

Britain, Bulgaria and benefits: the political rhetoric of European (dis)integration

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Britain, Bulgaria and Benefits: The Political Rhetoric of European (Dis)Integration

Introduction

Lesińska (2014) has charted the rise of anti-immigration discourse accompanied by tighter immigration controls across Europe in recent years, and in particular since the “Great Recession” and economic crisis of 2008. However, this critical discourse pre-dates the recession and is part of a larger pattern featuring the ‘immigration debate’. As Braidotti (2011:242) has pointed out European expansion has also occurred at a time of fragmentation and rising nationalist sentiment and sectarianism:

Unification coexists with the closing down of borders; the common European citizenship and common currency coexist with increasing internal fragmentation and regionalism; a new allegedly postnationalist identity exists with the return of xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism.

Political reaction to these contradictions and schisms within the EU has occurred at the level of both fringe and mainstream party politics as well as through governmental policies aimed at limiting immigration. However, from the perspective of the study presented in this chapter, it is ‘down’ at the level of the general population where people represent themselves and others in terms of ethnic and national identifications that such matters are brought to the fore. It is at this level where these issues become problematical in the face of rising levels of immigration. ‘Labour market’ immigrants from within the European Union (EU) are considered as far less problematic than that of other categories such as those who are regarded as seeking nothing more than access to state benefits or who are associated with petty crime, and perceived as ‘failed citizens’ (Anderson, 2013). Nevertheless, as Lesińska points out, in the post-9/11 world, there has been a rival of concerns about ‘foreigners’ and these have merged with concerns about immigration in general. A new climate of opinion has given ‘right-authoritarian’ parties purchase amongst the electorate in a number of counties, and particularly in the context of the

EU and its enlargement through the accession of countries in 2004 and 2007 (Berezin, 2009; Mudde, 1999, 2012). This has gathered pace in the post-2008 economic recession with increasing numbers of migrants from crisis-hit countries seeking work in the relatively stronger Western European economies (Barslund and Busse, 2014: 10-11).

Although this backlash against immigration has also found some populist support, its effects upon political leaders have for the most part resulted in defensive policies. This resulted in attempts to curb immigration in some way or other by placing restrictions and limits on those seeking to enter into a country. This has taken the form of citizenship tests (e.g. obligatory integration courses and language tests) or restrictions on rights to welfare benefits (Lesińska 2014; Currie, 2008; Dwyer and Scullion, 2014). As a result the thrust of EU reform strategies in relation the liberalisation of the labour market has largely remained intact, notwithstanding concerns about ‘cheap labour’ and job competition in host countries. However, there has also been a rising tide of critical discourse in Europe that has sought to undermine ideas of ‘multiculturalism’ with claims of threats to national culture, identity and community cohesion (e.g., Kymlicka, 2010). These ‘traditional’ objections to immigration have merged with economic concerns over jobs, welfare costs and fiscal burdens giving rise to the status of immigrants as major political issue in a number of EU states (Lesińska, 2014).

In United Kingdom (UK) this has resulted in the increasing popularity of the UKIP, the United Kingdom Independence Party (Martin and Smith, 2014; Ford and Goodwin, 2014). This political party advocates withdrawal from the EU as well as claiming that immigration is ‘out of control’ in the UK. For example, one of their 2013 posters read “Next year, the EU will allow 29 million Bulgarians and Romanians to come to the UK.” “The Government have admitted there’s nothing we can do about it, while we’re in the EU.” (“And Labour say they don’t want to do anything anyway.”) Another poster in relation to the European Parliamentary elections of May 2014 showed what was supposed to be a native British construction worker

'begging' in the street with the caption "EU Policy at Work." "British Workers are hit hard by unlimited cheap labour." "Take control of our country." Vote UKIP on May 22nd."

