5
EU Accession Immigration and the Rise of UKIP

Britain's relationship with the EU was at the root of two shocks that shaped the 2010, 2015, and 2017 British elections. The Brexit vote itself was the major shock in 2017, which we address in Chapter 9. This chapter examines the earlier shock of EU immigration, which rose dramatically following the accession of ten new EU member states in 2004. This shock had three key outcomes: first, the EU and immigration became inexorably linked as political issues; second, this fusion of these two issues led to the rise of UKIP by increasing the salience of immigration and destroying the perceived competence of first Labour, and then the Conservatives, on that issue; and third, the Conservative response to the UKIP threat led to the calling of the EU referendum.

The rise of UKIP is one of the most significant shifts in party support in Britain's recent history. UKIP was founded in 1991 (as the Anti-Federalist League), but was initially eclipsed by its better-resourced Eurosceptic rival the Referendum Party. Following the collapse of the Referendum Party, UKIP's fortunes slowly began to turn. In the 1999 European Parliament Elections (the first held using a system of proportional representation), UKIP won 6.5 per cent of the vote and three MEPs (including Nigel Farage), giving them an important bridgehead into the political arena. At the 2004 European Parliament Elections—buoyed by the presence of well-known celebrity candidate Robert Kilroy-Silk—UKIP nearly quadrupled its number of votes and pushed the Liberal Democrats into fourth place. In 2009 UKIP performed similarly well at the European Parliament Elections, finishing in second place thanks to a poor Labour performance. However, these triumphs failed to translate into success in other electoral arenas, with the UKIP vote plummeting back to earth at the general elections that followed.

The tide began to turn in 2012 as UKIP support ticked up in the polls: by 2013, 15 per cent of the electorate said they intended to vote for the party at the next general election. Strong polling translated into electoral success when the party made significant gains at the 2013 local elections, which heralded further success in both the 2014 EU Parliamentary Election, in which they won 27 per cent of votes and the most seats, and in the 2015 General Election, in which they won 13 per cent of the vote (but only one seat). UKIP's influence far exceeded their representation at Westminster. The presence of a credible Eurosceptic challenger

Electoral shocks. Edward Fieldhouse, Jane Green, Geoffrey Evans, Jonathan Mellon, Christopher Prosser, Hermann Schmitt, Cees van der Eijk, Oxford University Press (2020). © Fieldhouse, Green, Evans, Mellon, Prosser, Schmitt, and van der Eijk.
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prompted David Cameron to promise that a Conservative government would hold a referendum on EU membership—a promise that has profoundly affected British politics, as we discuss in Chapter 9.

How and why did this happen? To answer that question we need to consider the conditions that may have led to UKIP's rapid rise in support. UKIP is often thought of as a radical right-wing 'challenger party'. Such parties are typically linked with positions on liberal-authoritarian issues such as European integration and immigration that have not received representation via mainstream parties. Some challenger parties have achieved electoral success and in doing so have opened new dimensions of competition, or extended and polarized existing ones (Adams et al. 2006; Meguid 2008; Hino 2012; Wagner 2012; van de Wardt 2014; Jensen and Spoon 2010).[1]

Challenger parties have long played a role in many European party-systems (see, for example: Kitschelt 1988; Kitschelt 1995). Historically, levels of support for challenger parties have been low (less than 5 per cent of the vote on average across Europe), but their levels of support have more than doubled in the last decade (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Many explanations of this rise have often focused on the consequences of the Euro crisis. For Hobolt and Tilley (2016, 971), for example: voters 'choose challenger parties because they offer a rejection of, and an alternative to, the mainstream response to the crisis'. In some countries, however, these parties achieved notable earlier success in times of relative prosperity: for example, the *Front National* in France during the 1990s and the Dutch *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* in 2002. These parties point to another issue being key in understanding the rise of radical right parties: immigration. In Britain too, as we shall see, immigration played a key role in explaining the rise of UKIP, and the conditions were being put in place for immigration to emerge as a defining issue well before the arrival of the financial crisis.

The most influential explanations of UKIP's popularity have emphasized its appeal to the 'left-behind' losers of globalization. For Ford and Goodwin (2014, 270), UKIP is 'a working-class phenomenon. Its support is heavily concentrated among older, blue-collar workers, with little education and few skills.' However, others have found that the self-employed, traditionally the most right-wing of the social classes, are as solidly pro-UKIP as the working class themselves (Evans and Mellon 2016b). Additionally, UKIP's success could never have been achieved without substantial support from within the professional and managerial middle classes—the contemporary working class is simply too small (Evans and Mellon 2016b). Comparative research likewise finds that the self-employed and small employers such as shop owners, generally appear to provide important sources of radical right party support (Kitschelt 1995; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Ignazi 2003; Ivarsflaten 2005; Arzheimer and Carter 2006). More generally, this

[1] They are also referred to as 'niche parties' (e.g. Meguid 2008), but we will stick to the term challenger parties for sake of economy and clarity.

sort of interpretation has difficulty explaining the *timing* of UKIP's emergence from being a marginal party to one that represented one pole of arguably the key political issue dimension of the current era. The left-behind are not a new phenomenon in post-industrial societies (Evans and Tilley 2017).

In contrast to this focus on major social transformations, our thesis is that the primary catalyst for the increasing importance of immigration and the EU in British politics, which led to the rise of UKIP, was political: the decision taken in 2004 to open Britain's borders to EU accession countries. This decision set in train a process that raised the salience of immigration and led to the entanglement of the EU and immigration issues. A key issue was the inability of the government—*any* government—to respond to rising public concern. Although British immigration policy had previously responded to public opinion by restricting levels of immigration (Jennings 2009), controlling EU immigration was not possible because free movement between member states continued to be a fundamental EU principle. The lack of an effective policy mechanism to respond to this public concern resulted in attitudes towards the EU becoming increasingly aligned with concern about immigration.

In this chapter we first consider how Britain's relationship with the EU featured previously in electoral politics and why its impact on the dimensionality of political competition was muted until party decisions provided the conditions for the increased importance of immigration. We then examine the 2004 accession decision and how it acted as an electoral shock which helped shape the ensuing social and political context, leading to the emergence of UKIP, the reshaping of political allegiances, and, ultimately, Brexit.

5.1 Party competition and European integration

Across member states, party positions towards the EEC during the early phase of European integration—which was primarily concerned with market harmonization—were generally characterized by their economic left–right position. Parties on the right saw European integration as an opportunity to expand market competition, while those on the left saw it as a threat to protected national industries. As European integration broadened in scope, this alignment began to change, with party positions becoming more structured by the social and cultural dimension (often referred to as liberal–authoritarianism). Socially liberal parties began to see European integration as a way of fostering international cooperation, while for socially conservative parties, the EU was a threat to national autonomy and tradition (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; Prosser 2016d).

