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**Evidence on Attitudes to  
Asylum and Immigration:  
What We Know, Don't Know  
and Need to Know**

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## **Evidence on Attitudes to Asylum and Immigration: What We Know, Don't Know and Need to Know**

### **Abstract:**

Whilst many recent surveys and opinion polls provide a description of negative public attitudes towards asylum and immigration issues in the UK, they provide limited evidence on the factors that underlie differences in attitude at the local level and, in particular, over time and/or in relation to particular national or international events. This paper provides an overview of existing evidence on the factors affecting attitudes to asylum and immigration. This evidence suggests that attitudes are influenced by labour market position and income, educational background, individual demographic characteristics including age, gender and race / ethnicity, contact with ethnic minorities groups, knowledge of asylum and migration issues and the context in which attitudes are formed, including dominant political and media discourses. The paper outlines the information that is currently collected through existing social surveys in the UK and elsewhere and concludes that these do not adequately capture the factors influencing attitudes to asylum and immigration or the relationship between them. It sets out the key issues on which questions need to be asked in future social surveys to better inform understanding of attitudes in this area, and concludes with recommendations for further qualitative work that might be taken forward by those with an interest in this complex but increasingly important area of policy research.

**Keywords:** Asylum, immigration, UK, public attitudes, politics, social surveys, media, racism

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## List of acronyms

BSA	British Social Attitudes Survey
CASS	Centre for Applied Social Surveys
CCAA	Centre for Comparative Social Surveys (City University)
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
COPA	US Centre on Policy Attitudes
CREST	Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends
CRaM	Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration (UCL)
ESS	European Social Survey
EUMC	European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia
ICAR	Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK
ISSP	International Social Survey Programme
NatCen	National Centre for Social Research
NISA	Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey
NORC	National Opinion Research Centre (United States)
ONS	Office for National Statistics
RDS	Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office
SRC	Survey Research Centre (United States)
SSA	Scottish Social Attitudes Survey
UKDA	United Kingdom Data Archive

## **Introduction and aims**

Whilst many recent surveys and opinion polls provide a description of negative public attitudes towards asylum and immigration issues in the UK, they provide limited evidence on the factors that underlie differences in attitude at the local level and, in particular, over time and/or in relation to particular national or international events. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of what is already known about the factors that influence attitudes to asylum and immigration based on a review of existing evidence available from research, opinion polls, and social surveys undertaken in the UK and elsewhere. The paper then explores the ability of existing social surveys to capture information on the complexity of factors influencing attitudes in this increasingly important and politically contentious area. It concludes by providing specific recommendations for ensuring that the factors that are known to influence public attitudes can be to be explored in more depth and for improving understanding about how these attitudes are formed, and whether they are correlated with economic, social and political change.

## **Attitudes to asylum and immigration**

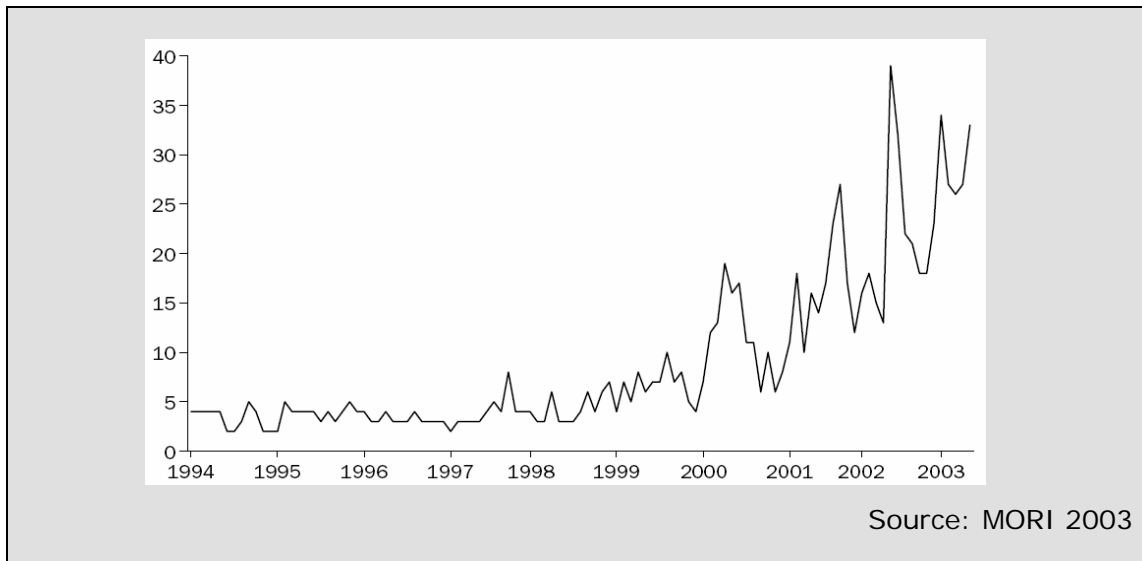
There is evidence of increasingly negative public attitudes towards asylum and immigration issues in the UK. This evidence can be found in ad hoc opinion polls, the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, European surveys - most notably Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey (ESS) - and international surveys, in particular the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Saggar and Drean (2001) provide a comprehensive summary of various recent opinion polls relating to asylum, migration and race undertaken during the late 1990s and conclude that a significant proportion of the British population express intolerant attitudes to migrants and ethnic minorities. Common majority sentiments identified in surveys are that 'there are too many in Britain', that 'they get too much help' and that 'migration is out of control'.

Over the past five years there has been a plethora of additional ad hoc opinion polls on attitudes to asylum and immigration undertaken by a range of market research companies and commissioned by organisations

or newspapers with an interest in this issue. Many of these polls confirm the existence of negative attitudes towards these issues. For example, a poll by MORI commissioned by refugee sector organisations as part of 'Refugee Week' found that the public's knowledge of asylum issues is limited, that negative words to describe asylum seekers and refugees are associated with the image portrayed in the media, and that young people are less likely than older people to be welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees in their community (MORI 2002). A survey undertaken by MORI in 2003 for Migration Watch UK suggests that that 85% of people in Britain, including a majority of Black and Asian Britons (59%), disagree that the Government has immigration under control. A YouGov survey for The Economist (2004a) found that the vast majority of respondents (85%) agreed that Britain will need more skilled and/or unskilled workers over the next five years. Despite this, 74% of respondents also agreed with the statement that 'too many immigrants are coming to Britain'.

Separate regular MORI surveys of the British public similarly show a major increase in those who see immigration as the most important issue facing Britain (Page 2004). For decades race relations and immigration was seen as a national issue of concern by only around 5% of people. Since the late 1990s however, it has soared up the public's agenda. The importance of race and immigration issues compared with other 'problems' has risen from 17<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> since Labour came into power in 1997 (Figure 1). According to MORI data on current trends, race relations, immigration and immigrants are consistently seen as one of the top three issues facing Britain and at the present time only the NHS and hospital are seen as more important. Indeed in February 2005 immigration was the single most important issue in the minds of nearly a quarter (23%) of the British population, nearly double the percentage who expressed concern about either the state of the nation's health care (13%) or Iraq, terrorism and the nation's defence (13%).

**Figure 1 Percentage of adults mentioning race/immigration as the most important issue facing Britain 1994-2003**



Data from opinion polls also identifies significant regional and other differences in attitudes towards asylum and immigration. According to MORI, the regions of the UK fall into broadly three groups in terms of their attitudes in this area: the North East, West Midlands and the South West; London; and the remaining regions of the UK. The North East, West Midlands and the South West show the most opposition to multiculturalism, immigration and asylum, and London has the least opposition to these issues, with the remaining regions falling in between. MORI found that three quarters of people in London (75%) agree that it is good thing that Britain is a multi-cultural society, compared to just 39% in the North East. There is also widespread regional differences in whether or not people think immigration is 'under control' with those in London being considerably less concerned about immigration being under control than those in the West Midlands. What is most interesting here is that negative attitudes are associated less with actual impacts than with perceived impacts. As is noted by MORI themselves:

While London is obviously de facto the most multi-cultural region, what is interesting is that more or less negative or positive views on these issues seem to bear little relation to the actual number of immigrants or asylum seekers in each region. The North East for example, is almost wholly white, and without huge numbers of asylum seekers, but is notably more negative about multiculturalism and asylum than many other regions. This is

consistent with other research MORI has undertaken on immigration (MORI 2003: 2)

Although London is generally more tolerant than other areas of the UK, other polls have found that those in the South East (43%) are likely to be most prejudiced against asylum seekers and refugees (Stonewall 2003). Findings in relation to other areas of the UK, most notably Scotland, are mixed. Whilst the Scottish public has generally been considered to be more tolerant of immigrants than other regions of the UK, a recent MORI poll undertaken on behalf of Oxfam in March 2005 found that of 1,000 Scottish adults, 46% believe that 'the number of asylum seekers living in Scotland is a problem; and only 26% disagree. A further 28% were undecided or refused to express an opinion. Almost 40% believed that asylum seekers did not make a positive contribution to life in Scotland while 28% said that they did.

These findings of recent opinion polls are consistent with more in-depth research on attitudes that identifies similar regional differences. In 2003, Stonewall published quantitative data showing the extent of prejudice against minority groups in England (Stonewall 2003). Follow up qualitative research undertaken by Valentine and McDonald (2004) aimed to drill down further into the causes of prejudice in three different regions of the UK – the South West, the West Midlands and London. The research found that although there are strong similarities in the nature and cause of prejudice in all three regions, the extent of prejudice and the ways in which it is expressed varies, in some cases considerably, as a result of local factors and issues.

It is also worth noting here that many opinion polls on attitudes to asylum and immigration identify significant differences in attitudes according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent. The findings in relation to the role of these factors are often contradictory. For example an opinion poll undertaken by MORI on behalf of voluntary sector organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees found that young people age 15 to 18 years old appear to be more negative than the population as a whole (MORI 2002). They were less well-informed and less likely to say they would welcome asylum seekers. By contrast a

survey of attitudes among young people in Northern Ireland has found generally positive attitudes among young people towards refugees and asylum seekers, although a significant minority hold negative or even hostile attitudes towards this small sector of society (Amnesty International 2004). These factors and their role in influencing attitudes are discussed later in this paper.

The tendency towards negative attitudes highlighted in opinion polls is reflected in the findings of the most recent BSA survey that anti-immigration sentiments increased significantly between 1995 and 2003. In 1995, around two-thirds of the population thought the number of immigrants should be reduced, but by 2003 this had jumped to three-quarters. Further, all of this increase was among those who thought the number of immigrants should be reduced 'a lot'. Meanwhile, the proportion that thought immigration should stay at the same level or be increased has fallen from just under a third to a fifth. Thus, "where there was previously some degree of ambivalence there no seems to be more conviction, and the conviction is overwhelmingly against immigration" (McLaren and Johnson 2004: 172).

McLaren and Johnson (2004) note that Britain's considerable uneasiness at being a country of immigration is shared by many of our European neighbours. Results from a Eurobarometer survey in 1997 showed an increase in negative attitudes towards minorities in the 15 EU Member States (Thalhammer et al. 2001). The results of a follow-up survey undertaken in 2000 show that in some ways the attitudes towards minority and migrant groups *in general* have changed for the better. Despite this there has been an increase in people worrying about unemployment, loss of social welfare and drop in educational standards and who, at the same time, blame minorities for these changes. More recently there is also evidence that negative public attitudes towards immigration are greater in the UK than elsewhere in Europe.

