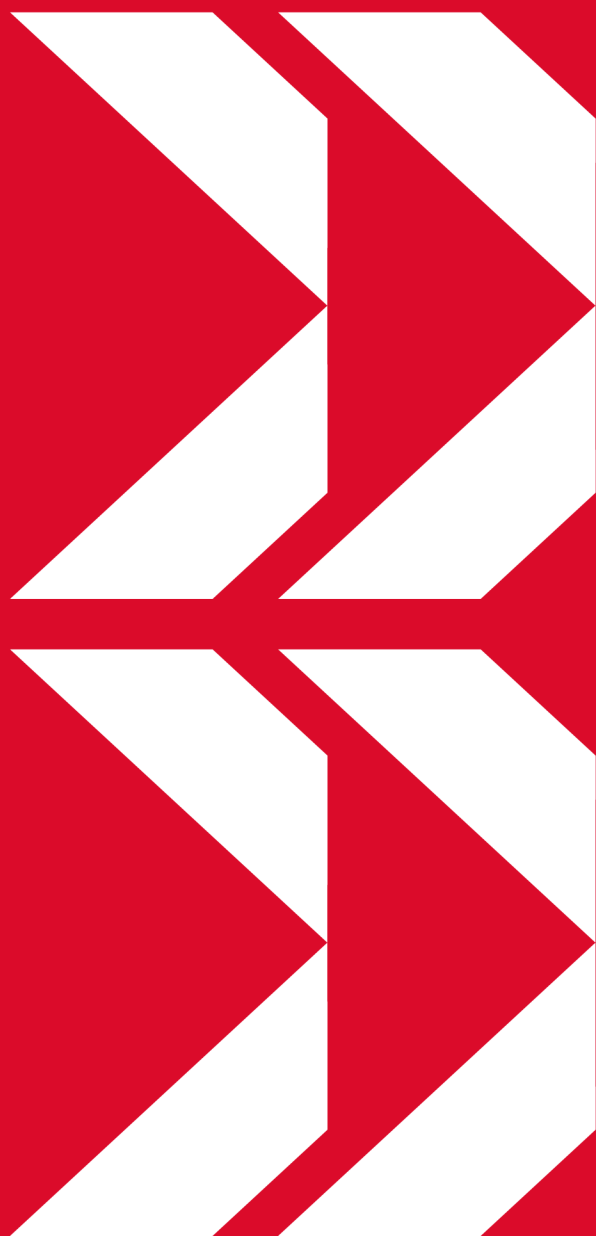


Migration in the Age of Insecurity

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March 2024

Labour Together



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Preface

About the Authors

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About Labour Together

In Labour's wilderness years, Labour Together was founded by a group of MPs fighting to make the party electable again. Today, Labour Together is a think tank offering bold ideas for Britain under a Labour government.

www.labourtogether.uk

Introduction

The world has entered an “age of insecurity”. War has returned to the European continent and rages beyond it. Political upheaval has disrupted some of the most stable democracies in the world, and is likely to do so again in 2024. Rising powers like China are destabilising the old order. In this era, Britain has been uniquely exposed. Its economy has flatlined. Public services have suffered. Trust in those who govern us has cratered.


This global age of insecurity is felt acutely by people across the United Kingdom. They experience it in their homes, where rising bills have overwhelmed flat wages. They feel it in their local communities, where high streets decay and crime goes unpunished. They see it in their public services, most of which are crumbling, some of them – like the ceilings in their local school – quite literally.

To many, this insecurity is felt at our borders too. Across developed democracies, a fear of uncontrolled immigration is having a major impact on electoral politics: uprooting governments, producing new political alliances and even parties, and dividing communities.

In many countries, centre-left governments have struggled in these conditions, torn between their progressive voter base who are comfortable with high levels of migration, and their more socially conservative, generally older, working-class supporters, who are not. In France and Germany, for instance, a new right-wing has emerged as the old left-leaning parties fall into decline.

In Britain, however, it is a right-wing government that has suffered. Britain’s Conservatives now find themselves blamed for record migration figures. Migration sceptics have been offered the promise of control (like the pledge to “Stop the Boats”) and received only chaos. On the other side, more liberal voters have looked upon their government’s attempts to address immigration as both ineffective and cruel.

The result is evident in national polling. For nearly half a century, Labour has almost always trailed the Conservatives when asked who would best manage migration. That has now changed, with Labour comfortably leading the Conservatives on this issue. However, overall confidence in the ability of political parties to manage this issue is low, with a majority of voters thinking either that neither main party would be best at handling the issue, or simply saying they ‘don’t know’.



The policies Labour has proposed from opposition seek security and control at Britain's border, without the chaos of the current administration. They also seek to allay people's concerns about the negative impact that migration might have on their economic prospects by ensuring migration is not used by unscrupulous employers to erode wages and conditions, and British people are able to access the training they need for the jobs of the future.

Supported by new polling, we suggest Labour could be bolder still. We believe Labour could set out a confident vision of a migration system that works for both the UK economy and for communities, and which starts to rebuild our dented international reputation. In particular, Labour could address concerns about the social impact of migration by promoting the integration of migrants into British society, including through citizenship, which this paper shows is popular with the British public at large.

In this paper, we explore three pillars which could underpin an effective and popular migration system, showing where Labour is already addressing them and where there are further opportunities to do so:

1. **From Chaos to Control.** Britain's migration and asylum system looks chaotic to Britain's voters for a simple reason: it often is. Where today there is chaos, Labour must provide control, for example through its emphasis on tackling the people-smuggling gangs and by pursuing a workable returns and resettlement agreement with Europe.
2. **From Insecurity to Fairness.** Many voters worry migrants take more from our society than they contribute, at a time when economic security feels out of reach for many and public services are under increasing strain. An effective migration system must be fair and put the economic security of working people at its centre. One way this could be achieved is through tougher labour market regulation preventing employers using migrant labour to undercut British workers' pay and conditions.
3. **From Division to Belonging.** Voters' attitudes to migration are transformed by how effectively migrants can integrate in their new home. Britain's migration policy must enhance a sense of belonging to avoid division, by actively encouraging migrants to take British citizenship and supporting the integration of refugees.

