


# **Growing apart:** The rise in British political sectarianism and how to respond

# Foreword

In an era where the very fabric of nations is tested by forces both global and internal, this report arrives as a clarion call. It meticulously dissects how mass immigration unprecedented in scale and pace, erodes the foundations of British democracy. As the authors note, by 2026, nearly half the populace views immigration as a paramount issue, a sentiment born not of caprice but of lived reality. Yet the report's analysis reveals a deeper malaise: democracy itself is offended by mass migration in three profound ways.

First, and most importantly, mass migration simply defies the will of the people. Since 1945, election manifestos from both major parties have pledged only 'balanced' or 'managed' inflows, tailored to the needs of a high-skill economy. The British have never endorsed the current migrant deluge; instead, they've been consistently and speciously promised restraint. This lying *betrayal* doesn't merely 'risk' undermining trust—it has already shattered it, as evidenced by governmental research and by multitude independent studies of 'broken' Britain.

The social contract, as Edmund Burke conceived it, is no mere compact among the living; it is a covenant across the generations binding the dead who bequeathed our inheritance, the living who steward it, and the unborn who must receive it undiminished. In this partnership, each generation acts as trustee, never as absolute owner, of a nation's patrimony: its laws, customs, soil, and spirit. Yet today's policies on mass immigration profane this trust. They betray the sacrifices of our forebears who forged a cohesive realm through toil, strife, and shared identity and mortgage the prospects of our descendants, who will inherit a fractured, unrecognizable land. The chain of obligation that sustains a nation has been deliberately severed. It follows that Britain as a nation stands in mortal peril.

Second, immigration fosters sectarianism, where loyalties cling to places of origin rather than to the ideals and interests of their supposed new home. The rise of five nominally 'independent' Muslim MPs, elected through bloc voting in migrant-dominated constituencies, exemplifies this fracture. The report warns of an 'existential threat', but perhaps too politely understates the peril: a low-trust society cannot sustain a thriving economy, and socially, it courts not just discord but something very dark indeed. As fractures deepen, with native populations feeling systematically abandoned and demonised for voicing legitimate fears, the conditions ripen for escalation beyond isolated riots toward sustained intercommunal conflict. Britain, once a model of ordered liberty sustained by shared identity and mutual obligation, is increasingly rife with tribal grievances, unaddressed and inflamed by elite indifference. In this lies the seed of civil war.

Third, it dismantles the *demos* – the settled people upon whom democracy rests. By 2060, projections suggest a majority-foreign population, rendering native Britons a minority. This 'great replacement', though politely veiled, signals the erasure of a historically culturally recognisable Britain. As George Orwell observed in 'The Lion and the Unicorn', English identity endures as a continuous thread:

England is not the jewelled isle of Shakespeare's much-quoted message, nor is it the inferno depicted by Dr Goebbels. More than either, it resembles a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons.

That familial continuity is now at stake. Make no mistake.

It is practically impossible to imagine Esme Wingfield-Stratford's 1913 two volume book *The History of English Patriotism* being published today. Yet he captured an essential thing that Britain had, then lost, and now must urgently restore, when he wrote that 'successive generations are but trustees of a common heritage. Politicians who betray this trust' must answer not only to their contemporaries but to a cloud of ancestral witnesses. This recognition of our country's enduring personality is patriotism's 'first and great commandment'.

To today's politicians, especially those who cringe at the very word 'patriotism' let alone expressions of it such as hanging the national flag I say: read this report and heed this warning before it is too late. You are not owners of Britain but temporary custodians of an ancient patrimony. By flooding the nation with unconsented mass migration, and especially unforgivably by shielding the mass rape of largely native working-class girls by largely Pakistani-origin sexual torture networks for decades through active complicity, by dismissing native fears as bigotry while selling the birthright of your own people, you commit treason against the dead who built this realm and the unborn who on current trajectory will inherit its ruins.

The hour is late; the peril is existential. The cause is not impersonal forces or historical inevitability – *it didn't have to be this way* – but an elite that has grown post-national in outlook, indifferent or even hostile to the historic nation over which it presides. Detached from any deep allegiance to Britain's particular people, culture, or continuity, this ruling class pursues policies that dissolve the fundamental idea of cohesive society, the concept of a collective 'we' or 'pre-political loyalty' as Roger Scruton once defined it upon which self-government depends.

Normal people understand that a nation's personality – a compact of lives across time – must be preserved if liberty and order, let alone prosperity, are to endure; astonishingly, those who've governed Britain incompetently and sometimes maliciously for the last generation do not. They've imposed transformations without consent, heedless of the warnings of philosophy, history, and their own people crying out against it. In doing so they've accelerated the fracturing of national cohesion, breeding deep resentment and low-trust conditions that are incompatible with those things that Burke's covenant requires us to defend across time.

When elites treat the homeland as a mere economic zone or an antiquated abstraction of political order, rather than a living inheritance, and its native people and their history as a disposable (indeed, despicable) quality, democracy itself becomes hollow, and the nation will vanish into history's wreckage, like so many forgotten civilizations before it, if they are allowed to persist much longer.

This report is timely, compelling, and on point though its truths, I would suggest, could be voiced more boldly. Within a few years – not decades – Britain's fate hangs in the balance: will it persist as the nation that the likes of Burke, Orwell, and Wingfield-Stratford revered, or vanish like the Akkadians or Hittites into history's ruins? The choice demands action now.

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# Introduction

It is no secret that immigration is one of the biggest (if not the single biggest) concerns in British politics today.

According to the latest YouGov polling, 71 percent of Britons believe that immigration has been too high over the last ten years.[1] This compares to just 4 percent who believe that the level of immigration has been too low over the same period. Concern about the present level of immigration cuts across both demographic and partisan lines; in the same poll, 65 percent of Liberal Democrat voters, 58 percent of Londoners, and 46 percent of 18–24-year-olds reported feeling that immigration over the past decade has been too high.

This sentiment analysis tracks, unsurprisingly, with data on salience. In April 2020, just 14 percent of Britons polled by YouGov said that immigration was 'one of the most important issues facing the country'. By February 2026, this figure had reached 49 percent, reflecting the issue's growing salience amongst the public.

This should come as no surprise; the scale of mass migration to this country has accelerated rapidly in recent years. With the exception of 2020, net migration has stood at more than 100,000 per year, every year, since 1998. Since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, this figure - already high in historical terms - has increased to record-breaking highs. In the year ending (YE) June 2021, net migration reached 239,000, according to estimates from the Office for National Statistics. This increased to 745,000 in YE June 2022, increased again to 906,000 in YE June 2023, and fell slightly to 728,000 in YE June 2024. According to the ONS' latest estimates, published 27th November 2025, net migration in YE June 2025 fell to 204,000, as a result of changes to visa eligibility introduced by the 2019-24 Conservative Government and continued restrictions under the Labour government elected in 2024.

However, these 204,000 figures still represents a historically high benchmark, which runs well beyond the pre-2021 average, let alone the pre-1997 average. Under this Labour government, while net migration has declined further due to inherited policies and new measures like closing the care worker route to overseas recruitment in May 2025, the pace remains troubling, with public perception lagging behind the data - two-thirds of voters wrongly believe immigration is still rising, fueling ongoing discontent.

Critical commentary on the impact of mass migration in Britain has often focused on the adverse impacts that this phenomenon has had on the British economy, and on public services. Some voices have also raised concerns about the cultural and social impacts of mass migration.

Alongside these negative economic and social externalities, which are beyond the scope of this paper, mass migration also fundamentally threatens British democracy. This claim operates on three levels. First, that mass migration runs contrary to the repeatedly stated wishes of the British

[1] You Gov March 2026; https://yougov.com/en-gb/trackers/do-brits-think-that-immigration-has-been-too-high-or-low-in-the-last-10-years

people. It is, therefore, undemocratic at the most basic level, and risks undermining public trust in our political system.

Second, that mass migration risks creating an environment in which ethnic, religious, and cultural sectarianism is the norm. When large numbers of people come to a country over a short period of time, it is very difficult to ensure smooth integration. As such, migrant groups often retain political habits from their home countries, including tribalism and affinity to foreign states. This tendency is borne out over a wide variety of historical contexts and reflects an existential threat to British democracy. When elections are reduced to a demographic headcount, political systems are generally subject to deadlock, conflict, and patronage. Recent polling underscores this divide, with three-quarters of the public viewing immigration as having increased societal divisions.

Third, that mass migration fundamentally undermines the basis on which democracy rests; a settled and/or slowly changing population, which renews itself sustainably, and has the opportunity to change its mind across an electoral cycle or multiple electoral cycles. In other words, elections represent a snapshot of a fixed or organically replenishing population's opinion at any given time. When that population changes rapidly over just a few electoral cycles, particularly where population growth is driven by newcomers with shallow or absent cultural ties to the wider body politic, then that 'snapshot' can no longer be taken as a representative reflection of shifting sentiment amongst the original population. Under the sustained mass migration model, future elections are no longer reflective of shifting opinion, but, in large part, of shifting demographics. Projections indicate that if trends persist, with net migration around current levels and 35 percent of births to foreign-born mothers, the UK population could become more than 50 percent foreign origin by 2060, rendering the native British a minority and altering the democratic landscape irreversibly.

In triplicate, these three phenomena represent a fundamental challenge for British democracy. A continued policy of mass migration risks destroying trust in the democratic process amongst current British citizens, introducing fractious sectarian politics into our political system, and creating a 'new normal', in which, over the medium-to-long term, British democracy becomes a reflection of changing demographics rather than of changing sentiment. In isolation, any one of these changes would be undesirable. In the aggregate, they could very well be fatal.

Preventing this impending disaster will require, first and foremost, bringing the era of mass migration to an end. Our existing model must be replaced with one in which settlement is restricted to a small number of highly skilled, culturally-compatible migrants. However, this alone will not be enough to address the challenge; the process of democratic degradation is already taking place. Labour's recent white paper on restoring control, published in May 2025, proposes linking immigration to skills needs but falls short of the stringent caps required to halt the demographic shift.

As such, we will also need to take more direct steps to protect our democracy. In broad terms, this will mean restricting political participation to those with a long-standing link to the nation and taking decisive action against mechanisms which exacerbate immigration's impact on our

democratic process. This could include extending settlement waiting periods to ten years, as consulted on in late 2025, to ensure deeper ties before full enfranchisement.

This will not be easy, but it will be necessary. The basic operability of our democracy is a basic precondition for every other step which needs to be taken to create the kind of country that the British people want - and deserve - to live in.



# Immigration and democracy

The idea that healthy democracies rely on a stable, cohesive population is not a new one. Perhaps the most persistent, pervasive, and persuasive is the concept of the social contract.

The social contract tradition is most commonly read as a series of attempts to explain how political authority originates from individual consent. Thinkers in this lineage are typically portrayed as constructing hypothetical scenarios, states of nature, founding agreements, original positions, in order to justify why individuals ought to obey the law and recognise the authority of the state. But this reading, while not wrong, misses something more fundamental.

Traced from Hobbes through Locke, Burke, and Mill, the tradition reveals a deepening understanding of a single underlying problem: that democratic governance and the rule of law cannot rest on formal institutions alone but require an underlying unity among the members of a political community, a shared orientation toward common life that makes authority legitimate and law meaningful. The tradition is, in this sense, less a debate about the origins of the state than a sustained inquiry into the conditions that make political order possible at all.
Hobbes establishes the foundation of this insight, though in its starkest and most minimal form. His state of nature is not merely a thought experiment about violence and competition; it is a demonstration that without some collective basis for order, social life becomes structurally impossible. In the absence of a common authority, every individual is simultaneously a potential threat and a potential victim, and the rational response to this condition, anticipatory aggression and perpetual suspicion, only deepens the insecurity it seeks to escape. The war of all against all is not an accident of human wickedness but a logical consequence of the absence of shared expectations.

