citizenship. If people move from one state to another they then make contributions to and claims on their new country. This may involve access to the labour market, to health care, to schools or to universities. How, then, has Britain, with its long history of immigration, made decisions about rights, entitlements and obligations for immigrant newcomers? To what welfare state benefits should newcomers be entitled? Should newcomers be expected, for example, to learn English and swear loyalty oaths before becoming British citizens? What protections should be offered to immigrant newcomers and their families against racist, ethnic-based or religious discrimination?
- *Participation and representation.* Immigration has changed the social, ethnic and cultural make-up of Britain, but have British political institutions responded to this diversity? Are immigrants and their descendants properly represented in our political institutions? What, in fact, would 'proper' representation mean? Are there gaps and deficits in levels of representation that mean that the voices of some members of British society whose origins lie in immigration are not heard?
- *Globalisation.* While British Governments have tended to be enthusiastic advocates of domestic and international economic liberalisation, this enthusiasm has not extended to free movement for people. Why has this been the case? More specifically, what impact has European integration had on the capacity of the British state to regulate migration?

The remainder of this chapter is structured around these four themes. By taking each in turn, immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity can be seen to raise important, pressing and powerful questions about who 'we' are, the kinds of society in which 'we' live or would like to live, and the links between British politics and the international system.

POLITICS IN FOCUS 29.1

Immigration and asylum at the 2005 General Election

Immigration was at the top of the campaign agenda at the 2005 General Election.

The Conservatives called for an annual immigration and asylum quota set by Parliament; round the clock surveillance at ports of entry (although when pointed out that there were 650 of these it was soon cut back to the 35 or so main ports of entry); a British border control police force; and a points system for work permits.

In its 2005 Strategy paper on immigration and asylum, the Labour Government proposed a point system for new economic migrants, but rejected the idea of quotas.



State power and the regulation of migration

In 2003 around 90 million people crossed the UK's borders. Most of these were either British or EU citizens, but around 12 million came from non-European Economic Area (EEA) countries. Of this 90 million around 270,000 people moved to the UK to work, 320,000 to study and just under 50,000 to seek asylum. Many of the remainder were tourists or people passing through the UK to another destination. These figures provide some idea of the scale of movement into the UK. What this snapshot can also do if we drill down more deeply is provide some idea of the diversity of this movement as people enter to work, to study, to seek refuge, for a holiday or to join with family members. While the numbers of people crossing UK borders is very high—and the numbers of those entering for work has increased dramatically since the 1980s and 1990s—there are many different reasons why people enter and the duration of their stay can vary enormously. The scale of movement and its diversity should be borne in mind when considering UK immigration policy. It would be wrong to see 'immigration' as a single, compact event. In fact, bearing in mind this diversity gives a better idea of the policy challenges that British Governments face as they seek to regulate immigration.

While arguments for open borders and unconstrained free movement of people have been made (see, for example, Barry and Goodin 1992), British Governments have not accepted them. Instead the core dilemma for government can be quite simply stated: regulating access to the state territory is an important component of a state's sovereign authority while being seen to lose control challenges state authority and the legitimacy of elected Governments.

The remainder of this section analyses the contemporary history of British immigration policy. Two points are central to the analysis that follows. First, the ways in which British immigration controls were 'racialised', which means that they were represented in social and political terms as involving 'race' and 'racial difference' (Solomos 2004). Second, since the 1990s there has been renewed openness to labour migration coupled with attempts to drive down numbers of asylum seekers.

The decline of the imperial state

The basis for immigration after the Second World War from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean, south Asia and Africa was an imperial conceptualisation of British citizenship enshrined in the 1948 British Nationality Act. Technically this entitled between 400 and 500 million subjects of the Crown to move to the UK, although it was far fetched in the extreme to imagine that this many people would move.

The ways in which immigration was understood as 'a problem' is central to understanding the politics of immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity in the UK. The important point is that the regulation of immigration was linked to ideas about 'race' and 'racial' differences between newcomers and the host society. If 'the problem' was 'race' then the solution to the problem as defined was controls on immigration from the 'New Commonwealth' (former colonies in south Asia, Africa and the Caribbean) and Pakistan.

