

Immigration

A meeting of minds? The impact of deliberation on attitudes towards post-Brexit immigration policy

Surveys largely capture people's top-of-the-head reactions. But do their views change if they have the chance to deliberate and discuss a policy question? This chapter reports what happened when a random sample of British adults were brought together online to consider Britain's immigration policy after Brexit. We summarise the character of the discussion, show how attitudes changed in the immediate wake of the deliberation, and assess the longer-term impact on participants' opinions.

Two dominant themes in discussions

Two main sets of arguments dominated people's reasoning – moral considerations and perceptions of self-interest.

- Moral considerations were mostly used in defence of a liberal approach. Concern was expressed about the ethics of splitting up families, of only valuing migrants for their economic contribution, and of not recognising everyone's right to a good quality of life
- Considerations of self-interest often lay behind arguments for tighter control. These included the need for migrants to have the skills Britain needs, for them to be self-reliant and not call on the welfare state – and that they should have the language skills needed to integrate effectively.

Contrary movements

After the deliberation, more people thought that immigration benefitted Britain – but there was also somewhat increased support for tighter control.

- The proportion saying that immigration is good for Britain's economy increased from 61% to 70%, while the proportion who said that it enriched the country's culture rose from 64% to 69%
- Support for requiring EU migrants to apply to come to Britain increased from 60% to 73%
- Support for allowing migrants into Britain irrespective of their income fell from 36% to 31%

Some meeting of minds

Leave supporters became more likely to say that immigration is beneficial, while Remainers moved in favour of tighter control.

- Among Leavers, support for the view that immigration is good for the economy increased from 43% to 58%, while the proportion who said it was culturally enriching rose from 42% to 50%.
 - After deliberating, 63% of Remainers said EU migrants should have to apply to come to Britain, up from 38% beforehand.
 - However, when participants were interviewed again some months after the deliberation, typically only around a half had stuck with their revised point of view.
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Introduction

As a result of leaving the European Union (EU), the UK now has to develop public policy in areas which were hitherto heavily influenced by EU decisions. One prime example is immigration, where the EU policy of ‘freedom of movement’ – a key feature of the EU’s single market - meant that until now EU citizens had the automatic right to come to the UK to live and work (while UK citizens had the same right in the rest of the EU).¹ There was, in effect, little limitation on the ability of EU citizens to enter the UK should they so wish. Consequently, exiting the EU single market obliged the UK to develop an immigration policy for EU citizens alongside the one already in place for non-EU citizens. In practice, the new migration policy that has been developed by the UK government treats EU and non-EU citizens in the same way, and emphasises income and skills as criteria for permitting entry (HM Government, 2018; 2020; Migration Advisory Committee, 2020).

But does this new policy framework fit with what voters want? One way of addressing this question is to invite representative samples of the population to express their views in response to a survey. A chapter on the results of such an exercise formed part of last year’s report (Curtice et al., 2020). It looked not only at attitudes towards immigration policy but also at aspects of food and consumer regulation. However, such surveys often only secure a ‘top of the head’ reaction from respondents (Zaller, 1992). This may be fine when the subject matter of the survey has been widely discussed and people have had the chance to develop well-thought through views. However, although the level of immigration was a contentious issue during the EU referendum, there was relatively little debate about the policy options for managing it after Brexit. Perhaps when people had had the opportunity to discuss the issue at length, the conclusions they draw might be a little different from the instant reactions observed in our general population survey?

Using an approach known as Deliberative Polling (Fishkin, 2011; 2018a; 2018b), on two occasions, once in June 2019 and once in October 2020, we brought together online two separate samples of ordinary citizens, each of them as representative of the adult population as possible. Over a weekend these two groups discussed among each other in a degree of detail some of the post-Brexit policy choices facing the UK, considered impartial briefing materials about those policy choices, and questioned a balanced panel of experts about some of the possible implications of those choices (Curtice et al., 2021). One of the subjects covered was immigration. Our aim was to establish what the public might think about the policy choices facing the UK after having an opportunity to become better informed about the issue.

¹ In principle, member states could require prospective EU migrants to prove that they had the means to sustain themselves, but the UK never availed itself of this provision.

The participants in the deliberation were drawn from the respondents to two of the general population surveys on which we reported last year (Curtice et al., 2020). Conducted in spring 2019 and spring 2020 via the NatCen mixed mode random probability panel (Jessop, 2018), these surveys included questions on the policy issues that were to be discussed at the deliberation events. The participants were asked the same questions (a) immediately before their deliberative weekend and (b) at its conclusion, thereby providing us with a measure of the short-term impact of the deliberation on their views about some of the policy choices that they had been asked to consider. In addition, the discussions among the participants were recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis, thereby providing us with an insight into some of the arguments that prevailed.

Additionally, the participants (together again with members of the general population) were surveyed once more (via the NatCen panel) a few months after their deliberative weekend, that is, in autumn 2019 and winter 2021. These surveys enable us to assess the longer-term impact of the deliberation on the attitudes of participants, while controlling for any movements in opinion that may have occurred in the meantime among the population as a whole. Across the two cycles of polling, a total of 376 people both participated in the deliberation and completed each of (i) the recruitment survey, (ii) the pre- and post-event surveys, and (iii) the survey administered a few months later. The resulting data have been weighted to make them as representative as possible of the general population.²

In this chapter, we report on and analyse the short and longer-term impact of this deliberation on the attitudes of participants towards immigration policy, as measured by the surveys, and, using the qualitative material, assess the character of the discussions that brought about such movement as occurred. Our interest lies not simply in whether and why the overall distribution of attitudes changed, but also in whether the underlying structure of those attitudes was altered. In particular, given the intensity of the public debate about Brexit and the polarisation of attitudes that has accompanied that debate (Curtice and Montagu, 2019), did bringing people together to deliberate further sharpen the differences between them. Or did it, instead, reduce the divisions between those on different sides of the Brexit debate (Fishkin, 2018b; Fishkin et al., 2021)?

We begin by reviewing some of the possible directions in which the deliberation might have shifted attitudes. We then use our qualitative analysis to describe the style and substance of the discussions that

² Thirty of these participants attended a pilot exercise in May 2019 rather than the first of the main events the following month. Some of the questions that were subsequently included on the pre- and post-deliberation surveys were not asked of this sub-sample. Although the events in 2019 and 2020 were run entirely separately, the content of the written briefings and the structure of the deliberation, and the identities of the expert speakers were largely the same at the two events. For the most part, the pattern of the results across the two exercises were very similar to each other, and thus we have felt justified in taking advantage of the increased sample size that comes from combining the two datasets.

took place. Thereafter we look at whether and how the overall distribution of attitudes changed in the immediate wake of the deliberation. Subsequently, we examine whether Remain and Leave supporters polarised over the issues that they had debated or whether in fact there was some meeting of minds. Finally, we assess whether the changes observed in the wake of the deliberation were still in evidence some months later.

The possible impacts of deliberation

What impact might we expect deliberation to have on people's views about post-Brexit immigration policy? One issue is whether discussion would change attitudes at all. On the one hand because immigration was a salient and contentious issue in the EU referendum, we might anticipate that participants had become entrenched in their views, and therefore were reluctant to change their minds. Those who want less immigration might maintain their support for a tough regime, while those who are more relaxed about the issue might retain their preference for a more liberal policy. In this scenario, neither group develops more nuanced views during deliberation and there is little overall aggregate movement in attitudes (Smets and Isernia, 2014). On the other hand, given that the details of immigration policy have not been the subject of extensive debate, perhaps the information and insight that people acquired through the deliberation might persuade them to change their views on the implementation of immigration policy even if their preferred level of immigration did not change.