What the social contract supplies, in this context, is not simply a sovereign equipped with the power to coerce. It is the institutional expression of something that already exists latently among individuals: a shared desire for security, a common recognition that peace is preferable to chaos, and a collective willingness to subordinate individual judgement to a common authority in exchange for stability. The sovereign matters, but only insofar as it gives concrete form to this underlying collective orientation. The rule of law, in Hobbes, is sustained not by force alone but by the tacit alignment of expectations across the community, the widespread recognition that a stable order governed by common rules is preferable to the alternative. Coercion enforces the law at the margins; it is this deeper consensus that makes the law operative in the first place.

Locke inherits this insight and transforms it by giving it an explicitly moral dimension. Where Hobbes locates the unifying impulse in the shared desire for security, Locke finds it in the mutual recognition of rights. Individuals in the state of nature are not merely fearful creatures seeking relief from insecurity; they are already moral agents, bound by natural law, already participants, however imperfectly in a shared moral order that precedes and transcends any political arrangement. Life, liberty, and property are not gifts of government but prior entitlements, recognised by reason, that political institutions exist to protect.

The political community, on this account, formalises and secures a moral consensus that already exists rather than creating one from nothing. Government derives its legitimacy not from the bare fact of its power but from how faithfully it reflects the community's underlying commitment to the protection of rights. And crucially, this has a radical implication: when government ceases to reflect that commitment when it becomes an instrument of oppression rather than a guardian of liberty the community retains the right to withdraw its support and reconstitute authority on better terms. The ultimate source of political legitimacy, for Locke, lies not in the institutions themselves but in the collective moral orientation of the people those institutions are meant to serve. Authority flows upward from the community's shared values, not downward from the apparatus of the state.

Burke extends this logic in a direction that might initially appear conservative but is in fact a further deepening of the same insight. For Burke, the unity of the body politic is not achieved in a single moment of rational agreement but accumulated gradually across generations. Societies are not artifacts of deliberate design, to be reconstructed according to abstract principles whenever those principles seem to demand it. They are living inheritances, shaped by custom, tradition, and the accumulated practical wisdom of those who came before. The social contract, reinterpreted in Burke's terms, becomes something richer and stranger than a hypothetical founding agreement: a partnership between the dead, the living, and those yet to be born, in which each generation receives an inheritance of institutions and norms and passes them on, modified but recognisable, to the next.

Institutions derive their legitimacy, on this view, not from consent in the abstract but from the long continuity of shared practice the embedded expectations and inherited norms that tell a community who it is, what it values, and how power ought to be exercised and constrained within it. Burke's contribution to the tradition is to reveal that the underlying unity of the body politic has a depth that purely rationalist accounts cannot adequately capture. It is historical as much as moral, temporal as much as logical. A community is not merely a collection of individuals who happen to share certain values at a given moment; it is a form of life with its own accumulated character, shaped by experience across time. Any democratic order that severs itself from this continuity that treats its institutions as infinitely malleable instruments to be redesigned according to the fashions of the moment, risks losing the cultural and historical ground on which its legitimacy ultimately rests.

Mill brings the tradition into the conditions of modernity and draws out its implications for democratic culture with the greatest explicitness. His concern is not simply the origin of political authority but its ongoing and active maintenance. A democracy cannot be sustained by its constitutional arrangements alone, however carefully designed; it requires citizens who possess certain habits of mind and character, a genuine and deeply held commitment to individual liberty, a tolerance for disagreement and diversity, and a willingness to engage in open, reasoned, and good-faith public debate. These qualities are not natural endowments distributed automatically across the population. They are cultivated dispositions, developed through sustained participation in public life and continuously reinforced by the norms and expectations of a democratic culture.

Without this civic foundation, democratic institutions are fragile at best and self-defeating at worst. Mill's anxiety about the tyranny of the majority reflects precisely this concern: that democracy, understood merely as majority rule, can become a mechanism for the suppression of minority opinion and individual difference, destroying the very conditions of free inquiry and open debate on which good collective decision-making depends. The formal structures of democracy, elections, representative assemblies, and constitutional rights do not protect against this danger on their own. What protects against it is the character of the citizenry: the extent to which individuals have internalised the norms of liberty, mutual respect, and intellectual openness that make democratic participation genuinely meaningful rather than merely procedural

Mill's insight, then, is that the unity necessary for democracy is not simply a unity of interest, as Hobbes suggested, or of moral principle, as Locke argued, or even of historical inheritance, as Burke maintained. It is a unity of democratic ethos – a shared civic character that must be actively cultivated, maintained, and renewed through education, participation, and the habits of public life. This ethos is never simply given; it is always, to some degree, an achievement, and one that can be lost.

What emerges across these four thinkers, taken together, is a coherent and progressively richer argument. Each successive figure takes the central problem, the conditions under which political authority is stable and legitimate and reveals a further dimension of what satisfying that problem actually requires. Hobbes demonstrates that coercion alone cannot sustain order; beneath enforcement must lie a genuine collective orientation toward common rules. Locke shows that this orientation must have moral content, that it must reflect a shared commitment to the rights and dignity of individuals. Burke shows that this moral consensus has historical roots and a temporal depth that must be respected and preserved rather than casually discarded. And Mill shows that it must be continually renewed through democratic culture, civic education, and the practices of public life.

The tradition moves, in other words, from a minimalist account of what collective life requires toward an increasingly demanding and layered understanding of what the unity of the body politic entails. At each stage, the account becomes less mechanical and more cultural; less institutional and more human.

The rule of law, in this light, is neither a technical achievement nor simply a product of constitutional design. It is the expression of something deeper and less tangible: a broadly shared commitment, often tacit and largely unspoken, to the principles and expectations that make governance legitimate rather than merely powerful. Democracy does not simply require the right institutions; it requires a people capable of sustaining them, bound together not only by legal arrangements but by a common orientation toward justice, liberty, and the demands of collective self-government. The social contract tradition, read in this way, is not primarily a theory of how states come into being. It is an inquiry into what kind of people a democratic community must be, and what must be true of them, in their values, their habits, their historical inheritance, and their civic character, for the institutions they inhabit to function as they are meant to. This is its enduring insight, and it remains as pressing and as unresolved as it has ever been.

Clearly, under the framework of the social contract, rapid demographic shifts, as a product of mass migration, would seem to undermine the conditions of the social contract. After all, if society is so divided - religiously, ethnically, culturally - that citizens struggle to conceive of a truly 'social contract', then laws will not typically be made in the general interest. Democracy will decline, in most cases, into a zero-sum competition for resources and political power.

And how does mass migration undermine the formation of a social contract in practice? A theoretical example of the difference between democracy in a low-or-no migration environment, and democracy in a high migration environment, is illustrative.

It is theoretically possible, for example, that over a protracted period of time, a majority of people in Britain might organically arrive at the idea that 'free mixing' between men and women is morally reprehensible. As a result, a future Government might take steps to restrict this practice. This is very unlikely to happen, but it conceivably could.

In a country with a settled, stable, culturally homogenous population, this process would take place over an extended period of time, in response to shared stimuli and shared context. This opinion would be reached, in other words, because of things which everybody in the country was experiencing. Such a radical shift in public opinion would likely take place over a long period of time and would involve sustained campaigning by proponents of this change; minds would need to be changed, and eventually, some kind of consensus might emerge. That consensus would, at its end point, reflect the culmination of a long deliberative process within a relatively fixed pool of citizens. Assuming that immigration was low, and political participation was restricted to citizens, the bulk of those who entered the electorate throughout the process of deliberation would share the same cultural context as those who were present in the electorate at the beginning of the process, thus ensuring a kind of cohesion. This can be meaningfully described as a 'social contract'.

We may not like the conclusion reached by our hypothetical electorate, but we can, at least, accept that the decision was reached through an organic deliberative process. We might campaign against this change, or oppose it fervently - but we would likely be doing so from a shared set of cultural norms, experiences, and ethical priors, which emerge most easily when a population is stable and settled.

That process is frustrated, fundamentally, by the advent of mass migration. New entrants into the electorate often do not share the same cultural context as the broader citizenry; as such, their objectives, ethical priors, and norms are often wildly different. The individual intellectual 'journey' that new arrivals will undertake will often start from a radically different position to that of the 'journey' undertaken by existing citizens. As the size of this population increases, so will its influence on the political process; the organic process of deliberation being undertaken by the original citizens will necessarily be interrupted by this new pressure.

In this example, if a large number of migrants from a country in which 'free mixing' was prohibited were to come to Britain, they might cause this process to speed up inorganically. They might insist upon laws which accommodated their belief system, and if sizable enough, they might be

able to influence policymakers to act accordingly. The 'social contract' is thus frustrated and is instead subjugated to sectarian interests. The organic process of idea-forming and consensus-building has been interrupted and altered suddenly by changing demographics.

Today, leading liberal nationalists such as David Miller echo the same sentiment. In *On Nationality*, Miller concludes that "a shared national identity...provides the basis for mutual trust and a willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of fellow citizens, which are essential for the functioning of a democratic welfare state." While Miller argues that some degree of diversity within a population is healthy, he also acknowledges the strain that rapid and/or large-scale immigration can place on this shared identity.

The basic conclusion of each of these philosophers is the same: for a liberal democracy to remain a liberal democracy, it must control its borders. If it does not do so, the 'social contract' - a precondition for healthy democracy - cannot form. There will be no 'social contract', and instead politics will descend into sectoral and/or sectarian conflict. Literature on democratic theory consistently emphasises that effective citizenship requires a tangible 'stake in society' - a long-term investment in the community's welfare that ensures voters prioritize collective stability over transient interests. Without this stake, enfranchisement risks diluting democratic legitimacy, as newcomers may lack the rooted commitment needed for informed, cohesive participation.

In many of the examples highlighted by philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes, Burke, and Mill, the divergences within populations were relatively small, in the grand scheme of things. Burke might have been concerned, for example, by territories divided between Protestants and Catholics (such as in Ireland or the Low Countries), or between Europeans who spoke different languages (such as in Austria). In each of these cases, cultural differences proved to be fatal to the functioning of healthy, shared, democratic institutions.

But in the modern day, the cultural differences between new arrivals and the settled citizenry are much broader and more fundamental than in Mill's day. Even leaving aside disagreements on particular ethical issues (such as abortion or women's rights), many new arrivals to Britain come from cultures where the fundamental understanding of democratic participation is radically different to that which is normal in Britain. This underscores the need for stringent citizenship criteria that enforce a 'stake in society,' such as extended residency and integration requirements, to preserve democratic integrity. Britain's post-imperial model, which grants voting rights to Commonwealth citizens after minimal residence, dilutes this stake, enfranchising those without deep ties and clashing with core democratic principles.

For centuries, democracy - and before democracy, political participation - in Britain has relied upon the idea that we act as individuals. In the aggregate, our individual expressions of self-interest contribute towards a broader 'national interest'; or, in the words of JS Mill, "the worth of a state, in the long run, is in the worth of the individuals composing it."

While this idea is not exclusive to Britain, it does have deep roots here. According to historians such as Alan Macfarlane and Peter Laslett, Britain - and England in particular - has had a unique model of social arrangement since at least the 13th century. Namely, it has largely been

constituted of parents, with their children, living in their own property, with relatively few obligations to an extended kin network.

This unique social structure, alongside low rates of consanguineous marriage, birthed a culture in which individuals and families were mobile, free to move in search of economic opportunity, and relatively self-reliant. Without strong ties to extended kin, British families were free to migrate internally according to their economic needs, bringing them into close contact with strangers. This, in turn, created a culture in which individuals needed to rely on strangers, rather than on family members or members of a broader clan/kin network. In response to this pressure, norms emerged which prized individual responsibility and trust between strangers.