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Scholars that have studied the responses to immigration have focused on the ways in which these responses were 'racialised' in the sense that immigration was represented socially and politically as involving 'race' and 'racial' difference (Layton-Henry 1992; Saggar 1992; Paul 1997; Spencer 1997; Joppke 1999; Hansen 2001). The words 'race' and 'racial' are placed in inverted commas to indicate that they are very problematic. No credible scientific evidence exists to support the view that people's social or political behaviour can be explained by their 'race'. Some of the worst and most hideous experiences in human history have arisen from the actions of those such as the Nazis who thought that they could. There is actually as much variation within as between so-called racial groups while arguments that people are any more or less human dependent on physical characteristics such as skin colour are deeply repugnant. Yet, in the UK there is a public discourse linked to the discussion of migration that refers to 'race', 'race relations' and 'racial equality'. The point to bear in mind is not that races are real in any scientific sense, but that the British politics of immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity has been socially and politically represented as involving 'race'. Moreover the insidious effects of racism where putative racial characteristics are used as a basis for presumptions of inferiority and superiority have had corrosive effects on British politics.

The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was the first step in the direction of controls on what at the time was called 'coloured' immigration. The Government was reluctant to admit that this was the intention because it did not want to be labelled as racist, but as a member of the Conservative Government of that time put it: 'The Bill's real purpose was to restrict the influx of coloured immigrants from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent. We were reluctant to say as much openly' (Deedes 1968: 10).

Immigration legislation can be linked to other debates concerning relative political and economic decline (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Debates since the 1990s

Immigration controls are based upon placing people into categories which then determine their right to enter, to reside, to work, to access welfare state benefits and so on (asylum is a rather different issue and needs to be kept separate, as will be discussed more fully below). At the same time, the British state faces constraints on its capacity to control immigration. Initially this was because of the open door to Commonwealth immigration symbolised by the 1948 British Nationality Act. When this door was closed from 1962 onwards, constraints were also faced when secondary migration by family members

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POLITICS IN FOCUS 29.1

outlines the main pieces of legislation introduced in the 1960s that reflected the retreat from Empire and a downsizing of the idea of Britain and British citizenship. The 1981 British Nationality Act completed this post-imperial downsizing.



POLITICS IN FOCUS 29.2

Post-imperial downsizing: main immigration measures in the 1960s and 1970s

Commonwealth Immigrants Bill 1962

This distinguished between citizens of the UK and its colonies and citizens of independent Commonwealth countries, such as India. The latter were then subject to immigration controls and would need an employment voucher to enter the UK. The number of these vouchers available was then reduced as a way of limiting labour migration. The aim of the legislation was to reduce what at the time was called 'coloured' immigration, although the Conservative Government of the day officially denied that this was the case.

Commonwealth Immigrants Bill 1968

This second measure, designed to limit immigration from Commonwealth countries, was targeted at British citizens of Indian origin residing in African states that were pursuing Africanisation policies in Kenya and Uganda that discriminated against their Asian-origin populations. A patriality rule specified that for anyone to enter the UK they needed a least one parent or grandparent who was born, adopted or naturalised as a British citizen. Many Labour MPs were strongly opposed to this legislation, which they saw as a shabby attempt to withdraw rights from British citizens facing persecution.

Immigration Act 1971

This measure essentially rounded off the controls on labour migration that were introduced in the 1960s. The legislation replaced all previous legislation. It distinguished between citizens of the UK and its colonies who were patrial (the one grandparent rule mentioned above) who could enter the UK and those citizens of independent Commonwealth countries that could not. The basis for admission by non-patrials was a work permit scheme. Immigration policy since has been based on this distinction.

British Nationality Act 1981

This measure completed the post-imperial downsizing by bringing patriality into nationality law by distinguishing between full British citizenship, British Dependent Territories citizenship and British Overseas citizenship. This latter category offered no right to enter the UK and was designed to encourage people in countries such as Malaysia to acquire citizenship in their country of residence. Family-related migration for reunification or formation remained the main immigration route to the UK through the 1970s, 1980s and into the 1990s.

occurred because this migration was protected by national laws and international legal standards. More recently, the UK Government has encountered constraints from international human rights standards that seek to guarantee the rights of asylum-seekers. There are thus some limits on the sovereign authority of the British state to regulate migration. To this can be added the growing influence of the EU, more of which later.