Background

Immigration has been a consequential issue in British politics for decades. It has been a major issue at general elections ever since the Second World War, and came to dominate the elections for the UK's Members of the European Parliament. In 2016, Britain voted to leave the European Union altogether. While this was nominally a plebiscite on the UK's relationship with Europe, it was at least in part an opportunity to voice dissatisfaction with migration.

Populists across Europe, including in Britain, have promised to turn back the tide, stopping migration entirely. From King Cnut onwards, attempts to command the tides have rarely worked. Migration is a fact of life in Britain, now as it always has been (with the Danish-born Cnut himself a case in point).

Some of the UK's dependence on migration shows weaknesses in our economic policies. That there are so many skilled roles in Britain today that cannot be filled by British workers is an illustration of a government failing its people. Britain has 10 million working-age people who are economically inactive¹ alongside a chronic skills shortage in its workforce. That gap is being plugged by migrant workers.

Britain will always be a nation that benefits from migration. Britain's economy, with a significant international services industry, depends on a constant circulation of talent. The NHS relies on doctors and nurses from overseas. Migrants are disproportionately represented in world-leading creative, university and technology sectors; and disproportionately lead job-creating startup businesses. They mitigate falling birth rates which would otherwise mean a declining and rapidly ageing population with all the associated economic and social challenges. And in a world that is growing more dangerous, there will be no end to forced migration either.

Progressive parties have often feared stepping into this debate. On the one hand, they fear alienating the section of their voting coalition who are instinctively uncomfortable with high levels of migration, and who are often the most likely to switch to other parties. On the other, they do not want to antagonise the more liberal voters who make up the base of their vote. As a result, they have often tried to move the political conversation onto other topics. The consequences of disengaging have been great. To the public, it looks like evasion. In the void, more extreme voices have dominated.

¹ BBC, 2023. Available [here](#).

We need a more nuanced debate that recognises the benefits of migration as well as the challenges. This must be based on acceptance of border controls as essential for democratic society, and that Britain should use the control of its borders to reflect its values.

It must also accept that we face stagnant growth and low productivity compared to our international peers. It must admit that we live in a world facing enormous crises, be that conflict or extreme weather. It should also celebrate the fact that we live in a diverse society that leads the world in showing how those of different backgrounds can live peacefully and productively together.

What Voters Think

In Britain, making sense of public attitudes towards migration is not straightforward. In the years before 2015, public concerns about migration rose steadily against a backdrop of historically high levels of immigration. In the autumn of that year, immigration was cited by nearly 60% of voters as being an important issue, substantially ahead of any other. But after Brexit something unexpected happened: although immigration levels remained high, migration rapidly fell down the list of voters' priorities, while at the same time public attitudes towards migration became more positive on a number of metrics.²

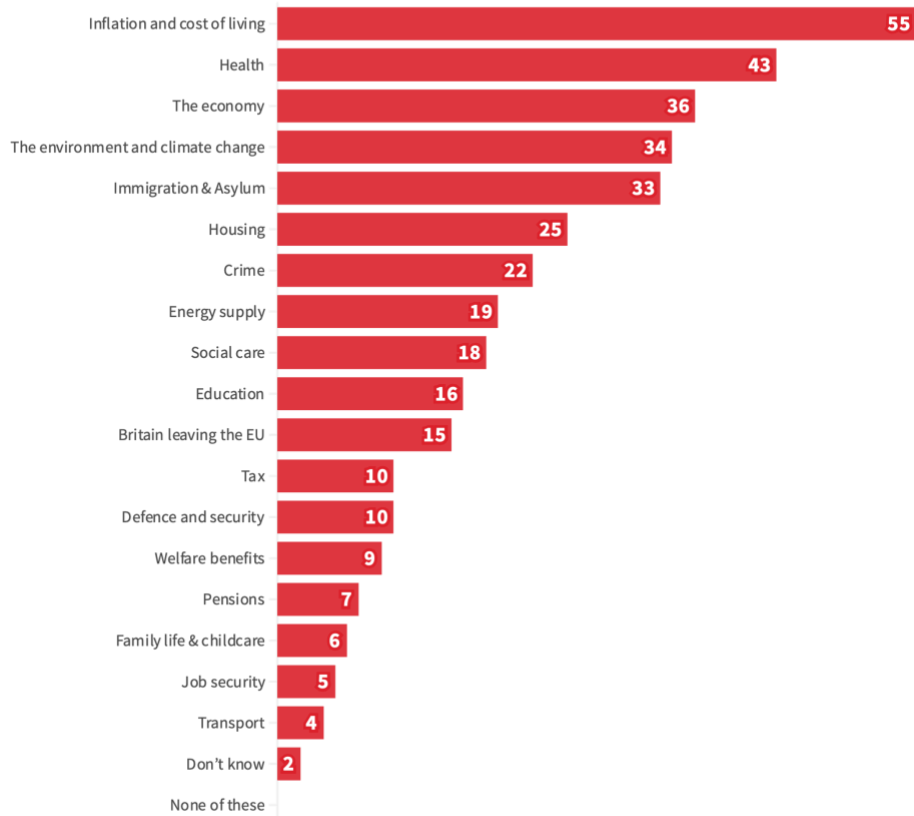
Since the end of the Covid pandemic, migration into the UK has dramatically increased. In 2022, net migration stood at a record 745,000.³ This time, public opinion has responded less dramatically than might have been expected. Both the salience of immigration and the number of people who believe migration has had a negative impact on the UK remain below their 2015 peak, despite net migration numbers being much higher. However, both these numbers have risen steadily since the low water mark of 2021, and may yet have further to rise. While immigration ranks behind the top issues that Britons cite, it cannot be ignored.

² Ipsos 2023. Available [here](#).

³ BBC, 2023. Available [here](#).

From the following, what are the most important issues facing the country today?
Please pick up to four.