After all, if strangers cannot rely on blood ties, they must learn to trust and support one another. We might colloquially call this a 'high trust society'. In high trust societies, the individual, rather than the clan or kinship network, is the basis of social organisation. We act, in the social, economic, and political arenas, according to our own individual interests, mediating this against a sense of broader social responsibility.
These norms are deeply unusual in the global context. According to the French anthropologist Emmanuel Todd, the 'absolute nuclear' family structure, which helped to create these individualist norms in England, is uncommon in most of the world. In fact, he identifies this model as the norm in only a few areas of north-western European, namely England, the Netherlands, Denmark, southern Norway, and north-western France.

Instead, in much of the world, communitarian family structures predominate; across most of Africa, Asia, and South America, this is the norm. In communitarian cultures, the individual and/or family unit is not the only consideration in political decision-making. In communitarian cultures, it is often common to put kinship, clan, cultural, sectarian, or religious affiliations before individual interests. Under the Millian framework, it would be troubling enough to live in a country in which different groups have divergent political and ethical norms. This is made even more troubling when the newly-arrived groups come from cultures in which political activity is largely conducted along sectarian lines. These communitarian norms compound the divergence of values and norms; expression of that divergence becomes not just a likelihood, but a social responsibility. Mass migration from such cultures risks eroding the 'stake in society' that underpins British democracy, as newcomers may prioritize imported loyalties over national cohesion.

Advocates of mass migration often argue that, under the right conditions, new arrivals will generally adopt the norms of the country in which they arrive. Under this optimistic framework, the ancestral communitarianism of new immigrants would have little-to-no impact on political behaviour; upon arriving in Britain, we would expect most migrants to begin behaving as rational individuals, contributing on a personal basis to the formulation of a broader 'social contract'.

However, as the American economist Garett Jones argues in his seminal work, 'The Culture Transplant', "immigration, to a large degree, creates a culture transplant, making the places that migrants go a lot like the places they left. And for good and for ill, those culture transplants shape a nation's future prosperity." Across a wide variety of examples, Jones identifies one commonality

- rather than conforming to the culture in which they find themselves, immigrants actually tend to make their host country a little more like their home country.

Jones' thesis focuses largely on approaches to and engagement with the economy. However, there is significant evidence that his thesis is applicable to other arenas as well. In 2014, Dimant, Krieger, and Redlin published a comprehensive study on the impact of migration on destination-country corruption levels.

According to their analysis of the immigration stocks of OECD countries between 1984 and 2008, "immigration from corruption-ridden origin countries boosts corruption in the destination country." Often, this corruption is enabled by clan-based or kin-based practices imported from the origin country, suggesting that these behaviours are carried over by migrants into their host countries, even across multiple generations.

In short, the emergence of a 'social contract' in the context of mass migration would be challenging enough if our only concern was with the number of arrivals. However, given the fact that recent migration to Britain has consisted largely of people from communitarian cultures, in which political sectarianism is the norm, the formation of any 'social contract' is rendered near-impossible. As these new arrivals come to comprise an ever-larger share of the population, it will become extremely challenging to form organic consensus, and the idea of Britain as a 'shared political community' will begin to fray considerably.



# Immigration and British democracy

Taking this philosophical framework as a starting point, we can assess the impact of mass migration on Britain in particular. In doing so, we might ask two questions:

(1) Was the current policy of mass migration a result of the '*social contract*' of British citizens?
(2) How is the ongoing process of mass migration undermining British democracy today?

On this basis, it would be fair to conclude that Britain's post-1997 mass migration has been undemocratic on two levels:

(1) It has run contrary to the repeatedly expressed will of the British people, as measured against election-winning manifestos;
(2) It has undermined the fundamental idea that democracy ought to be understood as a process by which a settled population changes its mind over a fixed period of time, rather than one in which the politically active population is fundamentally altered between each election.

## Was mass migration the '*social contract*' of the British people?

In the British context, no sentiment about mass migration rings truer than the simple idea that '*nobody voted for this*'.

According to analysis conducted by the University of Oxford's Migration Observatory, attitudes towards immigration to Britain have softened over time, but a policy of untrammelled mass migration has never enjoyed clear majority support.[2]

The earliest available indicator on the British public's opinion towards mass migration is found in the 1964 British Election Study. At that time, 85 percent of those polled agreed with the idea that '*too many immigrants have been let into the country*.' This sentiment has remained consistent whenever BES has polled immigration - with 86 percent in agreement in 1966 and 1979, 77 percent in agreement in 1983, 76 percent in agreement in 1987, 71 percent in agreement in 2015, 66 percent in agreement in 2017, and 52 percent in agreement in 2019.

Across that period (1966-2019), the British public has softened, in relative terms, in its approach to migration - but at no point has it expressed a clear desire for more immigration. This trend is borne out by other polls, conducted closer to the advent of mass migration in 1997. Ipsos-Mori polling on immigration in 1964 identified that 64 percent of Britons agreed with the idea that '*there are too many immigrants in Britain*', falling to 61 percent in 1997, but rising again to 66 percent in 2000.

[2] UK Public Opinion towards Immigration: Overall Attitudes and Level of Concern, The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 24th January 2025

However, public opinion polling is by no means an uncomplicated measure. Outcomes can differ widely, depending on how questions are framed - and any good pollster will be able to explain that there are often marked differences between stated and revealed preference. For example, the European Social Survey frames its main question around immigration as follows:

> "Allow immigrants of a different race/ethnicity to come and live in the UK"

According to that metric, the British public has become significantly more pro-migration. In 2002, 50 percent of respondents replied either 'none' or 'a few'; by 2023, this had fallen to 25 percent, with a low watermark of 19 percent recorded in 2021.

However, this apparent softening can be deceiving. It may be the case that, given the framing of the question, some respondents were uncomfortable with direct engagement with the racial or ethnic dimension of immigration policy. It may be that some respondents were primarily interested in the scale of migration, rather than the composition. It may be the case that, due to changing social and political contexts, some respondents were uncomfortable with publicly expressing views that might be regarded as 'racist'.

Given the deficiencies of public polling as a method of measuring public opinion, it cannot be taken as a straightforward measure of public sentiment. There will always be caveats. However, one trend emerges clearly - in Britain, **there has never been a decisive majority in favour of mass-migration, particularly in the pre-mass migration period**. There has been a trend away from explicitly voicing racial or cultural concerns about immigration - at least, away from doing so in front of pollsters -, but concern about immigration has remained high. There has certainly never been a clear majority in favour of the kind of untrammeled mass migration that we have seen in the post-Covid world.

Another way in which we can measure historic attitudes towards immigration in Britain is by looking at the manifesto pledges made by election-winning parties. Our first-past-the-post system relies on the shared understanding that Governments do not derive their democratic legitimacy from the popular vote, but by winning the majority of seats in Parliament. As such, the manifesto pledges made by election-winning parties can be said to have received the democratic consent of the British people.

It ought to be remembered that no election-winning party has achieved a majority of the vote since 1931, when Stanley Baldwin's Conservatives received 55 percent of the vote. General elections are not, therefore, a perfect proxy for understanding the majority opinion amongst the British public.

They nevertheless provide a useful indication of public sentiment at any given time; more importantly, they provide an indication of the policies that each new government has, in theory, promised to implement.

## Table A: manifesto pledges by election-winning parties on immigration, 1979-2024

| Election | Winning Party | Share of the vote | Manifesto pledge on immigration |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1979** | Conservative | 43.9% | "We shall introduce a new British Nationality Act to define entitlement to British citizenship and the right of abode in this country."<br><br>"We shall end the practice of allowing permanent settlement for those who come here for a temporary stay."<br><br>"We shall severely restrict the issue of work permits." |
| **1983** | Conservative | 42.4% | "By passing the British Nationality Act, we have created a secure system of rights and a sound basis for control in the future; and we will continue to pursue policies which are strict but fair." |
| **1987** | Conservative | 42.2% | "Immigration for settlement is now at the lowest level since control of Commonwealth immigration first began in 1962. Firm but fair immigration controls are essentially for harmonious and improving community relations."<br><br>"We will tighten the existing law to ensure that the control over settlement becomes even more effective." |
| **1992** | Conservative | 41.9% | "We are determined to maintain our present system of immigration controls unless we have evidence that other arrangements would be equally satisfactory and cost-effective."<br><br>"But an increasing number of would-be immigrants from Eastern Europe and other parts of the world seek to abuse our openness to genuine refugees." |
| **1997** | Labour | 43.2% | "There are, rightly, criteria for those who want to enter this country to join a husband or wife. We will ensure that these are properly enforced."<br><br>"Retention of the national veto over key matters of national interest, such as ... immigration." |
| **2001** | Labour | 40.7% | *No explicit promises made on immigration* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2005** | Labour | 35.2% | "We will ensure that only skilled workers are allowed to settle long-term in the UK, with English language tests for everyone who wants to stay permanently and an end to chain migration." |
| **2010** | Conservative | 36.1%[3] | "We will take steps to bring net migration back to the levels of the 1990s - tens of thousands a year, not hundreds of thousands." |
| **2015** | Conservative | 36.9% | "We will reduce the number of people coming to our country with tough new welfare conditions and robust enforcement. We will keep our ambition of delivering annual net migration in the tens of thousands, not the hundreds of thousands." |
| **2017** | Conservative | 42.3%[4] | "We also believe that immigration should be controlled and reduced, because when immigration is too fast and too high, it is difficult to build a cohesive society."<br><br>"It is our objective to reduce immigration to sustainable levels, by which we mean annual net migration in the tens of thousands, rather than the hundreds of thousands we have seen over the last two decades." |
| **2019** | Conservative | 43.6% | "Introduce a firmer and fairer Australian-style points-based system, so that we can decide who comes to this country on the basis of the skills they have and the contribution they can make."<br><br>"There will be fewer low-skilled migrants and overall numbers will come down." |
| **2024** | Labour | 33.7% | "Our economy has become overly dependent on workers from abroad to fix skills shortages. As a result, we have seen net migration reach record highs; more than triple the level than at the last election in 2019. The overall level must be properly controlled and managed. Failure to do so reduces the incentives for businesses to train locally. **So, Labour will reduce net migration**." |

[3] Following the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party entered into coalition with the Liberal Democrats, who received 23% of the vote

[4] Following the 2017 general election, the Conservative Party entered into a confidence-and-supply agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party, who received 0.9% of the vote

At almost every general election since 1979, the winning party has promised to reduce or control migration. Not a single election-winning manifesto has ever promised to pursue a policy of mass migration, or to deliberately increase numbers as part of a particular economic agenda.

In the simplest possible terms, mass migration has never enjoyed the consent of a clear majority of the British people. In relative terms, opinions have softened over time, but no Government at any point since 1974 has been elected on a platform of mass migration.

**At the most basic level, Britain's experiment with mass migration has therefore been undemocratic.** The British people were never asked whether they wanted mass migration - if they had been asked, they would most likely have said no. They have consistently voted for parties promising to control and reduce immigration. Time and time again, their wishes have been ignored; indeed, migration has increased markedly over the aforementioned period.

## How is mass migration impacting the process of '*social contract*' formation in modern Britain?

It is extremely challenging to determine how mass migration has shaped the outcome of recent British elections; it is equally difficult to quantify how exactly the introduction of new populations has influenced the emergence of Britain's 'social contract'. Until recently, Britain's ethnic and religious minority communities were fairly small. Polling them was difficult, and so their influence on electoral outcomes is hard to determine with any certainty. Often, the surveys which were conducted used excessively broad categories, or focused on 'ethnic minority' voters rather than 'migrant' voters.

However, by reference to qualitative examples and ongoing trends, we can begin to build a picture of how mass migration is shaping the British electoral landscape.