European Commission research published in 2003 presents the results of a qualitative survey carried out to assess how European citizens see questions relating to justice, security and immigration (European Commission 2003). The research found that sensitivity to the question of



immigration varies from one country to another but that it is very strong in six of the current European Member States, one of which is the UK. The Commission found that in countries like the UK, France and Germany “immigration is an old phenomenon but...there is an impression amongst the vast majority of people that things have ‘gone too far’” (European Commission 2003: 18). The Commission notes that in the UK in particular, there is “often exasperation at the phenomenon of immigration and the scale it has reached” (2003: 100), with veritable hostility among participants from the middle to lower social group. Results of the most recent Eurobarometer on public opinion on the immigration and asylum policies of the European Union (European Commission 2004) found that the proportion of respondents in the UK who believe that legal immigrants should have exactly the same rights as nationals is among the lowest in Europe despite relatively wide-spread recognition that immigrants are needed to fill gaps in the UK labour market.

In summary, existing sources of data in the UK indicate that the British public has, over recent years, become increasingly concerned about, and hostile towards, asylum and immigration issues. Opinion polls suggest that immigration is currently widely viewed as among the most important issues affecting the UK in the minds of the British public. There is some evidence of regional and socio-demographic differences in attitudes but this evidence is inconclusive and some cases contradictory. The findings of annual BSA surveys confirm that anti-immigration attitudes have increased in recent years. Although there has also been an increase in negative attitudes in other EU Member States, there is some evidence that the extent of negative public attitudes towards immigration is greater in the UK than elsewhere.

### **Problems with the existing evidence base**

Despite the large amount of data available from opinion polls and surveys about the attitudes of the British public towards asylum and immigration, there remain very considerable problems with this evidence as the basis for policymaking. These problems stem primarily from the fact that whilst many of the surveys and opinion polls provide a description of the differences in attitudes between different groups of the British public and

different areas of the country, *they provide us with a limited understanding of the factors and changes that underlie these differences in attitude*. This is reflected in the sometimes contradictory conclusions that are drawn from this evidence about the factors influencing public opinion on asylum and immigration.

There are a number of difficulties associated with using the existing evidence base in order to understand public opinion on asylum issues. These include the definitions that are used and the respondents' understanding of these, the different responses that can be elicited as a result of the questions that are asked, and the conclusions that are then extrapolated from this evidence.

An almost universal difficulty with opinion polls and surveys that ask the public for their opinion on particular issues is that they assume a level of knowledge about the definitions and terms that are used. There is evidence from research that the British public appears to have little understanding of the differences between ethnic minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers. Particular confusion exists in relation to the last two categories (Saggar and Drean 2001). Most opinion polls do not offer definitions for the terms they use and interpretation of the word 'immigrant' is particularly liable to change (McLaren and Johnson 2004). It is also clear that the terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' have very different meanings and connotations yet are often used interchangeably. In a context where terms themselves have become loaded with meaning and significance, it is difficult to ask respondents about their attitudes specifically about asylum issues without evoking responses about immigration or ethnic minorities more generally (Lewis 2005). Conversely questions about immigrants or ethnic minorities often elicit responses about asylum issues that may not be of direct relevance to the issues being explored.

A second significant problem is the interpretation of survey questions. In some cases this results from the nature of polls themselves. It is clear that different kinds of questions produce different responses and that the effects of how questions are worded are potentially important but often unpredictable (Glendall and Hoek 2002). The distribution of responses to a

closed question will always be critically dependent on the answer set presented to the respondents. Agree-disagree statements appear to be particularly prone to question wording effects. Moreover they also assume a degree of knowledge about the existing situation. So, for example, when the opinion polls ask respondents whether the level of immigration into the UK should be increased or reduced, they assume that respondents have some knowledge of existing levels of migration. To this extent opinion polls are just that – based on opinion rather than knowledge – and are therefore very susceptible to the influence of various sources of information and personal experience.

Linked to this problem is a concern about the use of opinion polls commissioned specifically to achieve a particular objective and reflected in the use of loaded and sometimes leading questions. For example, a YouGov poll commissioned by The Sun newspaper (2003) asks respondents whether they consider that ‘some parts of British cities have become so completely taken over by immigrant communities that they are no longer truly British’. Respondents were also asked to agree with a statement that ‘immigrants often fail to mix properly with the rest of society, and merely congregate together’. In some cases the answers to certain questions are extrapolated across or correlated with others to make a particular argument. In 2003 Migration Watch UK commissioned a survey of attitudes to multi-culturalism, immigration and asylum which was undertaken by MORI (2003). The survey asked a series of questions about very broad and general issues the answers to which reflect broader social and cultural change across the UK, for example, the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that it is a good thing that Britain is a multi-cultural society and whether respondents were concerned that Britain is losing its own culture. The responses to these questions were then used in conjunction with responses to questions specifically on asylum issues to argue that the British public believes that immigration and asylum is undermining British culture and British cultural values. An ICM poll in 2001 was reported by The Guardian newspaper (who paid for it) as evidence of a decline in anti-immigrant sentiment (ICM 2001). It shows, for example, a strong majority in favour of loosening controls on

immigrants with valuable skills that are in short supply in the UK, such as doctors, nurses and teachers. However as Saggart and Drean (2001) argue, a more detailed analysis of the survey findings does not necessarily give support to an optimistic assessment of attitudes. Rather they suggest that whilst people are willing to accept the entry of skilled and professionals in short supply in the UK, they do not support the entry of unskilled immigrants and those who cannot financially support themselves.

Nowhere is the tendency to extrapolate from general findings about public attitudes in relation to immigration more evident than in relation to asylum. Although few of the opinion polls described in the previous section specifically address the issue of asylum (most, including the BSA survey, are framed in terms of general immigration issues) findings of polls on race and immigration have been extrapolated over into the asylum context in order for things to be said (by politicians, the media, others) about the workings of the asylum system and the impact of asylum seekers on the economy and society more generally. Despite the increase in evidence on attitudes to immigration generally, there remains very little theoretical evidence on what factors influence attitudes specifically towards asylum seekers as opposed to immigrants in general. This is important given that immigrants and asylum seekers constitute a group in society with hugely varying reasons for being in the UK, with different needs and expectations, rights and aspirations. The limited knowledge that the public has about these differences means that there is often a failure to distinguish between these groups although the impacts may vary considerably. This is an issue that needs to be captured in social survey questions that aim to contribute to an understanding of what people think about different kinds of immigration and about different groups of immigrants. Failure to make this distinction means that negative or positive attitudes about one type or group may be extrapolated across other types or groups in ways that do little to enhance our understanding of the underlying factors which influence attitudes.

In summary therefore, whilst existing opinion polls and social surveys describe increasingly negative attitudes in relation to asylum and

immigration issues they provide us with only a very limited understanding of the factors and changes that underlie these attitudes. They do not fully or systematically explore that factors that influence attitudes across different socio-demographic groups or areas of the country. Opinion polls and surveys often use definitions and terms that are not fully understood by respondents and this can result in attitudes being expressed and recorded that conflate several different concerns and issues. Some opinion polls are conducted specifically to achieve a particular political (or other) objective and use loaded and sometimes leading questions. In addition, there is a tendency among those interpreting the results of opinion polls to extrapolate findings on attitudes to race and immigration across to asylum issues even where it is not clear that this is the specific issue or aspect that is of concern among respondents.

### **Factors influencing attitudes to asylum and immigration**

The factors influencing attitudes towards asylum and immigration are highly complex and frequently inter-connected. One of the difficulties in unpicking attitudes to any issue, is that these often reflects an individual's broader 'world view' which develops over time and is based on a whole range of factors in addition to those which are immediate or obvious. It is unusual for example, for an individual to feel particularly positive or negative about asylum or immigration but conversely about other related issues. Much more common is the existence of an overall set of beliefs and values which, although it can be influenced by levels of knowledge, the policy and political context and personal experience, remains largely constant and consistent.

Given the complexity of attitude formation, the model provided by Hernes and Knudsen (1992) provides a useful framework for identifying the factors that influence attitudes. According to this model, there are a number of structural factors that provide the context within which group or individual attitudes are formed. These include:

- Social and economic structure – housing market, labour market, education system and government welfare arrangements;

- National culture – including common beliefs and established relations with other nations and cultures; and
- The proportion and integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants (in the country as a whole and where individuals live)

Within this overall context, Hernes and Knudsen identify a number of individual socio-economic and demographic attributes that potentially have an important influence on individual and group attitudes towards immigrants. These include:

- Position in the labour market – including income and occupation or class;
- Level of educational attainment (individual and overall);
- Individual socio-demographic factors including age, gender and ethnic origin or background; and
- Values including religious and political beliefs, sympathy towards development issues and openness to foreign cultures.

The model and theoretical analysis provided by Hernes and Knudsen suggests that it is the combination of these individual factors combined with a number of subjective factors including the perceived fairness (or otherwise) of government policies – not just in relation to asylum issues but more generally – alongside actual or perceived *relative deprivation* which influences attitudes towards immigrants.

The concept of relative deprivation provided in the model is very important. The main idea is that the attitudes of individuals represent a relationship between their expectations and their achievement relative to others in the same position as themselves. The concept of relative deprivation may be the key to understanding attitudes towards ethnic or other 'outside' groups including asylum seekers and immigrants because it exists regardless of actual economic impacts and results primarily from a perception of discrepancy between the conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled and those they believe that others are rightfully entitled to have (Fetzer 2000). Thus, when others receive something they do not deserve or are perceived not to deserve – for

example, they obtain certain benefits without working for them, or are given a status which they are not considered to be worthy of – people react negatively.

### ***Labour market position and income***

Economic theories about attitudes towards immigration dominate not only popular explanations of anti-immigrant sentiments but also many scholarly studies of public attitudes (Fetzer 2000). Ultimately, according to labour market theory, opposition to immigration arises from economic deprivation and the fear of further financial decline. As Dustmann and Preston (2003) suggest, labour market theory predicts that these labour markets fears – especially when combined with welfare concerns – mean that negative attitudes to immigration should be more pronounced for those who are most directly affected by the competition of migrant workers. Theoretically therefore, those in vulnerable positions in relation to or within the labour market will hold the most sceptical views whilst those with higher status occupations are expected to be more positive because their jobs are normally characterised by greater security, freedom and pay. A variant on this theory accepts that this may not always happen because those with higher incomes and in a better labour market position may want to preserve these and may perceive immigrants to be a threat particularly those who are well-educated and highly skilled.

There are more sophisticated versions of this theory which suggest that the role of labour market position and income in shaping attitudes is more complicated. Both Fetzer (2000) and Dustman and Preston (2003) argue that there are two aspects of the actual or perceived economic impact of migration that need to be taken into account - concerns about the labour market versus the use of publicly funded public services including education, healthcare and welfare benefits services. These will have differing implications for different socio-economic groups. According to the former, people fear that immigrants – often willing to work for less pay and filling positions demanding fewer skills – will reduce the native-born working class's wages or take their jobs. On the other hand those who are contributing most through taxation to public services may more commonly express concerns about welfare system use. These concerns may be

particularly pronounced in relation to undocumented or irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who are perceived not to contribute to public services through the payment of taxes, and in the case of asylum seekers are in fact unable to do so because they are not allowed to access the labour market.