Mintchev (2014) has examined the ways in which UKIP and its leader Nigel Farage have constructed an anti-immigration stance against Bulgarians and Romanians settling in the UK. There are several strands to their arguments but taken together they create exclusionary discourses that, although ostensibly being culturally and ethnically neutral, seek to present the potential negative impact of *all* such immigrants. One line of argument suggests that they are a threat to jobs that otherwise would be taken by young British people whilst another claims that they are "benefit seekers" based on the presentation of differences in the relative economic wealth between the UK and Eastern Europe. Such seemingly rational arguments lend themselves to being more persuasive given that they are not couched in an overtly racist manner and steer clear of asserting cultural or national superiority. However, another argument presented does rely on the notion of challenges to cultural cohesion and integration through the claim that immigration needs to be curbed lest communities find themselves facing increasing disruption. Although such arguments often rely on making the case through drawing upon language differences they are also tinged with negative cultural stereotypes of criminality associated with East European Roma gypsies.

It against this backdrop that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) ran a story on 22nd December 2013 in which Vince Cable the Liberal Democrat Party Business Secretary within the Liberal Democrat-Conservative Coalition Government claimed the Conservatives were "in a bit of a panic because of UKIP" and that any proposed 75,000-a-year cap on the number of EU migrants to the UK would not happen. The Government had previously indicated that it would place a curb on immigrant claiming welfare benefits for the first three months of residency but the Home Secretary, Theresa May, has not ruled out a possible future cap on numbers. In response to these measures the BBC article cited comments made by the Bulgarian

President Rosen Plevneliev who warned that Prime Minister David Cameron's plans curb immigration could damage the UK's image as a "great global power that pioneered integration". Proposals seeking to curb immigrants' rights to welfare benefits in the UK has remained on both on the national and EU agenda. For example, Prime Minister Cameron "passionately urged other EU leaders to support his "reasonable" proposals for far-reaching curbs on welfare benefits for migrants" (BBC, 28/11/14: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30224493>). This is linked to his party's policy on an in/out referendum on the EU in the post-2015 general election landscape with the argument being made that the UK will be more likely to vote to stay in if such measures are adopted.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the comments posted in reaction to original news story when such plans were first mooted. The analysis examines what these comments reveal about the rhetorical ground on which claims are made by those who wish to curb immigration or those who support it. In order to do this I draw upon the work of Billig (Billig et al., 1988; Billig, 1991) who argues that nationalism is dilemmatic in nature in that it makes use of universalism and particularism; one nation within a world of nations. Billig and his colleagues further argue that this related to 'ideological dilemmas' that characterise common-sense thinking in that contrary views and themes require that people must construct a rhetorical position that is in actual, or potential opposition, to 'the other side of the coin'.

Condor and other have shown the analytical power of these ideas in relation the strategic construction of national identities in the UK. For example, this includes an examination of the ways in which opposing themes such as multiculturalism and Anglo-centrism, or national diversity and tolerance, are pitted against cultural homogeneity (Condor, 2011; Verkuyten, 2004). Such oppositional themes can sometimes be constructed together in such a way as to allow for the existence of multiple and conflicting positions to be adopted in relation to self and the other and to suppress the attribution of any negative in-group stereotype (Andreouli,

2013). And, in contemporary work that has a bearing on the present study, Andreouli and Dashtipour (2014) found that citizenship officers in London constructed the UK as humanitarian and tolerant on the one hand whilst on the other as being threatened by increasing numbers of immigrants. This often involved talking about immigrants in terms of being either ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or as ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’, in relation to criteria for the process of inclusion or exclusion as citizens.

The data reported upon in the paper is analysed with this dilemmatic nature of argumentation in mind with respect to the comments posted on the BBC news story outlined above. However, unlike this previous work, the analysis undertaken is more concerned with the rhetorical ground on which arguments rest and where a ‘stand is made’.