Immigration policies tend to focus on the regulation of immigration channels. These immigration channels may be widened or narrowed, but could never be fully closed. There

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is a channel for labour migration, another for students, one for family migration and another for asylum-seekers. The categories that are developed to define into which category an immigrant should be placed can be arbitrary and unfair because categories are less to do with the individual qualities of a person than they are to do with official views of the motives for immigration and the possible consequences of it. Once again, the practical development of immigration policies cannot be separated from the ethical basis for the population sorting that they involve. These dilemmas have been particularly acute in the UK since the 1990s as there has been an opening to new labour migration coupled with closure towards those forms of migration that the state has decided are 'unwanted', particularly asylum. It is to the politics of asylum that we now turn.

Tackling asylum-seeking migration

Responses to asylum are a key element of the British politics of immigration, asylum and ethnic diversity. An important distinction needs to be made between *economic migration* governed mainly by national laws and *asylum-seeking migration* protected by a set of international legal standards put in place after the Second World War and which are supposed to bind the behaviour of states. Yet, while asylum-seeking should be kept separate, it is common for economic migration and asylum-seeking to be confused.

The international standards covering asylum and refugee status are to be found in the United Nations' 1951 Geneva Convention.

Extract 29.1

Geneva Convention Article 1(A): A refugee is a person with a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'.

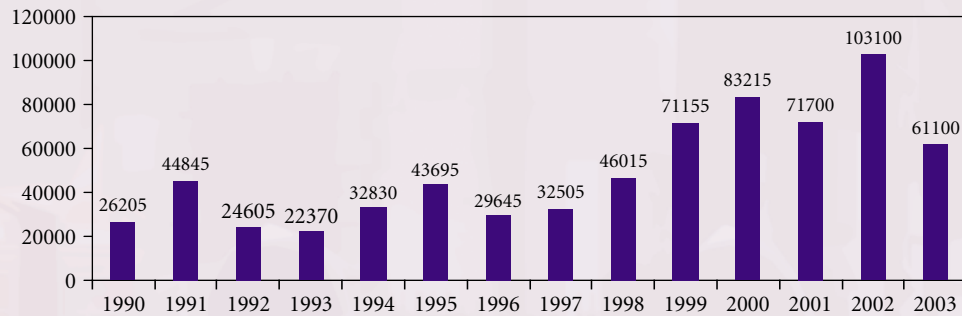
While the UK was top of the European league in 2003 in terms of overall numbers of asylum-seekers, when these figures are weighted to account for the total population then the UK is a mid-ranking European country of asylum with one asylum application per 1,000 of the total population, which puts Britain ninth in an EU league table of asylum applications.

The asylum system represents a point at which the sovereign authority of states to regulate access to their territory encounters international human rights standards that may constrain this power. On the one hand are a domestic politics of asylum and migration in the UK that may not be accommodating of new migration, but these encounter a symbolically powerful set of arguments about 'international human rights'.

If we judge Conservative and Labour Governments by their actions on asylum-seeking migration since the 1990s then we see a presumption that many asylum-seekers are in fact 'bogus' in the sense that they entered the UK for economic reasons or in pursuit of welfare

TABLE 29.1

Asylum applications in the UK 1990–2003



state benefits. In turn this generates a critique of international legal standards that seek to guarantee the rights of asylum-seekers. Both the Labour Government and the Conservative Party have questioned the continued relevance of the Geneva Convention. Such moves are, of course, deeply controversial. They could be seen to stigmatise asylum-seekers and attack basic international human rights standards. At the same time, Governments have been fully aware of strong anti-asylum sentiment amongst the general public and a strong campaign against asylum and asylum-seekers in some sections of the press. That said, the statements and actions of Governments have done little to portray asylum-seekers in a more positive light and may well have contributed to negative public perceptions and anti-asylum campaigns in the media.