There are a large – and growing – number of detailed empirical studies which test these economic explanations of attitudes to immigration. Some of these studies use complicated econometric models to test the theory that households will favour immigration if their income increased following immigrant's arrival and oppose immigration if their income decreases. The findings of these studies are inconclusive but in general terms suggest that there is no clear correlation between attitudes and labour market position or income (see, for example, Hernes and Knudsen 1992; Sanoussi et al. 1998; Bauer, Lofstrom and Zimmermann 2001)<sup>(1)</sup>. This evidence suggests that - contrary to frequently expressed opinion - hostility towards immigrants including asylum seekers is linked neither to individuals' experience of unemployment nor to local economic conditions. Even where the data partly support the theory of economic self-interest it does not do so in the way that popular suggestions would have it (Fetzer 2000). Dustman and Preston (2001, 2002, 2003) for example have found that both welfare and labour market concerns are more closely linked to negative attitudes towards immigration for non-manual than for manual workers, and for the more educated rather than the less educated.

Whilst economic concerns appear to be stronger among those who are poorer because the actual labour market impacts of immigration are not well understood, attitudes may be based on *perceived* economic consequences that bear no relationship to what happens in practice. This is reflected in the fact that concerns about economic impacts are often expressed as strongly in areas with very few asylum seekers and immigrants as they are in those with a high number of people from these backgrounds. As Fetzer (2000) suggests, these contradictory results may also reflect the fact that political elites and their media allies mediate understanding of economic impacts, an issue that is discussed in detail later in this paper.



In addition, there are a number of other variables that intersect and overlap with labour market position and income and mean that on its own it is an insufficient explanation. These include the characteristics of migrants themselves, and whether they are capital-rich or capital-poor, and non-economic variables including social and cultural differences (education, age, gender and ethnicity), nationalist sentiments and racism. It is very difficult in practice to separate out these different variables as they are closely inter-related. Dustmann and Preston (2003) conclude, for example, that negative attitudes towards immigration among manual and poorly educated workers are associated only and strongly with racial attitudes. This may reflect differences in the process of opinion formation towards immigration depending on levels of education.

### ***The role of education***

There is evidence that education can play an important role in shaping attitudes towards immigrants. A number of the surveys and opinion polls which were referred to earlier in this paper point to higher levels of education as contributing to more positive attitudes towards immigration (see also Saggar and Drean 2001). These findings are supported by more in-depth research studies. Dustman and Preston (2000) for example, have found the strongest relationship with racial prejudice to be that of education with highly educated individuals being 10-15% less likely to express racially intolerant opinions than are individuals with low education (see also Fetzer 2000; Bauer, Lofstrom and Zimmermann 2001; Rothon and Heath 2003). Most recently the empirical analysis undertaken by Dustmann and Preston (2004) based on European Social Survey (ESS) data supports findings in much of the previous literature of a strong relationship between education and more positive attitudes towards various issues relating to migration.

Education has been found to powerfully decrease reported opposition to immigration for two reasons. On the one hand, the relatively strong direct effect of education may be seen as an expression of certain values held by the well educated at a more general level. Thus positive attitudes are a result of respondents being socialised to greater tolerance and openness towards those from different background. More importantly however, and

in the context of the discussion in the previous section, a person's educational level represents an important resource, particularly in relation to the labour market. Hernes and Knudsen (1992) have found that whilst basic indicators of social position, such as age, gender, education and labour market position all affect attitudinal formation, the overall effect of education as compared with labour market achievements stresses this factor as a resource for doing well and getting ahead in society:

A high level of education is a general asset that may be transformed into other benefits in the labour market or other arenas, and therefore strengthens the individual's confidence that he or she can master crucial challenges in life...It is the potential for being able to reach certain positions rather than actually being in them that seems relevant" (Hernes and Knudsen 1992: 135)

Since some immigrants have either very little education or are *perceived* to lack the type of education needed to compete in the labour market, those that are well-educated (university degree and above) are protected from competition. Those with little education are much more vulnerable. This evidence seems to underline the meaning of the central concept as a feeling of being deprived, in comparison with some standard, or with the real or imagined condition of other people.

Although the findings on the relationship between education and attitudes to asylum seekers are strong, it should not be assumed that education automatically leads to more tolerance. Again, actual and perceived impacts are important in shaping the extent to which relative deprivation is felt by different groups in society and those who are more highly educated may have access to information and ideas about the impacts of migration which others do not. This may in some cases lead them to be more, rather than less, prejudiced – or at the very least more able to justify their hostility in different, more implicit, ways. This is reflected in the findings of the most recent British Social Attitudes Survey. Although McLaren and Johnson (2004) find a clear education gradient in hostility to immigration, the changes between 1995 and 2003 are unexpected and revealing:

The group whose attitudes towards immigration has changed the most is actually the most educated, particularly those with degrees. The proportion believing the number of immigrants

should be reduced rose by 21 percentage points among graduates, compared to the next highest increase of 12 percentage points among those with O level or equivalent (McLaren and Johnson 2004: 194)

This evidence raises interesting – and worrying – questions about current shifts in attitudes and the factors that underlie the increase in negative attitudes towards immigration among those with whom negative attitudes have typically less closely associated in the past.

### ***Individual demographic characteristics***

There are a number of individual socio-demographic factors including gender, age and ethnic origin or background which on their own and in conjunction with labour market position and education have been shown to be related with attitudes towards immigrants and asylum seekers.

The role of gender in shaping attitudes is perhaps the least understood of these. Hernes and Knudsen's (1992) model predicts that whilst women have to face greater competition in the labour market because they are competing – potentially with immigrants - for lower skilled, lower paid jobs, men as a group may feel more threatened because of their higher overall participation in their labour market. Although there is some evidence that women are likely to hold more positive attitudes towards immigration and ethnic minorities than men (Bauer, Lofstrom and Zimmermann 2001; Stonewall 2003), this is not consistently demonstrated by all opinion polls or in other research studies (Saggar and Drean 2001). In Fetzer's comprehensive study for example, gender - at least on average - did not produce any significant effects. There may however be more evidence of gender differences in the way in which attitudes are expressed. Valentine and McDonald (2004) for example have found that white majority women have higher levels of implicit prejudice, whereas white majority men are more likely to talk in explicit terms of the need to do something about 'them'. As a result men are more likely to exhibit aggressive prejudice often backed by threats of violence and women banal or benevolent prejudice.

The role of age in shaping attitudes to immigration in general and asylum seekers in particular is also contradictory. In theory at least it might be

expected that there would be a strong relationship between age and attitudes because age is a direct measure of life experience, because it captures cohort effects - those belonging to earlier cohorts with small immigrant populations are likely to have had less contact with people from different ethnic backgrounds - and because age reflects an individual's position in his or her economic life cycle (Saggar and Drean 2001; Rothon and Heath 2003). As a result we might expect young people to be more open to new and foreign impulses, and therefore show greater tolerance of new immigrants. However because the younger generation is in the process of becoming established both in the housing and labour market, it is likely that young people will be competing (or perceive themselves to be competing) against newcomers to get a home or a job. This being so, young people may be sceptical to new immigrants because they believe it to result in tougher competition for them. Parallel arguments seem to hold for older people: they feel that established welfare benefits and rights, which so far could be taken for granted, must now compete on the Government's priority list. Hence if this version of the relative deprivation thesis holds, both young and old should express negative attitudes.

Certainly there is existing evidence that younger people are not necessarily more tolerant and open to migration than older people. For example, MORI (2002a) conducted research with 15-18 year olds, the results of which show that young people's attitudes differed from the population as a whole and were broadly less well informed. The poll also found that people in this age group were likely to be less welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees in their community. An attitudinal survey commissioned by Amnesty International (2004) demonstrates an alarmingly high level of misunderstanding among young people of certain asylum issues. Although the survey found generally positive attitudes among young people in Northern Ireland towards refugees and asylum seekers, a significant minority hold negative or even hostile attitudes towards this group. And Preston's (undated) analysis drawing on the results of the European Social Survey (see below) concludes that older respondents are actually more liberal than younger people. These contradictory conclusions suggest that additional data is needed to test

existing theories on the influence of age and position in the life cycle in shaping attitudes to asylum and immigration.

It is also important to consider the role of respondents' own ethnicity or race in influencing their attitudes towards asylum and migration issues. This is necessary because an individual's race or ethnicity not only influences his or her perception about the impacts on the economy and society, but also because those from non-white backgrounds are more likely to be in contact with people from non-white backgrounds and to be directly affected by negative or racist attitudes associated with asylum and migration. Based on the theory of cultural affinity, those with cultural and ethnic ties to immigrants might be expected to promote pro-immigrant attitudes and support for more open immigration policy (Fetzer 2000) but the fact that ethnic minority respondents are more likely to be economically marginalised can lead to contradictory results.

It is often quite difficult to ascertain how opinions vary by race or ethnicity because of the categories used in questionnaires and opinion polls<sup>(2)</sup>. A YouGov poll commissioned by the CRE (YouGov 2004b) specifically designed to identify differences in attitudes between white and non-white respondents found that white respondents do not have as high an opinion of recent immigrants to Britain as non-white respondents. Similarly 35% of non-white respondents have a fairly or very low opinion of asylum seekers compared with 51% of white respondents. But the survey found some similarities between white and non-white respondents in relation to integration issues and suggests that there is a surprisingly degree of hostility among existing ethnic minority communities towards asylum and migration.

### ***Contact***

As was noted earlier in this paper, there is evidence that regional and local differences in the ethnic minority proportion of the population are strongly correlated with attitudes towards immigration with those area in which are more ethnically diverse and have a longer history of migration being more tolerant than those areas which are less diverse or for whom the arrival of asylum seekers and immigrants is a much more recent

phenomenon. This is generally considered to reflect the extent to which individuals have contact with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and for whom this personal experience acts as a counter to other information sources which would otherwise be an important contributory factor in attitude formation.

Contact theory focuses on the distribution of immigrants in a neighbourhood or region and on how many and what kind of personal contacts an individual has with newcomers (Fetzer 2000). According to Fetzer, not all contact is the same. Scholars have distinguished between 'true acquaintance' (e.g. being entertained as a dinner guest in someone's home) and superficial or 'casual contact' (e.g. passing someone in the street). While the first type of contact most often decreases prejudice, the second seems more likely to increase it. In short, "the more [casual] contact, the more trouble" (Allport 1979: 263 cited in Fetzer 2000: 15). According to Fetzer, such contact boosts hostility because seeing a 'visible out-group' member brings to mind all the other knowledge and information that is known through rumour, hearsay or stereotype. Casual contact does not require meaningful, effective personal communication with the out-group member. Such superficial interaction instead allows one's private obsessions to colour one's perception of reality.

Fetzer's research on attitude formation in the US, Germany and France is based on modelling demographic, economic and political time-series data from various polls on immigration in the United States, from SOFRES and Le Figaro Surveys in France and from Politbarometer West in Germany. In all three countries Fetzer found it very difficult to produce satisfactory measures for personal contact or proximity in the community because this information was not recorded in any of the polls that formed the basis for his analysis. He concludes that in all three countries superficial or 'casual' contact seems to be much more frequent than 'true acquaintance' such that an increase in the immigration rate or in the over-time proportion of foreign-born would boost rather than reduce opposition to immigration. He is unable to be definitive in his conclusion but speculates that in the workplace and in other close, possibly cooperative encounters, frequent contact might reduce hostility.