Data and Methodology

The story provoked a considerable reaction on the BBC news website with 1417 comments being posted in total (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-25484456>). As anticipated most of the comments posted were made as a negative reaction to the Cable’s comments contained in news story. These varied from what may be regarded as overtly hostile to more ‘reasoned’ positions. Any offensive posts were removed under BBC house rules pertaining to comments that are “racist, sexist, homophobic, sexually explicit, abusive or otherwise objectionable”. There were also a number of comments made that were in agreement with a liberal UK immigration policy or that challenged other’s ultra-right-wing or ‘racist’ comments.

In a similar approach to Andreouli and Dashtipour (2014), these comments were analysed in a theoretically guided thematic manner using the notion of ‘latent thematic analysis’ (Braun and Clark, 2006). This permitted an analysis in which arguments and counter-arguments, themes and counter-themes, could be examined as within a dialectical relationship with each other. However, the analytical focus in this paper differs in emphasis from that of Andreouli

and Dashtipour's work in that it seeks to show how each opposing 'side in the debate' draws upon particular rhetorical constructions to shore up and bolster its position. In other words, the focus of the analysis is the rhetorical act of winning the argument and of making a position that is credible and persuasive. No attempt has been made to quantify these comments given that the analysis focuses on rhetorical forms and is not concerned with distributions of views across the data. Moreover, it was anticipated that most of the comments would be reactive against Cable's remarks about the illegality of the proposed cap on EU immigrants and Bulgarian President's intervention. In other words, the people tend to post comments in a period of heightened political activity with the result that this would not permit any kind of distributive sampling to evaluate relative strengths of opinion (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2012). Themes were identified in an inductive manner through organising the comments in terms of their rhetorical strategies (e.g. resource-based arguments, employment, cultural issues) in either supporting or arguing against Cable and his remarks, as well as more broadly the issue of East European immigration to the UK. Also borne in mind was van Dijk's (1998: 33) concept of the "ideological square" in which the twin strategies of positive 'ingroup' description and negative 'outgroup' description manifest themselves through lexical choice and other linguistic features to emphasize and 'us' and 'them' ideological framework. The themes were then examined further in considering the deployment of assertions and/or supporting 'evidence'.

The comments presented below in the analysis have had all identifiers removed, save their comment number. Typographical errors have been corrected, and where comments contained 'texting-language' these have also been corrected to enable readability. In all other respects the comments presented are as posted with no amendments to content.

Findings

The Rhetoric of Resources

As noted above, it is not the purpose of this paper to politically side with these reactions in one way or another but rather to examine their rhetorical construction. One of the most common themes present in the data was the ‘rhetoric of resources’. This was particularly drawn upon by those objecting to the liberalisation of UK immigration in relation immigrants coming from Eastern Europe. Such people are positioned as being an actual or potential source of ‘competition’ for resources that are presented as being finite or constrained in some way or other. This type of comment came in various forms ranging from a simple statement about over-capacity and resources to more elaborate formulations that countered claims of racism.

Examples of relatively ‘straightforward’ claims about resource constraints are presented in comments 541, 772 and 472 below. Their rhetorical force is constructed in different ways although they all make much the same point. In comment 541 the rhetorical impact derives from its brief assertive sentences and by ending on a ‘plea’ to political leaders. Comment 772 also appeals those in “authority” to recognise that the UK is “grossly overcrowded” and hints at the effects on the “army” of “young unemployed”. The juxtaposition of immigrants coming with their “wives and children in tow” with that “unemployed youth” is a powerful rhetorical claim for curbing immigration. Comment 472 uses the familiar technique of a rhetorical question (“Why would we need more unskilled workers?”) in relation to prior resource shortage claims. Note the assertion that immigrants are “unskilled”.

Comment number 541

We are over-populated.

Our schools are full.

Our roads are full.

Our trains are full, with no seats left.

Hospitals are overflowing.

The skies are jam-packed.

..... and much more!

Mr Clegg and Mr Cable - our infrastructure cannot take more people!