At this initial stage, it is worth qualifying that, in many cases, immigrants who arrive in the UK are not able to vote. A Chinese student who attends a British university, for example, will be unable to vote - though their financial contribution to the university might influence that institution's behaviour in other ways.

However, due to the peculiar legacy of the British Empire, many new migrants can, in fact, vote. Traditionally, those living in Britain's overseas dominion were considered British subjects, with the same rights as those in Great Britain. However, as global realities shifted, the British Nationality Act 1948 created a distinction between British subjects and 'Commonwealth citizens'. The latter group still enjoyed generous rights, including the right to settle automatically in the UK and the right to vote in UK elections. At that time, the Commonwealth was small, and was composed mostly of culturally compatible settler-origin states, such as Canada and Australia. The number of Commonwealth citizens living in the UK was low, and those who did live here were mostly well-integrated, with families who could often trace a direct ancestral link back to Britain. This system, rooted in imperial history, was intended to maintain ties across a shrinking

empire, but it has evolved into an anomaly among modern democracies, where voting rights are typically reserved for citizens who have demonstrated a long-term stake in society through integration and commitment.

However, since 1948, the Commonwealth has expanded considerably. The Commonwealth now has 56 member states, with the majority in Africa and Asia. Its total population is nearly 3 billion - of whom nearly 2 billion are adults. If these adults immigrate to the UK, they have an automatic right to vote in British elections, from the day of their arrival. Most Commonwealth member states do not reciprocate this right. This lack of reciprocity highlights the system's obsolescence, as it allows immediate enfranchisement without requiring the kind of stake in society - such as years of residency, cultural assimilation, or economic contribution - that ensures voters prioritize the nation's long-term welfare over transient or imported interests. Unlike most democracies, where citizenship demands proof of investment in the community to foster mutual trust and democratic stability, Britain's model risks diluting this essential bond.

While data on the exact number of Commonwealth citizens living in the UK is not published by the Office for National Statistics, we do know that, at the time of the 2021/22 census, the UK was home to 369,232 Indian nationals, 166,420 Pakistani nationals, 117,644 Nigerian nationals, 60,482 Bangladeshi nationals, and hundreds of thousands more from other Commonwealth countries. This number excludes those Commonwealth-origin migrants who have become British citizens; it is simply a measure of those holding a passport from each of the respective countries mentioned here. And yet, because of our laws around Commonwealth voting eligibility, all of these individuals are able to vote in British elections. Recent estimates suggest that over a million non-citizens from Commonwealth countries are eligible to vote, a figure that underscores the scale of this electoral anomaly in a nation where democratic participation should reflect a genuine stake in society's future.

What's more, given that the era of mass migration has now been upon us for nearly thirty years, many immigrants have now achieved citizenship, on terms which did not necessarily guarantee their integration into the broader fabric of British society. Many of these migrants now have children or grandchildren who, because of the scale and pace of mass migration, have been able to retain close ties to their ethnic, religious, or cultural community, without truly integrating into British society at large. This raises concerns about whether such voters possess the stake in society necessary for informed, cohesive democratic engagement, as literature on citizenship emphasises that true participation requires a shared commitment to national values and collective well-being.

So what do we know about how migrant voters (and their descendants) behave in the democratic arena?

According to polling conducted by YouGov before the 2024 general election[5], we know that ethnic minority voters - a broad category which includes both migrants and the descendants of migrants - express very different political priorities to indigenous White British citizens.

[5] Ethnic minority Britons at the 2024 general election, Tanya Abraham, Yougov, June 28th 2024

Nationwide, 33.7 percent of all voters backed the Labour Party, 23.7 percent voted Conservative, 14.3 percent voted Reform, 12.2 percent voted Liberal Democrat, and 6.4 percent voted for the Green Party. Major parties which are unambiguously 'of the right' (namely the Conservatives and Reform) won 38 percent of the vote.

However, this picture is markedly different amongst ethnic minority Britons. 72 percent of Black Britons declared an intention to vote Labour, with just 18 percent intending to vote for either the Conservatives or Reform. Indian voters, by contrast, were roughly as likely to vote for right-leaning parties as the general population (37 percent), but were much more likely than average to choose the Conservatives (32 percent amongst Indians versus 24 percent nationally). Pakistani and Bangladeshi voters were even more left leaning; just 10 percent declared an intention to vote for a party of the right. However, a large chunk of these voters declared an intention to vote for either the Green Party (29 percent) or 'Other' (10 percent). The Labour Party has traditionally been able to rely on these voters - in 2017, support for Labour amongst Pakistanis and Bangladeshis stood at more than 90 percent.[6]

These divergences are interesting but not, in and of themselves, conclusive. They might be the result of differing socioeconomic profiles amongst different ethnic groups; the divergence between, say, Black voters and the general population might be a feature of the particular economic circumstances of Black voters.

But in the same poll, we see that, for some ethnic minority groups, membership of that group is not merely influential in helping to determine political affiliation, but fundamental. A full 41 percent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi voters said that 'the situation in Gaza and Israel' is one of the most important factors in deciding who to vote for. While British citizens from many different communities have strong views on the ongoing situation in Gaza and Israel, that a foreign conflict should prove to be such a prescient issue at a national general election is deeply unusual. Britain has limited influence over developments in Gaza and Israel; the war in Gaza does not have a major influence on the day-to-day lives of most ordinary Britons.

And yet, for a large number of people in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, this foreign conflict was decisive. So much so that, in many traditionally Labour-held seats, independent candidates representing the Muslim community defeated Labour incumbents. Four MPs were elected as independents in heavily Muslim seats. Each of these four candidates was endorsed by 'The Muslim Vote', a campaign group which aims to maximise the electoral impact of Muslim voters.

[6] Ethnic minorities at the 2017 British General Election, Nicole Martin and Omar Khan, Runnymede Trust, February 2019

## Table B: performance of 'The Muslim Vote' endorsed candidates in the top 20 most Muslim constituencies in the UK, 2024 general election[7]

| Constituency | Muslim % | IND/GRN/WPGB Vote % |
|---|---|---|
| Bradford West | 62.4 | 50.2 |
| Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley | 57.5 | 41.4 |
| Birmingham Ladywood | 53.1 | 42.7 |
| East Ham | 50.0 | 31.4 |
| Bethnal Green and Stepney | 49.9 | 46.2 |
| Blackburn | 49.5 | 50 |
| Bradford East | 46.7 | 32.2 |
| Dewsbury & Batley | 46.3 | 46.5 |
| Birmingham Perry Barr | 45.3 | 43.4 |
| Birmingham Yardley | 45,1 | 34.7 |
| Ilford South | 43.6 | 35 |
| Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North | 39.6 | 33.5 |
| Poplar and Limehouse | 38.8 | 27.9 |
| Leicester South | 37.2 | 45.1 |
| Manchester Rusholme | 36.5 | 37.3 |
| Stratford and Bow | 34.5 | 39.5 |
| Luton North | 34.4 | 26.4 |
| Oldham West, Chadderton, and Royton | 33.7 | 34.1 |
| Slough | 32.9 | 36.4 |
| Ilford South | 32.5 | 35 |

Nationwide, Independents, Green and Workers Party of Great Britain candidates received just 9.1 percent of the vote. In every single one of the twenty constituencies with the largest Muslim population, candidates standing under the same designations received more than 26 percent of the vote. There is, clearly, a marked difference between the '*social contract*' of the British

[7] Interactive table of religious diversity by constituency, Henry Jackson Society

population at large, and the sectarian will of Muslim voters who are, invariably, either migrants or the descendants of migrants.

Alongside former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, the four independent MPs sit as the 'Independence Alliance', the official colours of which are green, white, black, and red. It is no coincidence that these colours are also the colours of the Palestinian flag. The group calls for a total arms embargo on Israel, an end to Israeli settlements, and the immediate recognition of a Palestinian state.

Once again, a great many people in Britain have strong views on the Israel-Palestine conflict - but for very few of those voters does this single foreign conflict occupy such an outsized position in their political consciousness. Returning once more to the 'social contract' process described above, the strong views that these Muslim voters have on the Israel-Palestine conflict derive from a different context, a different consciousness, and different priorities to the population at large. Many within this group will understand their interests as distinct from the wider British population, and so their opinions are not shaped by the broader process of deliberation by which the whole population reaches decisions.

The divergence between Independent Alliance MPs and the broader British public is not confined to the foreign policy sphere. Speaking in the debate on a Conservative proposal to restrict marriage between first-cousins, Dewsbury MP Iqbal Mohamed argued that:

> *"An estimated 35-50% of all sub-Saharan African populations either prefer or accept cousin marriage, and it is extremely common in the Middle East and South Asia. The reason the practice is so common is that ordinary people see family intermarriage as something that is very positive overall; as something that helps to build family bonds and puts families on a more secure financial foothold."*[8]

In appealing directly to the cultural norms of "*sub-Saharan African populations*" and "*the Middle East and South Asia*", Mohamed makes clear the way in which mass migration and rapid demographic change undermines the formation of a democratic 'social contract'. His argument was not couched in practical concerns about the bill, or in any appeal to Britain's indigenous traditions around marriage and family formation. Instead, it was an explicit argument that Parliament ought not to enact a particular piece of legislation, on the grounds that it might run contrary to the established cultural practices of newly arrived groups. His argument does not reflect the latest evolution in an ongoing cultural dialogue about the prohibition of cousin marriage – indeed, it is the opposite. It is an explicit appeal to foreign cultural norms, in the context of a national debate around a policy area in which Britain's native norms are very distinct.

This trend is not, by any means, confined to the Independent Alliance. In response to the rising threat of the 'Gaza independents', Labour MPs in at-risk seats have begun voicing opinions which reflect the concerns of particular minority groups, and which are often starkly out of step with the British mainstream.

[8] Marriage (Prohibited Degrees of Relationship) Bill, Hansard, Tuesday 10th December 2024

Speaking at Prime Minister's Questions in November 2024, Tahir Ali, Labour MP for Birmingham Hall Green & Moseley, asked whether the Government would "*commit to introducing measures to prohibit the desecration of all religious texts and the prophets of the Abrahamic religions?*".[9] In other words, a sitting Labour MP called upon the Government to introduce a blasphemy law, which would specifically protect "*the Abrahamic religions*", namely Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. While it is theoretically possible that Ali's question was motivated by a desire to resurrect and expand historic prohibitions against criticism of the Church of England, it seems far more likely that it was motivated by the divergent cultural norms of his constituents, the majority of whom are Muslim, and many of whom voted for 'Gaza independents' at the 2024 General Election.

The list goes on and on. At the May 2025 Local Elections, Maheen Kamran was one of several 'Gaza independents' elected in heavily-Muslim wards in Lancashire. Kamran identified "*free mixing*" between men and women as a major issue in Burnley, calling for "*segregated areas*".[10] Concerted, enforced segregation between men and women at the local government level has no organic history in Britain; it seems unlikely that Kamran's fixation on "*free mixing*" is the result of rapidly changing attitudes towards gender relations. Instead, it seems far more likely to be rooted in changing demographics, and the relative growth of populations who come from cultures in which gender segregation is the norm.

The emergence of distinct sectarian voting blocs is the most visible sign of mass migration's fundamental incompatibility with the organic, national democratic process. When elections in large parts of the country are dominated by candidates whose reasoning and political priorities are drawn from an entirely different cultural context, it becomes incredibly difficult to create or identify a clear 'national interest', or even to have a truly 'national conversation'. Instead, elections are reduced to a demographic head-count, with little or no organic process of social contract formation.