% of all Britons



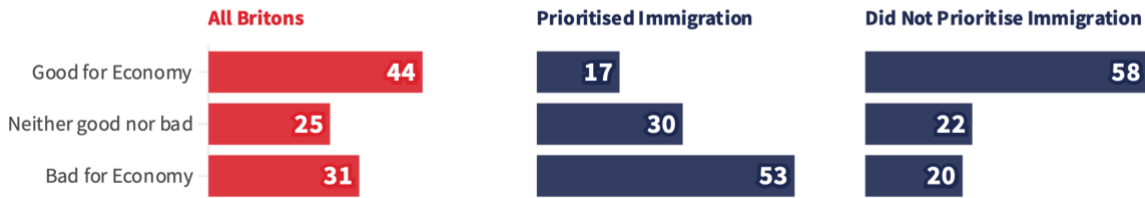
Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 9 - 10 January 2024

Figure A: Voters on the most important issues facing the country

While immigration is not *the* top issue, a third (33%) of respondents to our survey *did* think that immigration is one of the most important issues facing the country. While this is a minority of the voting public, it is a large one. It is a group that is much more likely to hold negative views about the impact of immigration than those who do not see immigration as an important issue (see Figure E below). It is also a group of voters who will have a disproportionate impact on the outcome of the next election: 60% say they will vote for a different party to the one they supported in 2019. Their views on how Labour and the Conservatives deal with their concerns may well determine how they vote this year.

Generally speaking, do you think immigration is good or bad for... Britain's economy?

% of all Britons, including 688 who selected immigration and asylum as one of the most important issues facing the country at the moment, and 1377 who did not.



Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 9 - 10 January 2024

Figure B: Voters on whether immigration is good or bad for the economy

Migration as a political dilemma

Immigration has always been a difficult subject for parties on the centre-left because they must hold together voters whose opinions on the issue vary widely.

In 2023, Labour Together published a segmentation of the electorate which grouped voters according to their attitudes to social and economic issues. The result was six segments, set out in *Figure C*.

THE KEY SWING VOTERS	
The Patriotic Left (aka ‘ Workington Man ’)	Older than average, the Patriotic Left are socially conservative but economically left wing. These voters often live in what has been called Labour’s “Red Wall”, a series of seats spread across the Midlands, North West and North East.
Disillusioned Suburbans (aka ‘ Stevenage Woman ’)	Younger than average, but economically insecure, Disillusioned Suburbans disproportionately live in small cities and towns. They are balancers in their world-view, sticking close to the median voter: a little to the left on economics, a touch to the right on social and cultural issues.
LABOUR’S CORE VOTE	
The Activist Left	Younger than average, highly educated, the Activist Left are the most progressive voters. They disproportionately live in cities and university towns. Out to the left in their economics, they are very liberal on cultural issues.
Centrist Liberals	The most affluent voters, they are often university educated, and live disproportionately in cities and the South. They are to the left of centre on economics and the same on culture.
THE CONSERVATIVES’ CORE VOTE	
English Traditionalists	The oldest segment in our group, English Traditionalists are also relatively financially secure. They are socially conservative on cultural issues, and lean a little towards the right on economics.
The Rural Right	An older group of voters, the Rural Right are the most financially secure group in our segmentation. They live in rural areas across the country, are firmly socially conservative on culture, and stridently right-wing on economic issues.

Figure C: Labour Together’s six voter segments

As a rule of thumb, to win a general election, either party must win the support of four of the six segments. To do so, Labour is forced to straddle a coalition that is divided on social issues, including – and especially – on migration. Here, different voters within Labour’s winning coalition believe, variously, that immigration should rise, fall and stay the same.

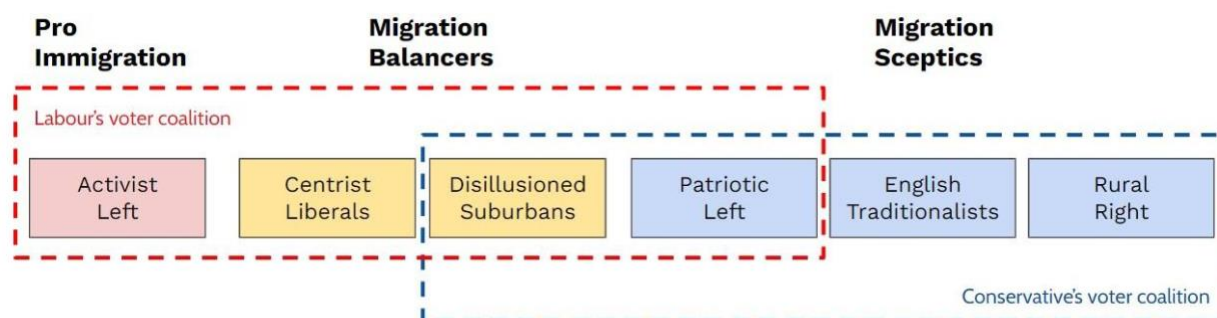


Figure D: Attitudes to migration within the segments

By contrast, the Conservatives can gain the support of the four groups they must win while prosecuting an argument on migration that is sceptical. With their own potential coalition united and Labour’s divided, the Conservative party has persistently attempted to exploit immigration as a “wedge issue” which can split Labour’s voter coalition. It is perhaps no surprise the Conservative party sought a pledge to “Stop the Boats” that symbolises this effort, especially given the historic success of such a strategy.

However, the Conservatives in government now face the tougher political challenge. Immigration is now a much higher priority for the potential Conservative coalition than it is for the potential Labour Coalition. Nearly half (47%) of respondents in the four segments that the Conservatives need to win cited immigration as an important issue. Only 19% of Labour’s coalition did the same.

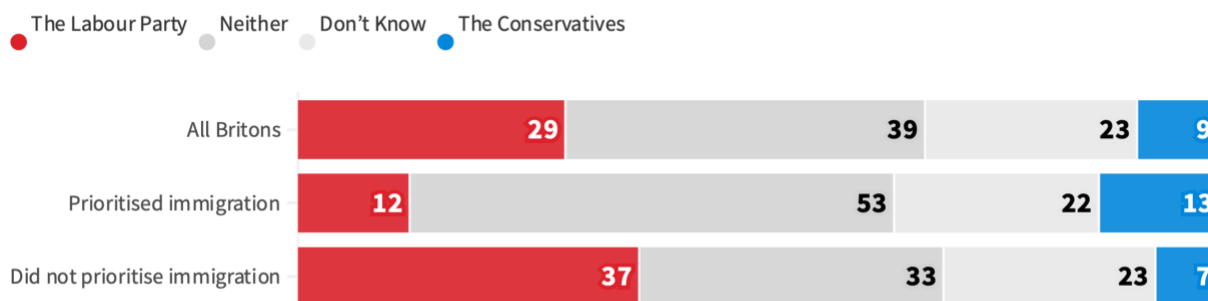
This is a problem for the government. The public’s view of the government’s record is now overwhelmingly negative, with just one in ten (10%) voters now believing that the government is doing a good job on immigration.⁴ As a result, recent government efforts to increase the issue’s salience are failing to win back 2019 Conservative voters who have switched to Labour, but who tend to prioritise economic issues over immigration. At the same time, it seems to be driving increased support for the populist right (in the shape of Reform UK) among those Conservative 2019 voters for whom immigration is a top issue. This has, in a significant political reversal of fortunes, made immigration a wedge issue splitting the Conservative coalition and not Labour’s.