From their actions (legislation in 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2002) we can see that successive Governments (both Conservative and Labor) have assumed that the increase in asylum-seeking migration has been linked to people in some way seeking to exploit or abuse the system by using the asylum channel when their real motive for migration is economic. Whether this is right or wrong (and evidence suggests that there are grounds for doubting this presumption), the effects on legislation are clear. What can be seen is a series of measures since 1993 that have changed the relationship between asylum-seekers and the welfare state. Based on the (questionable) assumption that they are 'bogus' Governments have sought to alter their rights to welfare state benefits. This has placed asylum-seekers in a more tenuous position and also, more cynically, it could be argued, reduced the likelihood, through the introduction of measures such as special accommodation centers, that asylum-seekers can be integrated into British society and thus ultimately more difficult to deport should their application for asylum fail. As will be seen later in this chapter, the British Government has also seen co-operation with other EU member states as a way of reducing asylum flows into the UK. In this instance, European co-operation and integration may actually enhance the ability of states to regulate access to its territory rather than necessarily weakening it.

New labour migration

The efforts to restrict asylum-seeking migration are not the whole story. Since the end of the 1990s British Governments have shown an increased interest in new labour migration to fill labour market gaps in important economic sectors such as health care, education and construction. In 2003, around 270,000 migrant workers entered the UK. In September 2004 the Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt identified 250,000 labour market vacancies and argued that new immigrant workers could help fill these gaps. Recruitment efforts by employers and by government have been particularly targeted at the recruitment of high skilled workers that are seen as able to contribute to the success of 'UK plc'. Asylum-seekers too could contribute because many have skills and talents that could be put to good use, but their categorisation as asylum-seekers means that they cannot work. Irrespective of their skills, asylum-seekers are more likely to be perceived as a drain on resources rather than contributors to economic growth. This is not because of an assessment of the individual qualities and talents of asylum-seekers, but because of the effects of categorisation that are the basis for an immigration policy that seeks to sort between different groups of people seeking to enter the UK.

The basis for UK policy since the end of the 1990s has been the view that new labour migration can help resolve labour market shortages and enhance the competitiveness of the UK economy. This has involved a more liberal approach to issuing work permits and, since January 2002, a specific Highly Skilled Migrants programme. The UK has not been alone in seeking to recruit highly skilled migrants. Other European countries too, as well as more traditional immigration countries such as Canada and the US, also compete in the global marketplace for skilled workers. The Labour Government has favoured a market-driven approach rather than having quotas for new immigrants. Former Home Secretary David Blunkett reflected this market-driven approach when he argued that he could see no obvious upper limit to the numbers of labour migrants entering the UK. This was not so much an abrogation of responsibility as an admission that the state attempts to regulate immigration through the imposition of quotas or other limits on new immigration may actually confound the needs of employers and that the market may be a better device for regulating migration than the state.

To conclude, the UK developed 'racialised' immigration controls designed to deal with the legacy of imperialism, which has given way since the 1990s to a twin-track and highly differentiated approach to asylum-seeking migration defined as 'unwanted' and skilled labour migration that has been actively solicited. The chapter's next section demonstrates how the shifting sands of debates about migration have had important effects on debates about membership and citizenship in the UK.



Membership and citizenship

In 2002 more than 100,000 people acquired British citizenship, but were required only to visit a local solicitor and swear a 28-word loyalty oath. This changed in 2003, since when new British citizens have been obliged to attend a ceremony at which they publicly

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proclaim their loyalty to Britain. Prince Charles attended the first of these ceremonies held in Brent Town Hall at which two Indians, a Pole, a New Zealander, an Australian, five Afghans, two Kenyans, a Somali, two Sri Lankans, a Nepalese and a South African paid £68 and pledged that: 'I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen.' The Government also envisaged classes for immigrants where they could learn English, find out something about the country's history and take a 'Britishness test' before receiving their nationality certificates, although whether or not this happens depends on whether money can be found to fund the scheme.

The focus of UK integration policy has been 'ethnic minorities' whose family origins lie in immigration. 7.9% of the UK population belong to an ethnic minority group. Table 29.2 shows the breakdown of the UK ethnic minority population.