But if people were to change their views, in what direction might they switch? This too is uncertain. On the one hand, critics of the claims made by the Leave campaign in the referendum might anticipate that when people became better informed about the subject, they would move away from wanting a tough migration regime, as their support for controls reflects a misunderstanding of the economic and social impact of immigration. That was certainly the experience of an EU-wide Deliberative Poll on the subject conducted before the 2009 European elections (Fishkin et al., 2014; Sanders, 2012). On the other hand, critics of the EU policy on freedom of movement might feel that when people become more aware of the 'weaknesses' of the previous regime, they would swing in favour of tougher rules.

Meanwhile, an equally important question is whether participants move apart and polarise in their attitudes or whether, as claimed by many advocates of deliberation, there is something of a meeting of minds as both sides accept some of their opponents' arguments, and attitudes become more nuanced and better informed (Fishkin, 1991; Rosenberg, 2007). Which of these happens in practice is much debated. It is suggested that the 'confirmation bias' to which all voters are potentially subject means that in any deliberation, voters will take on board the arguments that they hear that are consistent with their existing views, while rejecting those that are not (Kunda

1990; Sunstein 2002, 2017). This tendency has long been thought to be particularly evident among those with a strong affective attachment to a political party or cause (Bartels, 2002; Lebo and Cassino, 2007). And though strong identification with a political party is now relatively low in the UK (Curtice, 2016; Fieldhouse et al., 2019; Sanders, 2017), in the wake of the Brexit referendum many voters have developed a strong attachment to being a ‘Remainer’ or a ‘Leaver’ (Curtice and Montagu, 2019; Hobolt et al., 2021). Indeed, this was true of no less than 47% of the participants in our deliberation events when they were first interviewed in our recruitment wave surveys – and they tended to have very different views about immigration.³ Meanwhile, some previous research has suggested that immigration in particular may be one issue where deliberation does tend to confirm people in their prior predispositions (Smets and Isinieria, 2014).

In short, there is reason to doubt that deliberation about immigration would necessarily result in a meeting of minds. On the other hand, given that participants were exposed to impartial written briefings, to the arguments of a balanced panel of experts, and had their discussions moderated by a neutral facilitator, the format of the deliberation might make such an outcome more likely. Meanwhile, recent research by Fishkin et al. (2021) suggests that deliberation did reduce partisan differences between Republicans and Democrats across a range of issues on which the two camps were initially far apart (see also Fishkin, 2018b: 109-10). At the same time, other attempts to examine the impact of deliberation on attitudes towards immigration suggest that it does not necessarily result in polarisation even when people are deliberately assigned to like-minded discussion groups (Grönland et al., 2015; Lindell et al., 2017).

Deliberating about immigration

Much of course may depend on the content and character of the deliberation. Perhaps arguments in favour of a liberal approach to immigration would be heard more often in our deliberations – or the views of those who wanted immigration to be strictly controlled could dominate the discussion. Either way, this might mean that participants were largely only engaging with one side of the argument. Alternatively, however, perhaps participants were exposed to a diversity of views as a result of discussions that explored the pros and cons of any possible policy proposal.

The focus of our deliberation was a series of policy choices available to the UK once it had left the EU. In part, these choices were about what the UK’s priorities should be in determining who should be admitted and what conditions potential migrants should have to satisfy to be able to enter the country. This included whether the rules

³ For example, in our recruitment wave surveys, just 30% of very strong Leavers said that immigration enriched Britain’s cultural life, whereas no less than 83% of very strong Remainders expressed this view.

should be the same irrespective of a migrant's country of origin, what occupational criteria should potential migrants have to satisfy, and what rules should apply to the admission of family members (both of migrants and of British citizens)? In part too, the choices were about the rights migrants should have once they had entered the UK, including when they should be able to claim welfare benefits and how easy or difficult it should be for a migrant to gain the right to live permanently in the UK or to become a British citizen. At the same time, participants were also invited to consider whether there should be a cap on the level of migration - or at least a target level - in any one year. In each case, the pros and cons of each option were laid out in the written briefing through which participants were encouraged to work during their moderated discussion, albeit in a manner that varied from group to group.

As anticipated earlier, this structure did help ensure that typically there was some discussion of both sides of the argument. This of course meant that collectively the arguments put forward were sometimes contradictory. That said, many of the arguments drew upon one or other of two competing sets of considerations that were frequently used to justify the views expressed on many of the topics discussed. Here we outline the substance of these considerations and how they were used to express support for, or opposition to, the various policy options put before participants - and thus had the potential to influence the views that they subsequently expressed on the post-deliberation survey.

Moral and ethical considerations

The first key consideration comprised a set of moral and ethical themes that tended to accompany arguments that justified a relatively liberal approach to immigration control and which emphasised the obligation of the state to support migrants and their families. The second and potentially conflicting consideration drew more on perceptions of self-interest, and on the need to put Britain and British needs first. Economic arguments were especially prevalent in these considerations, which in particular were often thought to place an onus on migrants to be self-reliant. These latter considerations were often (though not always) brought forward to argue in favour of tighter control.

One instance when moral arguments were frequently used was when participants questioned the idea that only skilled workers with a relatively high income should be allowed to come to the UK. Some participants argued that migrants could make a valuable contribution to the country irrespective of their current wage level.

“For me, when it comes to migrants coming to work in the UK, it’s not important what the job is. It’s more important that they are here to work and there is a job here for them... Low-skilled, high-skilled, whatever you want to call it, it’s a job and they’re working and contributing towards the economy and that to me is not a bad thing.” (2020)

At the same time, some participants were concerned about reciprocity and goodwill; they argued that by treating economic migration in a fair and open way, similar opportunities might be afforded to Britons abroad. It was also pointed out that, once here, someone initially on a low wage might eventually secure better paid employment.

“Every human being has potential and surely that should be enough... you want people with a wide variety of skill levels, because you may be getting your next set of potential teachers coming in as well.” (2020)

Moral and ethical arguments also featured heavily in discussion of the rules governing the admission of spouses of both migrants and British citizens. Those who favoured the loosening or removal of requirements for bringing a non-British spouse and children into the UK were concerned about the morality of keeping families apart. Indeed, it was often suggested that anyone already living in the UK should be able to bring their family into the country regardless of their economic standing:

“It’s not a crime to be married, and one has to live with their family. So, I don’t think families should be split, and I do agree with Matthew and Eddie⁴ on that. Families should be together.”

“I agree that we should find a way to make sure families are together.” (2019)

The impact of the current rules was particularly highlighted when participants drew on their own circumstances to inform their views, for example on how to balance keeping families together while countering opposition to doing so on the grounds of economic standing:

“I have a family member, a spouse, who is in a very good relationship with my British child. She cannot come here and I feel really, really under a lot of stress because I can’t bring her here. At the same time, I earn enough, I’m obviously not on the dole [...] I don’t want anybody’s money but I would be - I think it would be right to let my immediate family join me and alleviate this stress that I am living in [...] it is a lesser evil if you let people in but at the same time do not automatically grant them access to public funds, which I think as an immigrant, I’m absolutely happy with. Could that be a compromise?” (2019)

Given the variable cost of living across the UK, a standard minimum income requirement was also sometimes seen to be arbitrary. At the

⁴ The names of participants in the deliberative events cited in the quotations have been anonymised throughout.

same time, it was argued that having suitable living conditions, access to public funds and the ability to use educational and healthcare services were all important for guaranteeing an acceptable quality of life, and especially so for families with children. Consequently, participants felt the state had a moral responsibility to ensure that these were provided in those places where migrants were living:

“...they may not be able to afford a three-bed or a four-bed property, but if they’re statutory overcrowding in a property, that is an issue.” (2019)

“I do think in areas where there is high immigration that there should be more infrastructure to help cope with it. There should be more support in schools where there’s lots of kids who don’t speak English as well.” (2020)

Meanwhile, moral arguments also featured in discussions of how long someone should be in the UK before being granted the permanent right to remain or to become a citizen. In particular, it was argued that it is unfair to deport or not offer voting rights to people who had lived in the UK for a long time.