⁴ YouGov 2024. Available [here](#).

Polling for this paper shows the public now believes Labour is better placed than the Conservatives to handle migration: 28% back Labour, whereas only 13% think the Conservatives handle the issue better (though among those who think immigration is *the* top issue facing Britain today the Conservatives remain marginally ahead). Labour is thought to be the best party to handle the integration of people who have migrated into UK society, with a wide lead of 20 points. Nevertheless, on both questions, a majority of voters currently trust neither party with the issue or they simply “don’t know” who would do so best. While Labour is more trusted than the Conservatives, distrust dominates.

And which of the following parties, if any, do you think would be best to handle the overall issue of asylum and immigration?

% of all Britons, including 688 who selected immigration and asylum as one of the most important issues facing the country at the moment, and 1377 who did not.



Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 9 - 10 January 2024

Figure E: Best party to handle immigration

Public priorities for the migration system

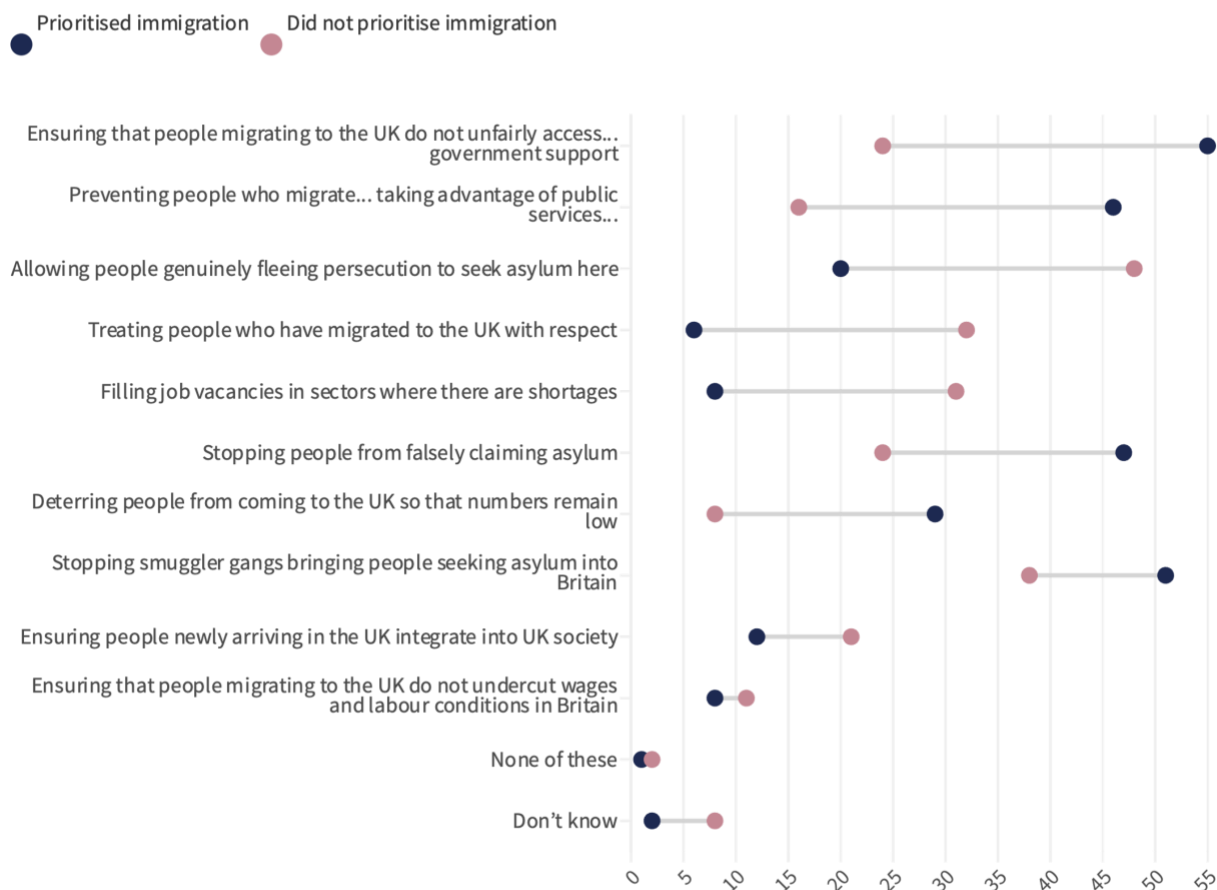
Despite their very differing beliefs about immigration, there are several areas where there is broad agreement among the public. For instance, when asked what they prioritise within Britain’s migration system, voters are united in their belief that the government must stop the smuggler gangs. This is considered a key priority by those who consider immigration a top issue and those who do not.

Beyond this, however, views diverge. Those who prioritise immigration also think the migration system should concentrate on stopping people falsely claiming asylum, and preventing migrants from unfairly accessing government support or public services. Those

who do not prioritise migration think allowing those fleeing persecution to seek asylum is the most important issue overall.

Which of the following, if any, should be the most important priorities for the UK's immigration system? Please select up to three.

% of 688 Britons who selected immigration and asylum as one of the most important issues facing the country at the moment, and 1377 who did not.