Comment number 772

Does no one in authority realise that the UK is grossly overcrowded as it is without even more people being allowed to come here with their wives and children in tow. We've got no spare capacity in houses, schools, health care and both trains and roads are bursting at the seams. Plus the fact that we can't provide jobs for the army of unemployed, especially the young.

Comment number 472

The country is overcrowded, we have a shortage of houses, hospital beds and the classrooms are full. Why would we need more unskilled workers?

Examples of comments that countered claims of racism are presented below. These were given either directly in response to another participant's comment or in more general terms. Comment 1256 adopts the more general response by arguing that a concern with resources is not 'racism'. The simplicity of this contrast structure differs from Comment 1385 which turns the argument into an environmental concern and the need to maintain a "pleasant country".

Comment number 1256

Re the 'racist' argument - disagreeing with mass immigration is not racist. I am sure that more Eastern Europeans are hard-working people who are simply wanting to improve their standard of living. The problem is the sheer numbers coming to the UK - at a time when we have a housing crisis, a shortage of primary school places, an overstretched NHS, crowded roads etc. etc. This is not racism!

Comment number 1385

In response to Comment number 1372.

"Immigration can work if we are willing to spend on infrastructure - massive house, school, hospital and transport building programmes. But not if we shy away from these issues."

And then more, and then more... You can't keep adding to infrastructure indefinitely, and in the mean time you end up with a less pleasant country than one that needs less infrastructure to cope.

Although those who argued against such views were in a minority, the counter-rhetorical stance to the focus on resources shortages was to redirect the criticism at previous UK government policy decisions. Comments 1404 and 1093 represent examples of this redirection back to politicians. In the case of Comment 1404 the issue of housing shortages back to a previous Conservative government policy whilst Comment 1093 makes a more general point about resources being exploited for the few.

Comment number 1404

If your objections to immigration is based in a housing shortage, then cast your mind back to the 1980's when Mrs T forced the sell-off of council housing but stopped any replacement of the housing stock to turn a house from somewhere you lived to a speculative commodity.

As for UKIP simply a one trick pony party whose leader decries the EU yet carries on drawing his MEP pay - A tad hypocritical.

Comment number 1093

Politicians of this country have made people to believe that reason behind all the problems is immigration, not exploitation of country's resources for the advantage of few.

Constructing the Citizen-Contributor

The immigrant as a citizen-contributor was also a common theme within the corpus of comments. As might be anticipated there were a number of comments that juxtaposed the immigrant with the taxpayer-citizen or the 'good' immigrant as a skilled person who works hard and pays their taxes with the 'benefit tourist' or unskilled migrant worker. Examples of these kinds of rhetorical construction are presented below. The simplicity of this contrast structure is that it set up the issue as a simple either/or. Metaphors such as "fling the gates open" or humorous quips such as referring to the UK as "Treasure Island" serve to strengthen these contrasts by heightening the problematisation of immigration. However, as can be seen later such a construction is open to being easily countered because of this very one-dimensional simplicity and sometimes undisguised stereotyping of immigrants.

Comment number 1096

So what's happening at our borders.

Well we have Labour and the Lib Dems wanting to fling the gates open so anyone can come in and claim benefits. Meanwhile you have taxpayers and the Tories calling for the gates to be closed.

Taxpayers (the few of us left), we know which way to vote now, don't we?

Comment number 1038

Nothing wrong with immigration if it's controlled.

But!

Any country that accepts immigrants, should be able to pick and choose who comes in.

If they don't offer anything to benefit the people who already live here then they shouldn't qualify.

Skilled people YES please.

Benefit tourists NO thanks.

Comment number 956

You don't have to cap immigration. Just REMOVE the benefits for 12 months. They won't come then.

Vince Cable you are wrong. Ask yourself why come to UK when passing all other EU countries, it's because UK offer best benefits. No wonder they call us Treasure Island.