This hypothesis about the role of contact in shaping attitudes has been further developed in research undertaken in the UK context by Stonewall (2003). *Profiles of Prejudice* presents the findings from a MORI poll undertaken in May 2001. A supplementary self-completion questionnaire was also distributed among the same sample because of the sensitive nature of the questions. One of the important objectives of the work was to find out whether knowing someone from a minority group influences how people feel about that minority group in particular, and about minority groups in general. Overall, the poll found that knowing someone from a minority group significantly reduces the likelihood of prejudice towards that particular group *and* other minority groups. Conversely the results of the poll suggest that lack of personal contact increases the likelihood of prejudice. Older people are the least likely to acknowledge the existence of prejudice against people from ethnic minorities (38% against 49% overall), and the least likely to know anyone from a different ethnic group (54% of people over 65 against 74% overall) and they are the *most likely* to be prejudiced against ethnic minorities themselves (24% against 18% overall).

In a follow up to the Stonewall report, Valentine and McDonald (2004) explored the factors that influence attitudes in more detail. Their report is based on evidence from ten focus-group discussions and 30 in-depth autobiographical interviews with white majority participants in three different regions of the UK, which were conducted between February and April 2004. Valentine and McDonald's conclusions confirm Fetzer's hypothesis that it is not just contact itself, but the nature and quality of that contact that is important:

Contact in public spaces, without engagement, is not enough to foster respect and can even exacerbate prejudice. Seeing young black men, Asians or asylum seekers on the street is linked to fear and anger just as seeing visible lesbians and gay men in public spaces can lead to expressions of prejudice (Valentine and McDonald 2004: 9)

Their research found that whilst people in areas of the country with few ethnic minorities are more aware of the presence of other ethnic groups in their communities or in other areas of the country – many of whom they may assume to consist primarily of new immigrants – they very rarely

have any meaningful personal contact with asylum seekers themselves. Moreover whilst negative individual 'encounters' tend to produce powerful negative generalisations, positive encounters do not work in the same way.

### ***Knowledge***

As was suggested earlier in this paper, an almost universal difficulty with opinion polls and surveys that ask the public for their opinion on particular issues is that they assume a level of knowledge about the definitions and terms that are used. Yet we know from other opinion polls that the British public actually knows very little about asylum and immigration and that their responses will reflect this lack of understanding. Surveys undertaken in the UK over recent years indicate that the British population has a highly erroneous impression concerning the number of ethnic minorities and migrants in the UK (Saggar and Drean 2001). For example, people know very little about the facts of the asylum issue, including the number of asylum seekers in the UK, the proportion of the global refugee population who claim asylum in the UK compared with other countries in Europe and in the world, and the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers when they are here.

This limited knowledge is not unique to asylum issues but extends to migrants and ethnic minority communities in the UK more generally. People regularly overestimate the proportion of the population that consists of asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and ethnic minority populations. This is significant because many negative attitudes are expressed in terms of the scale of immigration to the UK and concerns about overpopulation and excessive demands on scarce resources. It is also important because there is a widely held perception that the number of non-white immigrants to the UK is responsible for undermining British identity and social and community cohesion. In one poll conducted by MORI for the Readers Digest, the average estimate of the size of the ethnic minority population in the UK was 26% of the population, despite the correct figure at that time being closer to 7%. An ICM poll for The Guardian newspaper conducted in May 2001 found that when asked to estimate the proportion of the population consisting of migrants and



asylum seekers, the modal estimate was 51%+, despite the real situation being closer to 4% (ICM 2001). More than a quarter (27%) of all respondents estimated that asylum seekers and immigrants constitute more than half the UK population.

The public also grossly overestimates the proportion of the world's asylum seeking and refugee population hosted by the UK. Although the UK hosts just 1.98% of the world's asylum seekers and refugees, the public estimated a number ten times higher, believing on average that Britain hosts nearly a quarter (23%) of the world's refugees and asylum seekers (MORI 2002). MORI conducted the same research with 15-18 year olds, the results of which show that young people's attitudes differed from the population as a whole and were broadly less well informed. On average they believe that the UK takes 31% of the world's refugees and asylum seekers, with only 4% selecting the correct figure. These findings are reinforced by a more recent survey of young people's attitudes in Northern Ireland, which found that the average estimate of the proportion of the global population of refugees in Northern Ireland was 6.9% (Amnesty International 2004). In fact, less than 0.02% of all world-wide registered refugees and asylum applicants live in Northern Ireland, almost 350 times lower than the average figure quoted. There is also evidence that the public overestimates the amount of support available to asylum seekers once they are in the UK. Almost two thirds of respondents in the MORI poll for the Readers Digest felt that 'too much is done to help immigrants', yet at the same time respondents grossly overestimated the financial assistance available to asylum seekers through the benefits system (MORI 2000).

Given that the British public significantly overestimates the number of asylum seekers and migrants already in the UK, it is perhaps not surprising that the vast majority believe that future immigration should be reduced significantly and the number of asylum seekers reduced further still. Research has found that the stated estimates of the proportion of the population believed to be asylum seekers and migrants is a significant predictor of attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers with higher estimates corresponding to more negative attitudes.

### ***Political and policy context***

In the period since 1997 asylum and migration issues have been the subject of extensive political and policy debate and have rarely been out of the headlines. In many respects this is nothing new and reflects a history of politics around asylum and migration that goes back at least as far as the immediate post-war period (Solomos 2003). Race relations policies in Britain have, in one way or another, been premised on the notion that the aims of public policy were to encourage the integration of existing minorities by dealing with issues such as discrimination, education, social adjustment and welfare and to promote better community relations by stopping new immigration. Strict immigration controls have thus been widely viewed at both ends of the political spectrum as an essential pre-requisite for successful race relations policies for integrating Britain's own minorities (Spencer 1998; Statham 2002; Schuster and Solomos 2004). As Spencer (1998) suggests, this approach is based on the widely-held assumption that the hostility which some white people feel towards ethnic minorities would be exacerbated if they believed that their entry into the country was not effectively controlled. Thus the assurance that immigration controls *are* effective, or whether there are not *something is being done about it*, is intended to reassure that section of public opinion that the number of immigrants will not rise more than is absolutely necessary.

This overall approach is reflected in the politics of asylum. During the period 1979 to 1997 successive Conservative governments introduced increasingly strict immigration controls in response to the fear of 'ordinary people' about excessive immigration. For those on the Right therefore, the need to control immigration has been expressed in terms of a concern the whole fabric of British society could come otherwise under threat. Although the Labour party has rejected many of the extreme images of the impact of immigration and asylum since it came into power in 1997, it has been careful to adopt positions that are clearly influenced by its desire to protect itself from accusations of being 'soft on immigration' (Solomos 2003). Solomos and others (see for example Spencer 1998; Flynn 2003; Schuster and Solomos 2004) suggest that this has resulted in a number of

different – and sometimes contradictory - discourses emanating from central government and reflected in political debate more generally.

On the one hand, numerous policies have been introduced to deal with the social and economic problems of minority communities and to address the discrimination experienced by ethnic minorities across a wide range of sectors and services. There has also been explicit recognition of the contribution that economic labour migration can make to the UK economy in general and to specific sectors of the labour market in particular. At the same time however, the Government has been keen to emphasise that it is tough on the issue of asylum and on illegal or irregular immigration to the UK. Whilst this has nominally been focused on deterring individuals from using the asylum route as a means of gaining access to the UK labour market and welfare benefits, in reality efforts to tighten the UK's borders and changes to the provision of support for asylum seekers inevitably have an impact on those who are in need of protection as well as those who are not. More importantly for the purpose of this paper, they have also resulted in a political debate that has been framed almost entirely in terms of the 'pull' of the UK, the numbers claiming asylum and how to prevent 'abuse' of the system. Political debates in relation to Sangatte – which was also presented as a security concern – are a particularly clear example of this (see, for example, Thompson 2003). As Flynn (2003) notes, the public statements of ministers and other public commentators on immigration policy are replete with references to the existence of a 'legitimate public concern' over the volume and implications of immigration and, in particular, asylum. There has been rather less discussion or concern about the causes of forced migration or of how to ensure that those who are in need of protection are able to access it.

It is clear that central government discourse and the politics of asylum play an important role in setting the context within which information about local issues is interpreted (Bauer, Lofstrom and Zimmermann 2001; Saggar and Drean 2001). Public debates that focus on negative aspects of immigration, such as the debate on asylum seekers, may encourage negative opinion on immigrants – in other words, government policy and discourse does not simply react or respond to public opinion, but itself

contributes to it. Equally, government perceptions about what potential voters think in relation to both economic and cultural issues relating to migration can and does influence policy (Statham 2001, 2002; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2004). This view is shared by McLaren and Johnson (2004), whose analysis of recent BSA data leads them to the conclusion that the current framing of political discourse around asylum is the best explanation for the overall increase in negative attitudes towards immigration issues. In particular, the discourse about managed migration appears to have been confusing to the public who are not able to distinguish between different groups of migrants. To this extent there is evidence that the Government's approach to asylum has served effectively to legitimise and confirm that asylum and immigration is 'a problem' and, in turn, has heightened the sense that the government is not in control. As Flynn (2003) and Solomos (2003) suggest, public anxiety emerges not so much from a direct engagement with the practical issues of living with or alongside immigrant communities, but from the character of the public discourse promoted by politicians, policy-makers and the media.

### ***The role of the media***

Over recent years there has been a significant increase in the extent to which asylum issues have formed the basis of negative stories in the national press, particularly among 'red tops' such as the Daily Express and Sun. Although this increase in coverage may be partly related to the actual increase in numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers entering the UK since 1997, the increase in media coverage has been disproportionate (McLaren and Johnson 2004). One explanation for this has to do with where the media gets its information:

While sources of information are numerous, a key source is, of course, the British Government. Thus, UK government ministers' statements about an issue like immigration can change the nature of media coverage of the issue, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It seems that by the year before our 2003 survey, government ministers and agencies were indeed setting the media's agenda to a greater degree than previously (McLaren and Johnson 2004: 190)

Certain sections of the media have also clearly taken their own line on asylum and migration issues within this broader political context.

Given this context, a number of recent research studies have examined the role of the media – and in particular newspapers - in shaping or influencing attitudes towards asylum issues (see, for example, Buchanan et al 2003; Finney 2003; Buchanan and Grillo 2004; ICAR 2004). Despite this research, assessing the precise impact of the media on people's understanding of the world and on their actions is very difficult not least because people may chose a newspaper to fit their views, not the other way around (McLaren and Johnson 2004). Moreover individuals come into contact with a wide array of different information sources some of which they acquire second-hand through colleagues, friends and neighbours. Despite these caveats, it appears that the media influences attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees in several important ways (Valentine and McDonald 2004). Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the media sets the terms in which the public debate occurs and provide the stories and material that are used to justify people's prejudices. Examples and facts from the media are passed on as accurate and independent of the individual's view or prejudice because others corroborate them. This is of particular concern because there is evidence that media coverage is often far from accurate and may sometimes be deliberately misleading about the scale and impact of asylum in the UK context. According to research undertaken by Buchanan et al. (2003), certain sections of the national press are guilty of:

- A significant degree of conflation between the use of terms to describe asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants in terms of their legal status and reasons for being in Britain with many of these terms being used interchangeably;
- The use of provocative terminology, including meaningless and derogatory terms to describe asylum seekers such as 'illegal refugee' and 'asylum cheat';
- A heavy reliance on government officials and politicians as well as Migration Watch UK (an anti-immigration organisation) as sources for news reports and opinion pieces;

- Inaccurate, misleading or at best decontextualised presentation of statistical information which may be unsourced, at times exaggerated and in many cases conflicting; and
- Heavy editorialising of photographic images dominated by the stereotype of the 'threatening young male'.

