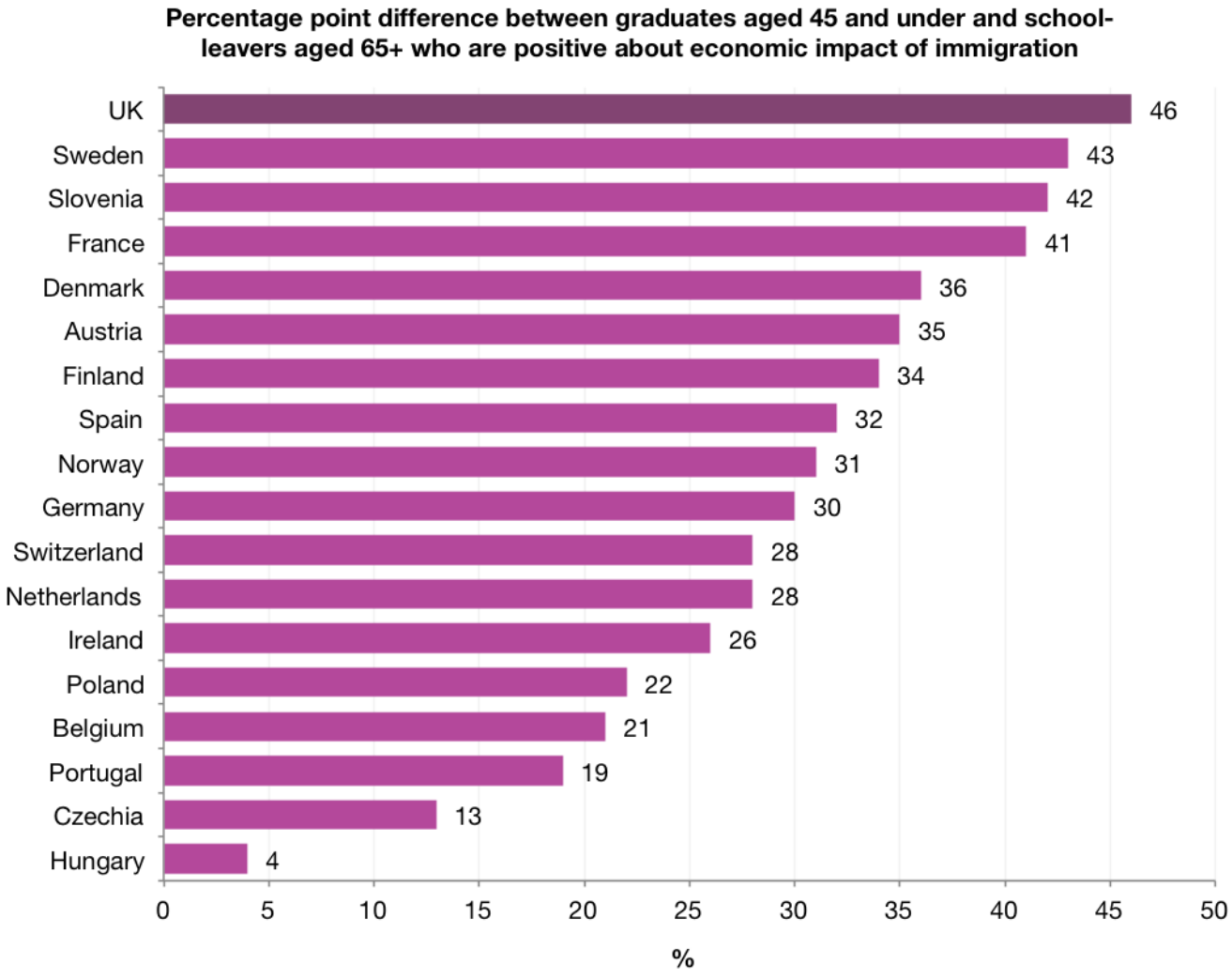
Immigration

How attitudes in the UK compare with Europe

In the years leading up to the Brexit vote we see a stark and growing divide in people's views on the economic impact of immigration between the young degree-educated and older school-leavers. Across Europe young graduates are more likely than older school-leavers to say immigration is good for the economy, and this divide is biggest in the UK.

The UK is the most divided country in Europe on the economic impact of immigration



Overview

Despite the debate about immigration becoming more prominent and contentious, this chapter finds that in the 12 years up to 2014 our attitudes on immigration's impact on the country became largely more positive. However, underneath this change hides a social divide in attitudes which is among the starkest in Europe.

Attitudes more positive but more selective

From 2002-2014 the public has, on balance, become more positive about the benefits of immigration, but also more selective on who they wish to see migrate.

- In 2002 the proportion believing immigration was bad for the economy outweighed those who thought it good by 16 percentage points. By 2014 this had changed, to the extent that the proportion with a positive view of its impact were 4 points ahead.
- The public have become slightly more sceptical about the cultural benefits of immigration, but those with a positive view still just outweigh those with a negative one by 4 percentage points.
- During this period the public have not noticeably become more or less keen on restrictions to migrant numbers. However, they are more selective. Significant majorities feel the ability to speak English (87%, up from 77%), a commitment to the British "way of life" (84%, up from 78%) and possessing needed skills (81%, up from 71%) are important criteria for selecting migrants.

UK attitudes more divided than in most European countries

UK attitudes to the economic impact of immigration have gone from being some of the most negative to being middling in the list of countries we examine. This overall trend however, masks a comparatively stark social divide in views.

- People in the UK now have a mid-ranking view of how positive immigration is for the economy (The UK is 7th out of 18 European countries, compared with 16th in 2002). By contrast, UK attitudes to immigration's cultural impact rank amongst the less positive countries in Europe (14th out of 18).
- By contrasting views about immigration's economic impacts among young degree-educated people with those of older school-leavers, we find that the UK has the starkest social divide in views in Europe. The UK's divide in attitudes about immigration's cultural impact is also one of the deepest in the continent.

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Introduction

The public has not typically been enthusiastic about immigration, but they have often shown a degree of pragmatism about it. For as long as we have had public opinion data, the prevalent public attitudes on the issue have been acceptance that some migration is useful, coupled with demands for strict government controls on its scale, particularly whenever the numbers of migrants arriving has risen. In the 1950s and 1960s, Britain experienced significant migration from Commonwealth nations. Commonwealth citizens took advantage of rights to live and work in Britain and responded to the British Government's calls to help fill labour shortages. This inflow triggered intense public hostility, making migration an explosive political issue. Immigration remained a controversial issue until a series of reforms by successive governments curtailed Commonwealth migration rights, a process completed by the British Nationality Act of 1981 (Hansen, 2002; Ford et al., 2014).