For many years the EU was the dog that didn't bark in British electoral politics. Labour itself was somewhat hostile to joining the European Economic Community

(EEC) before and after the 1975 referendum, but Harold Wilson, the leader of the party in government, successfully obtained strong support for staying in the EEC (Saunders 2016). Despite Enoch Powell's infamous 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968 and the social unrest in the 1970s associated with far right groups (Billig 1978; Fielding 1981) concern about immigration only briefly and modestly affected vote choice (Studlar 1978).[2] In general, there was little sign of a new electoral alignment along the liberal–authoritarian dimension of political competition (Heath et al. 1990).

Divisions within Labour over Europe had helped catalyse the SDP split in 1981 (Crewe and King 1995) but the modernization of the party under Neil Kinnock, together with the European Economic Community's (EEC) move towards 'Social Europe' under the Delors Commission, meant that Labour's position on European integration began to soften. Conversely, the Conservative Party, which had led Britain into Europe, began to cool towards Europe as the scope of integration deepened. This transition was exemplified by Margaret Thatcher, who had been a driving force behind the adoption of the Single European Act (1986) but only two years later in her famous Bruges speech declared: 'we have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them re-imposed at a European level.' As Clements and Bartle (2009) note, these differences are even more appreciable in 1997, 2001, and 2005. By the 2001 Election, analyses of the party manifestos indicated that Europe was a 'major point of party contention' (Bara and Budge 2001). The systematic evidence of the manifesto project also corresponded with scholarly analyses of the shifting positions of the parties (Nairn 1972; Denman 1995; Turner 2000; Forster 2002).

As long as Labour maintained a Eurosceptic position, mirroring that of many of its traditional working-class supporters, the opportunity for Europe to become a new cross-cutting issue had been muted. Once they abandoned that position, the seeds of realignment were sown. This policy reversal was given sharpest emphasis following the emergence of Tony Blair as party leader in 1994 and prime minister in 1997 and Labour's rebranding as 'New Labour'.[3] This period saw the traditionally Labour-voting and Eurosceptic working class start to lose their allegiance to Labour (Evans 1999b). Between the landslide of 1997 and the sweeping Labour victory of 2001 the only noticeable defection away from Labour to the Conservatives was by voters who did not like Europe (Evans 2002).

[2] Analyses of the impact of responses to the question of have 'too many immigrants have been let into this country' in the 1960s and 1970s show an increase in its effect in 1970 following that speech. People who agreed were slightly more likely to vote Conservative and they perceived a much larger difference between Labour and Conservatives on immigration in 1970 than they had done in 1964 or 1966 (Butler and Stokes 1974), but it did not last (Heath et al. 1990).

[3] The same 1997 Election saw James Goldsmith's Referendum Party attempt and fail to force the Conservatives to agree to a referendum on membership of the union (Heath et al. 1998).

But they were small in number. The EU still did not have the power to reshape political alignments.[4]

5.2 The catalyst

Why did this change? Our contention is that a key shock that led to the rising importance and closer linkage of attitudes towards the EU and immigration was the Labour government's decision to implement immediate open borders with the ten 2004 EU accession states rather than imposing transitional controls on immigration. Nearly all other existing EU members (the other exceptions were Ireland and Sweden) applied these controls, which concentrated the migrant flows towards Britain, Ireland, and Sweden (Europa.eu 2011).

How did this decision come about? While UKIP has claimed that Labour followed an intentional policy of encouraging mass migration in order to boost the city of London and future ethnic minority voters (UK Independence Party 2016), the evidence suggests that the policy may have come from an incorrect assessment of the likely number of migrants.

One key piece of evidence the Labour government relied on when deciding whether to impose a transition period on free movement was a now infamous Home Office report that concluded that 'net immigration from the AC-10 to the UK after the current enlargement of the EU will be relatively small, at between 5,000 and 13,000 immigrants per year' (Dustmann et al. 2003). In fact, the rate of increase in workers born in post-2004 accession countries has been closer to 127,000 per year (Vargas-Silva and Markaki 2015).[5]

The Home Office report does state that 'If Germany imposes a transition period for the free movement of workers . . . we would not think that more than one in three immigrants who had intended to migrate to work in Germany would instead migrate to the UK' (Dustmann et al. 2003, 57). However what the paper does not explicitly state anywhere is that this 'small fraction' could constitute more than six and a half times as many immigrants from accession countries as the stated forecast.[6] The paper was not technically incorrect, but did a poor job of

[4] It might have done so had Gordon Brown not prevented Britain from joining the Euro, but his efforts in this respect diffused what could have become a basis of mobilization given the public's opposition (Evans 2003).

[5] It should be noted that these figures differ somewhat from estimates using the International Passenger Survey. However, all studies agree that the number of immigrants from the AC–10 countries to the UK exceeded the Home Office estimates by many multiples.

[6] The highest forecast of annual net immigration to Germany in the paper is 209,651 (Table 6.4). The highest numerical forecast that the paper shows for the UK is 12,568. Therefore the multiple of additional immigrants can be calculated as: ((209651/3) + 12568)/12568 = 6.56. This calculation is never conducted or hinted at in the Home Office paper. See Nicholas Watt and Patrick Wintour, 'How immigration came to haunt Labour: the inside story', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2015. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/mar/24/how-immigration-came-to-haunt-labour-inside-story

communicating the importance of Germany's choice to impose transitional controls. The UK government's decision not to impose transitional controls therefore appears to be a relatively non-strategic decision based on incorrect expectations that the effects would be minor—and was belatedly recognized as such by its primary proponent.[7]

5.3 The 'transmission belt' of concern

The impact of immigration from the accession countries on UK immigration levels were substantial. It maintained the already high levels of immigration that had occurred since the late 1990s (Figure 5.1). Most significantly, however, it changed the composition of immigration into the UK, at times displacing Commonwealth immigration as the largest source of foreign immigration (Figure 5.2).