Most immigrants that came to the UK in the period of post-imperial migration during the 1950s and into the 1960s arrived either from the Republic of Ireland (with whom the

TABLE 29.2
UK ethnic minority population 2001

	Total population		Minority ethnic population
	Count	%	%
White	54153898	92.1	N/A
Mixed	677117	1.2	14.6
Asian or Asian British			
Indian	1053411	1.8	22.7
Pakistani	747285	1.3	16.1
Bangladeshi	283063	0.5	6.1
Other Asian	247664	0.4	5.3
Black or Black British			
Black Caribbean	565876	1.0	12.2
Black African	485277	0.8	10.5
Black other	97585	0.2	2.1.3
Chinese	247403	0.4	5.3
Other	230615	0.4	5.0
All minority ethnic population	4635296	7.9	100
All population	58789194	100	N/A

Source: Census 2001

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UK has a Common Travel Area guaranteeing free movement and the right to vote) or as subjects of the Crown from former colonies, clutching British passports and able to claim *civis Britannicus sum* (I am a British citizen). In contrast with other European countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany the focus for debate in the UK was not so much access to rights for ‘foreigners’ but the utilisation of rights by ‘ethnic minorities’. This prompted the enactment of legislation designed to tackle racist and ethnic-based discrimination that embodied an immigration policy trade-off formulated by Roy Hattersley thus: ‘Integration without control is impossible, but control without integration is indefensible’.

The link between immigration and integration was clear: if integration were to be successfully attained then it required some efforts to limit newcomers. This still leaves hanging the meaning of ‘integration’. We tend to understand it as a process rather than an end state because it is far from clear what a fully integrated society would look like or even whether it would be desirable: would we all be the same? Integration as a process of interaction between newcomers and the host society centres on two issues, noted in Politics in Focus 29.3.

How have these questions of entitlement and belonging been given meaning in debate, law and policy? To get a sense of the debate we first have to go back to the 1960s when measures were introduced to tackle discrimination on grounds of race and ethnic origin. Race Relations Acts in 1965 and 1968 put in place measures to tackle discrimination, but were seen as having serious weaknesses. These weaknesses were addressed by the Race Relations Act 1976 which amongst its provisions did two important things:

- It introduced measures to tackle both *direct* and *indirect* discrimination. Direct discrimination was the target of the 1965 and 1968 legislation. This is where individuals are blatantly discriminated against because of their racial or ethnic origin. The ‘no blacks’ or ‘no Irish’ signs that were sometimes used when houses were available for rent are examples of direct racist discrimination. Indirect discrimination is more insidious. This occurs where treatment is formally equal but outcomes are discriminatory against a group because of their ethnic or racial origin. The Race Relations Act 1976 dealt with both direct and indirect discrimination.
- It established the Commission for Racial Equality with investigatory powers to monitor implementation by public and private sector organisations of the legislation. The police

POLITICS IN FOCUS 29.3

Dilemmas of integration

1. Redefining the organisational borders of Britain.

Key question: ‘who is entitled?’ which then defines access to the labour market, the welfare state and other important institutions.

2. Redefining the conceptual borders of Britain.

Key question: ‘who belongs?’ which is much more nebulous but links to very important themes in the immigration debate that are associated with culture and identity.



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were excluded from the scope of the legislation, but in 2000, following the inquiry into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence and the deeply flawed police investigation that failed to bring to justice any of the perpetrators of this crime, the police were included within Race Relations legislation.

The debate about the ‘integration’ of immigrant newcomers thus focused on (i) regulating entry in order to protect ‘good race relations’ and (ii) introducing measures to tackle racist and ethnic-based discrimination.

This brings us back to the point raised at the start of this section when the new citizenship ceremonies were discussed. Why were these seen as necessary at the turn of the 21st century? There are two answers to this question. The first is the official government line: the countries of origin of immigrants coming to the UK were becoming more diverse. This meant that immigrants might not possess the understanding of British society seen as necessary if they were to make a success of their lives in the UK. Courses and training could help them do this. The second explanation has less to do with immigration and more to do with the kind of society in which we now live where the bonds of citizenship and collective identity have been seen as weakened by more individualised lifestyles. Anxiety about the integration of immigrant newcomers may therefore be a reflection of a broader debate about integration as it affects all of us. In an article on immigration and the welfare state, David Goodhart called this a ‘progressive dilemma’, that is, how to maintain bonds of solidarity with people to whom we do not feel a sense of attachment? The point here is that this is not simply an immigration issue. It is in fact a much broader debate about ‘integration’ as it affects us all because the people to whom we do not feel a sense of attachment may not simply be the immigrant ‘other’ but also the ‘other us’ meaning our co-nationals whose lifestyles may differ very much from our own. The debates about this ‘progressive dilemma’ can be at their most intense when immigrants are the subject, but the debate about immigration may be a cipher or code for a deeper reflection on the changing nature of British society. Put simply, society has changed, so it is not a surprise that expectations for immigrant newcomers have changed too. The point is that we must sort out cause and effect. It is not necessarily immigrants who have driven these changes in British society. In fact, given their numbers (around 4% of the British population) this appears implausible. Rather debate about the integration of newcomers is an effect of a deeper debate about the kind of society in which ‘we’ would like to live and of a continual process of reshaping the organisational and conceptual borders of that community. This now leads us to the section of this chapter that looks at participation and representation, and the ways in which political institutions have responded to changes in the UK population resulting from immigration.