Self-interest and economic considerations

In contrast, self-interest and economic arguments came to the fore in discussions about what the overall level of migration should be, and about whether or not there should be a cap or target for the level of migration. Those arguing for a lower overall level argued that British people should have first priority for jobs and services and often expressed the view that migrants put undue pressure on a welfare system which was already stretched. This sentiment was accompanied by a sense that Britain was somehow limited by its size and geography in the level of migration that it could allow.

“The island is too little. I don’t know about anybody else but if you look around in England now, all you see is people taking over green spaces and building houses. (...) We definitely need a way to control numbers because you just can’t be taking everyone in. The system will just implode.” (2020)

That said, people were largely unconvinced about the use of caps and targets as a way of controlling migration. Caps were often seen as too inflexible, unlikely to respond to market needs and temporary workforce shortages. In particular, participants pointed out the existence of gaps in the recruitment of care workers and seasonal fruit pickers.

“I don’t think a cap, a specific number is particularly useful, because if you specify a number, you lose all your flexibility to address shortages in care workers or this sort of thing. So, I’m not certain that putting an absolute number as a limit is a particularly brilliant idea.” (2020)

Caps were also perceived as unfair by some, who noted that those who would have otherwise fulfilled the criteria might be denied entry if they apply once the cap has been exceeded. Although targets were considered less restrictive, both measures were associated with being politically motivated and previously ineffective.

“If you set a political target, you can always miss the target. You can always say, ‘Oh, well, something came up and we’ve exceeded the target, because we suddenly had a need for 10,000 more nurses’, or whatever. I don’t see the - the government misses its targets all the time.” (2019)

More popular was the idea of using selection criteria to ensure that migration inflows responded to Britain’s changing needs. Several discussions pointed to the example of the Australian points-based system as an example which Britain could follow. However, when it came to identifying ‘Britain’s needs’, participants seemed more concerned that the selection criteria should take into account labour market shortages rather than a person’s level of skill. This in turn reflected an acceptance that the UK currently relies on a migrant workforce in many sectors of the economy and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, in part because British citizens are unable or unwilling to take on low-skilled jobs themselves. Unsurprisingly, in the 2020 event people pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic as having highlighted this reliance:

“...we’ve just proved that we need people to work in care homes, and it would be very limiting if we said only high-skilled jobs... We do need doctors; we do need highly-skilled people, but we also need people at all levels in society to come and do jobs, which maybe we haven’t got the personnel or the will to do it.” (2020)

That said, some participants had a longer-term aspiration for Britain to become less dependent on migrant labour, albeit only after an interim ‘transition period’ in which the UK continued to accept workers at all levels of skill. This aspiration was based on the feeling that the UK should be self-sufficient, and that British citizens should be employed in low skill jobs (for example, to prevent unemployment and dependence on benefits). Meanwhile, when discussing access to welfare, some groups thought that if the UK addressed its own skills shortages domestically it would not need to admit as many migrants thereby reducing pressure on social services and the need to restrict family migration.

Economic self-reliance emerged as an important consideration for some participants in their discussion of the admission of migrant spouses and their families. It was suggested that they should be able to support themselves financially, either by not relying at all on the UK benefit system or by being sufficiently economically productive that

they put more into the system than they take out.

“The first person to come to the country should be able to prove and should have initially that they can support their family if and when they arrive here. They can’t expect, well, they will get it from anywhere else [...] You’ve got to prove you can earn the funds to support your own family...” (2020)

This, it was felt, would ensure migrant families did not put too much strain on the UK economy or on taxpayer-funded services such as housing or the benefit system. In these arguments, migrants were seemingly regarded as a burden to the UK, until proven otherwise.

For example, those who argued in favour of the continuation of a minimum income requirement for bringing non-British spouses into the UK believed it would ensure that migrant families were ineligible for welfare benefits, that the current level of £18,600 was a realistically achievable figure for the vast majority of families, and that such a figure ensured the economic strain introduced by migration would be offset via a tax contribution. It was also suggested that the size of the family, and specifically the number of dependents, should be considered when determining the level of income required. Furthermore, occupational skill was considered an important proxy for income, while a guarantee of stable employment was seen to be an important predictor of longer-term self-reliance. Meanwhile, in discussion of how long someone should have lived in the UK before being given the permanent right to remain, it was argued that those who had been here for a substantial length of time would be more likely to contribute to the economy in the longer term.

Others, however, suggested that such preconditions for entry are too prescriptive and make the admission process unfairly difficult for applicants. There was some feeling that self-reliance can be encouraged instead simply by restricting a family’s access to benefits on arrival. These participants also saw an advantage to admitting families who contribute relatively little initially to the UK economically, albeit perhaps on a short-term visa, if it gives them the chance to be upwardly socially mobile. Similarly, it was suggested that those who want to settle permanently in the UK are likely eventually to contribute much more to the British economy than whatever they may initially take out from it.

Participants also commonly argued that migrants should be benefitting the economy, society or local community before they could qualify for citizenship or permanent settlement, and that these might be more important criteria than how long someone has lived in the UK. There were some who suggested that imposing tough conditions on length of residence could be self-defeating, including economically:

“[...] the people who come here who work every day, submit their taxes and that should really take less time than someone who comes here, works a day a week, if that, lives here for five years and doesn’t put the effort in.” (2019)

“Again like I say, I think proving your worth, I just want to make sure that that includes, for example, wives and mothers bringing up children who may actually not be going out to work and bringing in money economically, but obviously they’re bringing up children, doing important jobs.” (2019)

Self-reliance was also one of the considerations that affected people’s attitudes towards the desirability of requiring an everyday command of the English language as a condition of admission to Britain. It was argued that speaking English allows migrants to access health services, employment and education, to navigate day to day life such as doing their shopping, and to avoid tensions with local people. However, participants arguing for the importance of language skills were distributed along a spectrum, with some favouring a strict migration control system while others had more open attitudes.

“I don’t think it’s unreasonable to say, ‘If you want to come and live here, you need to speak the language and integrate and join in.’” (2019)

“I find as well, you need to speak a reasonable standard of English. If you go to a doctor or hospital and you need to explain your symptoms to the doctor, you cannot keep on having interpreters and everything put into several different languages. It costs money.” (2020)

Learning English was, however, not simply considered important for self-reliance but also for the integration of migrants into British society. Linguistic ability was not just about migrants’ ability to interact and communicate and thereby avoid becoming socially isolated within their own ethnic community or family, but was also thought to facilitate learning about Britain and British values. Being integrated was also seen by some participants as something to which migrants should aspire and ideally demonstrate before being able to settle permanently or become citizens. Indeed, for some participants being integrated was as important, if not more so, than the financial contribution or economic independence migrants could demonstrate.

However, participants holding these views sometimes also argued that migrants who want to be British or to integrate should not face unnecessary barriers. Some participants also expressed disappointment with the state’s failure to do enough to facilitate the integration of migrants.

“I just have a really, really baseline, simple thing. Do you want to be British? It’s that trivial. It sounds trivial, but it’s very, it’s not a simple thing, but if somebody wants to be British, great.” (2019)

“I don’t know what’s taken into account, but really, for me, it should be how much the people who want to become a British citizen are contributing to society. How much they’re integrated, how they are settling into the British life, if you like. For me, that would be more important than a financial gain.” (2020)

That said, one reason some felt that migrants should have lived in the UK for a reasonable length of time before they could apply for citizenship was to ensure they had adequate time to learn the language, as well as to have contributed to the country and acquired an understanding of British society and its politics before being granted full political and social rights.