Voters then reacted to the increase in EU immigration. Monthly Ipsos MORI data on what issue voters think is the most important (Figure 5.3) show that

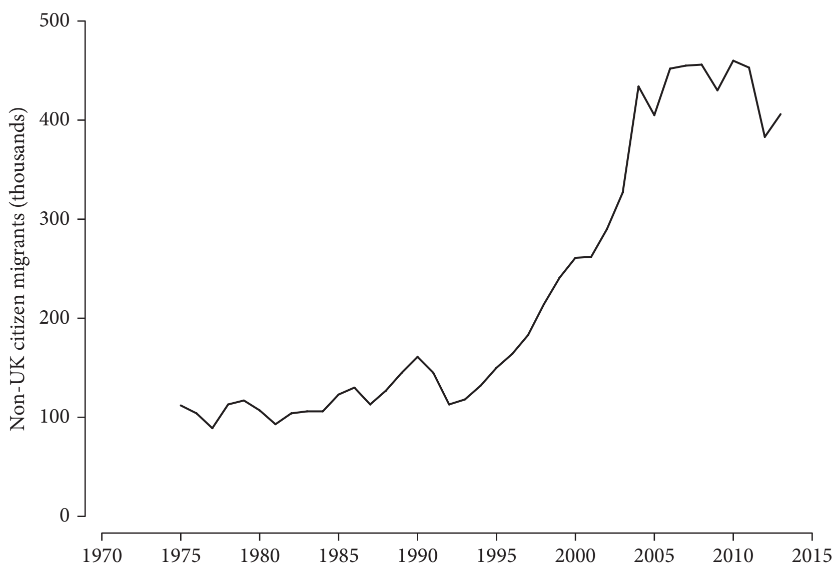

Figure 5.1 Total levels of immigration of non-UK citizens to the UK by year (thousands of immigrants)

[7] See Laura Hughes, 'Tony Blair admits he did not realise how many migrants would come to the UK after EU expanded', *The Telegraph*, 19 March 2017. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/19/tony-blair-admits-did-not-realise-many-migrants-would-come-uk/?WT.mc_id=tmgliveapp_androidshare_AnjSzsdxpSsP

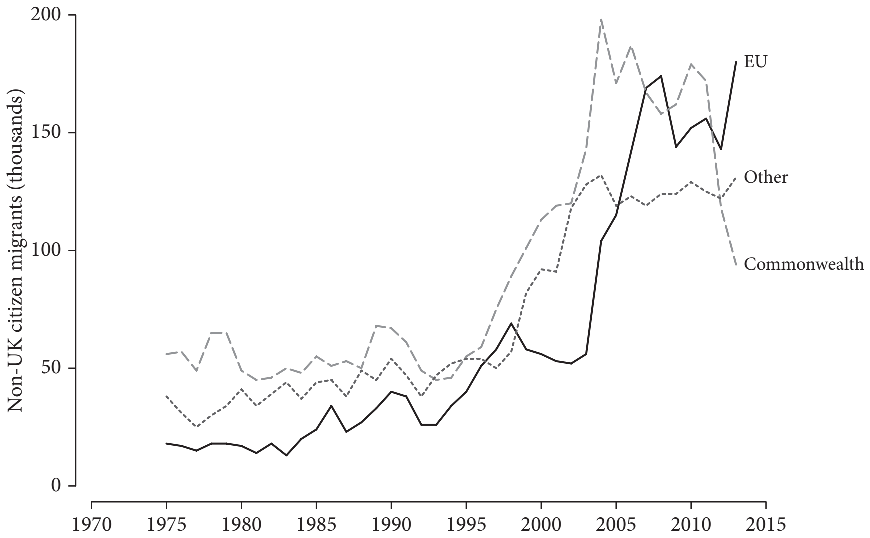

Figure 5.2 Total levels of immigration of non-UK citizens to the UK by year (thousands of immigrants) broken down by EU, Commonwealth, and other sources of origin

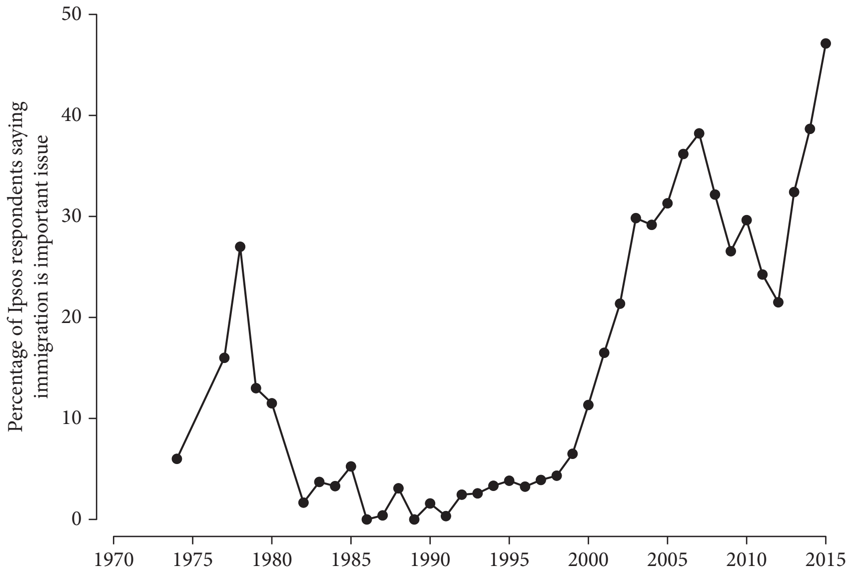

Figure 5.3 Ipsos MORI trends (1974–2015) on what percentage of voters mention immigration as an important. (Source: Ipsos MORI: 'What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today?' 'What do you see as other important issues facing Britain today?' Concern is averaged for each year over all surveys fielded in that year)

immigration concern peaked in the mid-2000s just after accession migration started. Concern inevitably fell away at the height of the economic crisis of 2008/2009 as the economy dislodged it as the most important issue facing the country, only to elevate rapidly in the following years.

While it is clear that public concern tracks actual levels of immigration, the mechanism that connects the two is not necessarily straightforward. After all, people cannot observe national immigration rates directly, so people must either learn about immigration through their own local experience or through the media.

There is some evidence for a weak effect of local experience. Recent research has looked at the question of whether anti-immigrant attitudes are related to the level of immigration to an area (Kawalerowicz 2016). Kawalerowicz's research (following earlier work in the United States (Newman 2013)) concludes that only 6 per cent of total variance in attitudes towards immigrants is attributable to differences across constituencies, with the remaining 94 per cent varying at the individual level. In line with other research (e.g. Kaufmann 2017) Kawalerowicz finds that immigration *rates* were predictive of anti-immigrant attitudes while the absolute *level* of people born overseas was not. Furthermore, Kawalerowicz finds that immigration rates are less predictive of anti-immigrant sentiment where there is a larger existing foreign-born population.[8]

We find that these patterns also hold for the salience of immigration (just 4.7 per cent of variance in the salience of immigration is at the local authority level), with the exception that the levels of the foreign-born population are also predictive of anti-immigrant attitudes after controlling for individual covariates (see Appendix Tables A5.1 and A5.2).[9] Although there is clearly some role for local experience, the available evidence suggests that local experiences of immigration account for only a small proportion of the variation in either attitudes towards immigration or its salience.

