

## **Right Ones In, Wrong Ones Out**

Immigrants are benefit leeches, contribute nothing to the economy and pose an increasing security concern to Britain. Great story, now let's talk facts.

On 14 October, the Metropolitan police thwarted a suspected terror plot and arrested four young men. One eyewitness curiously described one of the suspects as 'handsome' and 'definitely not like a terrorist at all'. So what does a terrorist look like? In the wake of Islamist group Al-Shabab's announcement of their plans to repeat the recent Westgate siege inside the UK, police and public have grown increasingly wary of a particular group: young men, possibly British-born, but of an ethnic minority. People who look, in a nutshell, like immigrants.

According to a study by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, black Britons are up to twenty-eight times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white Britons. In July, the UK Border agency allegedly used racial profiling during document spot checks at Kensal Green Underground station. And they don't seem to be alone in this.

The British public has a long history of aversion to immigration, with 27% of the population favouring reduced immigration rates, a higher percentage than in the US and the rest of Europe. These attitudes can be traced back by at least fifty years, according to the British Election Study. However, it is only over the last fifteen years that immigration has become one of the most important issues in political discourse.

The topic will almost certainly play a huge role in the 2015 general election campaign. Leaders of both major parties have made strong anti-immigration statements. Prime Minister David Cameron has professed that "today we will reclaim our borders and send illegal immigrants home". He has also urged the public to report illegal immigrants to Crimestoppers and the UK Border agency. The Labour party has espoused similar views, with Ed Miliband stating that "curbs on non-EU immigration would be a key priority for the incoming government". This political climate has led to measures like the mobile billboards, introduced by Immigration Minister Mark Harper, which told illegal immigrants to 'Go Home or Risk Arrest'.

So why are immigrants the subject of so much vitriol and hatred? The first reason is the alleged economic downsides, especially the cost of benefits and increased competition on the job market. Yet numerous studies consistently refute these claims – migrant workers have been shown to bring a net fiscal benefit to most countries, especially the UK. As for benefits, only seven per cent of immigrants claim, as opposed to seventeen per cent of those born in the UK. In most UK visas, there is a clear label stating that one 'does not have recourse to public funds'. So the notion that immigrants arrive in droves to drain the welfare system is nothing but a paper-selling tactic.

A consequence of this is that immigrants are increasingly being used as scapegoats for Britain's social ills. For instance, a recent headline in The Telegraph stated that 'Eastern European criminals [are] blamed for surge in migrant offenses', despite admitting later in the article that 'people are safer now than they have been at any time during the last ten years'. In another article, a headline ran as 'Up to one in three Romanians arrested, figures show'.

The problem with these numbers is that statistics are often inaccurate estimates, or often quoted out of context. For example, the total number of immigrants in the country is often unknown, arrests are conflated with convictions, and there is no allowance for re-offenders (the minority of the offenders accounts for the majority of arrests). Consequently, most members of the public grossly overestimate the number of immigrants, Muslims, and those of a non-white ethnicity in Britain, according to a recent study by the Royal Statistical Society.

This error is especially dangerous in connection with other misconceptions, especially an exaggerated fear of crime.

Ignorance is often a key factor in developing prejudice. A Sky News poll revealed that crackdowns on immigration are especially supported by those with little personal exposure to immigrants. In contrast to the impressions created by sensationalist media coverage, there is solid evidence that property crimes – burglary or vandalism – actually decrease in areas with high numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Additionally, there is no relationship between immigration levels and violent crime rates.

In short, there is no correlation between a person's 'immigration' status and their likelihood for criminal activity. Expecting a criminal to fit neatly into 'racial profiles', or blaming minorities for everything that is not functioning in Britain is a way of burying one's head in the sand. What is truly criminal is the fear-mongering and exaggeration surrounding immigration and its supposed constant 'security threat'. It is a great card for politicians to play, and an even better way to sell outrage to readers. But doing so results in nothing but a false sense of national insecurity. And Britain is better than that.