Freedom of movement

This mixture of moral and more self-interested considerations – cultural and international as well as economic - was also evident in what is often regarded as the most important decision that the UK has made on leaving the EU, that is, the ending of freedom of movement. Indeed, for some participants such a decision was justified on moral grounds – that is, that we should treat everyone the same regardless of their country of origin, and that non-EU nationals should be able to benefit from the opportunities to migrate to and work in the UK just as much as those from the EU. However, ethical and economic reasons were to some degree intertwined, as skills, not nationality, were what were thought to matter more.

“If you work, you work, if you’re lazy, you’re lazy in any culture, in any country, in any language. It doesn’t matter where you’re from.” (2020)

The discussions revealed that participants’ views on migrants’ country of origin were also influenced by what would best benefit foreign relations and trade. Those who argued for immigration rules that favoured those from some countries over others were more open to immigration from countries that could offer mutually beneficial agreements, a point of view that featured particularly in the event held in 2019. Meanwhile, a view commonly expressed in both years was that maintaining close links to EU countries is particularly beneficial, given the preference of many British people to live or study in the EU. Those expressing this view thought continuity was important and that for a period of time at least we should protect EU nationals and British people living in the EU. Participants favouring closer ties with Europe also attributed value to proximity in terms of geography, culture, economy and history.

“I think it’s definitely reasonable to have preferences, as people said earlier, from some countries and not from other countries depending on our country’s relation with them geopolitically.” (2019)

“If that [closer tie] goes out the window, three million people who live here currently, and three million people who live in Europe who are British citizens, have to sell their houses and move, and that situation doesn’t apply to any other country. There is no migration match. Yes, there are English people who live in Australia, but that European mix is unique.” (2020)

In contrast, other participants pointed out that in terms of international relations, it was more helpful for the UK to be on the global stage and build or maintain existing links with – for example – the Commonwealth, America, Australia, or only specific countries in the EU. However, while there were conflicting views on which countries would be the best partners for reciprocal agreements, a common thread in these arguments was that we should be doing whatever would benefit the UK most.

“I wouldn’t say that we’re culturally more aligned to Hungary than Pakistan. Pakistan, we ran the place till 1947, we had very [good] links with it for hundreds of years, a lot of people are already over here, originate there, whereas Hungary was behind the Iron Curtain until relatively recently in my memory. I don’t think the alignment is necessarily there.” (2020)

However, people also expressed negative attitudes towards migration from economically poorer countries or from those they thought had different cultures from the UK, although such views were not widespread. This was most sharply illustrated by the view that was expressed in one instance that migration from Europe is preferable because of common religious and cultural practices. Participants argued that people from particular countries find it more difficult to become integrated or are less likely to follow the rules and regulations in place in the UK.

“There’s places in the world where it’s still illegal to be homosexual or their human rights is not as it would be here, so I don’t think it is just a language and a skill. I think there is also, to look into things, like somebody’s, the country they’ve come from, are they easily going to be able to integrate into a society that does accept, on the whole, women as equal or that homosexuality is acceptable? Not just acceptable, but normal. I think those things are important too.” (2019)

Our deliberations were then often rich ones in which, in contrast to much of the public and political debate about migration, participants found themselves dealing with a balance of considerations, both moral and self-interested. On the one hand, they were motivated by a desire to see that migrants are economically productive (that is, that they contribute more to the economy than they take from it) and are able to integrate well, and that the economic interests of those living

here are protected. On the other hand, they were also motivated by a set of moral beliefs as discussed earlier – that everyone is entitled to live with their family and to have a good quality of life, and that Britain ought to be an open and welcoming country. As one participant expressed it:

“With my idealistic hat on, we’re all citizens of the world and we should be able to go wherever we want, whenever we want. Obviously, I realise that’s not necessarily the most practical viewpoint. I do think that if you want to come to this country, then you should be allowed to do that for whatever reason, whether it’s a job, whether it’s your family that’s already over here. I think, yes, it’s one that I battle with on a human level and on a practical level.” (2020)

One other feature of the discussions should also be noted. This is that their tenor was different when migrants were being considered as potential workers than it was when they were being evaluated as potential users of public services. Participants appeared to take a more positive stance on migration when they were discussing who should be able to come here to work; in these discussions migrants were framed as people assumed to be making an active, positive contribution to the country and economy. On the other hand, participants were generally less supportive when talking about migrants’ access to social services, a demand that was often referred to as a ‘burden’. In other words, the image of a ‘migrant’ in participants’ minds often appeared to shift depending on the topic being discussed, thereby opening up the prospect that some at least might sometimes want to be ‘tough’ on immigration while on other occasions preferring a more ‘liberal’ stance.

Short-term impact

But what impact did these rich and diverse discussions have on the views of participants? The answer is one that perhaps neither Remainers nor Leavers in the often polarised public debate would have anticipated. On the one hand, participants emerged from the deliberation somewhat less concerned about the overall impact of immigration. On the other hand, they became somewhat more inclined to favour tighter controls on which migrants are admitted to the UK.

In truth, even before deliberating, our participants leaned towards the view that immigration is beneficial for both Britain’s economy and its culture. In this they reflected a point of view that has become more widespread during the last decade among the general population (Hudson et al., 2020; Rolfe et al., 2021). Participants were invited on the pre-deliberation questionnaire to indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 whether they thought that migrants were good or bad for the country’s economy and then to use the same scale to indicate

whether they thought migrants enriched or undermined Britain's culture. As Table 1 shows, in both cases just over three-fifths chose a score of more than five, while the mean score given was six and a half. Yet despite the fact that participants began with this relatively favourable outlook, the proportion giving a positive score on the post-deliberation survey increased to around 70%, while the mean score was now approaching seven.

Table 1 Perceived impact of immigration on Britain's economy and cultural life, pre- and post-deliberation

	Perceived impact of immigration on...			
	Britain's economy		Britain's culture	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
Score on 0-10 scale	%	%	%	%
0-4 (bad/undermined)	13	10	18	14
5 (neither)	26	19	18	17
6-10 (good/enriched)	61	70	64	69
Mean score	6.48	6.86	6.50	6.91

Base: 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later.

Yet this movement was often accompanied by a swing in a less liberal direction on the policy issues that participants were invited to consider. Above all, this was true of attitudes towards the central issue of principle in the debate about post-Brexit public policy: whether or not to end freedom of movement for EU citizens. This issue was addressed by asking participants whether they were in favour or against 'requiring people from the EU who want to come to live here to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU', a proposition that equates to an end to freedom of movement for EU citizens. As Table 2 shows, this view was already popular among our participants even before they had deliberated – three in five (60%) said that were strongly or somewhat in favour. However, after the event approaching three-quarters (73%) were in favour, primarily as a result of an 11 percentage point increase in the proportion who were 'somewhat' in favour. It appears that a perception that immigration has been beneficial did not necessarily translate into support for maintaining a relatively liberal stance on EU immigration, where, as we have seen, participants articulated a range of moral and self-interested arguments as to why EU migrants should not necessarily be treated more favourably.

Table 2 Attitudes towards ending freedom of movement, pre- and post-deliberation

	Require application by...			
	EU migrants to Britain		UK migrants to EU	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour	35	37	33	40
Somewhat in favour	25	36	30	35
Neither in favour nor against	17	10	14	11
Somewhat against	15	11	14	9
Strongly against	7	5	8	5
Mean score	3.67	3.90	3.68	3.96

Base: 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later.