In general terms, there is strong evidence that the media play a key role in shaping public opinion (Bartels 1993; Kellstedt 2003; King, Schneer, and White 2017). More specifically, studies in other European countries have found that the media shapes levels of concern about, and attitudes towards, immigration (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009; Van Klingeren et al. 2015; Thesen 2018). Likewise, in Britain, media reporting of immigration appears to feed public concern. This can be seen by comparing Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4, which show how closely mass readership newspaper coverage

[8] This relationship may be better explained by a non-linear relationship between immigrant levels and sentiment, but the wider point stands that any specification explains only a small proportion of the variance in attitudes.

[9] The marginal effect of moving from the lowest to highest immigration rates is around 3 percentage points for people in areas with the lowest levels of prior immigration, so the effect is modest even at its greatest extent.

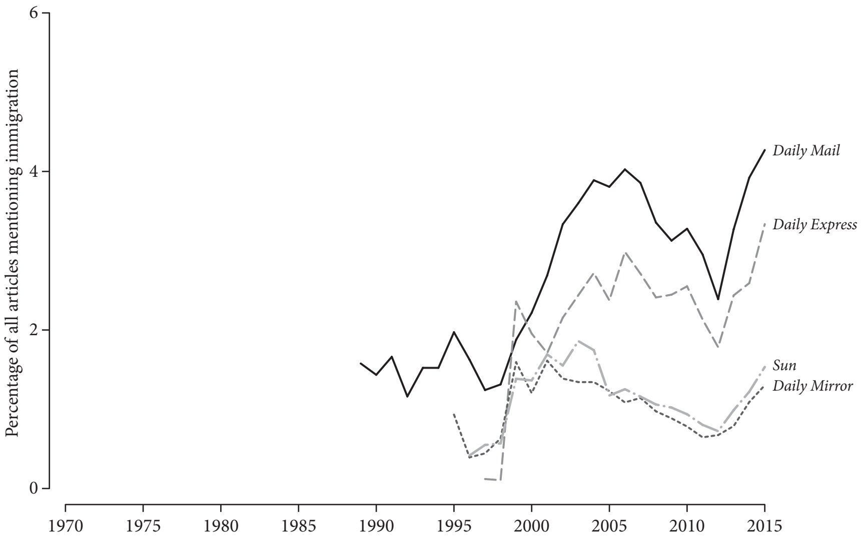

Figure 5.4 Levels of coverage of immigration in four tabloid newspapers

Table 5.1 Correlations of immigration importance (Ipsos MORI), coverage of immigration in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, and total immigration levels (International Passenger Survey)

	Immigration importance	*Daily Mail*	*Daily Express*	*The Sun*	*Daily Mirror*	Immigration levels
Immigration importance	1.00					
Daily Mail	0.97	1.00				
Daily Express	0.83	0.91	1.00			
The Sun	0.43	0.68	0.66	1.00		
Daily Mirror	0.30	0.55	0.58	0.93	1.00	
Immigration levels	0.86	0.89	0.76	0.19	0.10	1.00

corresponds with both immigration levels and levels of concern about immigration. The correlations between immigration level, newspaper coverage, and public concern are shown in Table 5.1. The strongest correlation is between public concern and the *Daily Mail*'s coverage ($r = 0.97$), followed by public concern's relationship with immigration levels and the *Daily Express*'s coverage. The relationship between immigration concern and coverage of immigration in the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* is considerably lower. This fits with other analyses which have found that the *Mail* and *Express* have consistently higher negative portrayals of immigration and immigrants (Gerard 2016). Once we model immigration concern as a function of coverage in the *Daily Mail* and immigration rates simultaneously, as shown in Appendix Table A5.3, there is no remaining effect of actual immigration

levels on public concern about immigration.[10] This suggests that the vast bulk of concern over immigration is mediated by media coverage and is not the result of direct observation by voters.[11] While there is no direct effect of immigration rates, the *Daily Mail*'s coverage is sufficiently strongly correlated with actual immigration ($r = 0.89$) that public concern tracks the actual rate of immigration closely.[12]

The links between immigration, media coverage, and public concern are impressively close, but immigration still need not have evolved into a powerful political issue. As we argued in Chapter 3, the impact of shocks is conditional on the response of political actors. To understand why EU immigration had such an impact, we need to consider how parties typically deal with issue concerns via their policy responses. In this respect, policy is often conceptualized as following a thermostatic model (Wlezien 1995), where a policy output such as redistribution is reduced when it gets too far above the level that public opinion prefers, and that public opinion responds in turn to the effects of these policy changes. As a result, in the long run, policy and public opinion remain in step, although they are subject to over-corrections in the short term.

British immigration policy previously responded to public opinion in a fairly thermostatic manner, with governments strengthening asylum policy and border controls in response to public concern over immigration (Jennings 2009). However, the rapid growth of EU immigration changed this relationship, with both concern and levels of immigration rising over an extended period. The fact that immigration was defined as a fundamental freedom within the EU seriously limited the ability of any government to adopt policies that would limit it. In fact, we can see evidence of attempts at a response by the government in Figure 5.2, which shows that Commonwealth migration plummeted a few years after increased EU accession migration began. However, while the voters have responded to rising immigration by becoming more concerned, the usual thermostatic response of more restrictive controls was absent. As a result, immigration continued to be high and public concern rose yet further. This further reinforces our argument that EU accession migration represented a sharp change in the status quo of British politics. In such circumstances new political issues can become sufficiently salient to begin driving vote choices in what is normally a unidimensional system of party competition.

[10] We should be careful about over-interpreting this null relationship as it is based on only twenty-five years of data. The *Daily Mail* is the only newspaper that entirely eliminates the relationship between immigration rates and immigration concern.

[11] As well as driving the salience of immigration, UKIP also benefited more directly from media attention. Murphy and Devine (2018) find strong evidence that media attention to UKIP drove increasing support for UKIP in the poll.

[12] The close link between immigration and media coverage could result from a number of processes: deliberate attempts to influence policy; a reflection of the principal agent relationship between voters who dislike immigration and the media who try to find stories their readers are interested in; or the paper's coverage may itself reflect the level of immigration and the supply of available stories to cover.

5.4 The changing relationship between EU and immigration attitudes

Given how strongly entwined they have become in contemporary politics, one would be forgiven for thinking that immigration and the EU would always have been tightly linked issues. However, just as there have been significant shifts between party ideology and positions on European integration, so too have there been large changes among the general public (van Elsas and van der Brug 2015; Eichenberg and Dalton 2007). As European integration progressed, opposition based on economic left-wing concerns about market integration gave way to concerns driven by liberal–authoritarian issues like immigration and cultural threat (McLaren 2002; McLaren 2006; Tillman 2013).