Over the past twenty years, a similar story has played out. Political reforms eased access to Britain, in particular to citizens from the new EU members in central and eastern Europe, to whom Britain (uniquely among western Europe's large economies) granted immediate and full free movement rights on their accession to the EU in 2004. Growing numbers of migrants opted to exercise the option to move to Britain, attracted by (among other things) a growing economy, buoyant labour markets and educational opportunities (Somerville, 2007). The result has been the largest, most sustained and most diverse inflow of migration in British history. As in the 1960s, the public has reacted to this with steadily mounting concern and demands for greater control of migration inflows (Ford et al., 2014). Immigration has been rated by voters as one of the most important issues facing the country continuously for most of the past decade (Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014). Surging public concern about immigration was a central factor in both the rise of UKIP as a new political force (Ford and Goodwin, 2014) and in the majority vote for "Brexit" in the 2016 EU membership referendum (see the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU', along with Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Clarke et al., 2017).

Immigration has been rated by voters as one of the most important issues facing the country continuously for most of the past decade

Past British Social Attitudes (BSA) reports on immigration have highlighted how the British public have reacted to recent rises in immigration by increasing their demands for control of inflows, while becoming much more socially divided about the economic and cultural effects of immigration (Ford et al., 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014). These earlier analyses also suggest that the public is highly responsive to differences between particular migrant groups; they are much more positive about the arrival of migrant students or skilled professionals than they are about family reunion migrants or unskilled labourers (Ford et al., 2012; Hainmuller and Hiscox, 2010).

With the Government signalling that Brexit will entail the end of the free movement rights for EU citizens to Britain, the Brexit process represents an opportunity for the most comprehensive debate of immigration policy in decades. This is therefore an opportune moment to examine how attitudes in the UK have changed over the past 15 years, and how they compare to those in other European Union countries. To do this we look at immigration views in two waves of the European Social Survey (ESS); wave 1 (2002-2003), fielded before the accession of new European members, and wave 7 (2014-2015), fielded long afterwards. The ESS collects data from 18 countries across Europe. Unlike BSA, it draws on a whole of UK sample and therefore includes Northern Ireland[1]. The use of the ESS means we will be considering data from 2014 and therefore before the UK's EU referendum vote. While more recent data are available, and partly analysed in the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU' in this year's BSA report, the ESS data here allow us to make important comparisons across Europe and time. However, as high profile debates about immigration in the context of the EU referendum and the refugee crisis have occurred since this latest ESS wave was conducted, it is important the conclusions from the 2014 data are treated with caution.

In this chapter we address three questions. Firstly, we look at whether the increase in migration over the past 15 years has made the public more selective about the migrants they think Britain should accept, and more sceptical about the effects of migration on the country. Next we examine whether the UK has become more divided in its views about migration. Finally we look at how UK attitudes stand in contrast to those in other European countries, over time, at an aggregate level and in terms of how internally divided each country is in its views.

A more sceptical public?

The scale of migration to Britain over the past 15 years is unprecedented, but has this increased public demands for greater control of migrant inflows? Four questions from ESS give us some insight on this. Firstly, respondents were asked:

> ***To what extent do you think Britain should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most of Britain's people to come and live here?***

The same structure was then used to ask respondents about people of a different race or ethnic group; people from poorer countries in Europe; and finally, about people from poorer countries outside Europe. These categories are broad, as are the response categories: "allow many to come and live here", "allow some", "allow few" and "allow none". We therefore need to ensure conclusions drawn from these responses are treated with caution as "allow some migrants

1 ESS collects data from the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland which represents approximately 1% of the sample. For the questions on immigration, respondents living in Britain were asked about "people coming to live in Britain". Respondents living in Northern Ireland were asked about "people coming to live in the UK".

from different ethnic groups to come to Britain" could mean a range of things.

While these are important limitations, the distribution of responses on these items give us a broad sense of public sentiment and whether it has shifted. There is no evidence of a large or general movement in views towards the restriction of migration over the past 15 years, but there are some small and potentially interesting changes in attitudes to particular groups (Table 1). Views of migrants from the same ethnic group as the majority remain stable, but the public has become more positive about accepting ethnic minority migrants: 57% feel that "many" or "some" should be allowed in the 2014 survey, up from 50% in 2002.

Table 1 Views on migration from different groups, 2002 and 2014[2]

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
How many immigrants from same race/ethnic group as majority should Britain allow to come and live here?	%	%	%
Allow many	12	14	+2
Allow some	52	50	-2
Allow few	27	26	-1
Allow none	8	9	+1
How many immigrants from different race/ethnic group to majority should Britain allow to come and live here?	**%**	**%**	**%**
Allow many	8	11	+4
Allow some	42	46	+4
Allow few	34	29	-4
Allow none	15	12	-3
How many immigrants from poorer countries in Europe should Britain allow to come and live here?	%	%	%
Allow many	9	11	+2
Allow some	45	40	-4
Allow few	33	31	-2
Allow none	12	16	+4
How many immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe should Britain allow to come and live here?	%	%	%
Allow many	8	9	+1
Allow some	41	34	-6
Allow few	36	34	-1
Allow none	14	21	+7
Unweighted base	*2052*	*2264*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

2 Figures showing change over time in this table are calculated from the exact data, rather than the rounded figures that appear in the table. As a result they will sometimes appear to be incorrect by +/-1%. This applies to all similar tables in this chapter.

The public has become slightly more restrictive regarding immigration from poorer countries outside Europe

While the significant increase in migrants from central and eastern Europe has been a major focus of political and media debate, public sentiment about migrants from poorer European countries has barely changed. The percentage saying "none" should be allowed has risen slightly (from 12% to 16%). The public has become slightly more restrictive regarding immigration from poorer countries *outside* Europe, with the percentage saying no migration should be allowed rising 7 percentage points to 21%, and the proportion favouring "some" migration dropping by the same amount, from 41% to 34%. While there are some modest changes in views of particular groups, the overall picture here is remarkably stable given the scale of the migration Britain experienced in the period between these two surveys.

BSA 2013 findings broadly corroborate these trends and found this resulted in most people wanting a reduction in immigration (Ford and Heath, 2014). In 1995 63% of people wanted immigration reduced "a little" or "a lot", with 39% wanting the larger of the two reductions. By 2013 these proportions stood at 77% and 56% respectively, but these figures were largely unchanged since 2008. While the time periods covered by BSA are different, the results are consistent with ESS finding attitudes having been broadly stable between 2002 and 2014. Interestingly, together the studies suggest the big negative changes in attitudes to immigration occurred between 1995 and 2002 when immigration levels were much lower.

