

**Sunder Katwala: Immigration fears have to be faced and defused, not dismissed
(2013)**

Politicians need to find a strong response to national concerns about cultural diversity

Most people worry about immigration being too high, do not believe it is being managed competently, and fear that this could fracture our society. Politicians need to acknowledge these anxieties, but how can they find workable responses to them too?

5 All of the parties also now know that tough rhetoric making unrealistic promises simply erodes trust further, as the slogan of "British jobs for British workers" showed.

British Future's State of the Nation report also shows that people are considerably more likely to identify immigration as a source of national than local tension. Local migration tensions are lower but, strikingly, are as likely to be expressed in the north-east or in Wales, where there are fewest migrants, as in high migration London or places of rapid change such as Slough in the south-east. Practical responses to local concerns about managing the pace of change on housing, health and schools matter. They could prevent anxiety accelerating further. But they will not resolve the national concerns. Nor should the national concerns be dismissed as somehow imaginary, as liberal voices sometimes can. Whether we are a confident nation, or live in a shared society¹, might be matters of perception: that doesn't prevent these being important, meaningful ideas to most people.

10 Though debates about immigration are polarised and noisy, the public also hold more nuanced views than they are usually given credit for. Most want to manage the pace of change, not to close the borders, though around a quarter wish they could. A moderate majority want to make selective choices to reflect this country's interests and values – managing the pace of change, while welcoming those who will contribute positively, or who need our protection as refugees. Anxieties about migrants claiming benefits have not been affected by government evidence showing immigrants are more likely to be in work and less likely to claim.

20 The political debate is mainly about overall migration numbers – and how close the government can get to pushing net migration down so it is 100,000 more than those who emigrate each year, without harming economic growth. Even achieving that target, which looks difficult, would mean up to half a million a year coming in. That shows, as the 2011 census underlined, that a multi-ethnic and multi-faith Britain is an ineradicable fact. This is who we are. Some are enthused about the opportunities this brings; others find it deeply unsettling.

30 We should pay as much attention to integration as to immigration. There is a strong public consensus on the essential foundations – the need to speak English and respect freedom of speech – and respect for cultural diversity within the boundaries of shared citizenship. There are no benefits of immigration without integration. With it, we can celebrate shared moments and institutions – from our Olympic summer to decades of pride in the NHS – where we realise the benefits of diversity for Britain too.

(478 Wörter)

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1 shared society – die geteilte Gesellschaft