Participation and representation

Discussions of ‘integration’ are flawed if they focus only on adaptation by immigrant newcomers as though the onus was entirely on them. Integration is a two-way process involving mutual accommodation by newcomers and the host society. We can develop this

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point further as we consider the extent to which British political institutions have responded to forms of diversity rooted in the presence in Britain of immigrants and their descendants. The discussion here turns to immigrants and ethnic minorities as political actors with a capacity to articulate their interests and shape British politics.

There is a widespread perception that people from ethnic minorities are excluded from British political institutions and that this is a flaw that strikes at the heart of the representativeness of the system. But what do we mean by representation? Would we expect British political institutions such as the House of Commons or local authorities to 'look' like the British people? Some would argue that they should and that there should be more women, ethnic minority, disabled and gay MPs to reflect the diversity of the population. At the same time, others may point out that political institutions that 'look' like the British people in the sense of being a precise statistical breakdown of the social composition of the British people but may not actually represent their interests particularly well. Does a politician need to share the personal and physical characteristics of his constituents in order to represent their interests? Some would argue that it is not necessary and that if we follow this argument to its logical conclusion then no-one could represent anyone else because no person would share the same exact same personal or physical characteristics with another. Others would contend that there are distinct experiences too which people may be subject because of, for instance, the colour of their skin and the experience of racism, that mean that only others with some knowledge and experience of this form of oppression could have a real understanding of their interests. This discussion highlights a distinction between *descriptive* representation and *substantive* representation, or, put another way, between political institutions that 'look' like the population they are supposed to represent and political institutions that substantively represent the interest of the population they are supposed to represent.

Levels of ethnic minority participation and representation in politics have improved, although the term 'ethnic minorities' is a very broad category and there is little evidence to suggest a distinct set of 'ethnic minority' political interests that unite groups with very diverse origins (Saggar 1999). Historically there has been a strong alignment between ethnic minorities and the Labour Party. The implication of this is that it is within the Labour Party that debates about ethnic minority representation have been most intense.

In 2005 one of the 23 Cabinet members was from an ethnic minority (Baroness Amos). Of all other Government ministers, David Lammy MP (Tottenham) was the only ethnic minority Commons minister. In total, therefore, three of the 89 Government ministers were from ethnic minorities. The roots of ethnic minority representation in the House of Commons can be traced back to the late 19th century when Dadabhai Naoroji was elected as Liberal MP for Finsbury Central from 1892 to 1895. The first Conservative ethnic minority MP to be elected was Mancherjee Bhownagree for Bethnal Green North-East from 1895 to 1905. Between 1922 and 1923 Shapurji Saklatvala represented Battersea North for Labour and then between 1924 and 1929 for the Communist Party. It was not until 1987 that the first MPs from ethnic minorities were elected. The four elected then were Diane Abbott (Hackney North & Stoke Newington), Paul Boateng (Brent South), Bernie Grant (Tottenham) and Keith Vaz (Leicester East). Diane Abbott was the first black woman MP. There has been a slow and steady increase in representation. After the 2001 General Election there were 12 MPs

TABLE 29.3

Ethnic minority representation in key political institutions (2004)

	Per cent from minority ethnic group
Cabinet	9.5%
Other Government ministers & whips	3.4%
House of Commons	1.8%
House of Lords	c.4%
MEPs	4.6%
Local councillors (England & Wales)	2.5%
Public Bodies	4.4%
Scottish Parliament & Welsh Assembly	Nil
Greater London Assembly	4.0%

Source: DOD's Parliamentary Companion

(1.8% of the total) from ethnic minorities, all representing the Labour Party. By 2005 the number of MPs of ethnic minority origin had reached 15, including two Conservatives.