In the context of the evidence presented earlier in this paper – that there is often lack of meaningful contact with asylum seekers or even existing ethnic minorities and that many sections of the UK public do not understand the difference between different groups of migrants and their rights and responsibilities – this is clearly very significant. There are no personal experiences to counter these stories and a lack of alternative sources of information that might have the same effect. In this context the media may not be able to sway the entirety of the population, but it generally has considerable influence over people who do not have strongly anchored opinions or those who had no or little opinion on an issue in the first place (McLaren and Johnson 2004). This is reflected in the findings of some research that the media are a strong influence on people who feel less positive towards asylum seekers and refugees. Stonewall (2003) found that two fifths of people who feel less positive towards this group (40%) are influenced by newspapers and that no other prejudice is as influenced by newspapers as this.

Valentine and McDonald (2004) also suggest that the media encourage latent feeling, usually of anger and disgust and that the media produces a sense of powerlessness among white majority people that there is nothing to be done about the issues that concern them. These are all very negative influences on attitudes. Saggart and Drean (2001) similarly argue that one of the key factors underlying negative public attitudes is a perceived lack of government control over people entering the country. This is also a significant issue of concern that is expressed by the media. The press conveys the impression that there is a large inflow of illegal immigrants, and that the Home Office cannot remove them or keep track of their movements. As a result people feel that the situation is not under control and that their views are not being taken into account. Results from the Home Office's own Citizenship Survey suggest that there is a relationship

between racial prejudice and newspaper readership, which the authors attribute in significant part to negative media coverage of asylum and immigration issues:

People who regularly read a national newspaper were more likely to hold negative perceptions about the extent of racial prejudice in Britain today and in the future. Among regular readers, 49 per cent thought there was more prejudice today compared with five years ago. Among people who did not regularly read a national newspaper, 41 per cent expressed this opinion. This may in part be due to extensive media coverage relating to asylum and immigration issues at the time of the survey...when people were asked which groups there was now more prejudice against, over half cited asylum-seekers and refugees (Home Office 2004: 74)

### ***Racism and prejudice***

The debate about attitudes to asylum seekers raises important questions about the extent to which hostility is driven by - and in turn exacerbates or even legitimises - racism. The 2002 BSA survey found that two-thirds (66.9%) of the British public describe themselves as 'not prejudiced at all' compared with 29.8% who describe themselves as 'a little prejudiced' and only 1.4% who consider themselves to be 'very prejudiced'. However a significant proportion of respondents (42.8%) think there is more racial prejudice in Britain than there was five years ago (Rothon and Heath 2003). McLaren and Johnson (2004) explicitly consider whether the increase in preference for the exclusion/ restriction of migrants is the result of increased level of racial prejudice. In the 20<sup>th</sup> BSA report, Rothon and Heath (2003) charted the long-term decline in self-reported racial prejudice. Between 1983 and 2001, for instance, the proportion of respondents who reported that they were either very or a little prejudiced dropped from 35% to 25%. However they also note that this increased to 30% in 2002. In 2003 this levelled off at 30%. As McLaren and Johnson suggest, it is important to look beyond self-rated racism at perceptions of racism in society more generally. The authors note that while people do not perceive themselves to be any more prejudiced now than in the mid-1990s, they increasingly think that others are becoming more prejudiced, perhaps as a result of increased immigration.

The race or ethnicity of immigrants has been found to be an important factor in the attitudes that people hold about them. For example, an ICM

poll conducted in May 2001 for the Guardian asked respondents how they would feel if asylum seekers from a range of different countries were to come and live in their neighbourhoods (ICM 2001). As is noted by Saggart and Drean (2001), results to this question revealed very different attitudes to people of different nationalities. Virtually every group of respondents (except social class DE) said they would approve of white South African and Chinese immigrants coming to live in their neighbourhood. By contrast virtually every group disapproved of Afghan and Romanian immigrants coming to live in their neighbourhood, and every group disapproved of Iraqi immigrants.

More recently, similar questions about respondents' approval or disapproval of different nationalities moving into an area have been asked by YouGov on behalf of The Economist (2004a). The survey found that whilst 85% of respondents would approve of or not mind Australians moving into their area, the corresponding figure for Black Africans was 39%, 16% for Iraqis, 26% for Pakistanis, 56% for Polish, 32% for Romanians. The results of both the ICM and Economist polls suggest that negative attitudes are not based purely along lines of colour: Romanians, Poles and South Africans may also be ethnically white but are thought of very differently as potential neighbours.

Dustman and Preston (2003) have similarly found that racial prejudice is likely to be related to the ethnic origin of immigrants, and may be more pronounced the more dissimilar the immigrant population is ethnically and culturally. Based on an econometric analysis using BSA survey data, they find that whilst welfare and labour concerns are associated with negative opinion towards further immigration, by far the most important single factor is racially motivated opposition. Their findings show that attitudes towards migration and the relative importance of the different factors influencing opinion differs according to the ethnic origin of the immigrants concerned. The dominance of the racial factor in influencing attitudes is particularly strong in relation to the Asian and West Indian population.

In summary, the evidence on the factors influencing attitudes towards asylum and immigration suggests that these factors are highly complex and frequently inter-connected. Attitudes towards these issues often



reflect an individual's broader 'world view' or overall set of beliefs and values and that in addition to structural factors and individual socio-demographic characteristics, feelings of relative deprivation are important in understanding attitudes to asylum and immigration issues. Feelings of relative deprivation exist as a result of perceived discrepancies between the conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled and those they believe others are rightfully entitled to have. These feelings are strongly influenced by knowledge of asylum and immigration issues, the policy and political context in which this knowledge is formed, media coverage and racism and/or prejudicial attitudes towards others in society.

In terms of individual causal factors underlying attitudes to asylum and immigration, economic theory predicts that negative attitudes towards immigration will be more strongly expressed by those who are most directly affected by the competition of migrant workers in the labour market. Existing evidence is inconclusive but suggests that there is no clear correlation between attitudes and labour market position and income. The extent to which attitudes reflect perceived rather than actual economic impacts has not been examined. Similarly the extent to which the attitudes of those in higher income groups reflect actual and or perceived impacts on public services rather than labour market position and income has not been explored in detail. There is evidence that education plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards immigrants and that higher levels of education contribute towards more positive attitudes. However there is also some evidence that attitudes towards immigration are currently becoming more negative among those who are educated to degree level. The role of individual socio-demographic factors such as gender, age and ethnic origin in shaping attitudes are not well understood and the evidence in relation to the role of these factors is largely contradictory. Although there is evidence that regional and local differences in the ethnic minority proportion of the population are strongly correlated with attitudes towards immigration, this is likely to result in more positive attitudes towards asylum seekers, immigrants and ethnic minorities generally only if there is meaningful contact between different

communities. Increased visibility without meaningful contact can actually increase hostility.

There is strong evidence that the British public has very limited factual knowledge and understanding of asylum and immigration issues and that there is a strong tendency to over-estimate the numbers of asylum seekers, immigrants and ethnic minorities living in the UK as well as the benefits to which they are entitled. Central government discourse and the politics of asylum (nationally and locally) can heighten awareness of asylum and immigration issues but does not necessarily increase understanding or knowledge of policy and practice. Despite extensive research on the role of the media in shaping or influencing attitudes towards asylum and immigration issues, it is difficult to assess the precise impact of the media because people come into contact with a wide range of information sources on a day-to-day basis. There is however some evidence that people who regularly read certain daily newspapers are more likely to hold negative attitudes, particularly in the absence of meaningful personal contact with these asylum seekers and immigrants. There is also strong evidence that the race or ethnicity of immigrants is an important factor influencing the attitudes that people hold about them.

### **Existing social surveys in the UK and elsewhere**

As has been noted throughout this paper, there are a number of social surveys undertaken in the UK, some of which already ask questions about attitudes to immigration issues. Having set out the evidence about what we already know and don't know about the factors influencing attitudes to asylum and immigration, the remainder of this paper examines whether existing social surveys in the UK and elsewhere adequately capture the complexity of factors that influence attitudes in this area.

#### ***British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey***

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is the largest independent social research institute in Britain. It has been in operation for over 30 years and conducts a variety of social surveys for both private and public concerns. NatCen's annual British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey series has been tracking public attitudes in Britain since 1983, and is

widely regarded as the most comprehensive and authoritative source of data about the ebb and flow of Britain's changing values. The series charts changes in British social values, with annual surveys carried out from a nationwide sample by NatCen's team of interviewers. Each year around 3,300 randomly selected adults are asked about their attitudes and opinions on a wide range of issues. Over the years it has covered an extensive number of complex social, political and moral issues. Demographic data are also collected. The results of the survey are reported and interpreted in a series of annual reports containing around 10 chapters on various subjects by BSA team members and invited authors, as well as in the mass media and are often at the centre of debates about public policy. The datasets are themselves made available for further analysis via UKDA at the University of Essex and are used extensively by social scientists as a rich source of material for analysis and teaching.

The BSA survey is core-funded by a charitable foundation and independent of political pressure, which is an important reason for its success and longevity. Core-funding is supplemented by financial support from a number of sources (including government departments, the ESRC and other research foundations), but final responsibility for the coverage and wording of the annual questionnaires rests with NatCen. The series is designed to produce annual measures of attitudinal movements which will complement large-scale government surveys such as the *General Household Survey* and the *Labour Force Survey*, which deal largely with facts and behaviour patterns, as well as the data on party political attitudes produced by the polls.

One of its main purposes of the BSA survey series is to allow the monitoring of patterns of continuity and change, and the examination of the relative rates at which attitudes, in respect of a range of social issues, change over time. For this reason the interview questionnaire contains a number of 'core' questions. These cover major topic areas such as defence, the economy, labour market participation and the welfare state. The majority of these questions are repeated in most years, if not every year. In addition, a wide range of background and classificatory questions

is always included. The remainder of the questionnaire is devoted to a series of questions (modules) on a range of social, economic, political and moral issues. Some questions are asked regularly, others less often. Questions covered in the past cover such topics as newspaper readership, political parties and trust, public spending, welfare benefits, housing, health care, illegal drugs, childcare, poverty, the labour market and the workplace, education, charitable giving, the countryside, transport and the environment, Europe, economic prospects, religion, civil liberties, sentencing and prisons, fear of crime and the portrayal of sex and violence in the media. New areas of questioning are added each year to reflect policy changes and current affairs, but all questions are designed with a view to repeating them periodically to chart changes over time. The questions asked are developed and funded in collaboration with grant-giving bodies and government departments. Although questions about attitudes to race and immigration change, they are routinely included in some form. Within this broad category are included: ethnic origin; extent of racial prejudice; extent of racial discrimination; legislation about racial discrimination; integration, multi-culturalism and diversity; and immigration and citizenship (Figure 2).