While there are some modest changes in views of particular groups, the overall picture here is remarkably stable given the scale of the migration Britain experienced in the period between these two surveys

Judged by ESS measures, there has been no general intensification in public demand for migration control. But how about views of the economic and social impact of migration? Has the increase in migration raised public concerns about disruptive effects? Table 2 takes a look at the following four questions asking about the impact of migration:

> *Would you say it is generally bad or good for Britain's economy that people come to live here from other countries? [11-point scale where 0 is Bad for the economy, 10 is Good for the economy]*
>
> *Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in Britain, or generally help to create new jobs? [11-point scale where 0 is Take away jobs, 10 is Create new jobs]*
>
> *Are Britain's crime problems made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries? [11-point scale where 0 is Crime problems made worse, 10 is Crime problems made better]*
>
> *Would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries? [11-point scale where 0 is Cultural life undermined, 10 is Cultural life enriched]*

The public has become more positive about the economic impact of immigration

Again, we find little evidence that the significant recent increases in immigration have resulted in a major negative change in public sentiment. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case in some areas. The public has become more positive about the economic impact of immigration, with the proportion judging immigration to be good for the British economy rising 14 points from 27% to 40%, and the percentage saying immigration creates jobs rising 10 points from 22% to 32%. These rises are from a low base, so even after a significant positive swing immigration enthusiasts barely outnumber sceptics on overall economic impact, and in 2014 slightly more people still see immigration as threatening to jobs than see it as an engine of job creation.

Table 2 Views on the impacts of migration, 2002 and 2014[3]

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Is immigration good or bad for the British economy	%	%	%
Good	27	40	+14
Neither good nor bad	28	22	-6
Bad	43	36	-7
Net good - bad	**-16**	**+4**	**+20**
Do immigrants take jobs away in Britain or create new jobs	**%**	**%**	**%**
Create new jobs	22	32	+10
Neither	35	30	-6
Take jobs away	41	36	-5
Net create jobs - take jobs away	**-19**	**-4**	**+15**
Crime problems made better or worse by immigrants			
Made better	8	13	+5
Neither	30	33	+3
Made worse	60	50	-9
Net crime better- crime worse	**-52**	**-37**	**+14**
Cultural life enriched or undermined by immigrants			
Enriched	44	43	-1
Neither	22	17	-5
Undermined	32	38	+6
Net enriched - undermined	**+12**	**+4**	**-8**
Unweighted base	*2052*	*2264*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

3 For each of the questions presented in Table 2, the 11-point scales have been grouped into 3 categories where ratings 0 to 4 are coded as positive (e.g. "Good", or "Create new jobs)", 5 as neutral (e.g. "Neither"), and 6 to 10 as negative (e.g. "Bad" or "Take jobs away").

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the public did not react to a decade of high immigration and economic crisis by becoming more anti-migration by these measures. This may suggest, in line with earlier work, that migration attitudes are pragmatic and responsive to context. Britain's labour market performed relatively well both before and after the financial crisis, with high levels of job creation and employment rates close to record highs. It seems that mass migration amid such benign economic conditions may have encouraged greater acceptance of the positive economic effects of immigration on the labour market and the economy in general.

There is a similar positive change in attitudes about immigration and crime, although here a very negative overall view remains in 2014, with roughly half of the public continuing to see immigration as a potential threat to crime levels (down from over 60% in 2002). There is, however, a negative change in views about the cultural impact of immigration, the item which attracted the most positive responses in 2002. The proportion who think migration undermines British culture rose 6 points from 32% to 38%. A buoyant economy may assuage economic concerns about immigration; it is less likely to alleviate worries about the impact mass migration has on British identity and culture. Yet even here, the negative change in attitudes is relatively modest given the scale of change. The largest inflow of migrants in British history has not produced a general negative change in the public mood about migration's effects.

The proportion who think migration undermines British culture rose 6 points from 32% to 38%

It is worth recalling that these questions were asked well before the prominent discussions of immigration surrounding the EU referendum, which may have changed views.

A more selective public?

In both ESS waves, respondents were presented with a list of characteristics and asked which they believed were important qualifications in choosing which migrants to accept:

> ***Please tell me how important you think each of these things should be in deciding whether someone born, brought up and living outside Britain should be able to come and live here***

Table 3 shows the proportion of respondents who rate various qualifications as being important[4] for selecting migrants.

Skills and being committed to the British way of life matter most to the public as criteria for immigrants

Here we do find evidence of a significant change in sentiment: the public has become more selective. They are very clear about what matters most as criteria for selection: skills and being committed to the British way of life. Achieved qualifications - things such as speaking English, work skills and education which can be acquired with time and effort - already mattered a great deal to people in 2002, with large majorities rating them as important factors to use in selecting migrants. The emphasis placed on all of these criteria is even higher in 2014.

4 "Important" is defined as scores of above 5 on a scale from 0 "extremely unimportant" to 10 "extremely important.

Migrants being "committed to the way of life in Britain" has also grown in importance and remains a top-two criterion for the public. Of the criteria in this question this is arguably the most subjective and the ESS leaves it open to personal interpretation. Earlier BSA research on identity found people struggled to define what values, behaviours or customs are typically British (Heath et al., 2007). The answers offered ranged from "politeness" and "fair play", to "history", "roast dinners" and "drinking tea". It is therefore likely that people are interpreting "committed to the way of life in Britain" in a wide variety of ways. For some it may concern observation of the law, for others customs, and for some it will be upholding certain values. This warrants further examination in subsequent research in this area given its importance to the public.

Table 3 Proportion of respondents thinking particular qualifications are important for selecting immigrants, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
% saying that to be able to come and live here it is important for someone from outside Britain to …			
… be committed to the way of life in Britain	78	84	+6
… be able to speak English	77	87	+10
… have work skills that Britain needs	71	81	+10
… have good educational qualifications	63	74	+11
… come from a Christian background	19	16	-3
… be white	11	7	-5
% saying it's important to have good educational qualifications AND speak English AND have work skills that Britain needs	**49**	**65**	**+16**
Unweighted Base	*2052*	*2264*	

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

Overall it is clear that there is a growing selectiveness from the public about immigration. This is even more evident if we combine the qualification-related criteria. Two-thirds (65%) of people in 2014 note that educational qualifications, work skills and English language skills are *all* important requirements when selecting migrants - up from half (49%) of people in 2002. While people are more aware of the positive economic effects of migration, it seems they might also be more sensitive to the skills and abilities which they see as maximising those positive effects.

Fewer than 1 in 5 regard a Christian religious background as an important qualification for migrants

While the public places a strong and rising emphasis on the achieved qualifications or behaviour of migrants, the same is not true for aspects of migrants' identities that are difficult or impossible to change. Fewer than 1 in 5 regarded a Christian religious background as an important qualification for migrants in 2002 and 2014. The

percentage of the public who see white ethnicity as important is even lower, and declining even faster (from 11% in 2002 to 7% in 2014).

Deepening social divides?