This discussion of participation and representation has sought to explore the ways in which British political institutions reflect the ethnic diversity of modern Britain. There have been changes, but change has been slow and piecemeal. We also saw that it important to focus on what is meant by the term 'representation' and to distinguish between descriptive and substantive forms of representation. Do we want political institutions that look like the British people? Do we want political institutions that effectively represent their interests? This is not necessarily an either/or choice. There is a fairly wide consensus across the political Parties that descriptive inadequacies need to be addressed and that this can lead to more sense amongst the general public that political institutions reflect British society. It would be glib, however, to assume that this means that the interests of highly diverse ethnic minorities are properly represented.



Globalisation and European integration

Immigration and asylum are not solely domestic concerns to be addressed by British political institutions alone. They signify links between the countries people move from and the countries they move to. They signify global inequalities of wealth and power that motivate migration and that link migration to broader global responsibilities. They signify

TABLE 29.4
Ethnic minority Members of Parliament elected in 2005

	Constituency	Party
Abbott, Diane	Hackney North and Stoke Newington	Labour
Afriyie, Adam	Windsor	Conservative
Butler, Dawn	Brent South	Labour
Dhanda, Parmjit	Gloucester	Labour
Hendrick, Mark	Preston	Labour
Khabra, Piara	Ealing Southall	Labour
Khan, Sadiq	Tooting	Labour
Kumar, Ashok	Middlesborough South and East Cleveland	Labour
Lammy, David	Tottenham	Labour
Mahmood, Khalid	Birmingham Perry Barr	Labour
Malik, Shahid	Dewsbury	Labour
Sarwar, Mohammed	Glasgow Govan	Labour
Singh, Marsha	Bradford West	Labour
Vara, Shailesh	North West Cambridgeshire	Conservative
Vaz, Keith	Leicester	Labour

Sources: DOD's *Parliamentary Companion*, various internet sources

the role of international organisations, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the International Organisation for Migration and the European Union in policies concerning immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and ethnic minorities.

Migration and globalisation

Even though international migration is made visible by states and their borders, migration can be linked to that modern day buzzword 'globalisation'. Countries such as Britain in the prosperous and developed parts of the world are often keen to maintain their ability to regulate access by people to their territory. British Governments express their support for international economic liberalisation, but this has not extended to supporting free movement of people. If economic liberalisation is advantageous—as British Governments assert—then why are arguments not made for freer movement by people?

The reason for this can be seen if we compare free movement for widgets and free movement for people. Both widgets and people can be vital components in the production

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process. The skills and learning abilities of humans will of course far surpass those of the humble widget. Yet widgets cross national borders much more easily than people. The reason for this is that a widget does not make claims on the society to which it moves. We do not tend to worry about the education of widgets, their housing, or their access to health care. Nor do we tend to concern ourselves unduly with the question of whether widgets are properly represented in our political institutions. The key point is that immigrants to the UK have rights, that those rights and entitlements tend to increase as a result of residence, and that the possession of rights means that migrants can legitimately make claims on the institutions of British society (and, reciprocally, these institutions can make demands on them). The result is that while British Governments are keen advocates of economic liberalisation as the organising principle of the international economy, this enthusiasm does not extend to free movement of people. This does not negate economic and ethical arguments in support of the free movement of people. Rather, it helps explain why these arguments have thus far had limited effects.

Migration and European integration

European integration has an ambiguous relationship with globalisation. Is European integration driven by globalisation? Perhaps European integration is a reaction against globalisation? Maybe it is both a reaction to and a response against globalisation? This dual identity of the EU—possessing both globalisation-enhancing and globalisation-defying attributes—becomes clear when we look at EU immigration and asylum policy. Here we see a distinct UK response centred on opt-outs from key EU provisions regarding migration and asylum. The reason for these opt-outs is quite straightforward. The UK relies on external frontier controls exercised at points of entry to the UK. Other EU member states tend to share land borders with their neighbours and have developed different systems for regulating movement of people across their borders. As an island, the UK has developed an alternative approach. The UK has therefore opted out of those provisions which move the EU in the direction of a frontier free area insofar as this relates to the free movement of people. So, if someone were to fly from the UK to Paris then they would need to show their passports when entering French territory, but if that person was then to fly on to Italy from France they would not need to show their passport again because that would be classed as an internal flight within a frontier-free EU. It is this different system for the regulation of population movement based on the UK's island position that has led to a difference between the UK and the rest of the EU on border controls.