In addition, there is growing evidence of bias within local government effected by sectarian politics of the allocation of funding along ethnic and religious lines. For instance, in Tower Hamlets an investigation has been opened over concerns that funding has been diverted to Bangladeshi community groups.[11]

This kind of sectarian political problem is not new. We still see the legacy of mass Irish migration in some areas of contemporary British political life, in the arena of Catholic vs Protestant sectarian politics. In Great Britain, particularly in cities like Glasgow and Liverpool, the arrival of large numbers of Irish migrants in the 19th century - many fleeing famine and economic hardship - brought with them religious divides that echoed the tensions back home. These migrants, both Catholic and Protestant, settled in industrial areas, where sectarian affiliations often aligned with employment, housing, and social networks, leading to persistent community divisions. For

[9] Prime Minister's Questions, 27th November 2024, Hansard
[10] Pro-Gaza councillor calling for segregation of the sexes wins seat, Daniel Martin, The Telegraph, 2nd May 2025
[11] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2026/03/19/tower-hamlets-cash-bangladeshi-groups-review/

instance, in Glasgow, Orange Order parades and football rivalries between Celtic (often associated with Catholic Irish heritage) and Rangers (linked to Protestant working class culture) continue to evoke echoes of conflict, with occasional violence and arrests during marches.

In 2021, a 10,000-strong Orange Order parade in Glasgow led to 14 arrests for anti-social behaviour and sectarian chanting; similarly, in 2024, around 15,000 marchers participated in loyalist parades, resulting in eight arrests across Glasgow and Lanarkshire. Historical data shows that between 2004 and 2005, sectarian incidents reported to police in Scotland increased by 50% to 440, with 64% motivated by anti-Catholic hatred. In the five years before 2011, there were annually between 600 and 700 charges of offences aggravated by religious prejudice. Similar patterns emerged in Liverpool, where Irish Catholic migrants faced discrimination from Protestant majorities, fueling political activism and occasional unrest that influenced local elections and union activities.

The 1909 sectarian riots in Liverpool, arising from attacks on Catholic religious processions, were comparable to those in Belfast, with reports of 3,200 Catholics forced to flee their homes in Everton for safety, and disturbances leaving a legacy of residential segregation into the 20th century. In 1910, The Times noted violent clearances, with Catholics driven from Scotland Road and Protestants from Netherfield Road. Differential voting patterns persist in these areas; in Liverpool, historical Conservative support drew heavily from working-class Protestants via the Orange Lodge and Working Men's Conservative Association, while Catholics leaned towards Labour, a divide that echoed in municipal elections where Protestant alliances secured Tory control until the mid-20th century.

In Glasgow, similar sectarian lines influenced votes, with Protestants favouring Unionist parties and Catholics supporting Labour or nationalist causes, as seen in post-war elections where religious affiliation correlated with party choice. Moreover, support for Irish republicanism among the Irish diaspora in the UK has endured, with groups like the Fenian Brotherhood organizing in cities such as Manchester and Liverpool in the 1860s, leading to events like the 1867 Manchester Martyrs execution, which galvanized republican sentiment. In the 20th century, diaspora networks provided funds and political backing for the IRA, with surveys showing 26% sympathy for republican paramilitaries in Northern Ireland and higher in diaspora communities.

Given the relative similarities between British and Irish culture - shared language, historical ties, and geographic proximity - the fact that these Catholic/Protestant divides have sustained over generations suggests that it's very hard to deal with sectarian voting as a problem. Even with cultural compatibility, imported religious and communal loyalties have lingered.

# Immigration and incentives

However, it ought to be made clear that this process has not, in general, happened as the result of deliberate 'electoral gerrymandering' on the part of successive Governments. In most cases, mass migration has been driven by factors such as short-term economic expediency, humanitarian concerns, or failure to manage and control the migration system.

Despite this, it is also true that the ongoing realities of mass migration create an incentive structure in which politicians are encouraged to either actively support, or turn a blind eye to, the negative impacts of mass migration on democracy. If political parties, or individual politicians, are reliant upon the votes of particular immigrant or immigrant-descended groups, it becomes much more difficult for those parties or politicians to restrict immigration from the relevant source countries.

If, for example, a politician is reliant on the support of EU nationals in their seat, it is unlikely that the same politician will be willing to support restrictions on EU immigration – it would clearly run contrary to their electoral self-interest. In the same way, if a party were reliant on the votes of EU immigrants, that party would be less likely to restrict migration from the EU; it may even tacitly support it, regardless of the British public's broader view on migration from the EU.

This example is not a mere hypothetical. In the wake of Brexit, parties of the political left, such as Labour and the Liberal Democrats, have pushed for expansive rights for EU citizens already settled in the UK, including not just residency but also voting rights. This push stems, in part, from a suspicion that EU voters – many of whom opposed Brexit and favour closer ties with Europe – are more likely to back pro-European, left-leaning parties. For instance, during his 2020 Labour leadership campaign, Keir Starmer pledged "full voting rights for EU nationals", arguing that their treatment post-Brexit had been "shameful" and that those who live and pay taxes in the UK should have a say in elections. By May 2023, Starmer confirmed that Labour was "looking at" extending the vote to EU citizens in general elections, a move that could enfranchise around 3.4 million EU nationals, potentially boosting support for parties advocating softer Brexit positions or re-engagement with the EU. The Liberal Democrats have gone further, consistently calling for EU citizens to retain or regain voting rights in local and general elections, framing it as a matter of fairness but also aligning with their pro-EU stance, which appeals to a voter base that includes many remain supporters among EU nationals.

These efforts extend to the EU Settlement Scheme; many on the political left advocated for automatic settled status for the over 6 million EU citizens who applied by 2021, rather than the application-based system implemented by the Conservative government. Labour figures, including Starmer, criticised the scheme's barriers and called for streamlined rights, suspecting that grateful EU voters would lean towards parties promising to protect and expand their entitlements, particularly those opposing hard Brexit. The Conservatives accused Labour of "gerrymandering" through such proposals, highlighting how enfranchising EU citizens – who polls show were overwhelmingly pro-Remain (with estimates of 70-80 percent voting against Brexit) – could shift electoral dynamics in urban areas with high EU populations, like London, where EU nationals make up around 13 percent of residents.

In this example case, we see the aforementioned incentive structure in action. The left's advocacy for EU citizens' rights creates a situation in which it becomes difficult for those politicians to objectively assess the advantages and disadvantages of continued EU migration or integration. Indeed, they are incentivised to support more expansive rights for EU nationals, particularly insofar as voting and settlement are concerned, because this is the stated will of a constituency that aligns with their pro-European leanings.

This is despite the fact that, by and large, the British public has consistently voted for parties which promise to reduce migration – including, presumably, from the EU, which represented a major source of net migration pre-Brexit. In other words, the 'social contract' of the British public is thus subjugated to the sectional interests of particular voters.

Nation-wide, this risks creating a ratchet effect, in which continued mass migration begets a policy of permanent mass migration. This is particularly true if migrant and migrant-origin communities act as a 'political bloc', exercising outsized influence through community organisation and a less individualized understanding of 'self-interest'.

## Table C: Local Election May 2026

There were local elections across 136 unitary, metropolitan, district and London councils in England, alongside elections for at least 6 directly elected mayors, covering a total of approximately 5,066 seats. In addition to elections in Scotland and Wales for the devolved parliaments. In total around 40 candidates were elected on explicitly pro Gaza tickets. This voting has a particular impact on the Labour vote as in the 58 council wards with a more than 20 percent Muslim vote, Labour's share of the vote was 21 percent down on 2021.[12] In addition to these results in Scotland, where the eligibility on standing for election is lower than in England, A Mr 'Q Manivannan' an Indian national on a temporary student visa gained election as an MSP.

Some of these areas where they were elected overlap with locations previously identified in Table B, where voting patterns have shown strong alignment with specific community groups.

| Area | Election Type | Key Context | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tower Hamlets** | Council + Mayoral | Existing local political base | Victory for Lutfur Rahman and his Aspire party |
| **Birmingham** | Council | Large, diverse urban populations | 13 pro Gaza Independents elected |
| **Blackburn and Darwen** | Council | Large Muslim population | 13 pro Gaza Independents |
| **Newham** | Council | Large Muslim population | 24 (pro Gaza Newham Independents |

[12] https://www.localgov.co.uk/Over-40-pro-Palestinian-candidates-elected-/60330

## Case study: The United States of America

The risk posed by mass migration to the formation of a democratic 'social contract' is not a theoretical one. Indeed, some other Anglophone countries have experienced similar trends over the past few centuries. These example cases serve as both a warning about the potential risk, and a blueprint for how the issue might be addressed in modern Britain.

It is worth noting that, for the purposes of this paper, we have focused on examples in which **mass migration within the context of a settled democracy in particular** has driven demographic change. There are numerous cases in which sectarian or communitarian politics has prevented the formation of a shared national 'social contract' – Lebanon, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, etc. –, but, while these examples might be informative insofar as they provide lessons about how sectarian politics can operate, it is these Anglophone democracies which provide the most appropriate point of comparison with modern Britain.

The United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries offers perhaps the most useful case study. From 1892 to 1954, the 'Ellis Island era' saw over 12 million immigrants arrive on American shores, predominantly from Southern and Eastern Europe, reshaping the cultural and political landscape of cities like New York and Chicago. The ethnic enclaves and political machines that emerged often prioritized group loyalties over a cohesive national interest, fragmenting the democratic process. The eventual response – through restrictive immigration policies, antitrust measures, and reforms targeting ethnic networks – reflects an attempt to restore a unified political community, though not without significant hurdles. This case underscores the tension between mass migration and the cultivation of a shared civic vision, with clear implications for contemporary Britain, where communitarian cultures among new arrivals similarly complicate the emergence of a collective will.

Between 1892 and 1954, Ellis Island, the federal immigration station in New York Harbor, processed an average of 5,000 immigrants daily at its peak, with a record 1,004,756 arrivals in 1907 alone. Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Russians, and others, fleeing economic hardship and persecution, comprised the bulk of this wave, distinct from earlier Northern and Western European immigrants in their languages, religions, and communitarian traditions. Approximately 40% of modern Americans trace their ancestry to these Ellis Island arrivals, a testament to the scale of this demographic shift. The federal government, having assumed control from state-managed systems like New York's Castle Garden (which processed eight million immigrants from 1855 to 1890), maintained a relatively open-door policy. Only about 1 percent of the 25 million European immigrants arriving between 1880 and World War I were excluded, typically for health or economic reasons, reflecting a system designed to accommodate mass entry. These newcomers settled predominantly in urban centers, with one-fourth of 1907 arrivals concentrating in New York and New Jersey, and others moving to industrial hubs like Illinois and Pennsylvania. The resulting ethnic enclaves preserved cultural practices from immigrants' countries of origin, often resisting assimilation into a broader American identity. As Garett Jones argues in *The Culture Transplant*, such migrations act as cultural transplants, making destination countries more like the places immigrants left. In America, this manifested in clan-based social

structures and political behaviors that prioritized ethnic loyalty over a shared civic purpose, challenging the concept of a 'social contract.'

Nowhere was this dynamic more evident than in the municipal politics of New York and Chicago, where ethnic political machines thrived by leveraging group identities. In New York, Tammany Hall, the Democratic Party's political machine, became a powerhouse of Irish immigrant influence. By 1860, over 200,000 Irish lived in New York City, and Tammany capitalised on their numbers, offering jobs, housing, and social services through ward heelers in exchange for votes. This patronage system, while integrating immigrants into political life, fostered a transactional loyalty to the Democratic Party rather than a commitment to a broader civic good. Under leaders like William M. "Boss" Tweed in the 1860s and 1870s, Tammany orchestrated voter fraud and graft, with estimates suggesting Tweed's ring siphoned off $45 million (equivalent to over $1 billion today) from city coffers. These practices entrenched Irish dominance but deepened ethnic divisions, as Italian and Jewish immigrants later formed their own voting blocs, further fragmenting the political landscape. In Chicago, a similar pattern emerged with the Democratic machine under mayors like Anton Cermak, who, in the 1920s and 1930s, built a multi-ethnic coalition of Czechs, Poles, and Italians. By 1930, Chicago's foreign-born population reached 25% of its 3.4 million residents, with Poles alone numbering over 400,000. Cermak's machine rewarded ethnic groups with patronage jobs - over 30,000 city positions were controlled by the machine in the 1920s - while ensuring loyalty through kin-based networks. These machines, while effective at mobilizing voters, prioritized group interests over a collective vision, undermining the 'social contract' by fostering a politics of factionalism and clientelism.