ESS evidence suggests that the UK has not, in the aggregate, become more negative about immigration. In fact, across some measures attitudes to immigration's impact have become more positive between 2002 and 2014. Yet this aggregate result might mask deepening social divisions over the issue. Recent work analysing both BSA data (Ford et al., 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014) and ESS data (Heath and Richards, 2016) have revealed strong social divisions in attitudes to immigration by age, education, social class, and migrant heritage.

This analysis confirms what previous evidence has shown: the public is deeply divided over immigration

Tables 4 and 5 look at the social divides in attitudes to migration from different groups, and in attitudes to the economic and social impacts of migration, in 2014. Here we take the top and bottom groups from each characteristic or attitudinal measure (full question wording for the attitudinal measures can be found in the appendix to this chapter). The tables confirm what previous evidence has shown: the public is deeply divided over immigration. On nearly every measure we find gaps of 9 to 30 percentage points in views between the social groups which are most positive about migration and those which are most negative. Majorities of 18-29 year olds support allowing "many" or "some" migrants from each group asked about, while majority support from the 70+ group for "many" or "some" migrants only extends to those of the same ethnic group.

The majority of the "higher service" classes believe we should allow "many" or "some" migrants from every migrant group tested, and see migration as enriching British culture and benefitting the British economy. In contrast, unskilled workers are much less likely to want more or some migration from poorer countries, and less than a third see economic or cultural benefits from migration. The education divides are particularly deep, with majorities of degree-holders backing the more pro-migration options on every item presented here, often by notable margins. In contrast, only one pro-migration option (migration from the same ethnic group) receives majority support from those with GCSEs or less (for ease referred to as "school leavers" from here on). There is also a large heritage divide in the UK; with the fast-growing proportion of UK residents born abroad being a great deal more enthusiastic about migration than those who were born in the UK to two UK-born parents.

Table 4 Views on levels of immigration from different migrant groups, by socio-demographic and attitudinal group

	Migrant group			
	Same ethnic group as majority	Different ethnic group as majority	From poorer country inside Europe	From poorer country outside Europe
% saying should allow "many" or "some" migrants from group into Britain				
Age:18-29	69	66	60	51
Age: 70 plus	58	42	38	27
Age gap	**11**	**24**	**22**	**24**
Class: higher service (professionals and managers)	76	67	61	54
Class: unskilled workers	56	51	45	36
Class gap	**20**	**16**	**16**	**17**
Education: Degree	78	74	70	62
Education: GCSE or less	56	47	40	33
Education gap	**21**	**27**	**30**	**29**
Heritage: Born abroad	75	73	66	53
Heritage: UK born, UK-born parents	60	53	47	40
Heritage gap	**14**	**21**	**19**	**13**
Social trust: most people can be trusted	71	65	60	51
Social trust: you can't be too careful	53	47	39	32
Social trust gap	**18**	**18**	**21**	**19**
Satisfaction with economy: satisfied	73	66	60	48
Satisfaction with economy: not satisfied	54	49	43	38
Satisfaction with economy gap	**18**	**16**	**17**	**10**

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
The class variables are drawn from the 5-Class OESCH class schema (Oesch, D., 2006a; 2006b)

Table 5 Views about impacts of immigration on Britain, by socio-demographic and attitudinal group

	% saying it enriches culture	% saying it is good for economy	% saying it creates jobs	% saying it makes crime worse
Age: 18-29	48	48	31	45
Age: 70 plus	31	29	29	60
Age gap	**17**	**18**	**2**	**15**
Class: higher service (professionals and managers)	61	57	45	43
Class: unskilled workers	32	27	24	52
Class gap	**29**	**30**	**20**	**10**
Education: Degree	68	62	52	37
Education: GCSE or less	30	29	25	57
Education gap	**39**	**34**	**26**	**19**
Heritage: Born abroad	62	61	55	37
Heritage: UK born, UK-born parents	36	34	27	54
Heritage gap	**26**	**26**	**29**	**17**
Social trust: most people can be trusted	52	50	40	45
Social trust: you can't be too careful	30	27	23	60
Social trust gap	**22**	**23**	**17**	**15**
Satisfaction with economy: satisfied	54	53	44	47
Satisfaction with economy: not satisfied	34	30	24	56
Satisfaction with economy gap	**20**	**22**	**19**	**10**

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
The class variables are drawn from the 5-Class OESCH class schema (Oesch, D., 2006a; 2006b)

Finally, we compare the attitudes of people with different levels of social trust and economic satisfaction. These are both commonly cited as possible drivers of opposition to immigration (Hainmuller and Hopkins, 2014; Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014; Herreros and Criado, 2009) - economically insecure people may worry more about competition from migrants, while those who are low in social trust may regard “outsiders” with more suspicion, and be less inclined to believe political or expert arguments in favour of migration. In accordance with these theories, we find more negative attitudes to migration are more prevalent among economically dissatisfied and distrustful groups. The bottom of Table 4 shows that those expressing satisfaction with the economy are far more likely to support entry of “many” or “some” migrants to Britain compared with those expressing dissatisfaction with the economy. Economic perceptions show an even stronger relationship with views about the cultural and economic impact of migration. More than half of those satisfied with the state of the economy are positive about the

cultural and economic impact of migration compared with a third or less of those who are dissatisfied with the economy. The around 20-percentage point (17-22 point) divides in views on the cultural and economic impact of migration that we see by levels of trust and economic satisfaction are also apparent to a similar degree in views on immigration's impact on job creation. With immigration's impact on crime, this divide narrows slightly to 10-15 percentage points.

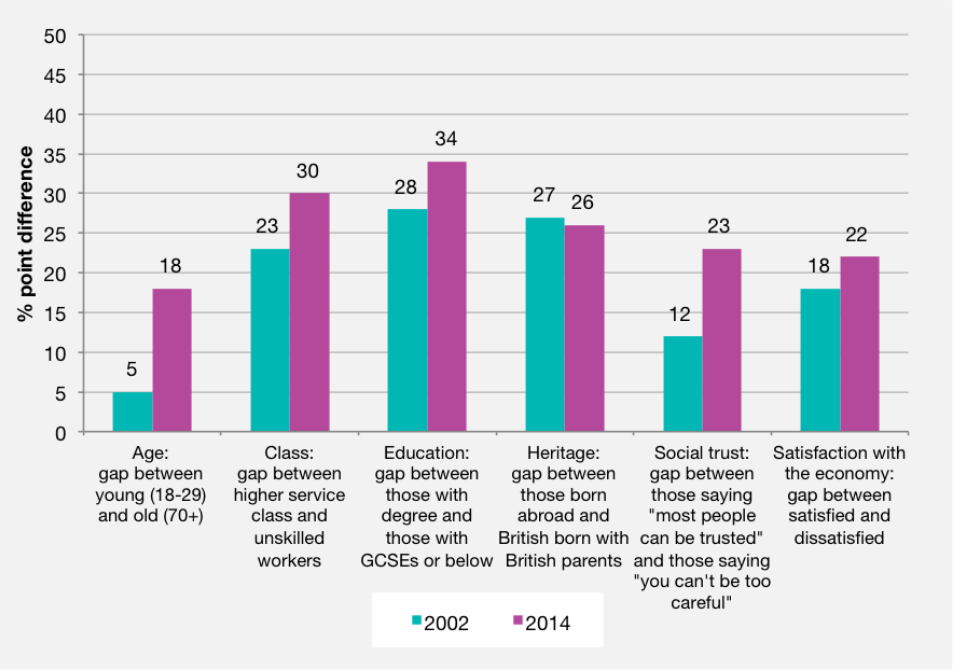
The majority of those expressing trust towards others also support entry of "more" or "some" migrants into Britain, while support among those who are distrustful is lower, with only two fifths supporting entry of "more" or "some" migrants from poorer countries outside Europe. More than half of those who express trust in others felt migration enriches British culture and benefits the economy, compared with less than a third of those who express distrust towards others.