Of course, ending freedom of movement not only means that EU citizens no longer have the automatic right to come to the UK to live and work, but also that UK citizens can no longer exercise the same right elsewhere in the EU. It might be thought that while people in the UK might like controls to be placed on the ability of EU migrants to come to Britain, they would be less willing to accept similar limitations on their right to migrate to an EU country. Yet, as Table 2 also shows, in practice the distribution of attitudes towards ‘requiring people from Britain who want to live and work in an EU country to apply to do so in the same way as anybody else from outside the EU has to’ was much the same in our pre-deliberation survey as the balance of opinion in respect of the same question about EU citizens. There was also much the same movement of opinion away from allowing freedom of movement. Thus, whereas in the pre-deliberation survey just over three-fifths (64%) said they were in favour of requiring UK citizens to apply to live and work in the EU, after the deliberation three-quarters (75%) expressed that view.

There were other examples of a move towards supporting tougher controls. Given the UK government’s emphasis on income as a criterion for entry, respondents were asked both whether a migrant who comes to the UK should have to be earning a minimum income and whether the same should be true of any British citizen who wishes to bring their migrant spouse into the UK. We saw earlier that many participants expressed the view that migrants should be economically self-reliant. And as Table 3 shows, in the case of a new migrant, the proportion who felt there should be no minimum income requirement at all fell from 36% before the deliberation to 31% afterwards, while in the case of a spouse it dropped from 43% to 37%. Not that this meant there was an increased expectation that only those with high incomes should be admitted. Rather, in the case of both the migrant and the spouse there was an increase in the proportion who said that someone should be earning £15K or £20K a

year – a relatively modest figure, and one considerably below the income requirement of £25.6K that in practice the UK government has adopted (HM Government, 2020).

Table 3 Attitudes towards minimum income requirement for migrants and spouses, pre- and post-deliberation

	Migrant		Spouse+	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
Minimum income should be..	%	%	%	%
£40K	2	2	8	3
£30K	14	12	15	16
£20K	26	31	19	26
£15K	21	24	16	17
None	36	31	43	37
<i>Unweighted base</i>	376	376	346	346

+ The question about a new migrant was asked of all 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later. The question about a new migrant's spouse was asked of the same group, with the exception of the 30 participants who had attended a pilot exercise in May 2019 (see Footnote 2).

There was also an increase, from 49% to 57%, in the proportion who agreed that a migrant husband/wife of a British citizen 'should only be allowed to come to the UK if they can speak everyday English', an ability that we have seen was often thought to be important for migrants' economic and social integration. Meanwhile, when asked how long a migrant who is working and paying taxes should have to wait before they can access welfare benefits on the same terms as British citizens, the proportion who responded that they should be able to do so either 'immediately' or after 'one year or less' fell from 43% on the pre-deliberation survey to 36% on the post-event one – a reflection it seems of the discussion of the potential 'burden' that immigration could create for the welfare system, and the need for migrants to offset this 'burden' before being granted full rights. In short, across a number of policy options the opportunity to deliberate persuaded some participants to back away from the most liberal positions on immigration control. To that extent, this meant they moved somewhat closer to the more selective and conditional approach adopted by the UK government in formulating its new immigration policy.

However, there was one area where public opinion moved away from the government's position. The entry criteria that the government has adopted in determining whether potential migrants can come to the UK now that it is no longer part of the EU emphasise the need for someone to be in a skilled occupation, as defined by the educational qualifications that are usually required to secure employment as well as the income that it commands. There is plenty of previous polling

that suggests that the public prefer ‘skilled’ to ‘unskilled’ migration. Yet there was considerable criticism of this approach in our discussions, both on moral and practical grounds. Meanwhile, what is meant by “skilled” is vague, and there is a risk that in asking people in a survey to choose between the two in the abstract, the term ‘unskilled’ implies ‘less worthy’ (Blinder and Richards, 2020; Ford et al., 2012). A better approach is to ask people whether those in particular familiar and specific occupations should be a high or a low priority for admission (see also Fernández-Reino, 2021).

As Table 4 reveals, even in our pre-deliberation survey adopting this approach exposed a mismatch between the UK government’s conception of a skilled occupation and the occupations that our participants prioritised. In particular, slightly less than one in ten (9%) said that (skilled) bankers should be a high priority for admission to the UK, while well over half (56%) said that (unskilled) care workers should be. In these instances at least, participants’ evaluations of the social worth of occupations were clearly at variance with their level of skill, as evidenced by their educational requirements and earnings potential. This pattern then became even more marked among our participants after they had deliberated. The proportion who said that bankers were a low priority increased from 34% to 44%, while the proportion who said that care workers were a high priority increased from 56% to 62%. In short, while participants became less liberal in their attitudes towards bankers, they became more liberal in respect of care workers, who, the discussions revealed, were both valued and thought to be in short supply.

Table 4 Perceived priority of those from different occupational backgrounds, pre- and post-deliberation

	Bankers	Care workers	Doctors	Hotel workers
Pre-Event	%	%	%	%
High priority	9	56	77	21
Neither	57	35	21	55
Low priority	34	9	2	24
Post-Event	%	%	%	%
High priority	11	62	77	18
Neither	46	29	21	56
Low priority	44	10	2	25

Base: 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later.

This movement towards a more liberal stance on care workers was not unique. Participants also moved in a more liberal direction on the treatment of those migrants who have made Britain their home. Before deliberating, a little under half (48%) of participants said that it should be ‘very’ or ‘quite’ easy for someone who is not a British

citizen but who ‘has lived here continuously for the last five years’ to apply to become a British citizen. After deliberating, the proportion who held that view rose to 55%. A wish to control who comes to the UK does not necessarily imply an inclination to deny political and social rights to those who are admitted and have resided in Britain for some time.

There were also some shifts in a more liberal direction when respondents were asked whether people from particular countries should be able to come to the UK relatively easily or whether they should find it more difficult. Two of the countries that were named, France and Poland, were EU members – but one more long-standing than the other – while two were Commonwealth countries, Australia and Pakistan, who it might be thought should have preferential access to the UK because they are part of the English-speaking cultural diaspora.

Table 5 reveals that, in line with the views expressed at Table 2, for each country between three-fifths and two-thirds of participants said in their pre-deliberation response that it should be neither easy nor difficult for people to come to the UK. For the most part this picture did not change in the post-deliberation survey. However, there were some small (but statistically significant) movements. There was an increase, from 24% to 29%, in the proportion who felt that it should be relatively easy for people from France to come to the UK, while there were declines in the proportion who felt that it should be relatively difficult for those from Poland (from 15% to 10%) and Pakistan (from 23% to 17%) to come. So here there was some marginal evidence of people becoming more liberal, and not least in respect of the two countries (Pakistan and Poland) that have been among the largest sources of migration to Britain and where at the outset participants were somewhat more likely to say that it should be relatively difficult for people to come to the UK.

Table 5 Attitudes towards migrants from particular countries, pre- and post-deliberation

Should be relatively easy/difficult for people to come from:	Australia	France	Pakistan	Poland
Pre-Event	%	%	%	%
Easy	27	24	15	21
Neither	63	65	62	64
Difficult	10	10	23	15
Post-Event	%	%	%	%
Easy	31	29	17	25
Neither	59	62	66	65
Difficult	10	8	17	10

Base: 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later.

The deliberation did not, then, simply produce a swing ‘for’ or ‘against’ immigration. Rather a more widespread appreciation of the benefits of immigration was often - though not always - accompanied by slightly stronger support for the introduction or extension of controls on immigration. Indeed, our surveys confirm the impression created by the deliberative discussions that it was control – and not simple limits on numbers – that most participants wanted Britain’s new immigration policy to deliver. When at our 2019 event we asked participants whether it was more important ‘to limit the total number of immigrants who come to Britain in any one year’ or ‘to control who comes to Britain to live and work so that we are letting in those who we need’ no less than three-quarters (75%) backed the latter view in their pre-event survey, while just 17% prioritised a limit on numbers. Moreover, that latter proportion fell to just 11% in the responses to the post-event questionnaire.⁵ Against this backdrop, attitudes appear to have become more nuanced, a pattern that might be thought to be consistent with a more considered evaluation of the policy options between which the UK was having to choose – just as many theorists anticipate deliberation should deliver (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Fishkin, 2018b; Niemeyer and Dryzek, 2007). It perhaps also suggests that rather than becoming entrenched in their existing views participants may have become less polarised in their attitudes towards the issue, with each side in the immigration debate willing to be persuaded of at least some of the merits of their opponents’ case. It is to that possibility that we now turn.