It should be noted that there is some cross-over between the BSA survey and other surveys discussed in this section. Between 1984 and 1986 the ESRC funded the introduction of a panel element into the series, enabling about half (about 700) of the first year's respondents to be re-interviewed with a slightly adapted questionnaire. Since 1985, the self-completion questionnaire has carried a module of questions, developed by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) of which the National Centre is a founder-member. In addition some of the work on analysing the BSA data on social attitudes is carried out under the auspices of the CREST (see below) who have also produced some of the modules specifically of relevance to this paper.

**Figure 2 BSA survey questions on race and immigration**

**Racial prejudice**

Prejudice against people of West Indian and African origin nowadays  
Prejudice against people of Asian origin nowadays  
Perception of racial prejudice in past  
Prediction for level of racial prejudice in future  
Own racial prejudice  
Acceptability of boss of black/West Indian origin  
Acceptability of boss of Asian origin  
Acceptability of in-law of black / West Indian origin  
Acceptability of in-law of Asian origin

**Immigration and settlement**

Controls on and help for settlers  
Controls on immigration  
Views about immigrants  
Illegal immigration

**Views about immigrants**

Whether immigrants increase crime rates  
Whether immigrants are good for the economy  
Whether immigrants take jobs of those born British  
Whether immigrants make Britain open to new ideas

**Identity, locality and region**

Section on national identity asks about important things for being truly British including:  
Having been born in Britain  
Having British citizenship  
Having lived most of life in Britain  
Ability to speak English  
Being a Christian  
Respect for British institutions and laws  
Feeling British  
Only fully British if share traditions

***CREST Election Panel Surveys***

The Centre for Research on Elections and Social Trends (CREST) is an ESRC Research Centre founded in 1994 and based jointly at the National Centre for Social Research and the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford. CREST's work relies on the conduct and interpretation of high quality social surveys of the general public, designed to document and explain changing patterns of voting behaviour, trends in social attitudes, and similarities and differences between the UK and other countries. Elections are a primary focus of CREST's attention and analysis. CREST also develops and encourages improved methods of measuring attitudes and behaviour. Its work addresses four main questions:

- Why do people in Britain vote the way they do?
- How are social attitudes changing?
- How does Britain differ from other countries in its social attitudes and political behaviour?
- How can we best measure people's social attitudes and political behaviour?

CREST has run two major survey panels in recent years; the first of these was for the period 1994 -1997 Panel and 1997-2001 Panel. They include questions on: Newspaper readership and party ID; general election vote; feelings about the parties; local elections; Europe; unemployment and inflation; tax and spend; redistribution; the European Union; nationalization and privatization; economic expectations; issues (including, for example, attitudes towards the death penalty, prison sentences, abortion and immigration); devolution and Constitutional Reform. In addition – and most importantly given the focus of this paper - CREST devised the English National Identity Module for the BSA survey in 1999. Both the immigration questions asked in the Election Panel Survey and those asked in the Module are the same as those asked in other BSA surveys. As with the BSA survey, CREST panel surveys on political behaviour and attitudes also contain modules which feed into the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).

### ***Other relevant UK social surveys***

There are a further two social surveys that run in parallel with the BSA survey and provide more detailed information on attitudes in different regions of the UK. The *Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey* (NISA) was first run in 1989 and allows for direct comparison of the attitudes, values and beliefs held by UK citizens on either side of the Irish Sea. The survey was intended as an extension of the BSA series. The survey series ended in 1996 as the government was no longer willing to bear the full costs of the survey and efforts to secure other funding were only partially successful. NISA has been succeeded by the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* (NILT) series and the corresponding *Young Life and Times Survey* (YLT) series which surveys young people aged 12-17 living in the

households of adults interviewed for NILT. The first report on 'Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland' was published in 1992, the most recent report, The Ninth Report, was published in 2004.

The *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey* (SSA) is also modelled on the BSA survey. Since the BSA survey sample is designed to be representative of the population of Britain, only around 360 people in Scotland are included in any single year. With the advent of devolution in Scotland, NatCen inaugurated an annual SSA survey. The emphasis is on tracking the presence of absence of underlying patterns in people's attitudes and values and how these might change over time. The first survey took place in 1999 and the study achieves around 1,600 interviews each year. As well as overcoming the limitations of the sample size of the BSA survey in Scotland, the Scottish Social Attitudes survey also makes it possible to examine issues that are of special importance to Scotland.

In addition to these surveys, the Citizenship Survey is a more recently introduced survey funded by central Government which is designed to be part of the evidence base for the Home Office's community policy area. It is worthy of brief consideration here because it is specifically intended as a policy tool, informing both the development of policy and its implementation and as a mechanism for providing information for Home Office performance measurement. The first survey ran in 2001, with a subsequent survey in 2003. The next will be in 2005. In general, the samples are in two parts: a nationally representative sample of 10,000 people and a booster sample of 5,000 people of minority ethnic origin. As the Citizenship Survey and policy requirements have evolved, other booster samples have been added. The survey is designed around five core modules, but the contents of these vary:

- Good citizen: information on perceptions of rights and responsibilities and whether people feel they can influence decisions and trust institutions. This feeds into the Home Office's Civil Renewal Unit;
- Neighbourhood: information on whether people know, socialise with and trust their neighbours; collective efficacy and social capital.

This feeds into the Home Office's Active Community Unit and Community Cohesion Unit;

- Active communities: information on civic participation, informal and formal volunteering, including frequency, intensity, duration and barriers. This is central to the work of the Active Community Unit;
- Racial prejudice and discrimination: information on perceptions of racial prejudice in Britain and perceptions of discrimination by public and private sector organisations. This provides core information for the Race Equality Unit, and in turn informs the work of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE); and
- Family and parenting: information on family structures, family level social capital and parenting support which is used to inform family policy across a number of key Government departments in addition to the Home

These core modules may be of interest for any future work in this area because they provide a framework for collecting information on issues of contact and prejudice. Moreover the modular survey design creates a unique degree of flexibility, which allows the Citizenship Survey to respond to evolving policy requirements. One such policy requirement is arguably in relation to immigration attitudes.

### ***Social surveys in other countries***

Despite the increase in political and public interest and concern about asylum and immigration issues globally, very few countries undertake any detailed social survey-based research in this area. Most European countries appear to rely upon the Eurobarometer surveys and, most recently, the European Social Survey for information on attitudes to a whole range of issues including asylum and immigration (see below).

In the United States there are a number of research centres that undertake social surveys on various aspects of public opinion and attitudes. The National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) is a national organization for research at the University of Chicago. One of the oldest of NORC's landmark surveys, the *General Social Survey* (GSS) has been administered 25 times since its initial fielding in 1972, with core funding



from the National Science Foundation. The GSS is undertaken biannually and is both a data diffusion project and a program of social indicator research. The sample for the survey was about 1,500 for the first 19 surveys but became 3,000 when the survey became biennial in 1994. All of the data is collected through in-person interviews lasting around 90 minutes. The basis of the interview is a questionnaire which contains a standard core of demographic and attitudinal variables, plus certain topics of special interest selected for rotation (called 'topical modules'). The exact wording of the core questions is retained to facilitate time trend studies as well as replications of earlier findings.

The basic purposes of the GSS are to gather data on contemporary American society in order to monitor and explain trends and constants in attitudes, behaviours, and attributes; to examine the structure and functioning of society in general as well as the role played by relevant subgroups; to compare the US to other societies in order to place American society in comparative perspective and develop cross-national models of human society; and to make high-quality data easily accessible to scholars, students, policy makers, and others, with minimal cost and waiting. The GSS does not appear to include any questions specifically on attitudes to immigration.

The Survey Research Center (SRC) is based at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR). For more than 50 years, the SRC has been a national and international leader in interdisciplinary social science research involving the collection or analysis of data from scientific sample surveys. The research programmes of the SRC are in continuing evolution. These cover a wide range of economic and social areas although none specifically address attitudes to immigration or immigrants.

The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA) is a group of social science researchers established in 1992. Its purpose is to give the public a greater voice in the public policy process by seeking to discern public opinion on public policy and to communicate its findings to the policy community, academia and the press. It does this by conducting nationwide polls, focus groups and interviews and integrating its findings together with those from other organisations into a coherent analysis of majority opinion. The

Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) is a joint program of COPA and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland. PIPA carries out research on public opinion on foreign policy and international issues by conducting nationwide polls, focus groups and comprehensive reviews of polling conducted by other organizations. Although PIPA has undertaken some survey work on relevant areas, for example, attitudes towards international human rights, it has not done any work on attitudes towards immigration other than in the context of its work on globalisation issues. Of particular interest however is that fact that the organisation takes a much more complicated approach to questionnaire design and asks about very complex issues.

In Canada, the *General Social Survey* (GSS) has been conducted by Statistics Canada annually since 1985. The GSS has two principal objectives: to gather data with a degree of regularity on social trends in order to monitor changes in Canadian society over time; and to provide information on specific policy issues of current or emerging interest. GSS is a continuing program. The surveys are designed to monitor changes in the health of Canadians and to examine social support. Cycles 1 to 14 cover various content and special focus areas. Each cycle classifies subjects by variables for age, sex, education and income. Communication Canada also undertakes public opinion research. Among its major research projects is the *Listening to Canadians* survey conducted three times a year. These surveys measure Canadians' views on public policy priorities, and on how the Government of Canada serves Canadians in response to those priorities.

### ***Eurobarometer and other European Commission surveys***

As was noted earlier in this paper, there are a number of European-wide surveys that provide comparative data on attitudes to asylum and immigration across EU Member States. Many of these are conducted under the auspices of the Public Opinion Analysis sector of the European Commission.

The standard Eurobarometer was established in 1973. Each survey consists in approximately 1000 face-to-face interviews per Member State (except Germany: 2000, Luxembourg: 600, United Kingdom 1300

including 300 in Northern Ireland). It is conducted between two and five times every year, with reports published twice yearly. The most recent standard Eurobarometer (volume 62) was published in December 2004 (European Commission 2004). Questions on immigration and asylum policy are asked throughout. In addition to the standard Eurobarometer approach, ad hoc thematic telephone interviews are also conducted at the request of any service of the European Commission or other EU Institutions. These Flash Eurobarometer surveys enable the Commission to obtain results relatively quickly and to focus on specific target groups of up to 500 respondents as and when required. A Flash Eurobarometer survey was requested by Directorate General Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) in December 2003 and published in March 2004 (European Commission 2004a). The survey asks a number of questions about attitudes to immigration and asylum policy.

Eurobarometer also undertakes a more limited number of qualitative studies which investigate in-depth the motivations, the feelings, the reactions of selected social groups towards a given subject or concept, by listening and analysing their way of expressing themselves in discussion groups or with non-directive interviews. As with the Flash Eurobarometer series, these studies are usually undertaken and published by the specific areas of the Commission's apparatus with responsibility for, and interest in, the issues concerned. For example in 2003 the Justice and Home Affairs Directorate General published research presenting the results of a qualitative survey carried out to assess how European citizens see questions relating to justice, security and immigration (European Commission 2003).

The European Commission also publishes Special Eurobarometer reports periodically. These are based on in-depth thematic studies carried out for various services of the Commission or other EU Institutions and integrated in Standard Eurobarometer's polling waves. There was a Special Eurobarometer report on racism and xenophobia published in 2001 (Thalhammer et al. 2001) Although there has not been anything specifically on immigration or on racism since that time in 2003 the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMU)

commissioned a research team from the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands (NISCO) to conduct a major analysis of data from the 2003 Eurobarometer Survey and the 2003 European Social Survey on attitudes towards minorities and migrants in different European countries, which is discussed in more detail below. The researchers also compared the findings of the 2003 Eurobarometer with results of earlier Eurobarometer Surveys.