The impact on municipal governance was profound. In both cities, political machines operated as de facto ethnic fiefdoms, where loyalty to one's group trumped broader civic ideals. A 1907 study by Robert Hunter estimated that 60 percent of New York City's budget was diverted to patronage and corrupt contracts, starving public services like schools and sanitation. In Chicago, the machine's control over aldermanic elections meant that policy decisions often reflected ethnic bargaining rather than citywide priorities. For instance, Italian wards secured a disproportionate share of infrastructure projects in the 1920s, while Polish communities gained police protection for their businesses, often at the expense of other groups. This fragmented governance eroded the notion of a shared political community, as citizens' allegiances lay with their ethnic leaders rather than a unified polity. As Jones' thesis suggests, these immigrants brought cultural norms - often rooted in kin-based or communitarian practices - that shaped political behavior, making American cities more like the hierarchical, sectarian societies of Southern and Eastern Europe. A 2014 study by Dimant, Krieger, and Redlin, though focused on modern migration, offers a parallel insight: immigration from corruption-prone countries tends to increase corruption in destination countries, a pattern evident in the machine-driven graft of the Ellis Island era. In New York and Chicago, the absence of a 'social contract' was not merely a function of numbers but of the cultural transplants that reinforced group loyalty over collective democratic ideals.

The United States eventually sought to address these challenges through a series of reforms aimed at restoring a cohesive political community. The first major step was restricting immigration to curb the influx of communitarian cultures. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 slashed annual arrivals from over one million to under 150,000 by

1929, prioritising immigrants from Western Europe and effectively closing the borders to mass migration from Southern and Eastern Europe. These laws, while rooted in nativist sentiments, aimed to stabilize the cultural and political landscape, allowing time for assimilation. By 1954, when Ellis Island closed, the foreign-born population had dropped to 5.4 percent of the U.S. total, down from 14.7 percent in 1910. Concurrently, the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, though primarily an economic tool, was used to dismantle monopolistic political machines by targeting their financial underpinnings. In Chicago, for example, federal investigations in the 1930s exposed machine-linked businesses, weakening their economic hold. Additionally, Progressive-era reforms, such as the introduction of nonpartisan elections and civil service exams, reduced the influence of ethnic networks within political parties. In New York, the 1901 Greater New York Charter expanded civil service requirements, cutting Tammany's ability to distribute patronage jobs (from 12,000 in 1898 to under 5,000 by 1910). Federal crackdowns on voter fraud, including the 1920s prosecution of Chicago machine operatives, further eroded ethnic-based political control. These measures, while imperfect, aimed to shift politics toward meritocracy and civic unity, fostering conditions where a 'social contract' could emerge.

Yet, the legacy of this era reveals the enduring challenge of mass migration in democratic societies. The ethnic machines of New York and Chicago, while eventually curtailed, left a lasting imprint on American politics, with group-based voting patterns persisting into the 20th century. The reforms, though effective in reducing overt corruption, did not fully erase the cultural transplants that Jones describes, as ethnic identities continued to shape political behavior in subtler ways. For Britain today, where migration from communitarian cultures similarly fragments the political landscape, the American experience serves as a cautionary tale. The sheer scale of arrivals, combined with the persistence of imported norms, can render the formation of a shared 'social contract' elusive, threatening the cohesion of the democratic polity.

## Case study: Australia

Australia's post-World War II immigration boom offers another instructive case for examining how mass migration can erode the formation of a democratic 'social contract,' much like the United States during the Ellis Island era. From the 1940s to the 1970s, Australia welcomed over two million European immigrants, predominantly from Southern Europe, whose communitarian cultural practices shaped the political landscape of cities like Sydney and Melbourne. Ethnic networks, particularly among Italian and Greek communities, fostered factionalism that prioritised group loyalties over a cohesive national interest, echoing the ethnic machines of New York and Chicago. Australia's response - through tightened immigration policies, electoral reforms, and efforts to dismantle patronage networks - mirrors American attempts to restore civic unity, yet highlights the enduring challenge of cultural transplants, as described by Garett Jones in The Culture Transplant. For contemporary Britain, where migration from communitarian cultures similarly fragments political cohesion, Australia's experience reinforces the cautionary lessons of the U.S., underscoring the difficulty of forging a shared civic vision amidst diverse, clan-based political behaviours.

Following World War II, Australia embarked on an ambitious immigration program under the slogan "populate or perish," driven by economic needs and security concerns. Between 1945 and 1975, approximately 2.5 million immigrants arrived, with Italians (over 250,000 by 1971) and Greeks (160,000 by 1971) forming the largest non-British groups. By 1966, the foreign-born population reached 18.3 percent of Australia's 11.6 million residents, a level comparable to the U.S. at the height of its immigration wave. Unlike earlier Anglo-Celtic migrations, these Southern European immigrants brought distinct cultural practices, including strong kin-based and regional loyalties rooted in their homelands' traditions of patronage and clientelism. The federal government, through the Department of Immigration, actively recruited these migrants, offering assisted passage schemes that covered up to 90 percent of travel costs for Europeans. Most settled in urban centers, with Sydney and Melbourne absorbing over 60 percent of arrivals by 1960. In Melbourne, Italians concentrated in suburbs like Carlton, comprising 25 percent of its population by 1971, while Greeks dominated areas like Richmond. In Sydney, Leichhardt became an Italian hub, with 20,000 Italian-born residents by 1966. These enclaves preserved cultural norms, such as family-based business networks and community associations, which, as Jones argues, acted as cultural transplants, making Australian cities reflect the hierarchical, group-oriented societies of Southern Europe, much as Eastern European immigrants reshaped American urban centres.

In Sydney and Melbourne, ethnic networks translated into political influence, particularly within the Labor Party, which dominated urban politics. Italian and Greek communities, leveraging their growing numbers, formed ethnic associations that functioned as political machines, securing patronage and influence. In Melbourne, the Italian community's Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Emigrati e Famiglie (FILEF), established in the 1960s, mobilized voters in Carlton and Fitzroy, securing Labor candidates' victories in local elections. By 1970, Italian-born councillors held 15 percent of Melbourne's municipal seats in these suburbs, despite Italians being only 6 percent of

the city's population. These leaders channeled resources - such as community grants and public works contracts - to their constituencies, with a 1972 report estimating that 25 percent of Melbourne's municipal budget was allocated to Italian-heavy wards. In Sydney, Greek community organizations, like the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales, played a similar role, controlling voter blocs in Marrickville, where Greeks comprised 20 percent of residents by 1971. These groups ensured loyalty through patronage, such as jobs in council maintenance (over 1,000 positions in Sydney by 1965) and favorable business licensing. These practices, rooted in the clientelist traditions of Southern Europe, paralleled the Irish-dominated Tammany Hall in New York, prioritizing ethnic interests over a broader civic vision and fragmenting the democratic process in ways that hindered a 'social contract.'

The impact on municipal governance was stark, as ethnic factionalism undermined cohesive policy-making. In Melbourne, a 1969 inquiry into municipal spending found that 30 percent of contracts were awarded to Italian- or Greek-owned businesses, often at inflated costs, echoing the corruption seen in American cities like Chicago. In Sydney, ethnic voting blocs skewed infrastructure priorities, with Greek-dominated wards securing disproportionate funding for community centers (e.g., $500,000 for a Marrickville cultural hall in 1970) while broader city needs, like public transport, were underfunded. This mirrored the U.S. experience, where ethnic machines diverted resources to loyal constituencies. As Dimant, Krieger, and Redlin's 2014 study suggests, migration from societies with clan-based norms can increase destination-country corruption, a pattern evident in Australia's urban politics. The persistence of communitarian loyalties - Italian *campanilismo* (regional allegiance) and Greek kin-based networks - meant that political decisions often reflected group bargaining rather than a shared national interest, rendering the 'social contract' elusive. While less overtly corrupt than American machines, these ethnic networks still fractured civic unity, as citizens aligned with community leaders rather than a collective polity, much as in New York's Tammany era.

Australia responded with measures to curb ethnic influence and foster a unified political community, echoing U.S. reforms but tailored to its context. Immigration policy shifted with the gradual dismantling of the White Australia policy in the 1960s and 1970s, replaced by a points-based system by 1973 that prioritized skills over ethnicity, reducing Southern European arrivals from 50,000 annually in the 1960s to under 20,000 by 1980. This slowdown, akin to the U.S.'s 1920s quotas, aimed to stabilize cultural integration. By 1981, the foreign-born population stabilized at 20.6 percent, allowing assimilation efforts to take hold. Electoral reforms also targeted ethnic patronage. The 1971 Commonwealth Electoral Act tightened voter registration, reducing fraudulent enrollments (e.g., 300 invalid registrations uncovered in Melbourne's Carlton in 1970). In New South Wales, the 1968 Local Government Act mandated merit-based hiring, cutting municipal patronage jobs from 5,000 in Sydney in 1965 to 2,000 by 1975. Federal investigations into corruption, such as a 1973 probe into Melbourne's council contracts, led to convictions of ethnic community leaders, weakening their political grip. These reforms, like the U.S.'s civil service expansions and antitrust measures, aimed to shift politics toward meritocracy and civic unity, fostering conditions for a 'social contract' to emerge.

Yet, Australia's post-war experience, like the U.S.'s, reveals the persistent challenge of cultural transplants. Ethnic voting patterns lingered into the 1980s, with Italian and Greek communities maintaining influence in urban Labor strongholds. Australia's case reinforces the U.S. lesson: mass migration, particularly from societies with clan-based traditions, complicates the formation of a shared 'social contract'.

## Case study: Irish Catholic migration to England and Scotland

From 1845 to 1852, the 'Famine era' saw over 1 million Irish Catholic emigrants arrive on British shores, predominantly from rural Ireland, reshaping the cultural and political landscape of cities like Liverpool and Glasgow. The ethnic enclaves and sectarian politics that emerged often prioritised religious loyalties over a cohesive national interest, fragmenting the democratic process. The eventual response – through restrictive poor laws, anti-sectarian legislation, and reforms targeting communal networks – reflects an attempt to restore a unified political community, though not without significant hurdles. This case underscores the tension between mass migration and the cultivation of a shared civic vision, with clear implications for contemporary Britain, where communitarian cultures among new arrivals similarly complicate the emergence of a collective will.

The Great Famine triggered an exodus that averaged around 200,000 Irish Catholics annually at its height, peaking at over 300,000 in 1847 alone. Escaping starvation and eviction from provinces like Connacht and Munster, these migrants stood apart from the native British in religion, Gaelic influences, and clan-oriented traditions. Roughly 25 percent of today's populations in Liverpool and Glasgow claim some descent from these Famine arrivals, highlighting the magnitude of the shift. Under the Tory administration of Sir Robert Peel and later the Whig government of Lord John Russell, the influx was tolerated despite local strains, with few returning home amid industrial labour demands. By 1851, over 80,000 Irish Catholics resided in Liverpool and 59,000 in Glasgow, clustering in urban slums. These settlements clung to homeland customs, slowing integration into a wider British society. As Garett Jones notes in The Culture Transplant, migrations like this import cultural elements, altering host societies to resemble origins more closely. In Britain, this appeared through family-based alliances and politics favouring sectarian ties over unified civic goals, disrupting the concept of a 'social contract.'