The UK is more divided than it was in 2002 by age, class, education, social trust and personal economic satisfaction

When we compare the depth of social divides in 2002 and 2014, we find that the biggest change has occurred in divides over the economic impact of immigration - where overall attitudes have become more positive. Figure 1 illustrates this, showing the depth of divides in views about the economic impact of migration by various factors in 2002 (light bars) and 2014 (dark bars). While the public is more positive overall about the economic effects of migration, this aggregate change masks deepening division on all but one of our measures. The growth in this divide is largely the result of young graduates becoming more positive about the economic impact of immigration, whereas older less qualified people's views have remained the same.

The UK is more divided than it was in 2002 by age, class, education, social trust and personal economic satisfaction, while the divides by migrant heritage remain as large as they were before. This poses problems for policymakers. While, on aggregate, people have a balanced view about the positive or negative economic effect of immigration, most people don't actually hold such a middling view. In practice, people are either positive about immigration's economic effects - in which case they opt for allowing "more" or "some" migrants in - or negative about the economic impact of migration - in which case they are more likely to opt for "few" or "none". While a compromise policy may best match the overall average, when views are polarised like this - and growing more so over time - centrist positions may backfire, angering both sides in the political debate.

Figure 1 Differences (in percentage points) between social groups in their view that immigration is good for the economy, 2002 and 2014



Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)
The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The persistent and often deepening social divides in views about migration may also help to explain why the issue has become more politically contentious

The persistent and often deepening social divides in views about migration may also help to explain why the issue has become more politically contentious (Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014), despite no negative adjustment in overall public attitudes. The social groups who are untroubled by immigration usually do not see the issue as important, and tend to focus on other issues when voting, whereas, for immigration-sceptics the issue seems to have become ever more central to their electoral decisions (see the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU'). While overall views have not changed dramatically between 2002 and 2014, opponents to immigration became more politically mobilised and more focused on the issue, creating the impression of a population-wide backlash against immigration.

Is the UK different?

The prominent and divisive role played by immigration in the debate about the UK's membership of the European Union has led some to speculate that the public is unusually negative about the effects of immigration, and unusually hostile towards immigrants. In Table 6 below we compare UK attitudes about the economic and social impact of immigration to those in all the other European countries surveyed in both 2002 and 2014. In 2002, the UK was indeed unusually negative about economic effects of immigration, with sceptics outnumbering optimists by a larger margin than in any other western European country surveyed. UK pessimism about the economic effects of immigration at this point was more similar to that

After a decade of unprecedented migration inflows, the UK is not unusually positive or negative about the economic effects of immigration compared with other EU countries

in post-Communist Europe where migration was (and remains) very low, than views in the migrant-receiving nations of western Europe.

Things are different in 2014. The UK saw the largest positive change in views of the economic impact of immigration between 2002 and 2014, moving attitudes overall from unusually negative to mid-ranking among the countries we analyse. Both of the other countries to experience large positive changes - Germany and Poland - also had relatively strong economies and labour markets between the two survey years. By 2014, after a decade of unprecedented migration inflows, the UK was not unusually positive or negative about the economic effects of immigration compared with other EU countries. By contrast, other large migrant-receiving western European EU members such as Austria, Netherlands, Belgium and France, saw their attitudes about the economic effects of immigration become more negative.

Table 6 European views about cultural and economic impact of immigration, by country, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Net view about economic impact of immigration (% positive – % negative)			
Switzerland	+32	+42	+10
Germany	+7	+23	+16
Sweden	+20	+23	+3
Norway	+16	+22	+6
Ireland	+3	+8	+5
Finland	+15	+7	-8
UK	**-16**	**+4**	**+20**
Poland	-13	+2	+15
Spain	+17	+2	-15
Austria	+22	-2	-24
Portugal	-2	-2	-
Netherlands	+2	-5	-6
Denmark	-7	-7	-
Belgium	-11	-16	-4
France	+6	-17	-23
Slovenia	-20	-27	-8
Czechia	-16	-43	-27
Hungary	-25	-42	-17
Net view about cultural impact of immigration (% positive – % negative)			
Sweden	+67	+64	-3
Finland	+77	+59	-18
Netherlands	+44	+40	-3
Poland	+39	+37	-3
Germany	+38	+35	-2
Switzerland	+42	+34	-8
Spain	+31	+31	+1
Belgium	+31	+27	-4
Norway	+29	+23	-5
Denmark	+24	+19	-4
Ireland	+18	+19	-
Portugal	+13	+16	+3
France	+9	+6	-3
UK	**+12**	**+4**	**-8**
Slovenia	+7	+3	-4
Austria	+26	-2	-28
Hungary	+5	-6	-11
Czechia	-8	-34	-25

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
Countries are ordered by 2014 result

In contrast to their views on the economic impact, people in the UK are on aggregate, less positive about the cultural impact of immigration than most of their European neighbours. While the UK's aggregate view of the cultural impact has become more negative between 2002 and 2014, we witness a similar trend in most other countries resulting in the UK remaining at the bottom end of the table.

The two other wealthy European countries with similarly pessimistic views on the cultural impacts of immigration - France and Austria - both have very large and electorally successful anti-migrant radical right-wing parties. Radical right-wing candidates made the run-off round for Presidential elections in both countries over the past year, suggesting that the rising concerns about the cultural effects of immigration the EES had detected in 2014 can be a potent electoral force.