### ***The European Social Survey***

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a new social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. The central aim of the ESS is to develop and conduct a systematic study of changing values, attitudes, attributes and behaviour patterns within European polities. Academically driven but designed to feed into key European policy debates, the ESS hopes to measure and explain how people's social values, cultural norms and behaviour patterns are distributed, the way in which they differ within and between nations, and the direction and speed at which they are changing.

One of the most innovative features of the ESS is that individual countries participate according to a clear and detailed central specification of requirements. These documents are produced by the Central Co-ordinating Team and are revised and updated after each round of the survey. The survey employs more rigorous methodologies than those seen in other social surveys. Data collection is planned to take place every two years by means of face-to-face interviews of around an hour in duration, followed by a short supplement. The questionnaire consists of a 'core' module lasting about half an hour, which will remain relatively constant from round to round. The core module asks questions about political orientations, attitudes and behaviour; underlying social and moral values; national, ethnic and religious allegiances; and socio-demographic variables. Other topics are covered on a 'rotating' basis, repeated at intervals, each of which is devoted to a substantive topic or theme. Thus, while the purpose of the rotating modules is to provide an in-depth focus on a series of particular academic or policy concerns, the core module

aims instead to monitor change and continuity in a wide range of socio-economic, socio-political, socio-psychological and socio-demographic variables.

Round 1 of the survey included a module on immigration based on a proposal submitted to the ESS by Ian Preston and Christian Dustmann at CReAM. The module included more than 40 questions on the perceived effects of immigration and related questions about attitudes. The questions in this module are very rigorous and underpinned by a detailed empirical understanding of the factors that influence attitudes to asylum and immigration (Dustman and Preston 2002, 2003, 2004; Dustman et al. 2004). The areas of questioning include:

- What respondents know about where different groups of immigrants come from;
- How many of each different group of immigrant respondents think should be allowed to come and live in the countries of Europe;
- Important characteristics for deciding which immigrants should be allowed to come and live here;
- The impacts of people coming to live and work here including on wages and salaries of indigenous workers, on the economic prospects of the poor, on whether they immigrants fill shortages in the labour market on whether immigrants should be allowed to stay if they become long-term unemployed, on what rights immigrants should be given, on whether those who have committed a crime (serious / less serious) should be required to leave;
- Whether immigrants generally take jobs or create jobs, put more in than they take out of vice versa, are good or bad for the economy generally, undermine or enrich cultural life, worsen or improve crime, have a good or bad effect on the countries from which they originate;
- The overall benefits to richer countries of migration and whether the richer countries have a responsibility towards poorer ones;
- Whether respondents would mind if someone of a different race or ethnic origin was appointed as their boss or married a close relative of theirs;

- The preferred and actual ethnic composition of the areas in which respondents live;
- Whether respondents agree or disagree with a number of statements on customs and tradition, religion, language and educational segregation;
- Whether laws against racial and ethnic discrimination and hatred are good or bad for a country; and
- If respondents have any friends or work colleagues that are from a different country and, if so, how many.

Because both the areas of questioning and the questions asked are underpinned by an understanding of the factors influencing attitudes to immigration issues, the results of Round 1 of the European Social Survey offer more direct evidence on underlying opinion than is available elsewhere (Card, Dustmann and Preston 2003). There is no separate module on immigration in Round 2 of the ESS, but scope exists for further modules to be run at a later date.

### ***The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)***

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) is a continuing annual programme of cross-national collaboration on surveys covering topics important for social science research. Because it brings together pre-existing social science projects and co-ordinated research goals, the ISSP adds a cross-national, cross-cultural perspective to the individual national studies. The ISSP comprises around 30 countries worldwide who collaborate in the design, conduct and analysis of a simultaneous annual survey on a rotating set of subjects. Participating countries vary for each topical module. The aim of the series is to identify and explain national differences and track trends. Every survey includes questions about general attitudes toward various social issues such as the legal system, gender, and the economy. Special topics have included the environment, the role of government, social inequality, social support, family and gender issues, work orientation, the impact of religious background, behaviour, and beliefs on social and political preferences.

In 1995-6 ISSP undertook a module specifically on the issue of national identity with 23 participating countries and a second module on national identity was undertaken by the ISSP in 2003. National Identity II also contains some specific questions on attitudes to immigration and immigrants as well as a large number of questions on various aspects of national identity including feelings of 'belonging' to a particular country, integration issues, the rights of people from different nationalities and backgrounds and the role of the European Union in the affairs of individual Member States. The immigration-related questions in the module clearly reflect the type and wording of the questions in the BSA survey and in turn the English National Identity module produced for NatCen by CREST in 1999.

In summary, although the British Social Attitudes survey is the most comprehensive UK social survey and provides time-series data on attitudes and opinions about a wide range of issues, the questions on attitudes towards asylum and immigration that are currently asked do not capture the factors that influence attitudes in this area, most notably in relation to pre-existing knowledge and contact with asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and ethnic minority groups more generally. The language and questions used in the BSA survey also reflect the terms in which the policy and political debate on asylum and immigration issues is conducted. In a context where the public debate is both ill-informed and highly politicised this may mean that the responses provided more accurately reflect media representations of the issues than the factors which influence the attitudes of individual respondents.

There are no other social surveys in the UK that specifically capture data on attitudes to asylum and immigration issues although the Home Office's Citizenship survey includes a module on racial prejudice and discrimination. CREST Election Survey Panels do not specifically address attitudes to asylum and immigration although CREST does input into relevant modules within the BSA survey. There are a number of European-wide surveys that provide comparative data on attitudes to asylum and immigration across EU Member States, most notably standard, Flash and Special Eurobarometer surveys which collect

information on what people think about asylum issues though not on all of the factors that are known to influence their attitudes in this area. To date the most comprehensive survey of attitudes on asylum and immigration issues has been provided by the European Social Survey, and in particular the module on immigration which was included in Round 1 and included more than 40 questions on the perceived effects of immigration and related questions about the factors that might influence attitudes. Because the questions are underpinned by a understanding of the factors influencing attitudes, the results of the ESS offer more direct evidence on underlying opinion than is available elsewhere. For this reason the module produced as part of the ESS should form the basis of any future work in this area.

### **Asking the right questions**

This paper has set out the available evidence on the factors influencing attitudes to asylum and immigration issues and existing social surveys in the UK and elsewhere which attempt to capture some of this information. It is clear from this evidence that whilst a substantial amount of information about attitudes to immigration is available to social researchers, existing social surveys either do not capture the complexity of the issues sufficiently (e.g. BSA survey), are not sufficiently in-depth to explain what is going on at the UK level (e.g. Eurobarometer), or are irregular (e.g. ISSP). The clear exception to this is the module on asylum and immigration attitudes that has recently been developed by researchers at CReAM for the European Social Survey (ESS) although it is not clear at this stage whether this is a module which will be repeated by the ESS on a sufficiently regular basis to provide a robust time-series data set on attitudes and the factors that influence them.

All of this suggests that different and more nuanced questions need to be asked in UK-based social surveys that are interested in attitudes and social trends. This is necessary to produce time-series datasets that are able to examine and control for the public's misperceptions and reveal the deeper values that underlie apparent inconsistencies. This is the type of approach that has been developed by the US Centre on Policy Attitudes (COPA), which has developed innovative methods for discerning how the



public' s values come to bear on areas of public policy. These new methods seek to simulate the deliberative process policymakers go through in making policy decisions. For example, COPA polls not only ask questions in a neutral fashion, they also present strongly stated pro and con arguments - the kind that policymakers hear. COPA's polls require respondents to make tradeoffs, similar to those policymakers must make - for example, asking them to try to balance components of the federal budget. Efforts are made to find out if attitudes are being influenced by misperceptions and to determine the effects of correct information. COPA's approach uniquely includes members of the policymaking community in poll question development to ensure questions are balanced and reflect the prevailing policy debate. Because COPA makes a point of questioning assumptions it has been able to refute some of the myths that currently prevail in US society about what the American public thinks about certain issues and why these views exist. For example, polls showed that strong majorities felt the US was spending too much on foreign aid. However, COPA went further and asked Americans to estimate how much of the federal budget was spent on foreign aid. The median estimate was 15-20% - when the actual amount is 1%. Asked how much it should be, the median response was 5-10%, hardly a sign that the public opposes foreign aid.

Better quality, more in-depth long-term quantitative data on public perceptions and attitudes would arguably have a number of benefits in the UK context. It would provide a clearer picture of the levels of positive and/or negative attitudes, and of how attitudes change over time, and might be helpful in identifying factors that influence people's attitudes towards asylum seekers, immigrants and other ethnic minorities, for example levels of knowledge, contact with others, socio-economic status (Saggar and Drean 2001).

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that if we are serious about understanding the factors that influence attitudes to asylum and immigration issues, in addition to existing questions on labour market position and income, education and individual demographic characteristics we also need we need to include questions relating to an individual's

attitudes to asylum and immigration policy, views about the impact of immigration, racism and prejudice, and levels of contact and knowledge. Whilst this list is not definitive, it arguably best captures the range of factors that are already believed to influence attitudes without being overly complicated or laborious.

There is, of course, a whole range of other issues that feed into the individual 'world view' of a respondent and his or her attitude towards asylum and immigration related issues. It is not clear however that these issues are best captured through the social survey method, although in some cases existing questions (for example, on political outlook, trust in government or feelings about social and cultural change) may provide useful indicators for cross-comparison. Neither is it clear, given the complexity of the relationship between the media and public attitude formation and the role of a whole range of information sources in shaping public knowledge, understanding and attitudes, that questions specifically, on newspaper readership would add any value to the existing evidence base. Although the tone and content of many recent newspaper headlines is highly problematic in itself in terms of informing the public about what are actually very complicated processes and policies, it is possible for individuals to come into contact with and be influenced by these headlines without purchasing or reading a newspaper. Moreover it seems likely that those who read newspapers with a strong anti-asylum and anti-immigration position already hold negative views, albeit that these are then reinforced.

### ***Attitudes to asylum and immigration policy***

It is important that questions about asylum and immigration policy are separated from questions about the actual and perceived impacts of immigration. This is because views about the appropriateness of particular policy approaches or about the effectiveness of specific policies are often closely allied to general worldviews or political positions regardless of the policies themselves. Moreover, questions about European policy or UK policy (in relation to immigration and more generally) often produce answers that reveal more about the respondent's views of European

membership or the UK's political leadership than they do about specific areas of practice.

The questions devised by CReAM for the ESS module provide a good basis for questions in this area because the responses that they generate provide an indication not only of whether respondents have a positive or negative view of immigration generally but also of whether their attitudes vary depending upon the group of immigrants about whom the questions are being asked, and their race, nationality and/or country of origin. Among the questions asked in the ESS module are:

- To what extent do you think the UK should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most British people to come and live here?
- How about people of a different race or ethnic group from most British?
- How about people from the richer countries outside Europe?
- How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe?