A meeting of minds?

We do so by looking at whether the views of supporters and opponents of Brexit came together in the wake of the deliberation or whether they moved further apart. As indicated early on in this chapter, a measure of whether and how strongly our participants regarded themselves as a ‘Remainer’ or a ‘Leaver’ was obtained via our initial general population surveys conducted some months before each deliberative event. This was secured by asking them, ‘Thinking about Britain’s relationship with the European Union, do you think of yourself as a ‘Remainer’, a ‘Leaver’, or do you not think of yourself in that way?’. Those who said they did not think of themselves in that way were then asked the follow-up question, ‘Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one side or the other?’. No less than 93% of participants said that they were a ‘Remainer’ or a ‘Leaver’ in response to one or other of these questions.

⁵ This fall, measured on just 188 respondents falls just short of being statistically significant at the 5% level. At the 2020 event we invited participants to use a 10-point scale to indicate whether they thought ‘The government should set a maximum limit on the number of migrants who can come to Britain’ (which was scored at 0) or that ‘the government should judge every application to come and live in Britain on its merits (scored 10). Only 15% of participants recorded a score of between 0 and 4 while the average score increased from 6.72 on the pre-event survey to 6.93 on the post-event, though this movement is not statistically significant.

Table 6 shows how the views of these two sets of partisans on the impact of immigration on Britain's economy changed between the pre- and post-deliberation survey. They started off quite far apart. Nearly four in five (78%) of Remainers gave a score of six or more, indicating that they were inclined to the view that immigration was good for the economy. In contrast, only just over two in five Leavers (43%) gave the same score. Given their already largely favourable view, it perhaps is not surprising that the proportion of Remainers giving a score of six or more only increased marginally to 83%, while the average score that they gave (7.53) barely changed at all. Nearly all of the swing behind the view that immigration is good for the economy we observed at Table 1 occurred among Leavers, nearly three-fifths of whom (58%) now gave a score of six or more, while their average score increased substantially from just under 5.4 to a little over six. As a result, the gap between Leavers and Remainers was now considerably narrower.

Table 6 Perceived impact of immigration on Britain's economy by Brexit identity, pre- and post-deliberation

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
Perceived impact of immigration on economy	%	%	%	%
0-4 (bad/undermined)	3	3	24	21
5 (neither)	19	14	33	21
6-10 (good/enriched)	78	83	43	58
Mean score	7.52	7.53	5.35	6.02
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	203	203	151	151

A similar pattern is in evidence when participants were asked their views about the cultural impact of immigration (see Table 7). Pre-deliberation, over four in five (83%) of Remainers gave a score of six or more, thereby indicating that they were inclined to the view that immigration enriched Britain's culture. This was almost twice the equivalent proportion among Leavers (42%). The attitudes of Remainers barely changed at all after deliberation. Once again, nearly all of the movement towards a more favourable view of the impacts of immigration occurred among Leavers, half of whom now gave a score of six or more. At the same time the average score of Leavers increased from just above five to as much as 5.81.

Table 7 Perceived impact of immigration on Britain's culture by Brexit identity, pre- and post-deliberation

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
Perceived Impact of Immigration on Britain's culture	%	%	%	%
0-4 (bad/undermined)	3	5	36	26
5 (neither)	14	12	21	23
6-10 (good/enriched)	83	83	42	50
Mean score	7.71	7.72	5.08	5.81
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	203	203	151	151

So far as attitudes towards the consequences of immigration are concerned, there was then some meeting of minds between Remainers and Leavers. This was largely because Leavers moved closer to the more favourable starting outlook of Remainers. The two groups still had their differences, but it appears that the deliberation had served to reduce them somewhat. But what happened on attitudes towards the various policy options that participants had been asked to consider – where, after all, the overall movement of opinion had been towards somewhat tighter control?

Table 8 addresses this question for the issue of ending freedom of movement for EU citizens. This again was a subject on which the two sets of participants were far apart prior to deliberation. Leavers were almost unanimous in their support for requiring EU citizens who wish to come to the UK to live and work to apply to do so. Nearly nine in ten (88%) said they were in favour, whereas fewer than two in five Remainers (38%) expressed the same view. However, the views of Remainers were markedly different after the deliberation – now as many as three in five (61%) were in favour, in stark contrast to the position beforehand when slightly more had been opposed to than supportive of the option. Among Leavers, in contrast, not only was there no similar swing in favour, but also the proportion who said that they were 'strongly in favour' fell somewhat (from 63% to 56%).

Table 8 Attitudes towards ending freedom of movement for EU citizens by Brexit identity, pre- and post-deliberation

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
Require EU migrants to Britain to apply to come	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour (5)	15	20	63	56
Somewhat in favour (4)	22	40	25	31
Neither in favour nor against (3)	21	12	9	9
Somewhat against (2)	27	18	3	4
Strongly against (1)	13	9	1	1
Mean score	2.99	3.44	4.47	4.38
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>151</i>

Thus, here too there was also some meeting of minds. But whereas in the case of perceptions of the impact of the consequences of immigration it had been Leavers who changed their minds, on ending freedom of movement for EU citizens it was primarily Remainers who did so. The opportunity to consider the issue on its merits, free from the partisan battle over immigration that had dominated the EU referendum campaign, had apparently led to a substantial rethink among a group of voters that mostly still believed in the advantages of migration but who were now also persuaded that it required a greater degree of control.

A not dissimilar pattern is found in Table 9, which undertakes the same analysis for whether UK citizens who wish to move to the EU should have to apply to do so. Prior to deliberation around four in five Leave voters (82%) thought that they should, compared with only around a half of Remainers (49%). However, after deliberation support for the idea had increased among Remainers to 62%. Although in this instance this movement was matched to some degree among Leavers – 88% now said they were in favour – the proportion who said they were strongly in favour dropped somewhat (from 59% to 54%), and, if translated into a scale from 1-5, the average score of the responses given by Leavers was little changed.

Table 9 Attitudes towards ending freedom of movement for UK citizens by Brexit identity, pre- and post-deliberation

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
Require UK migrants to Britain to apply to go to EU	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour (5)	19	28	59	54
Somewhat in favour (4)	30	34	23	35
Neither in favour nor against (3)	11	13	13	9
Somewhat against (2)	25	16	3	1
Strongly against (1)	15	9	2	2
Mean score	2.99	3.44	4.34	4.38
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>151</i>

However, this narrowing of the difference between Remainers and Leavers was less in evidence and certainly not consistent on the other policy issues where we have seen that there was a movement towards a somewhat less liberal position among participants in general (see Table 10). True, nearly all of the decline in support for not having a minimum income requirement when a British citizen wishes to bring a migrant spouse into the UK occurred among Remainers – support fell among them by 11 percentage points compared with just two points among Leavers. However, the same is not true of the question on requiring migrants themselves to have a minimum income. Support for not having any such requirement fell by six points among both Remainers and Leavers. Equally, as Table 10 shows, the decline in the proportion who said migrants should only have to wait a year or less before being able to access welfare benefits on the same terms largely occurred among Remainers.⁶ Yet, at the same time, the increase in the proportion who thought that a spouse entering the UK should be able to speak everyday English was, if anything, rather greater among Leavers (14 points) than Remainers (11 points). Although between them the responses in Table 10 do not indicate that there was any further polarisation in attitudes, they certainly show that there were limits to the extent that Remainers and Leavers came together in the immediate wake of their deliberation.