Table 7 summarises the wide range of different views about the economic and cultural impacts of immigration found across the continent (though note the baseline level of positivity about cultural impacts is higher). Germany, Sweden and Switzerland are positive about the economic effects and very positive about the cultural effects of immigration, while Norwegians on balance see economic benefits but are comparatively less positive about the cultural impact. A cluster of four countries - Finland, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands - see immigration as very enriching to the national culture, but are uncertain that it brings economic gains. Ireland, Portugal and Denmark combine similarly balanced attitudes to the economic impact with a comparatively middling view on the cultural impact. The UK, along with Austria, has a balanced and mid-ranking view on economic impacts, but a comparatively sceptical view of the positive cultural effects. Finally, five countries have comparatively negative aggregate views on the economic and (aside from Belgium) cultural impacts. France, where the anti-migrant Front National recently secured its strongest-ever presidential election performance joins a cluster of low immigration central European countries (Hungary, Czechia and Slovenia) in expressing the most negative views about both effects of immigration.

The UK, along with Austria, has a balanced and mid-ranking view on economic impacts, but a comparatively sceptical view of the positive cultural effects

Interestingly, while there is a large cluster of countries that are on aggregate positive about the cultural effects of immigration but negative about the economic impacts, whereas the opposite pattern – positive about the economic impact but on balance negative about the cultural impact - never occurs (though the UK comes close). The continuing economic struggles in many parts of Europe following the financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis may have reinforced anxieties about the economic effects of migration, but they do not seem to have undermined the broadly positive stance about cultural impacts in most of the continent. However, it is important to remember that these views were gathered before the refugee crisis of 2015-16, which affected many parts of Europe, and may have further changed patterns of attitudes.

Table 7 Distribution of attitudes about economic and cultural impacts of immigration

	Positive about economic impact (+10 or more)	Neutral about economic impact (-10 to +10)	Negative about economic impact (under -10)
Strongly positive about cultural impact (+30 or more)	Switzerland, Germany, Sweden	Finland, Poland, Spain, Netherlands	
Positive about cultural impact (+10 to +30)	Norway	Ireland, Portugal, Denmark	Belgium
Neutral or negative about cultural impact (under +10)		**UK**, Austria,	France, Slovenia, Czechia, Hungary

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

Social divides over immigration in the UK and Europe

Overall UK views about the effects of migration are not a major departure from European norms. Partly, this is because there is no consistent European norm to depart from; immigration views vary widely across the continent. But it is also because where UK attitudes have shifted, the change has made the UK more typical: the public was unusually negative about the economic effects of migration in 2002, when the British economy was booming and migration was relatively low. In 2014, after a major economic crisis and a massive inflow of migrants, the public became comparatively more positive on migration's economic impact while many European countries moved in the opposite direction (though the UK's aggregate view was overall neutral). However, as we have seen earlier, a focus on the overall changes to UK migration attitudes risks masking growing social polarisation on the issue. Perhaps it is the divisiveness of immigration that sets the UK apart?

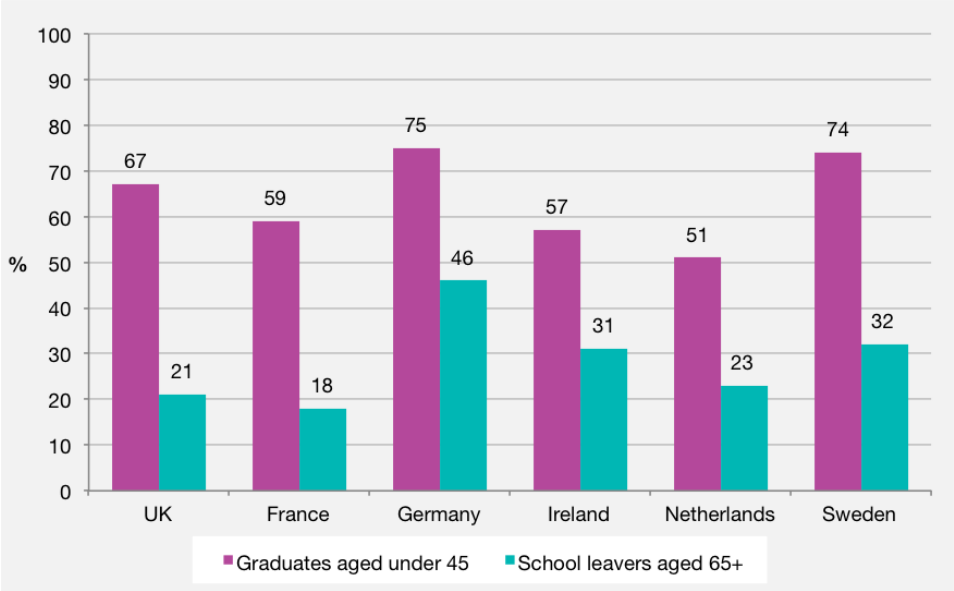
Summarising the full range of social divisions in the full range of immigration attitudes across many nations is a major task, beyond the scope of this chapter. So we focus on two of the social factors that have been most strongly associated with immigration attitudes in past research: age and education. To get a sense of the depth of social divides, we combine these measures to compare two large social groups on opposite sides of the immigration debate: university graduates under the age of 45 (9% of respondents in the overall 2014 ESS sample) and those with lower secondary education over the age of 65 (11% of respondents). Given limited space, we focus on views about the economic and cultural impact of immigration, which have been central in both academic and political debates about the issue.

Figures 2 and 3 take a look at the social divide in views about the economic and cultural impacts of migration in the UK and a selection of nearby European countries - France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden - using the 2014 ESS data. Divisions over

Divisions over immigration in the UK are certainly not unique: deep divides exist in every country charted

immigration in the UK are certainly not unique: deep divides exist in every country charted. Between half and three-quarters of young graduates in all six countries said they think immigration is good for their country's economy. The percentage of older school-leavers who feel similarly ranges from a fifth to a third in every country except Germany - and even there only 46% of older school-leavers see immigration as economically beneficial.

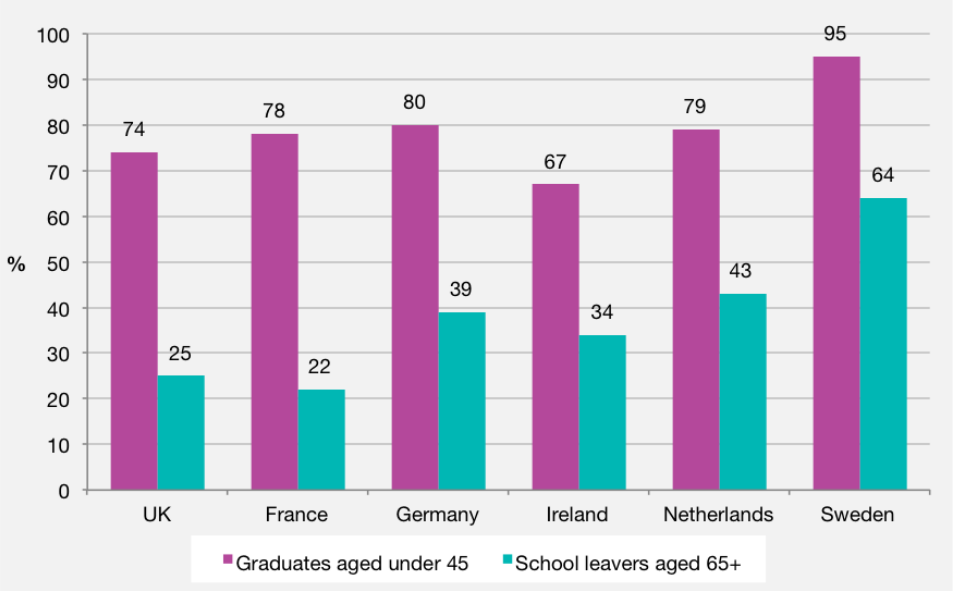
Figure 2 Proportion who are positive about the economic impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country



Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

The divides on cultural effects are even deeper. The vast majority of young graduates across all these countries see immigration as enriching their national cultures, with even the lowest proportion being 67% in Ireland, and the highest being 95% in Sweden. Older school-leavers by contrast are much more sceptical. Around a quarter see migration as culturally enriching in the UK and France (22%), a third (34%) in Ireland, 39% in Germany and 43% in the Netherlands. Only in Sweden do older school-leavers have a majority of positive views about the cultural impact of migration - and even in Sweden they are much more sceptical than young graduates.

Figure 3 Proportion who are positive about the cultural impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country



Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)
The data on which Figure 3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Concerning views on the economic impact of immigration, the social divide in the UK has grown more rapidly since 2002 than in any other country

In Table 8 we look at these social divides in a bit more depth, examining the difference in the prevalence of positive views about immigration across the full range of ESS countries, and seeing how it has changed since 2002. Including details on the changes in each social group's attitudes would make the table unmanageably large and complicated, so instead we discuss the drivers of the changes in levels of social division below.

Here we see that the UK is among the most deeply divided nations of those covered by the ESS in 2014. Concerning views on the economic impact of immigration, the social divide in the UK has grown more rapidly since 2002 than in any other country. While this division in attitudes is strong in the UK, it is found in many other countries too.

Where the division within a country on the economic impact has grown, we find this is due to young university graduates becoming more positive

Where the division within a country on the economic impact has grown, such as in the UK, Sweden, Spain and Ireland, we find this is due to young university graduates becoming more positive, while the more sceptical views of older school-leavers have changed little, or not at all. A similar trend explains the growing divides in attitudes to the cultural impact found in Slovenia, France, Denmark, Spain, Ireland and Portugal.

In Germany, Switzerland and Norway, immigration remains divisive but the divides have on the whole reduced, and views are positive on aggregate. Perhaps not coincidentally, these are three of Europe's richest nations, and three of the countries whose economies weathered the financial crisis best.

At the bottom of both tables we find the two countries, Czechia and Hungary, with the smallest divides in opinion and the most negative

overall views on the impacts of immigration. In both countries the reduction in divide on the economic impact is due to aggregate positivity of young graduates having disappeared. Scepticism in these two countries - where immigration is very low - is now near universal.

Table 8 Social divides (percentage point difference) over the economic and cultural impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Difference between younger graduates and older school-leavers in attitudes about economic impact of immigration (% graduates under 45 positive – % school-leavers over 65 positive)			
UK++	**+27**	**+46**	**+19**
Sweden	+27	+43	+16
Slovenia	+25	+42	+16
France	+34	+41	+8
Denmark	+27	+36	+10
Austria	+26	+35	+9
Finland	+30	+34	+3
Spain	+26	+32	+6
Norway+	+37	+31	-6
Germany+	+37	+30	-7
Switzerland+	+45	+28	-16
Netherlands	+21	+28	+7
Ireland	+18	+26	+8
Poland	+25	+22	-3
Belgium	+23	+21	-2
Portugal	+23	+19	-4
Czechia+	+41	+13	-28
Hungary	+15	+4	-12

Table 8 Social divides (percentage point difference) over the economic and cultural impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014 (continued)

	2002	2014	Change 2002-2014
Difference between younger graduates and older school-leavers in attitudes about cultural impact of immigration (% graduates under 45 positive – % school-leavers over 65 positive)			
Slovenia	+24	+57	+33
France	+50	+55	+6
Denmark	+43	+50	+6
UK++	**+46**	**+49**	**+3**
Spain	+39	+45	+7
Austria	+40	+44	+5
Germany	+45	+41	-4
Switzerland	+39	+39	1
Finland	+34	+39	+6
Belgium	+45	+37	-8
Netherlands	+44	+36	-8
Portugal	+27	+34	+8
Poland	+45	+32	-13
Ireland	+26	+33	+7
Norway	+46	+33	-13
Sweden	+38	+30	-8
Hungary	+47	+26	-21
Czechia	+37	+21	-16

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)
Bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter
+Bases for some groups in these countries fell below 100; therefore caution should be used with these figures
++derived from country specific variable

Conclusions

We set out to answer three questions about how attitudes to immigration have changed in response to the largest inflow of migrants in British history. Firstly, has the UK reacted to the recent increases in immigration by becoming significantly more negative overall about migration and its effects? We find they have not. Attitudes on the economic impacts of immigration have instead become more positive (while neutral overall),and views on the cultural impact of migration have become slightly more negative. Attitudes to the impact of immigration on crime have also become more positive, but nonetheless remain strongly negative overall. It is possible therefore that the UK's comparatively well-performing labour market

during this period did enough to neutralise any growing concern about immigration's impact on the economy, jobs and crime, but understandably did not halt the slight growth in concern about its cultural impact.

We find that views about the admission of different migrant groups are also largely stable, though we note a small increase in opposition to migration from poorer countries. The UK has, however, become more selective, placing an ever-stronger emphasis on acquired skills such as language, work skills and educational qualifications, as well as a commitment to a British "way of life".

The UK public has responded to high migration not by demanding migration by intensifying their demands for greater selection in immigration policy

This continues a trend identified in earlier research: the UK public has responded to high migration not by demanding migration be halted across the board, but by intensifying their demands for greater selection in immigration policy (see also Ford et al., 2012; Ford and Heath, 2014). It is migrants' skills and their commitment to a British way of life, not whether they are white or Christian or where they migrate from that chiefly matter to the public in the UK. Support for selecting migrants on ascribed criteria such as religion or race, which was already low in 2002, has declined further since.

We do however find that the public's views on the economic impact of immigration have become more polarised, and views on the cultural impact are also divided but not more or less so than they were in 2002. This, in turn, may explain a paradox about immigration over the past 15 years; that its political importance has increased dramatically even though public attitudes on average have not shifted in a negative direction. There are big social divides in views about immigration. These divides fuel political conflict between groups such as graduates, the young and the middle class who see immigration increasingly positively and those, such as pensioners, the working class and school-leavers, who see it in a more negative light. Where the divide has deepened, this is not the result of mounting hostility in the sceptical groups but instead because the social groups with more positive views have become even more positive about migration.