This does not mean that the UK has not been interested in EU developments. Since 1997 UK Governments have seen scope for the EU to help the UK reduce numbers of asylum seekers. This has meant that the UK has been to the fore in proposing schemes for the external processing of asylum claims, which would mean that claims for asylum would be processed in camps close to the countries of origin of asylum applicants, that is, a long way from Britain. If such schemes were to come to fruition then European integration could be sovereignty enhancing in the sense that it would allow the UK Government to achieve a domestic policy objective through the EU rather than sovereignty-diminishing. It may

appear counter-intuitive to suggest it, but European integration could actually enhance the sovereign power and authority of member states if it helps them resolve domestic issues.



Conclusion

International migration is not a political side-issue because it goes to the heart of four very important political questions that tell us important things about the role and power of the British state. These four questions are the power and capacity of the state to regulate access to its territory; the ability to regulate access to key social and political institutions; the representation of ethnic minorities in political institutions; and the relationship between national migration policies and important international developments. The capacity of the state to regulate migration remains formidable, but perceptions of loss of control were a key issue at the 2005 General Election. It is also accurate to say that there have been large increases in net migration to the UK. It would, however, be a mistake to ascribe huge causal significance to migration and to imagine that it drives welfare state and labour market changes. In fact, international migration is likely to be an effect rather than a cause of these changes. By this is meant that the ways in which the UK economy and welfare state works can create spaces for new migrants. So, for example, a dynamic, liberalised and deregulated UK economy can create spaces for economic migrants at the top and lower ends of the labour market. If we think about the issue in this way then we can see that international migration in its various forms provides a lens through which we can view all these issues and acquire important insights into British society and politics and also to debates about Britain's place in the world. This became clear at the 2005 General Election when immigration and asylum were central to the Conservative campaign. Population ageing and labour market needs seem likely to mean that migration will remain an important and controversial feature of British and European politics in the years to come.

KEY POINTS

- Immigration to Britain increased after the Second World War.
- The bulk of migration to Britain was related to colonial ties between sending countries and Britain.
- Immigration became politically contentious in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The political contention of immigration was based on ideas about 'race' and supposed 'racial difference'.
- Tough controls on immigration were introduced between 1962 and 1971.
- British citizenship was changed in 1981 to mark the retreat from Empire.
- Migration came back onto the political agenda in the 1990s when asylum-seeking migration increased.
- Labour Governments have often felt vulnerable to attack from the Conservatives on immigration issues.

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KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) Why did immigration to Britain increase after the war?
- (2) Why and with what effects were British immigration controls 'racialised' in the 1960s and 1970s?
- (3) Why and how was British citizenship legislation changed in 1981?
- (4) Why did the numbers of asylum-seekers coming to Britain increase during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century?
- (5) Should Britain have a more open or a more restrictive approach to migration?

IMPORTANT WEBSITES

A useful (and free!) global email newsletter Migration News is available from Migration Dialogue, UC-Davis, California, <http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/index.html>. The Migration Research Unit, University College London contains the European Migration Information Network, which is an information network on immigration funded by the EU <http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/mru>. The Migration Policy Group in Brussels is a leading Brussels-based think-tank that keeps a close eye on migration in Europe <http://www.migpolgroup.com>.

Statewatch is a European civil liberties group that monitors EU developments in the area of immigration, asylum and racism (as well as other internal security issues) www.statewatch.org. The following are the sites of leading international organisations active in the area of migration: the International Organization for Migration <http://www.iom.int>, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees <http://www.unhcr.ch>. For UK migration data see the UK national statistical office at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>.

FURTHER READING

A very good source is R Hansen, *Immigration and Citizenship in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). A little dated but still useful for their historical overviews are Z Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) and S Saggat, *The Politics of Race in Britain*

(London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992). On race and politics in Britain see J Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 3rd edn, 2003). On comparative European immigration politics see A Geddes, *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*, (London: Sage, 2003).



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