⁶ However, it should be noted that the narrowing of the difference between Remainers and Leavers does not quite reach statistical significance.

Table 10 Attitudes towards possible immigration controls by Brexit identity, pre- and post-deliberation

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%
No minimum income for migrants	45	39	24	18
No minimum income for spouses*	53	42	28	26
Migrants wait 1 year or less for benefits	56	44	26	22
Agree spouse should speak everyday English*	35	44	62	76
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>Unweighted bases for ** items</i>	<i>189</i>	<i>189</i>	<i>141</i>	<i>141</i>

There was, then, some evidence that the attitudes of Remainers and Leavers became somewhat less polarised in the wake of their deliberations about immigration. On the perceived consequences of immigration, it was primarily Leavers that shifted, moving towards the more favourable outlook of Remainers. But on the details of immigration policy, including on the issue of freedom of movement, it was Remainers who changed their minds most, taking them closer to the view of Leavers in favour of stronger immigration controls. Participants on both sides of the Brexit divide did indeed seem to develop a more nuanced point of view following discussion.⁷ However, did the impact of the deliberation last during the weeks and months after the deliberation?

Did the impact of the deliberation last?

Ascertaining that people express different views immediately after deliberating is of interest in itself. It potentially gives us insight into what public attitudes would be if voters were better informed and had the opportunity to consider the issues at stake at length (Fishkin, 2011). However, we might also want to know whether the change of outlook among participants proves durable. If it does that might suggest that, if it were practised more widely, deliberation might have a lasting – and perhaps beneficial – impact on how public attitudes are formed (Fishkin and Mansbridge, 2017).

While there is a substantial body of research on the immediate impact of deliberation, fewer studies have examined its longer-term

⁷ Not only had the relationship between Brexit identity and attitudes towards migration weakened, but so also had that between perceptions of the consequences of immigration (as measured at the initial recruitment survey) and attitudes towards some of the policy options. For example, the proportion of those inclined to the view that immigration is good for the economy who supported requiring EU citizens to have to apply to come to the UK increased from 49% in the pre-deliberation survey to 68% in the post-deliberation one. (Among those who took a less favourable view of the economic consequences of immigration, there was only a five-percentage point increase from 78% to 83%.

impact by revisiting participants and ascertaining their attitudes towards the subjects discussed some weeks or months later. When this has been done, the results have not all pointed in the same direction. The Europe-wide Deliberative Poll to which reference was made earlier did re-interview its participants several weeks later. This study found that the distribution of attitudes that were being expressed by participants towards both immigration and climate change at that time was still different from that in evidence prior to deliberation (Fishkin, 2018: 43). At the same time, however, the difference was less marked than it had been in the post-deliberation interview. However, a follow-up to a deliberative poll in Hungary on the economy and European integration suggested that while some attitudes were still different a year after deliberating, on other items the immediate impact of the deliberation had disappeared (Lengyel et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a study of a deliberation on energy options in Idaho came to the conclusion that several months later there was little evidence that the deliberation had led to any enduring attitude change (Hall et al., 2011).

In our case (as detailed at the beginning of this chapter), we re-interviewed our participants – along with a sample of the general population – some months later. For the most part the results of the general population survey were very similar to those obtained in the initial surveys conducted a year earlier, in spring 2019 and spring 2020 (Curtice et al., 2020b). Consequently, any difference we uncover between the views that participants expressed in this post-event survey and those that they reported before deliberating is unlikely to reflect a change of attitude among people in general. We begin our examination by looking at the overall distribution of attitudes among our participants some months after deliberating, then look in particular at the views expressed months later by those who had changed their minds during the deliberation, and finally assess whether any remnants of the depolarisation that occurred between Remainers and Leavers were still in evidence well after our events.

Aggregate level analysis

Table 11 looks at the overall distribution of attitudes towards the economic and cultural consequences of migration when participants were interviewed some months after their deliberation weekend, and compares it with the equivalent distributions on the pre-deliberation questionnaire. It can be seen that some of the increase in support for the idea that migration is good for the economy reported in Table 1 was still in evidence some months later. Now 66% gave a score of six or more, five percentage points above the equivalent figure in the pre-deliberation survey, while the average score was 0.2 higher. However, this still meant that the swing towards a more favourable point of view was weaker over the longer-term than it had been in the survey conducted immediately after deliberation. At that point (see Table 1) 70% had responded with a score of six or more.

Table 11 Perceived impact of immigration on Britain's economy and cultural life, pre-deliberation and months later

	Perceived impact of immigration on...			
	Britain's economy		Britain's culture	
	Pre-Event	Months later	Pre-Event	Months Later
Score on 0-10 scale	%	%	%	%
0-4 (bad/undermined)	13	15	18	19
5 (neither)	26	19	18	16
6-10 (good/enriched)	61	66	64	65
Mean score	6.48	6.68	6.50	6.59

Base: 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later.

Table 11 also shows that some months after the event there was relatively little difference between the perceptions that participants now had of the cultural consequences of immigration and their perceptions before deliberating. While the average score was still a little (but not significantly) higher than in the pre-deliberation survey, the proportion who gave a score of six or more was, at 65%, almost exactly the same. Meanwhile, Table 12 shows that attitudes towards ending freedom of movement were now much as they had been before deliberation. At 64% the proportion who favoured placing a requirement on migrants from the EU to apply to come to the UK was only modestly higher than the 60% who had backed that position in the pre-deliberation survey, while the proportion favouring the application of similar controls to UK migrants going to the EU (64%) was now exactly the same as in the pre-deliberation survey (64%).

Table 12 Attitudes towards freedom of movement, pre-deliberation and months later

	Require application by...			
	EU migrants to Britain		UK migrants to EU	
	Pre-Event	Months later	Pre-Event	Months Later
Score on 0-10 scale	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour (5)	35	33	33	32
Somewhat in favour (4)	25	31	30	32
Neither in favour nor against (3)	17	16	14	18
Somewhat against (2)	15	14	14	11
Strongly against (1)	7	6	8	7
Mean score	3.67	3.73	3.68	3.71

Base: 376 people who participated in the deliberation and completed the recruitment survey, the pre- and post-event surveys and the survey administered a few months later.

That said, some of the other differences that we had identified between the pre- and post-deliberation interviews on more specific policy issues were still in evidence months later. At 30% the proportion who said that potential migrants should not have to earn a minimum income was six points below what it had been before deliberation. At 34% the proportion who thought that a British citizen bringing a spouse to the UK should be required to have a minimum income was even slightly lower than it had been in the post-deliberation survey (37%). Meanwhile, the proportion who said that bankers should be a low priority for admission remained as high (44%) as it had been in the post-deliberation survey, while at 61% the proportion who said that care workers were a high priority almost matched the elevated level of 62% in the post-deliberation survey.⁸

Individual level analysis

Another way of looking at the longer-term impact of the deliberation is to look specifically at the responses in our post-event survey of those who changed their response between the pre- and post-deliberation surveys. To what extent did those individuals who appeared to change their minds in the immediate wake of deliberating maintain their changed point of view, and to what extent did they revert to the views that they had expressed in the pre-deliberation survey?