We can see the stark nature of this change by examining the relationship between immigration attitudes and European integration preferences in the 1975 EEC referendum and at the 2015 General Election. In Figure 5.5 we compare EU preferences among people who think there are too many immigrants using evidence from the 1975 EEC referendum (Crewe, Robertson, and Sarlvik 1975) and the 2015 BES post-election face-to-face survey.

In 2015, a respondent's attitude towards immigration was an extremely strong predictor of their EU attitudes, with 51 per cent of respondents who believe there are too many immigrants supporting leave, compared with just 11 per cent of those who did not think there were too many immigrants. In the 1975

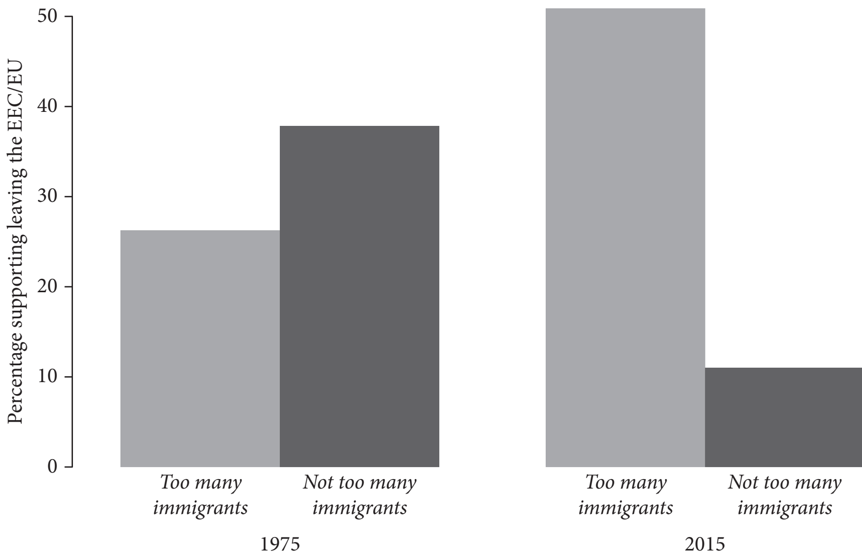

Figure 5.5 The relationship between believing there are too many immigrants and support for leaving the EU in 1975 and 2015

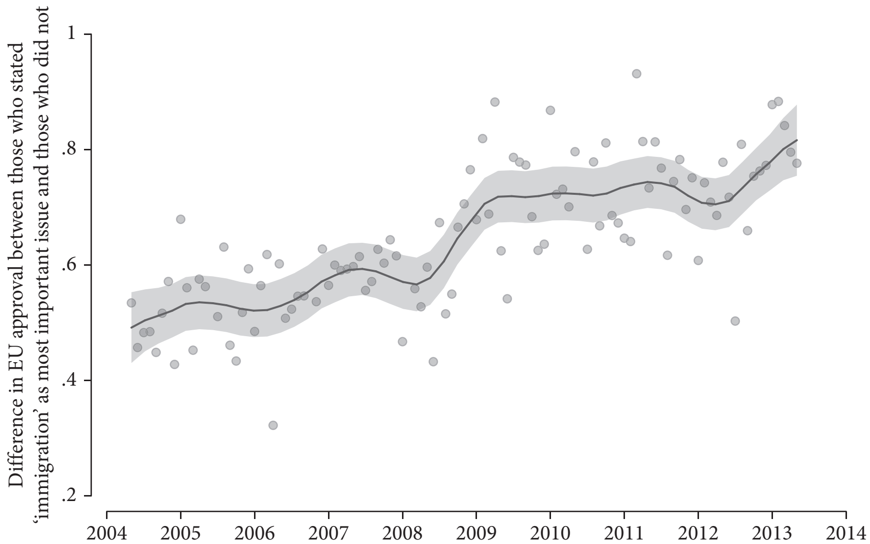

Figure 5.6 The growing link between responses to 'How much do you approve of Britain's membership of the EU?' and 'what is the most important issue facing the country?'

EU referendum, by contrast, the difference was far smaller (12 percentage points) and in the *opposite* direction.

However, we can also examine the extent to which voters' attitudes towards the EU and immigration are linked over time in a more granular way and using more contemporary data by examining the BES Continuous Monitoring Survey (Sanders and Whiteley 2014b). This survey is carried out every month and asks separately about which political issue is currently most important to respondents and their level of approval of the EU.[13]

Figure 5.6 shows the difference between the average support for the EU among respondents who said that immigration was the most important issue facing the country and respondents who said another issue was the most important. The results show that even in early 2004 there was a positive relationship between concern about immigration and disapproval of the EU. However, the relationship clearly strengthens substantially over time, with the gap in EU perceptions between people who worry about immigration and those who do not almost doubling between 2004 and 2013.[14]

We also know anti-EU attitudes rose over this same time period. After initial ambivalence towards Britain's membership of the EEC in the 1970s, public

[13] Wording: Overall, do you strongly approve, approve, disapprove, or strongly disapprove of Britain's membership in the European Union?

[14] The data for the Continuous Monitoring Survey is not available publicly after 2013.

support had increased steadily through the 1980s before it peaked in 1991, when 57 per cent of those surveyed said Britain's membership of the Common Market was 'a good thing' and only 14 per cent said it was a 'bad thing'.[15] From that peak however, support for integration steadily eroded throughout the 90s, before stabilizing in the mid-2000s. However, anti-EU sentiment increased at the same time as immigration and the EU were becoming linked issues and the Eurozone crisis was reaching its peak. Anti-EU sentiment ran very high during this period, but initially this did not translate into political opposition. In the CMS data, disapproval of Britain's membership of the EU peaked in late 2011—*before* the rise of UKIP—and declined steadily thereafter. Only when the potent combination of the EU and immigration came together did the European issue achieve a political breakthrough.

5.5 The political consequences

The link between immigration and the EU provided the perfect opportunity for a radical right party to prosper electorally. Immigration was initially integrated within traditional two-party left–right competition. The Conservatives took a harder line on the issue, promising to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands. This appeal was relatively successful in the 2005–10 election cycle when the Conservatives were not in government, so that by 2009–10 substantial numbers of voters were defecting from Labour because of the government's handling of immigration (Evans and Chzhen 2013). This was particularly striking given the country was then also in the midst of a major financial crisis. In the 2010–15 electoral cycle, however, the impact of immigration and the EU moved decisively from favouring the Conservatives who, once in government were powerless to implement effective reduction of EU immigration, to favouring UKIP. This was aided by UKIP's emphasis on a more typical radical right agenda, making anti-immigrant policies a central and vocal part of its agenda along with its existing anti-EU agenda (Ford and Goodwin 2014). Indeed, many of the voters that the Conservatives won from Labour and the Liberal Democrats in 2010 by campaigning on immigration subsequently moved onwards to UKIP in 2015 (Evans and Mellon 2016b).