Comment number 389

Immigrants who come to this country to work are welcome. Those who arrive, expecting immediate hand-outs of UK taxpayers' money are not. It really is that simple. The PM is right to introduce rules governing benefits paid to new immigrants. If the EU do not like it, then we should leave.

Comment number 362

If you have a job lined up then I don't think it's so much of a problem.

However if you have no job, why should you be entitled to the benefit system and NHS? It's not paid for by the EU it's paid for by taxpayers of the UK who in these austere times are struggling to foot the bill for those who already live at present in the UK. Free movement ok.

Freeloading?

Definitely not.

Comment number 216

An educated and skilled American who will not claim a penny in benefits and contribute positively to the economy will basically find it impossible today to get a visa as they are non-EU citizens. An uneducated, non-English speaking Romanian who is here for the sole purpose of claiming benefits only - welcome to the UK, here's some free money! Good for the economy Lib Dems? You haven't a clue.

Comment number 54

Polish people are mainly single, came here to work and got jobs and don't use / abuse public services and pay into the system. BUT - it'll be a completely different demographic from Romania and Bulgaria - purely benefit / health tourism. These countries are corrupt. Has to be a restriction - ONLY PEOPLE WITH JOBS WHO WILL PAY INTO THE SYSTEM. This influx will further decimate health services.

As noted above these comments lend themselves to being easily countered either directly by pointing out the 'good' immigrant-contributor (comments 1380, 741, 210) or by drawing attention to the one-dimensional nature of the 'blame the immigrant' argument (comments 1279, 1287, 823, 779)

Comment number 1380

Overall immigration is a good thing. New blood, new skills, ideas, etc. we are after all a nation of immigrants. The difficult thing is that there seems to be little in the way of a) helping immigrants adapt to UK life; b) stopping those with a criminal record from entering the UK; c) having some control over the deportation of those who seek to undermine our way of life.

It is a complex issue...

Comment number 741

The fact is that those EU migrants come here to WORK. Almost all of them. They ARE good for Britain. If one thinks they lose their jobs to foreigners then how miserable they have to be to lose a job to a foreign guy who doesn't speak the language properly? One must be ashamed to say so. Moreover most of those who claim having lost their job seemingly have never even had one.

Comment number 210

Immigration has been the bedrock on which our countries have been built, since before our little group of islands could even call themselves countries.

Immigrants throughout the ages have enriched the UK in all matters financial, cultural and spiritual, and they continue to do so today.

We should welcome any and all who wish to call our home their own, and together reap the benefits that follow.

Comment number 1279

I don't have a job - Blame it on immigrants. I can't raise my kids - Blame it on immigrants.... I don't have a good education - Blame it on immigrants... My Health is poor- Blame it on immigrants. Stop these xenophobic attacks on immigrant... Having studied and worked with Eastern Europeans, I must say they are a lovely people and work hard unlike some of our own people here.

Comment number 1287

Most immigrants are hard workers , that scares the bone idle Brits to death.

Comment number 823

The British view of the average immigrant is disproportional. Working immigrants is exactly what this country needs; more tax to pay for our ageing population. Most of the immigrants are skilled, filling jobs that Britain doesn't have enough of. The rest are students, who spend billions per year.

If you're unemployed, I would suggest you take the initiative of these immigrants, and look elsewhere.

Comment number 779

I think it's a myth that large numbers come over for benefits as I work with quite a few Eastern Europeans, they come over as they can earn more money here than they can at home and they either settle and pay tax like the rest or pay tax while working and then leave.

We should be asking ourselves why people from Eastern Europe who rarely speak English are better candidates for jobs than locals.

Constructing Politicians and the Populace

Another form of rhetorical construction present in the posts is the connection, or lack of connection, between politicians and the populace. Anti-immigration rhetoric within the data most commonly alluded to the political elite being out of touch with the 'ordinary' voters. Examples of this kind of construction are presented below and in each case draw attention to the alleged political consequence/backlash. Such constructions vary in their rhetorical force by drawing on name calling, references to being politically correct, or deluded. Nevertheless all

present the case that politicians should be in touch and reactive to voters' concerns or otherwise face the political consequences.