Table 13 undertakes such an analysis. It shows for a number of the questions where the distribution of attitudes shifted between the pre- and post-deliberation surveys: (a) the proportion of those individual participants who had shifted attitude after deliberation who months later stuck with their revised view, and (b) the proportion of those who held that same view before and after deliberation who gave the same answer a third time months later. It will be seen that typically around a half of those who had changed their mind in the wake of the deliberation retained their revised view some months later, though the proportion varied from just one in three (33%) among those who had swung in favour of requiring EU migrants to apply to come to the UK to seven in ten (71%) among those who had turned against the idea that someone bringing a spouse into the UK should not have to have a minimum income. However, in each case, the proportion expressing the same view months later as they had done in the post-deliberation survey was less – and often much less – than the equivalent proportion among participants who had already expressed the same

⁸ Some of the other movements that were observed between the pre- and post-deliberation surveys only partially endured. At 20% the proportion who strongly agreed that a spouse coming to the UK should be able to speak everyday English was still five percentage points above the level in the pre-deliberation survey, though the proportion who just said 'agree' had fallen back heavily. Meanwhile, just 13% now said that a migrant should be able to access welfare benefits immediately, below the 19% recorded in the pre-deliberation survey. However, at the same time the proportion who said that migrants should be able to access welfare after a year was now six points higher. Much of the increase in the proportion who said that migrants who have lived in the UK for five years should be able to acquire citizenship relatively easily was also still in evidence, with 53% now backing that view.

view in both the pre- and post-deliberation survey. While the deliberation did leave a lasting mark on the attitudes of many of the participants who had changed their minds after deliberating, for some it appears that the change of mind proved to be a temporary one.

Table 13 Response months later, by impact of deliberation

Response months later	Among those who moved to this view after deliberation	Among those who already held this view before deliberation
	%	%
Migration good for economy	55	91
Migration enriches culture	55	92
Require EU citizens to apply	33	90
Require UK citizens to apply	48	84
Spouse should speak everyday English	60	75
	%	%
Not giving this response months later	Among those who moved away from this view after deliberation	Among those who already did not take this view before deliberation
	%	%
No income limit for migrants	69	90
No income limit for spouse	71	93
Welfare benefits after 1 year or less	39	91

The details of the unweighted bases on which these numbers are based are presented in Table A1 in the appendix to this chapter

What happened to differences between Remainers and Leavers?

The tendency for up to half of those who changed their mind in the immediate wake of the deliberation to have reverted months later to their former point of view suggests that some of the convergence we observed between Remainers and Leavers will have been attenuated too. As Table 14 illustrates, this was indeed often the case. Here we compare how Remainers and Leavers answered our question on the cultural consequences of immigration months after the deliberation with the views they expressed in the pre-deliberation survey. After the deliberation, the responses given by Leavers had moved closer to those of Remainers – but there is relatively little trace left of that movement in Table 14. At 44% the proportion of Leavers who months later had recorded a score of six or more was much closer to the 42% who had done so in the pre-deliberation survey than the 50% who had done so in the post-deliberation one. Although the difference between the two sets of voters in their average score was still somewhat less than it had been before the deliberation, the reduced difference was now well short of being statistically significant.

Table 14 Perceived impact of immigration on Britain's culture by Brexit identity, pre-deliberation and months later

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Months later	Pre-Event	Months later
	%	%	%	%
0-4 (undermined)	3	6	36	37
5 (neither)	14	15	21	19
6-10 (enriched)	83	80	42	44
Mean score	7.71	7.60	5.08	5.21
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	203	203	151	151

Meanwhile, the narrowing of the gap between Remainers and Leavers in their perceptions of the economic consequences of immigration after the deliberation had now disappeared almost entirely. While, at 5.56, the average score among Leavers was still rather higher than the 5.35 recorded in the pre-deliberation survey, the score among Remainers was, at 7.66, now a little higher too. The difference between the two groups months after the deliberation was, at 2.10, little different from the 2.17 observed in the pre-deliberation survey.

However, not all traces of the depolarisation between Remainers and Leavers were lost. This can be seen in Table 15, which shows for the two groups their attitude towards the key issue of freedom of movement for EU citizens. Months after the deliberation, Remainers continued to be more inclined than they had been in the pre-deliberation survey to favour requiring migrants from the EU to apply to come to the UK. Although below the 61% who expressed support in the post-deliberation survey, at 49% the proportion who did so months later was still well above the 38% in the pre-deliberation survey. As a result, the difference between Remainers and Leavers is still significantly smaller than on the pre-deliberation survey.⁹

⁹ The same, however, is not true of attitudes towards ending freedom of movement for UK citizens wishing to migrate to an EU country.

Table 15 Attitudes towards ending freedom of movement for EU citizens by Brexit identity, pre- deliberation and months later

	Remainers		Leavers	
	Pre-Event	Months later	Pre-Event	Months later
Require EU migrants to Britain to apply to come	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour (5)	15	17	63	57
Somewhat in favour (4)	22	32	25	30
Neither in favour nor against (3)	21	18	9	8
Somewhat against (2)	27	23	3	4
Strongly against (1)	13	11	1	*
Mean score	2.99	3.22	4.47	4.40
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	203	203	151	151

It appears that our deliberation did have a longer-term impact on the views of some of our participants. Typically, around a half of those who had changed their minds during the deliberation held with their revised view some months later. However, the other half appear to have reverted to their former views. As a result, the change in the overall distribution of attitudes registered months later was less than the movement that had been in evidence immediately after the deliberation, though in some instances the change remained statistically significant. Much the same is true of the depolarisation of attitudes between Remainers and Leavers. The impact of deliberation on those who participate is evidently far more than simply ephemeral, but over the longer-term people's prior predispositions reassert themselves again to some degree, suggesting that deliberation would need to be practised on much more than an occasional basis if its use is ever to have a significant impact on attitude formation.

Conclusions

The discussion on post-Brexit immigration at our deliberative events exposed participants to a variety of views that were rooted in potentially conflicting considerations of morality and self-interest. This experience does appear to have had some immediate impact on their views. Moreover, it did so in a manner that is consistent with some of the claims made in favour of deliberation. Collectively at least, attitudes became rather more nuanced as participants became more likely to feel that immigration has been economically and culturally beneficial for Britain, but at the same time also became a little less liberal in their attitudes towards immigration control. Moreover, because the first of these movements occurred primarily among Leavers while the second was more evident among Remainers, there was some meeting of minds between those on

opposite sides of the Brexit debate. That said, only part of this change was still in evidence when we re-interviewed participants some months later, with only around half of those who changed their minds during the deliberation sticking to their revised view. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a limit to the difference made on a contentious issue by a one-off event.

Yet there are still important lessons from our research for any evaluation of how well the post-Brexit immigration policy that the government has introduced fits the public mood. Further consideration of the issues at stake reinforced what was already widespread support for the decision to end freedom of movement and treat EU and non-EU migrants in a similar fashion. Much the same could be said about the decision to focus on control rather than caps or targets. On the other hand, our research raises questions about how well some of the criteria that the government is using to achieve control match public preferences. Although there was some movement in the wake of the deliberation towards the idea that migrants should have some level of minimum income, participants still seemed inclined towards a lower level than the norm of £25.6K that has been introduced. Meanwhile, the government's emphasis on occupational skill seems somewhat at odds with the views of a public for whom the social value of an occupation and the needs of the labour market appear to be more important considerations. While the overall framework of the government's post-Brexit policy may be better attuned to the public's mood than the regime that preceded it, there is, it seems, still plenty of room for debate about how that framework should be applied.

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Appendix

Unweighted bases for Table 13 are shown below.

Table A1 Response months later, by impact of deliberation

Response months later	Among those who moved to this view after deliberation	Among those who already held this view before deliberation
Migration good for economy	48	228
Migration enriches culture	35	229
Require EU citizens to apply	61	199
Require UK citizens to apply	64	200
Spouse should speak everyday English	65	130
Not giving this response months later	Among those who moved away from this view after deliberation	Among those who already did not take this view before deliberation
No income limit for migrants	51	202
No income limit for spouse	53	170
Welfare benefits after 1 year or less	54	190

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