The reasons for this reversal are not difficult to ascertain, given that the Conservative-led coalition government continued to promise to reduce net immigration to less than 100,000, and did reduce non-EU immigration, but could do nothing about immigration from the EU. Consequently, EU nationals now formed, for the first time, the plurality of immigrants. As a result, EU immigration was

[15] https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/chartType/lineChart//themeKy/3/groupKy/3/savFile/10000

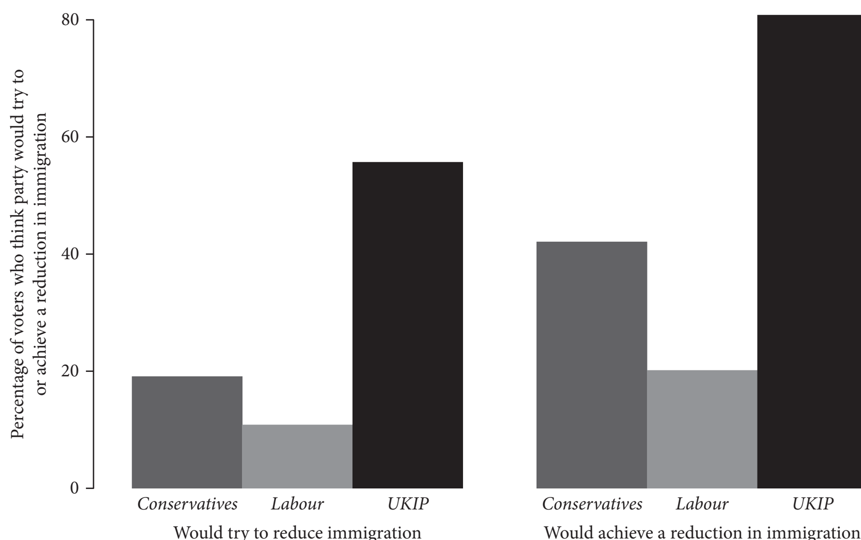

Figure 5.7 Perceptions of the parties' desire to reduce immigration and their ability to do so

even more salient and the government's impotence became even more apparent. As can be seen from answers to a question in the 2015 BES survey shown in Figure 5.7, all parties were seen to have aspirations that outstripped their ability to reduce immigration, but UKIP was believed to be by far and away the party most likely to do so if they were in government. Given the growing importance of immigration to the electorate, this gives a basis for expecting substantial levels of immigration-related vote-switching to UKIP.

The EU, Immigration, and Vote-Switching 2010–15

To assess the importance of the EU and immigration to political choice, we model the 2015 vote choice of various groups of 2010 voters looking at how EU and immigration attitudes (as measured in 2010) predicts the flows in the merged 2010 and 2015 BES internet panels.

In the 2010 BES pre-election panel wave, respondents were asked to describe their feelings about immigration[16]—whether they had felt a series of emotions about immigration. We run an IRT model on indicator variables of whether respondents' felt angry, disgusted, uneasy, or afraid about immigration, and a

[16] Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about immigration (Please tick up to FOUR): Angry, Happy, Disgusted, Hopeful, Uneasy, Confident, Afraid, Proud, No feelings, Don't know.

binary variable measuring whether respondents said immigration was the most important issue.[17]

Because we run separate models for each 2010 party origin, we also include people who have a different identity to the party they voted for in the non-identifying category on the basis that a party identification with a different party is unlikely to be an impediment to them switching in future (as we demonstrated in Chapter 4). This substantially increases the proportion of non-affiliated voters in each year.

Figure 5.8, Figure 5.9, and Figure 5.10 show predicted probabilities from three separate multinomial models predicting 2015 vote choice for different groups of 2010 voters: Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats. In each case, the latent immigration variable (measured in 2010) and EU approval strongly predict switching to UKIP in 2015. The only other variable that has a consistent impact is having a strong party identity, which inhibits switching. Demographics have only minor and inconsistent effects (see Table A5.5 in the appendix).

We can get a sense of the importance of EU/immigration concern by considering two counterfactual scenarios where respondents did not express any of the negative emotions about immigration or cite it as the most important issue (15 per cent of respondents fell into this category). In the first scenario we just look at the direct effect that this reduction in immigration concern would have

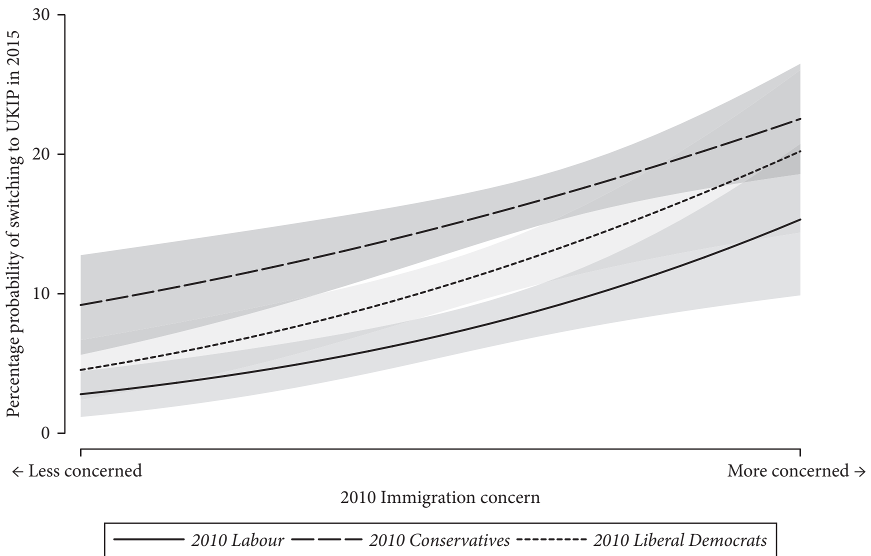

Figure 5.8 Predicted probabilities of switching to UKIP in 2015 for voters of different 2010 party origins with different levels of 2010 immigration concern

[17] Table A5.4 in the appendix shows the results of the IRT model.