Comment number 1400

Cable is an idiot if he doesn't understand by now that this is a serious issue for voters. Arrogantly describing it as panic is just another pseudo-intellectual conceit from the 'right on' PC establishment that allowed unrestrained immigration in the first place. You are not listening to the votes Cable and you will reap the whirlwind in the next General Election.

Comment number 1360

Cable is completely mad if he thinks remaining passive in the face of open borders with Romania and Bulgaria is the best way to allay people's fears. This issue will cause the overthrow of the political class, who are in the grip of a delusion.

Comment number 1040

The apathy to address the British people's concerns about mass uncontrolled immigration will be the downfall of the political parties currently in Westminster. Is it any wonder UKIP are on the rise? They are the only political party that isn't afraid to pussy foot around this issue. What the Tories are proposing is all smoke and mirrors.

Comment number 1014

The Lib Dems are reading this one very badly. The majority of the public are frustrated & upset by the rapid culture change being forced onto the country placing a burden on its infrastructure and people. All this is, rightly or wrongly, bringing us closer to leaving the EU. The libs need to be more in tune with public thinking & legitimate worries... But I suppose it doesn't affect them?

These kind of comments were countered by claiming that populist extremism has taken hold and that this is 'beyond reason', threatening and disturbing. What is striking about these claims is the extent to which they mirror academic critiques as a rhetorical counter to anti-immigration.

Comment number 1295

The depressing thing is the lack of willingness of the mainstream parties to tackle such issues, or even admit that they are issues. By avoiding serious issues that have a bit of political danger about them a disturbing number of people start turning towards the more unhinged parties (who mostly want curbs for all the wrong reasons). Scary times.

Comment number 1267

So now the Tories are swinging to the xenophobic to placate the drift of their support to UKIP. It wasn't that long ago that Cameron referred to UKIP as swivel-eyed loons so if they are swivel-eyed loons by implication the Tories are too?

Comment number 635

There seems to be a lot of pride in how 'nasty' we are becoming as a nation; towards immigrants, the unemployed, pensioners, the disabled, towards those needing the help of food banks. These days we follow the likes of Nigel Farage, the former investment banker who 'talks our language' and therefore CLEARLY is 'one of us' and anyone with a shred of empathy left for others is a leftie, communist etc.

The Voice of Experience

Some contributors posted comments based upon personal circumstances and knowledge. These drew upon through largely the same rhetorical structure as those advocating anti- or pro-immigration positions. The voice of experience is presented in these accounts as verification for the position being argued for – it is rooted in what the person has encountered. These sorts of accounts are taken as being literally self-evident in that they are not based upon a more generalizable argument. This is both a strength and a weakness - to claim that your experience has taught you this or that is easily countered by someone else's contrary experience. Comments 1175, 843 and 802 are examples of an anti-immigration stance whilst comments 1327, 1273, 417 and 85 are examples of pro-immigrant rhetoric.

Comment number 1175

I've worked in Bucharest for two years, and I can completely understand why Romanians would want to escape their country. I've also visited Bulgaria and they are even poorer, considerably poorer. There is a total disregard from their own government for their own welfare, security and safety. I'm against mass immigration, but actually don't think they will arrive en masse. Many do work hard there.

Comment number 843

My young nephew is sick and tired of having his job applications turned down point blank because local employers have a policy of taking on immigrant workers - no questions asked! If local employers recruit immigrants they don't have to pay the minimum wage and also can

get away with ignoring a whole load of legal requirements. It's got absolutely nothing to do with British workers being lazy!