In the local governance of Liverpool and Glasgow, sectarian divisions took root most starkly, with religious blocs mobilising around imported grievances. Liverpool's Conservatives forged ties with Protestant Orange Lodges to offset Irish Catholic sway; by 1851, Catholics formed 22 percent of the city, and nationalists like the Irish Nationalist Party seized wards in council votes, demanding home rule and faith-based protections that clashed with Protestant norms. Such systems integrated newcomers politically but bred deals loyal to religious groups, not broader public good. Leaders like Archibald Salvidge in the early 1900s rallied Protestant voters via Orange networks, commanding up to 20,000 ballots in pivotal districts. This hardened Protestant control yet widened rifts, as Irish Catholics built opposing factions, splintering civic life further. Glasgow mirrored this, with Unionists courting Protestant support against Catholic-backed Labour. By 1878, Irish Catholics numbered 332,000 in Scotland, and outfits like the Home Government Association claimed seats in the 1880s, advancing Irish autonomy. Protestant areas locked down extra policing and employment in the 1890s, sidelining others. Overall, this balkanised decision-making, tying allegiances to faith leaders rather than a common framework.

Governance suffered deeply under these strains. Sectarianism turned British locales into religious strongholds, where group fidelity overshadowed civic duties. Census data from 1851 revealed Irish Catholics burdening Liverpool's poor relief at £100,000 yearly (about 10 percent of the budget), diverting funds from essentials like hygiene. Glasgow's ethnic negotiations skewed policies toward faith-based trades, not collective needs. Catholic districts won education subsidies in the 1870s, eating 15 percent of local funds, while Protestants secured parade restrictions favouring their side. Effective for turnout, these setups favoured factional gains over shared aims, eroding the 'social contract' via clientelism and division. Echoing Dimant, Krieger, and Redlin's findings, inflows from divided regions import strife, as seen in Famine-era clashes.

To counter this, successive administrations pursued reforms to rebuild political harmony. Key was curbing inflows and aid to limit communitarian growth; under Russell's Whig ministry, the 1847 Poor Law extensions and later Palmerston's adjustments in the 1850s cut Irish welfare, repatriating over 50,000 by 1852. These steps, economically driven, sought cultural steadiness for blending in. By 1901, Irish-born numbers held at some 500,000. Disraeli's Conservative government advanced the 1870 Education Act to neutralise faith sway in schooling, while Gladstone's Liberals pushed the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act to curb sectarian vote-buying.

## Case Study: The Gorton and Denton by-election 26th February 2026

The Gorton and Denton byelection on the 26th February 2026 was caused by the resignation of the Labour MP Andrew Gwynne led to accusations of sectarianism and electoral malpractice.

The seat is an urban seat within the Manchester metropolitan area comprised of two contrasting areas. The East comprises Denton, a largely white former textile town, and Gorton, Belle Bue and Leverhulme to the West where a substantial Muslim population resides. Overall, the constituency is 57 percent white and 27 percent Asian, mostly Muslims of Pakistani heritage.

The seat was one of the Labour Party's 50 safest seat would normally have been a formality, with a Labour majority of 13,413.

However, the Labour vote became contested from two directions. Firstly, from the Reform Party in the traditional white working-class areas of the seat and secondly by the Green Party, particularly in the Muslim areas of the seat. It is the latter where accusations of sectarian campaigning have come out. These issues have manifested themselves in the following ways.

- Family voting contrary to the Ballot Secrecy Act.
- Election literature in Urdu aimed at one community.
- Postal voting aiding 'Family voting' where coercion could take place at home.
- Commonwealth voting, widening the electorate to new migrants.

Family voting is where family groups enter polling stations and booths and is an offence under the Ballot Secrecy Act. In practice this can lead to compulsion by one family member over others, often the man in a Muslim family over the women and younger family members. In the Gorton and Denton byelection an NGO 'Democracy Volunteers' found that their "team saw family voting in 15 of the 22 polling stations observed, some 32 cases in total, nine cases in one polling station alone. The team observed a sample of 545 voters casting their vote – meaning 12 percent of those voters observed either caused or were affected by family voting." In addition to 'family voting' in the polling booths postal voting would allow an unknown amount of coercion to go on in the home.[13]

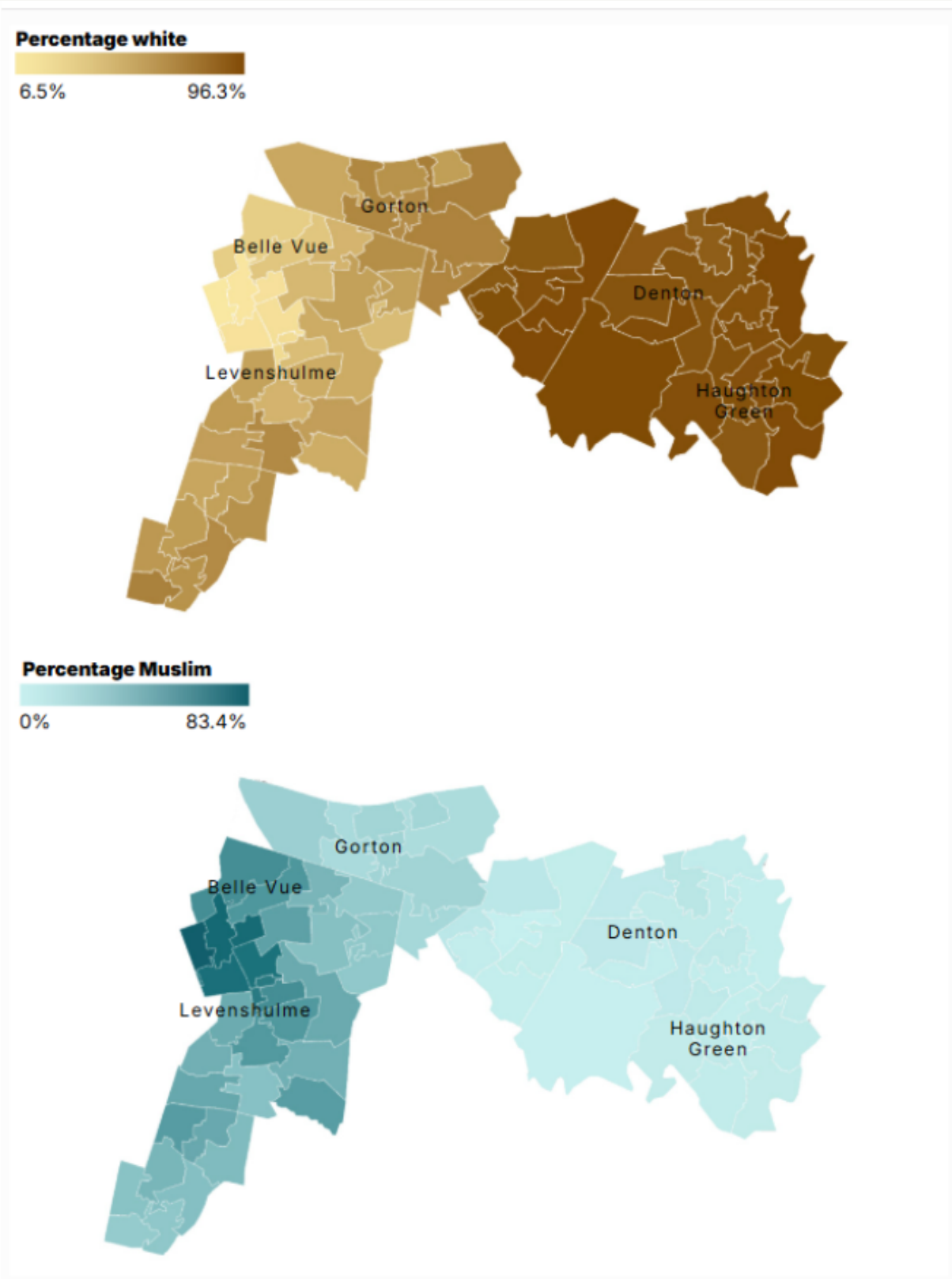
The Green Party was also accused of running literature in Urdu (the language of the Pakistani minority) with messages tailored to a sectarian audience featuring the Prime Ministers of Israel and India.

Lastly, in Gorton and Denton there was a particularly large participation of voters who were not British Citizens allowed to vote under historic rules on voting from Commonwealth citizens.

In total this byelection was one in an ethnically and religiously polarised seat where two separate election campaigns were fought at the same time. One within the Muslim community between

[13] Greater Manchester Police concluded that none of these irregularities met their evidential test. https://www.gmp.police.uk/news/greater-manchester/news/news/2026/march/criminal-investigation-concludes-into-family-voting-allegations/

the Green and Labour Party and another within the White working class community between Labour and the Reform Party. In effect a sectarian election.



## Postal voting

Postal voting was opened up to all voters in 2001 its popularity has expanded from 4.9 percent of valid votes in the 2001 General Election to 21.0 percent in 2019. The prevalence of postal voting varies across the country.

The effects of widespread postal voting on levels of electoral fraud are largely unknown as there is very little resource dedicated to investigating electoral fraud in total little if any dedicated to postal voting. The Electoral Commission and the College of Policing themselves devote almost no consideration to postal ballot fraud in their guidelines, focusing instead on increasing turnout and election day safety.[14],[15] It should therefore be no surprise that there have been no convictions for postal vote fraud arising from the 2019 general election.[16]

However, the absence of convictions does not mean fraud in postal voting does not exist. Research by Manchester University in 2026 found that "Postal votes are vulnerable to fraud via routine handling of votes by either other members of community, or party activists and candidates."[17] They went on to set out the findings of interviews within Muslim communities that found that the "majority of our interviewees both knew and recounted examples of fraud relating to postal votes." They identified the following problems:

- "lack of law enforcement around fraudulent applications for postal votes"
- "undue influence and intimidation both when filling out the vote at home with others present, and during the handling of the vote by party activists, community members and candidates themselves"
- "fraudulent applications to join the electoral register"

In addition to this they identified "kinship networks" involved in delivering votes and playing a role in candidate selection.

While fraud concerning postal ballots is difficult to prove, it is also very difficult to say for certain that it is not widespread and having a material impact on the outcome of elections and individuals within Muslim communities, be it younger voters or women, to Participate in elections.

## Faith Schools

Until 1997 faith schools were exclusively Christian or Jewish however in recent years faith schools have widened their scope and now cater for all the major religions. In England 37 percent of

https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/combined-authority-and-combined-county-authority-returning-officer-guidance-combined-authority/planning-election/managing-risk-electoral-fraud-and-security-election

[15] https://www.college.police.uk/app/policing-elections

[16] https://pa.media/blogs/election-fact-check/fact-check-little-evidence-of-postal-vote-fraud-in-the-uk-2/

[17] Sobolewska, M., Heeg, S. W., Hill, E., & Borkowska, M. (2015). Understanding electoral fraud vulnerability in Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities in England. Electoral Commission. https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/files/31873216/FULL_TEXT.PDF

primaries and 19 percent of secondaries are faith schools. Two-thirds of the faith schools in England are Anglican with most of the rest Roman Catholic. There are also 52 Jewish, 35 Muslim, 13 Sikh, and seven Hindu faith schools.[18] The operate in a range of models; voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, or more recently faith academies, receiving government funding. In addition to these there are independent schools (including 180 private Muslim schools) that are free to set their own ethos. In Northern Ireland faith schools make up a larger percent, up to 90 percent, and have been accused of perpetuating segregation.

While these faith schools can achieve good examination grades there are questions as to whether schools that draw their pupils exclusively from one community, be it a majority national or majority local community or a national or local minority.