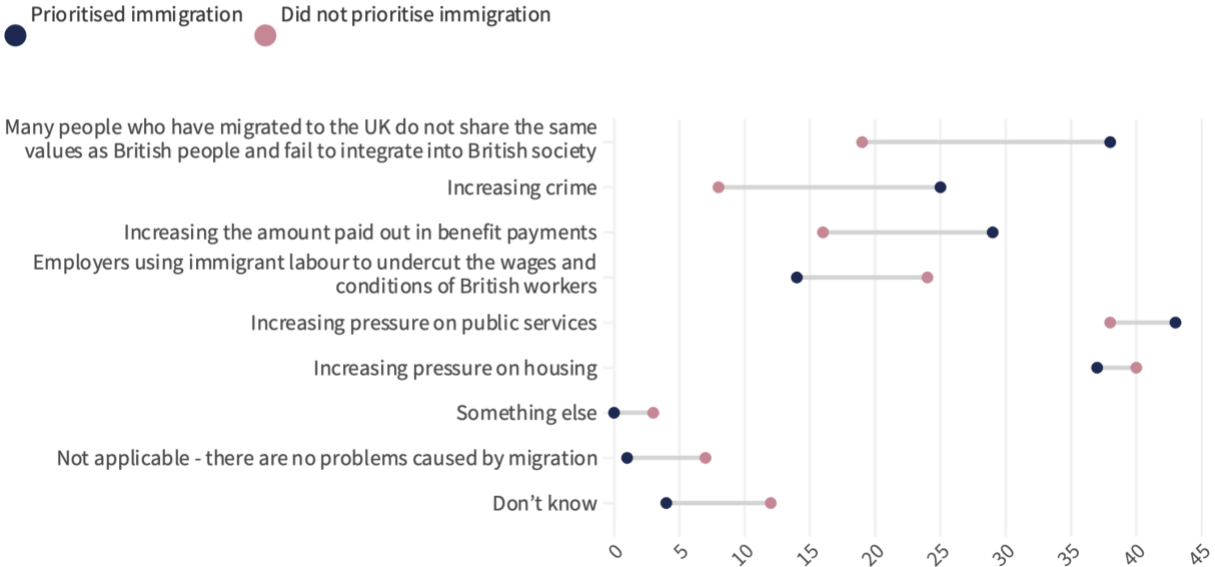
Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 9 - 10 January 2024

Figure F: Priorities for the UK's immigration system by those who prioritise immigration as a top issue facing the country, versus those who do not

When we asked about the biggest problems caused by legal migration to the UK, we again find agreement among respondents: the impact on public services and housing are important issues. The group who prioritise immigration have a further concern: namely that migrants do not share British values and fail to integrate into UK society.

Which, if any, of the following do you think are the biggest problems caused by legal migration for the UK. Please select up to two. If you don't think there are any problems caused by migration, please tick not applicable

% of 688 Britons who selected immigration and asylum as one of the most important issues facing the country at the moment, and 1377 who did not.



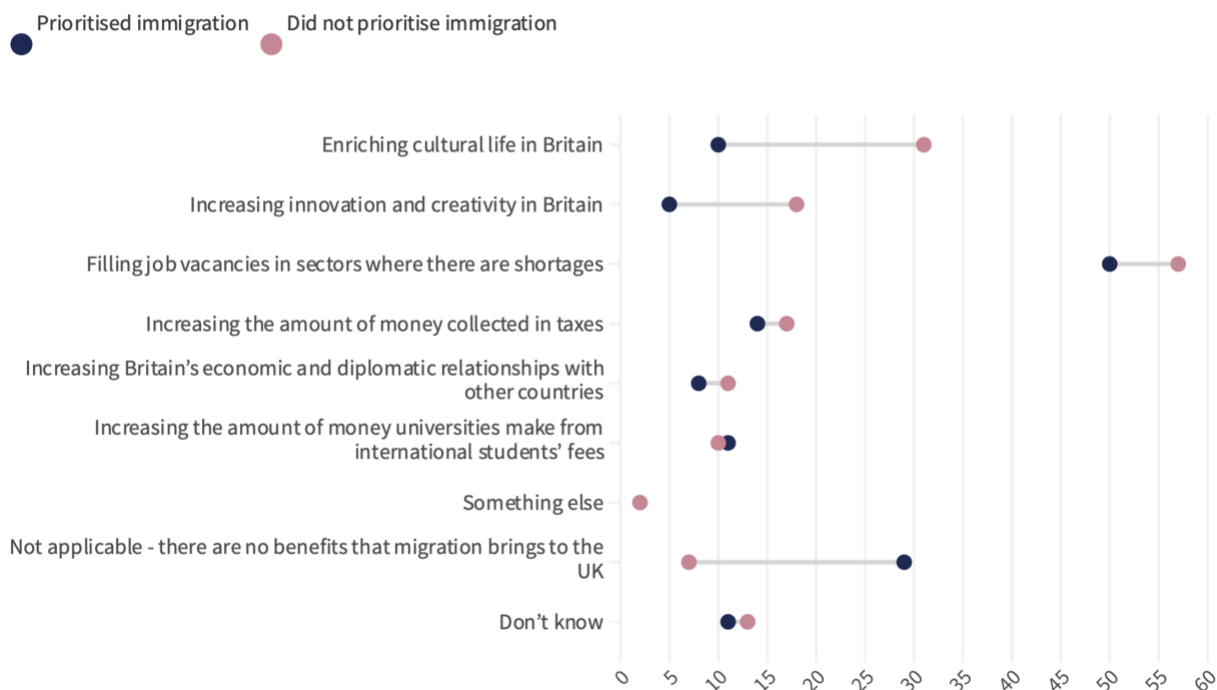
Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 9 - 10 January 2024

Figure G: Biggest problems caused by legal migration to the UK with percentage who chose each option

On the benefits of migration, there is a wide consensus that filling job vacancies in sectors where there are shortages is the most important benefit. Exactly half of those who prioritise immigration cite this as a positive. It is important to note 71% of this group, disproportionately sceptical of migration, believe that migration does bring *some* benefits to the UK, although in most cases it is clear they feel these are outweighed by the negatives.

Which, if any, of the following do you think are the most important benefits legal migration brings to the UK. Please select up to two. If you don't think migration brings any benefits to the UK, please tick not applicable

% of 688 Britons who selected immigration and asylum as one of the most important issues facing the country at the moment, and 1377 who did not.



Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 9 - 10 January 2024

Figure H: Top three benefits of legal migration into the UK, with percentage who chose each option

There is also a very high degree of consensus on questions around work and citizenship. Three quarters (76%) believe asylum seekers should be allowed to work while waiting for a decision on their claim. A similar proportion (74%) support the idea that victims of the Windrush Scandal should be granted citizenship and free British passports. Nearly two thirds (63%) think children born in the UK should be entitled to British citizenship regardless of where their parents are from.