In 2002, public opinion about immigration was more negative than practically every other large west European country with a significant migrant population. Since then the UK has shown the biggest positive change in attitudes on the economic impact of migration. As a result, the UK's aggregate view is now mid-ranking in the list of European countres analysed. By contrast, the UK public's aggregrate view on the cultural impact of immigration remains towards the sceptical end of this table of countries.

What sets the UK apart from the rest of Europe is the depth of the social divides over views on the economic impact of immigration, and the degree to which this divide has increased. The UK is more divided over migration on this measure than any other European society measured, and the divide has grown more here than anywhere else. These attitude changes were visible well before the debate over Brexit got underway - ESS data are from 2002 and 2014.

Yet the social divides over immigration we find map well onto the social divides researchers analysing the Brexit vote have also found (see the chapter on 'The vote to leave the EU'; Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Clarke et al., 2017). The deep Brexit divide between Remain young graduates and Leave older school-leavers already existed in 2002 on attitudes to immigration's economic impact and was even deeper in 2014. While the Brexit decision did not create these social divides, the EU referendum campaign and the vote to leave the EU have politically mobilised them. Policy makers looking to build a new immigration settlement for the post-EU era will face a major challenge in bridging the huge and longstanding gap between the UK's migration supporters and sceptics.

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Appendix

The bases for Tables 4 and 5 can be found below.

Table A.1 Views on levels of immigration from different migrant groups, and impacts of immigration on the UK, by socio-demographic and attitudinal group

	Unweighted Base
Age	
18-29	*253*
70 plus	*458*
Class	
Higher service (professionals and managers)	*378*
Unskilled workers	*456*
Education	
Degree	*569*
GCSE or less	*771*
Heritage	
Born abroad	*314*
UK born, UK-born parents	*1747*
Social Trust	
Most people can be trusted	*1099*
You can't be too careful	*653*
Satisfaction with the economy	
Satisfied	*861*
Not satisfied	*979*

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

Full question wording for the attitudinal questions in Tables 4 and 5 is shown below.

Social trust:

> ***Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.***

Satisfaction with the economy:

> ***On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [Britain / the UK]? Still use this card. [where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied.]***

The data for Figure 1 are shown below.

Table A.2 Differences between social groups in attitudes about the economic impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014

	2002	2014
Age: gap between youngest (18-29) and oldest (70+)	5	18
18-29 Unweighted base	*283*	*253*
70 plus Unweighted base	*338*	*458*
Class: gap between higher service class and unskilled workers	23	30
Higher service unweighted base	*368*	*378*
Unskilled workers unweighted base	*484*	*456*
Education level: gap between those with degree or higher and GCSEs or below	28	34
Degree unweighted base	*480*	*569*
GCSE or less unweighted base	*1140*	*771*
Heritage: gap between those born abroad and those UK born with UK-born parents	27	26
Born abroad unweighted base	*191*	*314*
UK born, UK-born parents unweighted base	*1716*	*1747*
Social trust: gap between those saying "most people can be trusted" and those saying "you can't be too careful"	12	23
"Most people can be trusted" unweighted base	*884*	*1,099*
"You can't be too careful" unweighted base	*707*	*653*
Satisfaction with the economy: gap between those who are "satisfied" and those who are "dissatisfied"	18	22
"Satisfied" unweighted base	*885*	*861*
"Not satisfied" unweighted base	*705*	*979*

Source: UK respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

The bases for Table 6 can be found below.

Table A.3 European views about cultural and economic impact of immigration, by country, 2002 and 2014

	2012	2014
Country	*Unweighted Base*	*Unweighted Base*
Switzerland	*2040*	*1532*
Germany	*2919*	*3045*
Sweden	*1999*	*1791*
Norway	*2036*	*1436*
Ireland	*2046*	*2390*
Finland	*2000*	*2087*
UK	***2052***	***2264***
Poland	*2110*	*1615*
Spain	*1729*	*1925*
Austria	*2257*	*1795*
Portugal	*1511*	*1265*
Netherlands	*2364*	*1919*
Denmark	*1506*	*1502*
Belgium	*1899*	*1769*
France	*1503*	*1917*
Slovenia	*1519*	*1224*
Czechia	*1360*	*2148*
Hungary	*1685*	*1698*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)

The data for Figure 2 are shown below.

Table A.4 Proportion who are positive about the economic impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country

% saying immigration good for the economy	Graduates under 45 years old	School leavers over 65 years old
Country		
UK	67	21
Unweighted base	*291*	*342*
France	59	18
Unweighted base	*196*	*214*
Germany	75	46
Unweighted base	*262*	*95*
Ireland	57	31
Unweighted base	*264*	*382*
Netherlands	51	23
Unweighted base	*240*	*292*
Sweden	74	31
Unweighted base	*233*	*204*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

The data for Figure 3 are shown below.

Table A.5 Proportion who are positive about the cultural impact of immigration, comparing graduates under 45 years old and school leavers over 65 years old, by country

% saying immigration enriches culture	Graduates under 45 years old	School leavers over 65 years old
Country		
UK	74	25
Unweighted base	*291*	*342*
France	78	22
Unweighted base	*196*	*214*
Germany	80	39
Unweighted base	*262*	*95*
Ireland	67	34
Unweighted base	*264*	*382*
Netherlands	79	43
Unweighted base	*240*	*292*
Sweden	95	64
Unweighted base	*233*	*204*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 7 (2014)

The bases for Table 8 are shown below.

Table A.6 Social divide over the economic and cultural impact of immigration, 2002 and 2014

	2002		2014	
	Graduates under 45	**School-leavers 65+**	**Graduates under 45**	**School-leavers 65+**
Country	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Austria	*163*	*194*	*114*	*127*
Belgium	*303*	*191*	*203*	*173*
Switzerland	*289*	*126*	*133*	*96*
Czechia	*67*	*105*	*132*	*62*
Germany	*300*	*99*	*262*	*95*
Denmark	*218*	*97*	*217*	*106*
Spain	*166*	*408*	*186*	*339*
Finland	*253*	*257*	*257*	*273*
France	*257*	*228*	*196*	*214*
UK	***338***	***360***	***291***	***342***
Hungary	*94*	*194*	*124*	*167*
Ireland	*381*	*237*	*264*	*382*
Netherlands	*279*	*305*	*240*	*292*
Norway	*295*	*132*	*233*	*98*
Poland	*138*	*197*	*218*	*213*
Portugal	*104*	*346*	*110*	*377*
Sweden	*220*	*264*	*233*	*204*
Slovenia	*117*	*140*	*137*	*102*

Source: respondents to the European Social Survey wave 1 (2002) and wave 7 (2014)