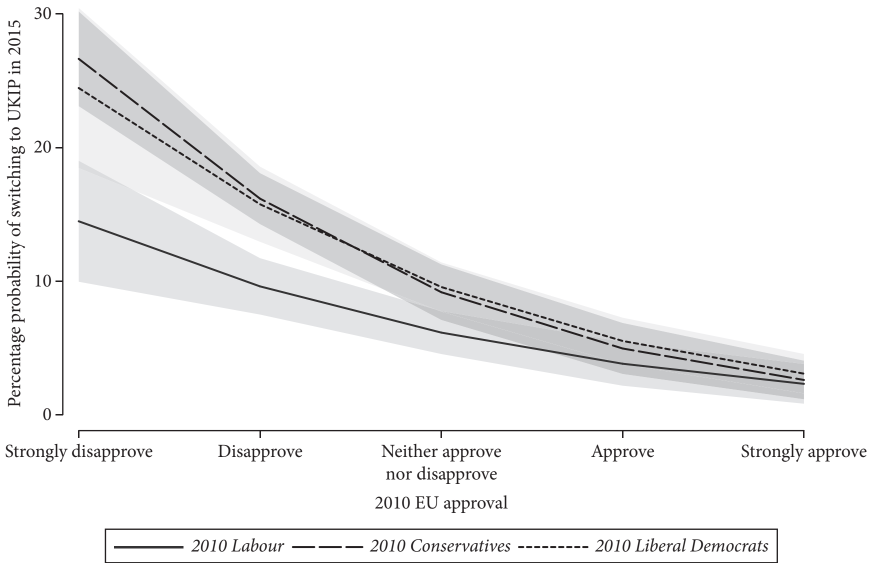

Figure 5.9 Predicted probabilities of switching to UKIP in 2015 for voters of different 2010 party origins with different levels of EU approval in 2010

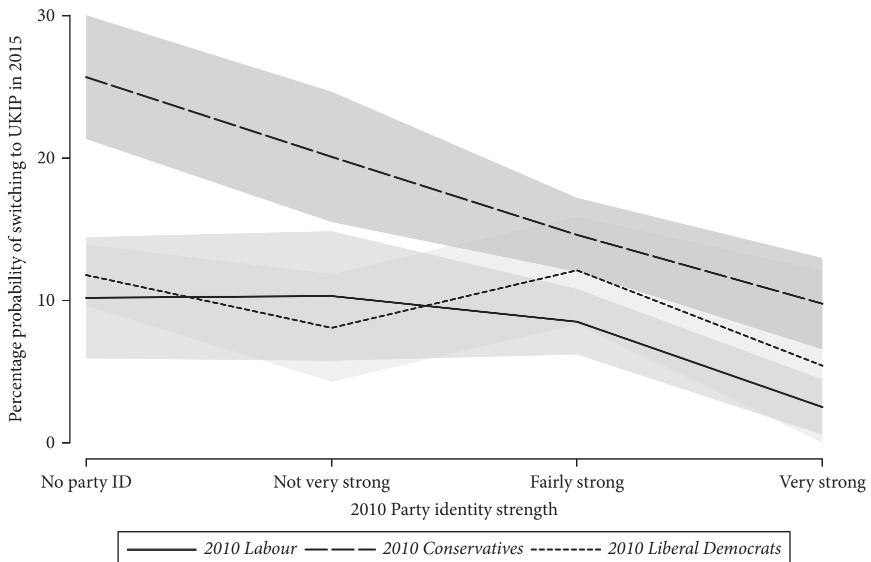

Figure 5.10 Predicted probabilities of switching to UKIP in 2015 for voters of different 2010 party origins by 2010 party ID strength

had on the UKIP vote. In the second scenario, because immigration is so closely linked with the EU, we also impute (predict the values based on the model) the levels of EU approval that respondents would have had had they not been concerned about immigration (using the regression model in Table A5.6 in the appendix). This model predicts levels of support for Europe on the basis of several factors including a respondent's level of concern about immigration. This imputation of EU approval moves the mean score from 2.81 to 3.38 (out of 5). This predicted level of anti-Europeanness is then used along with the counterfactual level of concern about immigration to predict the UKIP counterfactual.[18]

Based on this counterfactual simulation, we estimate that the levels of switching to UKIP would have been drastically lower in the absence of a salient immigration issue in 2015. Figure 5.11 shows the actual flows to UKIP for respondents in the 2010–15 models and the estimated flows to UKIP if the immigration and the EU had been less salient. If immigration concern had not been widespread, fewer than 5 per cent of the three main parties' supporters in 2010 would have switched to UKIP in 2015.[19]

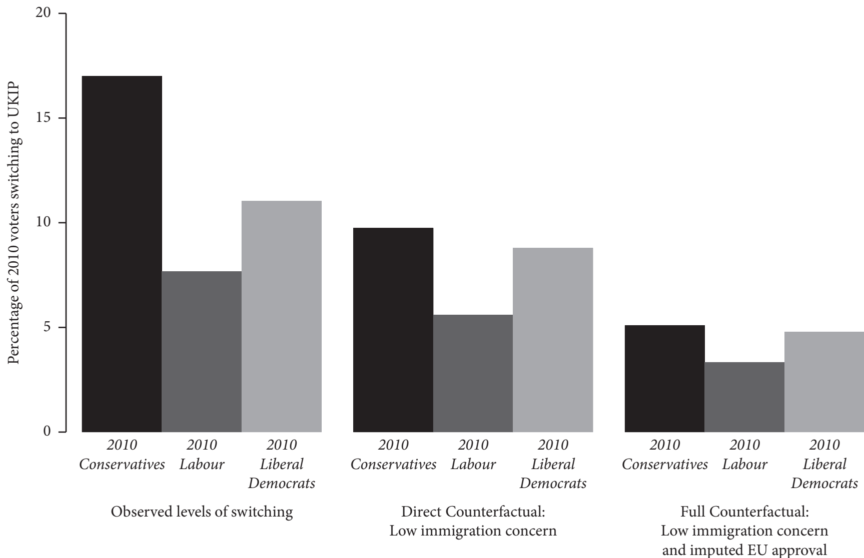

Figure 5.11 Levels of vote switching to UKIP among respondents in the multinomial models under the actual levels of concern and the counterfactual scenario of low immigration concern

[18] Note that we only examine voters in England and Wales given the very different patterns of response in the Scottish party system, where UKIP never achieved prominence.

[19] As we cannot rule out selection effects or reverse causation completely on the basis of this analysis, the true counterfactual figure likely falls between the direct and full counterfactuals.

UKIP and Brexit: the spillover

Although UKIP performed very well in 2015 by the standards of minor parties in British politics, their most important impact on British politics was indirect: by activating the EU as a salient political issue, UKIP helped bring about the 2016 EU referendum. The 12.9 per cent of the vote that UKIP won in 2015 substantially underestimates the potential of their appeal in the electorate. Not only had UKIP won half a million more votes at the European Parliament election the year before, the relative aggregate stability in the polls belies considerable volatility. Among respondents who took the six waves of the BES internet panel fielded between February 2014 and May 2015, 23 per cent voted for UKIP in at least one (European Parliament, local, or general) election, and a further 7 per cent said they intended to vote UKIP at least once. The popularity of a distinctly Eurosceptic challenger party posed an obvious threat to the main British parties, especially the Conservatives.