We also found respondents are significantly more likely to think migrants who take UK citizenship are making a meaningful contribution to the economy (when compared to those who do not become citizens). However, there is little support for the government using taxpayers' money to help migrants integrate into British society.



The overall message from our public opinion research is that the sense of insecurity migration-sceptics feel derives from a perceived lack of control over who comes here, the belief migrants take out more than they put in, and a concern newcomers to the UK do not hold British values and fail to integrate. These concerns are particularly acute at a time when housing and public services are under such obvious pressure. It is worth noting, even amongst migration-sceptic respondents, there was positivity about migrants demonstrating a commitment to the UK by acquiring British citizenship.

This analysis of voter perceptions leads us to the three shifts that we believe any future government should seek to achieve in the UK's migration system, and which the polling demonstrates would be popular with a wide range of voters:

- First, moving from chaos in our migration system (and in particular in the asylum system) to – to coin a phrase – taking back control.
- Second, moving from a migration system that seems to entrench insecurity to one actively promoting fairness (for both the existing residents and new arrivals).
- Third, building a migration system that lessens division by building belonging and promoting citizenship and integration.

The First Shift

From Chaos to Control

Any migration policy must start with the recognition that control matters. Even those who believe that migration has generally been a force for good must accept uncontrolled migration is not desirable, either in principle or practice. It undermines the democratic consent on which liberal democracies depend, is not in the public interest, and is not seen as such by the public.

Today, our system is failing to deliver either effective control or public perception of it. The government has consistently promised reductions in numbers, while pursuing policies that achieved the opposite. It has overseen a deterioration in the asylum system, with a collapse in the number of cases processed being followed by new laws which leave tens of thousands of people in permanent legal limbo, and billions spent on hotel accommodation as a direct consequence of the resulting backlogs. The level of political mismanagement is staggering. Ministers have prioritised ineffective and tokenistic approaches. They have publicly overridden and undermined the Civil Service's view they offer terrible value for money for taxpayers. They have sought to avoid scrutiny and accountability, including from the (now fired) Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration. And they have failed to replace agreements with our European neighbours since Brexit. All this has hindered the UK's ability to return those who arrive on our shores in small boats.

The government's signature policy has only added to the chaos. The Rwanda Plan has seen spiralling costs, now believed to be reaching more than £400 million, with still higher costs in store if the government succeeds in sending any migrants to Rwanda. Even if they do, the numbers being sent to Rwanda will never be high enough to act as any kind of meaningful deterrent, while damaging Britain's international reputation. The eye-popping costs of this scheme will never be justifiable.⁵

The public has noticed. In November, Labour Together polled the government's migration policies, both with and without the Rwanda Agreement. Including Rwanda made the government's policies less, not more, popular. The most recent polling shows that 40% of the public now want to stop the plan. Just 20% want to see it continue.⁶

In response, Labour's approach has recognised that delivering security at the border is an essential precondition for a well-functioning and fair system. It stresses the importance of targeting organised immigration crime, but also accepts asylum seekers have a right to have their claims assessed, and rejects the Rwanda Plan as both an expensive gimmick and a betrayal of British values. Labour's plans also emphasise competence and pragmatism as key elements of effective control. These include proposals to improve the speed and

⁵ National Audit Office 2024. Available [here](#).

⁶ YouGov 2024. Available [here](#).

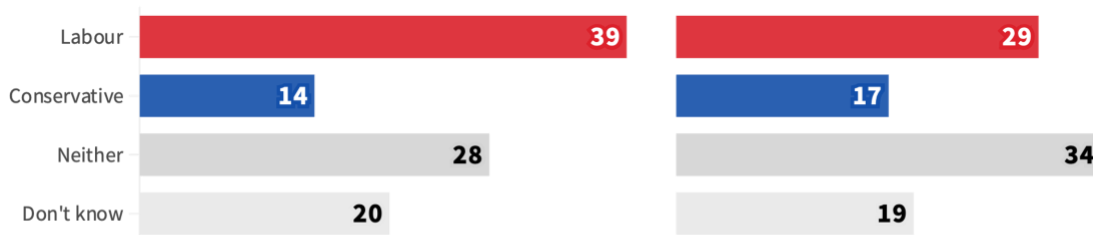
quality of asylum processing, and a new willingness to work with partners in Europe, for example with respect to enforcement and returns but also on resettlement.

In comparison to the government's Rwanda Plan, Labour's plan on asylum is more popular with voters. In October 2023, Labour Together tested Labour's asylum policies against an attack on those policies, quoting then Home Secretary Suella Braverman directly. Showing voters Labour's plan and the Conservative attack, saw Labour's lead on handling immigration rise by 10 points.

This translated into a higher proportion of voters who said they were likely to vote Labour, increasing Labour's lead on voting intention by four points.

And which of the following parties do you think would best handle asylum and immigration?

% of 1968 Britons who saw Labour's policies on migration and a Conservative attack on these policies, and 2238 Britons who did not*.