Currently, faith schools can set their own faith-based selection criteria. If a faith school is oversubscribed, it may give priority to children whose families meet religious criteria. For new faith schools a 50 percent faith cap has been imposed that means that if a new faith or church free school is oversubscribed, it can only prioritise pupils based on faith for half of the places.[19] This was introduced to counter the impression that successful faith schools would be closed to those of other faiths or none. What it has not addressed is the potentially more important issue of faith schools that are unable, or do not want to attract pupils of other faiths. That would lead to schools where a minority culture predominates to the exclusion of social cohesion. Concerns over segregated education led in Northern Ireland to the Integrated Education Act 2022 aimed at encouraging integrated schools.[20]

In England concerns over faith schools and segregation manifested in the 2014 ‘Trojan Horse’ scandal where 21 schools in the Birmingham area were accused of propagating extremism.[21]

[18] https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/uk-schools/advice/faith-schools-in-the-uk
[19] https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/how-reducing-the-cap-on-faith-school-admissions-will-help-to-raise-standards/
[20] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/15/contents/enacted
[21] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/01/trojan-horse-the-real-story-behind-the-fake-islamic-plot-to-take-over-schools

# Finding the solution

Reversing the negative impacts of mass migration on British democracy is no small task.

**The single most important step that any future Government could take to reduce the impact of mass migration on British democracy is to end the era of mass migration**. The exact mechanisms by which to achieve this are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the examples outlined in this paper are informative in helping us to determine some of the broad principles which should inform this new model. These principles include:

(1) **A significant reduction in scale**, ensuring that the numerical impact of immigration on British democracy is limited;

(2) **A preference for highly-skilled migrants**, ensuring that the ethical priors and cultural norms of new arrivals fit easily into the deliberate political process undertaken by the citizen population;

(3) **A more restrictive model of citizenship**, ensuring that those who are permitted to participate in the country's political process demonstrate a long-standing commitment to the nation, and a level of integration which ensures that they will not adversely disrupt the organic process of political deliberation.

However, this alone will not be enough. Successive governments, both Labour and Conservative, have pursued a policy of mass migration for almost three decades. As of 2021 - before the post-Covid migration spike - 16 percent of people in the UK were already foreign-born[22]. Even if we controlled immigration today, we would still find ourselves grappling with the consequences of previous migration waves.

As such, any future government committed to reducing the adverse impacts of immigration on British democracy should consider implementing the following steps:

(1) **Immediate restriction of voting and political participation to British citizens**. At present, in order to be eligible to vote at a UK General Election, a person need only be a 'British, Irish, or qualifying Commonwealth citizen', resident at an address in the UK or living abroad and registered as an overseas voter. 'Qualifying Commonwealth citizens' are citizens of the 56 Commonwealth nations (plus Zimbabwe), who have leave to enter or remain in the UK. The same eligibility criteria apply for those who wish to stand for election. At local elections, the rules are even more lax. In England and Northern Ireland, citizens of Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain are eligible to vote in local elections, as well as citizens of other EU countries who have had permission to enter and stay since 31st December 2020. In Scotland and Wales, non-citizens with permission to enter or stay in the UK can vote in local elections.

[22] *Migrants in the UK: an overview*, The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 9th August 2024

**(2)** Clearly, extending the franchise beyond the citizen population opens the door to erosion of the '*social contract*' principle discussed at the beginning of this paper. Given the lax citizenship regime adopted and maintained in recent years, there is no guarantee that citizens themselves are fully integrated into the body politic - let alone non-citizens. At a bare minimum, those who vote in our elections should be expected to have undertaken a process of integration and contribution, which ought to be inherent in our citizenship regime.

In order to ensure that political participation is restricted to citizens, a new 'Election Integrity Act' should amend the Representation of the People Act 1983, to remove the right of Commonwealth citizens to vote in British elections. Likewise, Section 15 and Schedule 8 of the Elections Act 2022 should be repealed, in order to prevent EU citizens from voting in English local elections.

This would not be a novel provision for instance in Australia "You cannot nominate for the Senate or the House of Representatives if you are disqualified by section 44 of the Constitution and have not remedied that disqualification before nomination. Examples of this include: **a citizen or subject of a foreign power**." [23]

There are a number of 'edge cases' which may prove challenging to navigate, namely:

(i) **Intervention in Scottish and Welsh devolution**. Typically, the parameters for elections in Scotland and Wales are set by their respective devolved institutions. Though non-binding, the Sewel Convention makes clear that Westminster will "*not normally*" legislate on matters within the devolved powers of these legislatures without the consent of the relevant devolved legislature. However, given that this is a non-binding convention, there is not necessarily a procedural or legal impediment on Parliament's ability to do so. Any intervention to remove the right of non-citizens to vote in Scottish and Welsh elections would almost certainly be subject to legal challenges from the devolved institutions; however, a well-drafted ouster clause (perhaps modelled on the ouster clause used in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020) would prevent any such legislation from being reviewable.

(ii) **Irish voters and the Common Travel Area**. Under the Common Travel Area, established in 1923, Irish voters resident in the UK have an automatic right to vote in British elections, a right which is enjoyed reciprocally by British voters resident in Ireland. **This is particularly important in the context of Northern Ireland, where many Republican voters carry Irish passports as an expression of their desire to break away from the United Kingdom**. Unilaterally ending the right of Irish voters to participate in UK elections would violate long-standing agreements with the Irish Republic, and could provoke tension in Northern Ireland. With this in mind, and considering the relatively low impact and high-compatibility of Irish migration to the UK in recent years, the most sensible course of action would be to preserve the rights of Irish citizens to participate in UK elections.

(iii) **Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain**. Citizens of Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain enjoy the right to participate in English and Northern Irish local

[23] https://www.aec.gov.au/elections/candidates/qualification.htm

elections. This right is separate from the general right enjoyed by EU citizens who settled in the UK before 31st December 2022; it derives from bilateral agreements, which extend reciprocal voting rights to British citizens living abroad in those countries. Whether or not to renegotiate or renege upon those agreements will depend on any future government's foreign policy orientation and priorities. However, given the fact that this right is enjoyed reciprocally, and is the result of bilateral negotiation, **there may be a case for maintaining these agreements, particularly given the relatively large number of British citizens in Spain, and the relatively low impact of these citizen groups on the UK's democratic process.**

(iv) **Postal voting should be returned to the pre 2001 position** where it is available only for those with an illness attested by a medical practitioner. This would at a stroke remove the potential for widespread postal voting fraud, allow a genuinely secret ballot unaffected by kinship groups or political activists and recreate the civic occasion of an election all held on the same day in the open.

**(3) New electoral offences against religious coercion and foreign-language campaigning.** The introduction of electoral offences targeting religious coercion is essential to prevent sectarian practices from eroding the 'social contract.' In Britain, migration from communitarian cultures, particularly from South Asia and the Middle East, has led to instances where religious leaders exert undue influence over voting behavior, reminiscent of the ethnic bloc voting that characterized Tammany Hall's New York or Melbourne's post-war ethnic networks. The 2014 Tower Hamlets election, for example, documented cases of imams in Bengali Muslim communities pressuring congregants to support specific candidates, with reports of intimidation at polling stations affecting up to 10 percent of voters in certain wards. To counter this, a new 'Elections Integrity Act' should amend the Representation of the People Act 1983, which governs electoral conduct, to establish an offence of religious coercion. This offence would criminalize actions by religious figures or organizations that leverage spiritual authority or communal obligation to influence electoral outcomes, with penalties mirroring those for undue influence (up to seven years' imprisonment under Section 115).

The Electoral Commission's code of conduct could be revised to prohibit religious venues from hosting campaign events, ensuring neutrality. Several edge cases complicate implementation:

(i) **Defining coercion versus free speech.** Distinguishing religious coercion from legitimate political expression risks legal challenges under the Human Rights Act 1998, which protects freedom of religion and expression (Articles 9 and 10). A precise definition, modeled on Canada's Elections Act prohibition of "improper influence," could mitigate this risk.

(ii) **Enforcement in diverse communities**. Monitoring religious coercion in tightly knit communities may strain local police resources and provoke accusations of bias, particularly in areas like Bradford or Birmingham with significant South Asian populations. Community liaison officers, as used in Australia's 1973 electoral reforms, could facilitate enforcement while maintaining communal trust. These measures would curb sectarian influence, fostering

a political environment conducive to a shared civic will, as seen in American and Australian reforms that reduced ethnic factionalism.

In the same vein, the Electoral Commission could be given new powers to restrict the use of campaigning materials in languages other than English, or other national languages – Welsh, Cornish, Irish, Scots, Ulster-Scots, and Scots Gaelic. Such restrictions would curb the most blatant attempts to influence the outcome of elections by appealing to particular ethnic or cultural communities, and could be designed in a similar way to the existing discretionary powers that the Commission holds over electoral literature.

(4) **Lifetime electoral bans for those convicted of fraud relating to ethnic or religious sectarianism.**
Imposing lifetime electoral bans on individuals convicted of electoral fraud is a necessary step to safeguard the integrity of Britain's democratic process and prevent the manipulation seen in historical ethnic machines. In the U.S., Chicago's machine politics in the 1920s relied on voter fraud, with fraudulent registrations enabling ethnic blocs to dominate elections, while in Australia, Melbourne's 1960s Italian networks manipulated voter rolls. In Britain, similar issues have emerged, notably in the 2014 Tower Hamlets case, where the High Court found evidence of fraudulent postal votes orchestrated by supporters of a mayoral candidate, affecting 20 percent of ballots in key wards. To address this, the Representation of the People Act 1983 should be amended to introduce lifetime bans from standing for office for those convicted of electoral fraud under Sections 60–62 (e.g., personation, postal vote fraud). The Elections Act 2022, which strengthened voter ID requirements, could be expanded to include a new clause mandating automatic lifetime bans, with the Electoral Commission maintaining a public register of banned individuals.

(5) **Ban on local government grants being given to charities or NGOs which are explicitly racial, ethnic, or religious in orientation.**
Prohibiting local government grants to charities or NGOs with explicitly racial, ethnic, or religious orientations is crucial to prevent the entrenchment of communitarian loyalties that undermine a shared civic vision. In the U.S., ethnic machines like Tammany Hall diverted public funds to loyal constituencies, while in Australia, Melbourne's Italian and Greek wards secured disproportionate community grants, fragmenting municipal priorities. In Britain, local councils have awarded grants to organizations tied to specific ethnic or religious groups, such as a 2019 Birmingham council grant of £100,000 to a South Asian community center that primarily served one ethnic group. This practice, often rooted in the communitarian norms of migrant communities, mirrors the clientelism Dimant, Krieger, and Redlin associate with increased corruption. To address this, the Local Government Act 1972, which governs council funding powers, should be amended to prohibit grants to organizations whose stated mission or activities explicitly prioritize racial, ethnic, or religious identities, with oversight by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Charities Act 2011 could be revised to require charities receiving public funds to demonstrate universal service provision, with the Charity Commission enforcing compliance.

**(6) Introduce an Integrated Education Act to encourage integration. Such an Act could:**

(i) Introduce a requirement that all faith schools must have at least 10 percent of pupils from another faith or no faith.

(ii) Enforce section 70 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 which stipulates that pupils of community, foundation or voluntary schools in England and Wales must take part in a daily act of collective worship, of a "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character."

(iii) Give OFSTED stronger guidance on faith schools and extremism and community cohesion, including the role of women in society, including guidance on the banning facial coverings.



# About CFABB – Centre for a Better Britain

CFABB – Centre for a Better Britain is an independent think tank dedicated to developing practical, world-class policy ideas to support a stronger, more prosperous United Kingdom. Through research, discussion and collaboration with policymakers, industry leaders and experts, CFABB aims to contribute credible policy solutions that promote economic growth, innovation and long-term national success.

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