### ***Views about the impact of immigration***

Questions relating to the perceived impacts of migration need to be framed in a way that captures the complex and contradictory responses to these types of questions in existing social surveys and which allow for more nuanced responses than simply agreement or disagreement. Careful wording of these questions will also mean that the responses can be correlated with levels of knowledge in each of the areas (based on the immigration knowledge quiz based below). Again, much of the work on formulating questions that capture the complexity of immigration impacts has already been undertaken by CReAM for the ESS module. These questions reflect some of the existing questions within the BSA survey but are more nuanced and therefore provide greater insight into underlying issues and concerns (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 ESS questions on perceived economic and social impacts of immigration**

<b>Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in the UK or generally help to create new jobs?</b>													
Take jobs away											Create new jobs	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		
<b>Most people who come to live here work and pay taxes. They also use health and welfare services. On balance, do you think people who come here take out more than they put in or put in more than they take out?</b>													
Generally take out more											Generally put in more	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		
<b>Would you say it is generally bad or good for the UK's economy that people come to live here from other countries?</b>													
Bad for the economy											Good for the economy	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		
<b>Would you say that the UK's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?</b>													
Cultural life undermined											Cultural life enriched	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		
<b>Is the UK made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?</b>													
Worse place to live											Better place to live	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		
<b>Are the UK crime problems made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries?</b>													
Crime problems made worse											Crime problems made better	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		
<b>When people leave their countries to come to live in the UK, do you think it has a bad or good effect on <u>those</u> countries in the long run?</b>													
Bad for those countries in the long run											Good for those countries in the long run	(Don't know)	
00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88		

### ***Racism and prejudice***

The BSA survey already collects detailed information on racism and prejudice, much of which forms a solid baseline for identifying whether there is a change in attitudes over time. The ESS module also includes two questions, each in two parts, which seek to identify the extent to which prejudicial attitudes in the workplace and in personal relationships are influenced by race and ethnicity.

### ***Contact***

Given that meaningful contact with people from other countries appears to be a key factor in influencing attitudes towards immigration issues, there is a clear gap in the information that is collected in existing UK-based social surveys about the level and type of contact that respondents have with different ethnic minority groups. This undermines understanding of attitude formation in relation to both asylum and immigration and issues of race and racism more generally.

### ***Knowledge***

In many of the social surveys discussed in this paper the questions that are asked of respondents themselves assume a level of knowledge and understanding about what is being asked. It is generally acknowledged that different kinds of questions produce different responses and that the effects of how questions are worded are potentially important but often unpredictable (Glendall and Hoek 2002). As was noted earlier in this paper, the distribution of responses to a closed question will always be critically dependent on the answer set presented to the respondents. The responses they elicit will also be highly dependent upon the level of knowledge that the respondent has about the existing situation. The only way to counter this is to simultaneously collect information on the levels of knowledge that people have and their contact with different groups in society. Without questions being asked about the levels of knowledge held by respondents datasets will continue to provide information about what people think about asylum and immigration issues but little or nothing about why they hold these views and why these views might change over time.

In order to better understand the factors that influence attitudes to asylum and immigration issues in the UK, we also need to know whether these attitudes are based on a concrete understanding and knowledge of the current situation or on a perception of the current situation and a view about what should happen in the future which does not reflect reality. The key problem in asking people whether, for example, they think that asylum and immigration to the UK should be increased, decreased or remain at the same levels is that they already significantly over-estimate the scale and impacts of migration because of the ways in which these issues are discussed by politicians, policy makers, sections of the media and others.

One way of measuring knowledge is to ask people to state their level of knowledge along a sliding scale e.g. know a lot through to know very little. The problem with this type of approach is that respondents may think that they know a lot but actually very little of this may be accurate or, conversely, they may not consider themselves to have a detailed understanding but actually know a reasonable amount about the issues generally. An alternative approach and one which this paper recommends be developed further is to develop a short quiz within the social survey to measure knowledge on these issues. A similar approach is used in CREST surveys to establish levels of political knowledge against which to correlate responses to particular areas of interest. As part of the general work on question development, CREST decided to devise a measure of political knowledge in the UK (Martin et al 1993). The aim was develop a measure analogous to one of scientific knowledge developed for a survey of the public's understanding of science. CREST have constructed a short quiz consisting of some ten to twelve questions in the form of statements, some of which are true and some false. Respondents are asked to say whether each statement is true or false and their answers coded as correct or incorrect. For each person a total score of the number of correct answers is derived. Since CREST's aim was to devise a scale that could be used over a period of time, they decided to concentrate on knowledge of the more enduring features of the British political system. A similar approach could be taken in trying to establish levels of knowledge of

asylum and immigration issues and systems in the UK context, for example, questions could be asked about the proportion of the world's refugees and asylum seekers that come to Europe, about the numbers of labour migrants in the UK, and about the ethnic minority composition of the UK. The most important aspect of this approach however would be to keep the questions simple (non-technical) and factual rather than interpretative.

### **Improving the evidence base – ways forward**

Having identified the questions that need to be asked in order to establish an evidence base which enables a better understanding of the factors that influence attitudes to asylum and immigration issues, the question remains of how this work should be taken forward. The analysis in this paper suggests that there are three alternative approaches that could be pursued.

The first option is for researchers and policy analysts with an interest in understanding public attitudes to asylum and immigration to effectively do nothing new in terms of asking additional questions but make more use of the data that is already available. There is a large amount of existing data that has not been analysed in great detail. The BSA survey data sets, for example, provide scope for further analysis and interpretation and have been used to good effect by some researchers working in this area.

The second option is for existing social surveys to include new and better questions on asylum and immigration and/or to reinstate those questions which have previously been asked but for which data is no longer being systematically collected. Although the collection of Europe-wide information on attitudes to asylum and immigration through the inclusion of the immigration module in the European Social Survey is a very valuable exercise, it is not clear at this stage whether it is intended that such a module will be included on a regular basis. Certainly such an approach supported. At the same time there is a need for annual time-series data on attitudes to asylum and migration to be developed specifically in the UK. One way forward would be for NatCen to pick up some of the questions in the ESS module and to take these forward on an

annual basis within the British Social Attitudes Survey. There might also be scope for the Citizenship Panel team at the Home Office to include questions on asylum and immigration in their existing bi-annual survey, particularly given the very clear emerging evidence on the relationship between attitudes to asylum and immigration issues and racial prejudice and community cohesion issues more generally.

The third option is to establish new approaches to collecting time-series data that focus specifically on attitudes to immigration, asylum and race. This would allow all of the areas of interest to be covered and would enable far more scope for including new and different issues than those which have previously been addressed. This is clearly a very different proposition than simply adding new questions to existing surveys or doing more with what is already available, although the time and resource implications required would reflect the scale and type of new data sets that are collected. One possibility is to develop an approach similar to that devised by COPA in the United States, which undertakes polls that require respondents to make tradeoffs between different alternatives, and which systematically attempt to find out if attitudes are influenced by misperceptions and to determine the effects of correct information. Alternatively – or in parallel - a regular (annual) People’s Panel could be developed which specifically explores the complexity and inter-relationship between different factors that influence attitudes to asylum and immigration issues by looking at individual attitudes over time (i.e. from a life cycle viewpoint) and in relation to external events. Both of these approaches would enable new robust evidence on the factors influencing public attitudes to be placed in the public domain on a regular basis and would contribute to a more sophisticated undertaking of attitude formation in relation to asylum and immigration issues.

Beyond the issue of additional social survey questions designed to collect more meaningful information on the factors that influence public attitudes to asylum and immigration, there is clearly scope for a whole range of issues to be examined in more detail using qualitative in-depth research methods. We know that the public are generally hostile to asylum and immigration and that they have very limited knowledge and



understanding of these issues. What is not known is whether there is a direct relationship between these two factors and whether, if the public were better informed about, for example, the factors underlying forced migration and the positive economic contribution of labour migration to the UK economy, there would be less hostility. Given evidence that attitudes towards immigration and immigrants often vary depending on the ethnic background of those entering the UK it is also important to know whether economic and cultural concerns exist in relation to all immigration or are used primarily as a justification for holding racist or prejudice views.

A number of recent in-depth research projects have looked at these issues and started to unpick the complexity of factors influencing attitudes to asylum and immigration in the UK. The Institute for Public Policy Research has recently published in-depth public opinion research on attitudes to asylum in different areas of the country undertaken in partnership with local authorities in Birmingham, Camden, Cardiff, Norwich and Weymouth (Lewis 2005). The research examines the views and experiences of different population groups living in different areas of the UK (with different ethnic minority populations and migration histories) to explore the factors shaping attitudes and whether these differ according to socio-economic and demographic characteristics (including income, age and ethnicity). The methodology incorporates both qualitative research in the form of discussion groups and quantitative survey research. It also includes in-depth interviews with stakeholders and service providers in the different local authority areas to identify whether the issues raised in the focus groups are reflective of local issues and impacts. The Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) has examined strategies and approaches for managing the arrival of asylum seekers into anxious local communities across the UK (D'Onofrio and Munk 2004). *Understanding the Stranger* uses the experience of Dover, and areas to which asylum seekers have been dispersed in significant numbers for the first time since 1999, to show that with careful planning, regular access to information, and opportunities to meet asylum seekers, the local community can come to accept and welcome incomers who might otherwise be met with

hostility, prejudice and fear. ICAR has also published research exploring the link between media and political coverage of asylum issues, hostility to asylum seekers and refugees, increased community tensions, and patterns of racial incidents in London (ICAR 2004).

The findings of this research combined with what we already know and don't know from existing evidence about the factors influencing attitudes suggest two areas where further in-depth research would be particularly beneficial. The first of these is the issue of contact - or more specifically, lack of contact – with ethnic and faith minorities, migrants and refugees. Although there is some evidence that this appears to be a significant factor in attitude formation, what is not known is how this factor interacts with other factors influencing attitudes nor what types of contact are meaningful for different groups in society and which are viewed as threatening. Without a better understanding of the types of contact that influence attitude formation it will be difficult to devise appropriate policy responses for ensuring that the opportunities for meaningful contact are increased. In this context it would be particularly useful to explore the nature of workplace relationships.

In addition, it is clear that attitudes to asylum and immigration often generate public and political concern because they are symbolic of other wider political, social and economic changes in society. As such they may reflect a wider 'world view' which cannot easily be changed through the provision of information, more sensitive public debate or increased levels of meaningful contact with ethnic and other minority groups. For example, an individual's attitude towards asylum and immigration issues may reflect wider concerns about British identity, about Britain's place in Europe and/or the world or about changing social roles. Similarly it may reflect a general sense of political disengagement and lack of trust in political and policy structures. These are recurrent themes in many analyses of attitude formation, but have not been explored in any detail in relation to asylum and immigration issues and which provide an important backdrop for understanding the negative public attitudes that many of those in British society appear to hold.

## Endnotes

(1) The notable exception to this is the work of O'Rourke and Sinnott (2004) who use a cross-country dataset to investigate the determinants of individual attitudes towards immigration and find that for labour market participants, standard economic theory does a good job of predicting individual attitudes towards immigration. The high skilled are less opposed to immigration than the low-skilled, and this effect is greater in richer countries than in poorer countries, and in more equal countries than in poorer countries. However this is a very high-level overview analysis and perhaps not as useful in assessing the role of economic factors at the national or local level

(2) As Saggar and Drean (2001) point out, many opinion polls do not classify responses to surveys by ethnic group and when ethnic groups are identified, they are often not the same as those used in the census or Labour Force Survey. Rather broad categories such as 'Black', 'Asian' or 'White' are most commonly adopted.

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