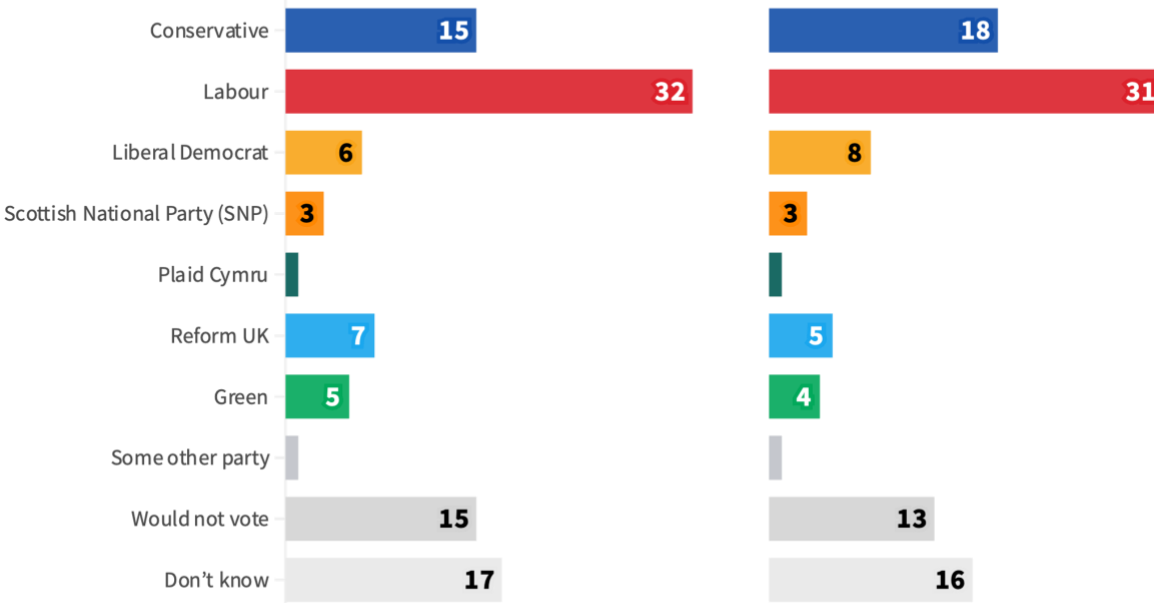


Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 2 - 4 October 2023 * Respondents were randomly allocated to either see Labour's policies on immigration and a Conservative attack on them, or not.

Figure I: Party best to handle immigration

If there were a general election tomorrow, who would you vote for?

% of 1968 Britons who saw Labour's policies on migration and a Conservative attack on these policies, and 2238 Britons who did not*.




Source: YouGov on behalf of Labour Together • 2 - 4 October 2023 * Respondents were randomly allocated to either see Labour's policies on immigration and a Conservative attack on them, or not.

Figure J: Current Voting Intention

Labour is now able to build on the credibility it has started to establish on asylum and border security. But, if Labour forms the next government, it should not underestimate the challenge of delivering this in practice. For example, achieving an effective deal with our European neighbours will be no mean feat. Labour will be able to draw on a long tradition of internationalism to present a fresh start, but will be faced with difficult decisions and trade-offs.

A new government will also need to establish and demonstrate control across the whole migration system, not just asylum. Public opinion research should give Labour confidence that a combination of security, competence and pragmatism can gain public support, even while migration numbers remain relatively high. The shift from chaos to control could be further demonstrated by a more open and transparent mode of governing to increase public confidence in the migration system. At a minimum, a new Labour government should have the confidence to welcome scrutiny and accountability, including from the



Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) and the Migrants' Commissioner recommended by the Windrush Lessons Learned Review. But Labour could go further. For example, many have argued that migration flows – past, present and future - should be openly debated in parliament. This would be supported by the Migration Advisory Committee or another independent body given OBR-style powers to annually report on flows and assess the impact of migration, locally and nationally.

Labour's policy is not just control for its own sake. Control is in the service of Labour's values and responds to the concerns and aspirations of the British people. This leads to the second shift.

The Second Shift

From Insecurity to Fairness

While asylum is one of the most hotly contested issues in the current political debate (and certainly one of the most visible in newspaper headlines and on our TV screens), most migration into Britain is accounted for by migration for work, study and family.

Migration, managed well, is a vital source of economic growth and supports the provision of high-quality public services (which are served by a large migrant workforce). Most of the British public agree. Over half (55%) think filling job vacancies is an important benefit of legal migration. Half (50%) of those who prioritise immigration as a top issue facing the country (the vast majority of whom believe migration numbers should fall) agree.


However, at a time when economic security feels out of reach for many, and public services are under increasing strain, it is essential Labour's migration policies are founded on fairness and give confidence that long-term problems are being tackled rather than tolerated. That means being clear that current migration policies and patterns are symptomatic of underlying problems with our economy and public services.

Many, including Labour, agree the current level of net migration is too high. There are caveats to this: the current level of net migration has been artificially boosted by one-off factors, such as the time-limited increase in arrivals from Ukraine and Hong Kong, and the post-pandemic bounce in student migration (much of which will be offset by emigration over the next 2-3 years). So, we would expect net migration to fall in coming years, even if the government took no action.

Nonetheless, very high levels of migration to the UK clearly tell us something about the state of our economy and public services. Britain's migration story is not one of Britain attracting the world's brightest and best. It is instead a sign of an economy that is overly-reliant on migrant labour in certain places, and has under-invested both in the skills of its people and in key sections of its public service workforce.⁷ High net migration is not the cause of these problems, but is important evidence of them.

Some of the policies already announced by Labour have signalled a welcome intention to make sure the migration system is not part of the problem of economic insecurity. Ending the provision whereby employers could recruit migrant workers at 20% less than the 'going rate' in skilled roles, for instance, was welcome – and something the government subsequently adopted.

⁷ After years of flatlining productivity, and in the face of persistent high levels of labour market inactivity (especially post-Covid), population growth driven by net migration has been a key source of GDP growth (and associated 'fiscal headroom').



There are more steps that can be taken in this vein, with a focus on ending exploitative employment practices. For example, improved labour market enforcement (such as a Single Enforcement Body) and changes to make it easier for migrant workers (including Overseas Domestic Workers and Seasonal Workers) to change employers would help to tackle unscrupulous employers who exploit migrant workers and undercut British workers. This would help to ensure that the migration system delivers fairness for both migrants and for the UK workforce.

Part of the problem is that current policies are not joined up. Decisions about migration are not integrated with broader policies on economic development, skills, public services, and welfare reform. Labour is right to look at how it can adapt the points-based system to better connect with wider policies, including training and skills, and public service workforce planning. New structures and working practices to ensure the Home Office works more effectively with other government departments would be an important first step to achieving this. To deliver a shift from insecurity to fairness, Labour will need to confront the deep-rooted problems that drive both economic insecurity and high migration.

The Third Shift

From Division to Belonging

The two shifts already discussed in this document – from chaos to control and from insecurity to fairness - are necessary conditions of a migration system that works and earns public support. They are not, however, sufficient.

If the British public, and particularly those who are concerned about immigration, are to feel migration does not imperil their security they must be confident that those who come to Britain share their values and integrate into British society.

Recent government policy on this question has done little to promote integration and citizenship, and in fact has done far more to erode it. Theresa May’s focus as Home Secretary, and then Prime Minister, was to prioritise short-term migration at the expense of longer-term settlement, to the extent even very long-settled communities were deeply affected. Her desire to create a “hostile environment” and encourage migrants to leave the UK created the conditions in which the Windrush Scandal was able to occur. Alongside this, government support for integration has been greatly diminished, with local authorities often now acting as a poorly-funded and inconsistent resource for the most marginalised groups.