Although the 2016 EU referendum was unique in being an in/out referendum, the strategic use of holding (or at least, saying you are going to hold) referendums on the EU to avoid electoral competition over European integration is well established in the EU (Oppermann 2013; Prosser 2016a). The logic of this strategy is that by holding a referendum on the EU, governing parties provide an electoral outlet for Eurosceptic voters and, in doing so, minimize the extent to which EU attitudes influence vote choice in general elections. In Britain, this strategy was first adopted by Labour under Blair (Oppermann 2008). Faced with a potential backlash over its preferred European policy, Blair offered (but avoided holding) referendums on first Britain joining the Euro, and second the ratification of the proposed 2004 Constitutional Treaty.

The same strategy lay behind the Conservative's decision to hold a referendum on EU membership. UKIP's surge and the continuing salience of immigration were key drives behind the decision to hold a referendum (Shipman 2016). It is no coincidence that, following a year in which UKIP's support in the polls had jumped by about ten points, in January 2013 David Cameron announced that there would be an in/out referendum on Britain's membership of the EU.

5.6 Conclusion and discussion

We have argued that the 2004 decision on open immigration from EU accession countries appears to have unintentionally unlocked potent issues in British politics. This decision was highly salient (as we can see from public concern and media coverage), a large change from the status quo (because the government was unable to formulate a policy response), and clearly highly relevant to party politics, as the series of election results from 2010 to 2017 have shown. In Chapter 3

we identified three main ways that a shock can affect electoral politics. The EU accession shock worked primarily through two of these mechanisms. The first was through increasing *salience*: concern about immigration, specifically EU immigration, can be traced to an increase in EU accession migration resulting directly from this decision. Our evidence is consistent with the media functioning as an information transmission belt to which the electorate responded. The second effect of the EU accession shock was through its effect on *competence* evaluations. The inability of any government to respond thermostatically to this growing concern—illustrated clearly by the coalition's government's year-on-year failure to reduce or even flatten off EU immigration rates—provided the opportunity for a challenger party, UKIP, to fill that representation gap. Thus a spiral of interconnected immigration fears and Euroscepticism emerged, resulting in a dramatic upsurge in support for UKIP, the only occupant of the anti-EU, anti-immigration space that was perceived to be competent on the issue and which provided representation for more socially conservative voters.

While not denying that challenger parties need to seize the opportunities provided by mainstream party decisions, much as the literature on the role of opportunity structures (e.g. Kitschelt 1995) would predict, our analysis shifts the focus to the actions of the governing party in providing the catalyst for a swift and dramatic surge in immigration concern. Evidence that political decisions of this sort can act as salience shocks that elevate immigration concerns and facilitate the swift emergence of radical right challenger parties has also been seen recently in Germany, where Chancellor Merkel's decision to welcome immigration from outside the EU in 2016 in response to the Syrian crisis transformed the fortunes of Germany's own radical right challenger party, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). Arzheimer and Berning (2017) track the change in the AfD's fortunes during this period when they reorientated themselves to become an immigration-focused party rather than just an anti-EU party. Immigration gave their EU message far more mobilizing power.

As a final point, we should note that the impact of EU immigration appears to be unrelated to any increase in intolerance in the electorate. In other words, rising concern about rising levels of immigration does not indicate that xenophobia per se is on the rise. This should not surprise us: the electorate is now substantially more highly educated than in previous decades and higher education is more strongly associated with tolerance and social liberalism than just about any social attribute (Evans, Heath, and Lalljee 1996; Evans 2002; Tilley 2005). If anything, therefore, attitudes towards immigrants have become less negative over time as the population has become increasingly more socially liberal (Harding 2017). This can be seen from responses to a BES question on the belief that 'there are too many immigrants' asked at various points over the last forty or so years (see Figure 5.12). These confirm that people were, if anything, a little less likely to believe there are too many immigrants in Britain in 2015 than they were in previous decades and

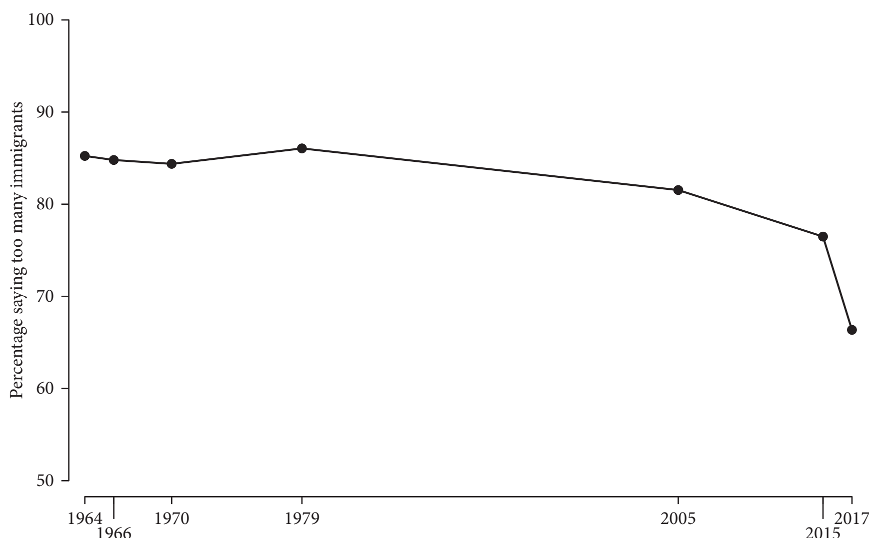

Figure 5.12 'Do you think that too many immigrants have been let into this country, or not?'

had become much less likely to believe there are too many immigrants by the time of the 2017 Election. Growing intolerance does not appear to lie behind recent responses to immigration or the rise of UKIP.[20]

That the electorate is not getting more intolerant does not mean, however, that dislike of immigration is not present. As we can see from Figure 5.12, there has always been a substantial anti-immigrant bloc of voters who could be mobilized if the issue became (and stayed) politically salient. The decision to allow unfettered EU immigration ahead of all other major recipient countries provides the ideal shock for this political mobilization.

We examine the impact of Brexit as an electoral shock in Chapter 9, which examines how the EU has moved from being a predictor of UKIP support to being almost as important a predictor of Conservative voting as economic right-wing attitudes. While UKIP largely vanished in 2017, their *raison d'etre* has only grown in importance.

[20] The role of challenger parties in promoting as well as seizing upon new issues has been highlighted by, among others, de Vries and Hobolt (2012). However, the rise in concern about immigration is unlikely to be simply a consequence of UKIP's presence: as our over-time data shows, immigration became salient in the public and media agendas before UKIP became an electorally viable party. This is consistent with the findings of extensive cross-country over-time comparisons conducted by Bohman and Hjerm (2016) who find no effect of a radical right, challenger party presence on anti-immigration attitudes.