The UK lacks an overarching goal of promoting citizenship in its migration system. This stands in stark contrast to countries like the United States, where migrants are encouraged to follow a path that leads to swearing their allegiance to the Stars and Stripes. The same is true in Canada, where the government sets goals for both permanent settlement and citizenship. For Britain to set out a similar goal could provide a guiding vision against which to judge progress. Supporting and encouraging people to become British citizens could directly impact millions of long-term residents⁸ and benefit communities across the UK.

The sense migrants do not make enough of a contribution to Britain is strong among migration-sceptic voters and is a key reason for wanting migration reduced. The acquisition of citizenship, however, is seen as a clear signal a migrant has made a commitment to Britain and is therefore likely to be contributing to the economy in the long-term.

As part of the research for this paper, Labour Together ran an experiment that illustrated this neatly. Survey respondents were shown two short narratives. The first group saw the following text:

⁸ Migration Observatory 2021. Available [here](#).

“A person emigrated to the UK from Nigeria in the year 2000. They have since worked in the UK as a building contractor. They have not paid to apply for British citizenship, and so they are not a British citizen.

How likely or unlikely do you think it is that this person makes a meaningful contribution to the British economy?”

The second group saw the same text, but with an additional sentence added to the first paragraph:

*“A person emigrated to the UK from Nigeria in the year 2000. They have since worked in the UK as a building contractor. **They have paid to apply for British citizenship and have been successful - so they are now a British citizen.***

How likely or unlikely do you think it is that this person makes a meaningful contribution to the British economy?”

The answers to these questions were markedly different. Of those who were told the migrant had become a British citizen, 83% thought it “very likely” or “quite likely” they had made a “meaningful contribution” to Britain’s economy. This was 21 points higher than among those who were told the migrant had not acquired citizenship. Perhaps most notably, the difference was even larger (28 points) among those who prioritise immigration (and are most often the greatest migration sceptics).

Further to this, our research found the public was overwhelmingly in favour (74%) of granting citizenship and offering free British passports to Commonwealth citizens who settled in the UK before 1973 (the Windrush Generation). A majority (55%) was in favour of making the process of acquiring British citizenship easier and quicker for people from the EU who have permanently settled in the UK, and (63%) in favour of British-born children being entitled to citizenship wherever their parents are from.

Citizenship enables migrants to fully participate in our society, to plan, and to invest in their communities. The British public wants migrants to do exactly these things. The hurdle to this, noted above, is they do not want the state to cover the cost.

The good news is that creating pathways to citizenship need not require significant new investment. There are a range of steps that could be taken by a Labour government to smooth the path to citizenship. For example, default citizenship could be granted to the Windrush Generation and to those who have received EU Settlement since Brexit. Labour

could also explore the scope for simplifying and shortening some routes to settlement and citizenship, including the '10-year' route.⁹

There are also opportunities to use citizenship to actively strengthen communities. For example, research suggests that small changes to citizenship ceremonies could effectively promote volunteering and civic engagement among new citizens.¹⁰ Other behavioural science studies show that inviting British citizens to attend citizenship ceremonies for new British citizens could have a positive impact on community cohesion outcomes.

Effective support for integration does require resources, but even here better use of existing budgets could have a huge impact. For example:

- Current spending on asylum accommodation is so vast that even a modest redirection of resources could have a huge impact. For example, at 2023 rates of accommodation expenditure, 18,000 social rent houses could be added to Britain's housing stock that could house refugees and migrants temporarily and then be reallocated to long-term social tenants or homeless families. There would be a return on investment for the taxpayer achieved in less than 12 months according to gold-standard research.¹¹
- A single world-leading scheme for local and community sponsorship of refugees and other vulnerable groups could build on the ground-breaking sponsorship schemes for Ukrainians and Afghans. This would support local government and lever in wider community resources to support integration.

⁹ For a detailed look at the experiences of the estimated 170,000 people on this route, see IPPR 2024, available [here](#).

¹⁰ Journal of Representative Democracy 2020. *Citizenship Ceremonies as an Opportunity for Behaviour Change: A Quasi-experiment with London Councils*. Available [here](#).

¹¹ *Accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees: building a more cost effective and humane system* November 2023 K.Wareing, R.Grayston, T. Lloyd, B. Eckley

Conclusion

A country's migration and asylum policies can be a source of insecurity. Today, in Britain, they are clearly seen that way by a significant number of voters. Our asylum system has descended into chaos: a huge backlog of claims to process, a misguided fight over a deterrent that will never work, and vast spending on housing asylum seekers in the meantime. Our wider migration system, meanwhile, lacks any guiding strategy or objectives, and merely holds a mirror up to our faltering economy and public services. Finally, rather than encouraging the integration of migrants into society, our government fosters further division.

There is a different path that could be taken. Rather than being a source of insecurity, our approach to migration can make our nation and our communities stronger and more secure. An effective and consistent asylum system would reassert control over our borders while we meet our international responsibilities. A fair system would make migration part of the solution to economic insecurity, rather than part of the problem. Citizenship and integration policies that prioritise belonging would narrow divides within our society, ensuring those who come to Britain make our country stronger by doing so.

Labour's existing policies, on both migration and asylum, mark a considerable shift from the current government's position. Labour prioritises control and accepts cooperation across borders is essential. It acknowledges solving migration issues in Britain requires addressing the wider challenges our nation faces, like public services scrambling to recruit enough staff, and a failed economic model that means we are not training enough people for the jobs we need.

In this paper, we have suggested a few ways this commitment to security could be taken further, with a particular focus on enhancing belonging, citizenship and promoting integration. As we have argued, doing so would be popular, not just amongst those who look favourably on migration, but also those who are sceptical that its benefits outweigh its costs. And, crucially, this can also be achieved without a significant investment of taxpayers' money, and instead by re-designing a wider system that is, in so many places, broken.

The world is an insecure place today. For over a decade, Britain has seemed unsure about how it will thrive within it. Insecurity abroad has led to insecurity at home. Our migration and asylum system has come to embody this. As we have argued in this paper, a Labour government could change that. By bringing both control and fairness back to our borders, and enhancing belonging within our communities, a more secure future is possible.

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