Comment number 802

Come down to Luton in Chatham Kent. See the groups of Eastern Europeans, mostly Roma, who do not work, wander the streets in gangs, schools up to 50% Roma, Medway Maritime Hospital maternity unit struggling with their women turning up 9 months pregnant as their 1st appearance....yeah, tell me unlimited migration is a good thing, all you goody goodys come and live amongst it.

Comment number 1327

Each summer, a lecturer at the local university would phone me and ask if I would take students on work experience during the holiday. Having interviewed 5 of them I had to say no because they had been taught nothing of our key processes. I have retired now but my previous position and others are now filled by brilliant young Europeans. Our problems would seem to stem from our own inabilities.

Comment number 735

We have just tried to employ eleven people on £24 a year we got just under a 100 apply most failed the entrance exam. We are now interviewing educated Poles who have almost all passed the exams.

Comment number 417

I happen to be one of the 'East European' migrants in UK. Part of my job is to hire people at my workplace. I give preference to native British but you may be shocked how hard that might be. Try explaining the importance of timekeeping to an ordinary 'working class' Brit. Or even importance of turning up at work at all. So nope we don't take their jobs. They just refuse to take them themselves.

Comment number 85

I know this will get a lot of likes but does anyone know any 'benefit tourists' personally. I worked as a cleaner alongside a staff which was majority Polish and I've never met a harder working people. We are scapegoating outsiders in times of economic hardship because that's a natural but very bigoted human reaction. Every benefit scrounger case I've heard of has been white and totally British.

Comparing Countries

Given The United Kingdom's traditional links with Commonwealth countries and the USA, a number of posts made direct comparisons with immigration policies in Canada, Australia and the USA where there are points-based systems. Somewhat like the personal experience comments these types of comments drew their rhetorical force in equal measure by either advocating an immigration policy similar to those countries (comments 1376, 1286, and 497) or in pointing to the different reception of people from these countries in the UK in comparison to East Europeans (comments 1128, 585, 548). It is also notable that the pro-immigrant rhetoric extended to comparisons that pointed to hypocritical claim in relation to the status UK immigrant in other countries (comments 904 and 815).

Comment number 1376

I think we need to adopt a points based migration system. If you are not skilled and you cannot contribute adequately then the subject migrant will inevitably become a drain/ burden (welfare, public services, NHS etc...) and hence should not be allowed in. Free movement is all well and good in a single state/ country, but that's not what the EU is (yet...).

Comment number 1268

Maybe we should take the standpoint of countries such as Australia whereby criteria for immigration into their country is strict. i.e., immigrants need a profession or trade useful to their economy/country and if I'm not wrong money in the bank to support their initial move. This said it seems outrageous that the UK as a smaller country with a bigger population continues to burden itself!

Comment number 497

We need immigration for certain high skilled areas and they contribute to our education system. However, that doesn't mean that access to this country should be a free-for-all and immigration should be reflected by economic needs. Over 2 million have come here since the recession. Modern liberal democracies like Australia and Canada have made access harder. Why can't we?

Comment number 1128

It amazes me that people are blaming immigration on the EU. The UK has been taking immigrants for cheap labour since the 1900's, India, Jamaica etc. Why is it suddenly a problem? Governments have been happy for years with the situation, suddenly they make a fuss because they think it's a vote winner. Shameful.

Comment number 904

Er - I think you will find that Brits DID go to most countries and built their own churches, and created ghettos with different cultures, etc. It was called the British Empire, and yes, we DID get kicked out.

Comment number 815

For heaven's sake get a grip you commenters! under the same laws YOU have the total right to buy a farm in France, open a B&B in Bulgaria, manage a hotel in sunny Spain or retire to Rhodes. Look for Work anywhere! You can send your kids to university in Holland, tuition is £200 a term. You can get a major op done in France quicker than here. At least 700,000 of us live in Spain, 200,000 live in France.

Comment number 585

I've only see the little Englanders moaning about Eastern Europeans nobody ever complains about the number of South Africans, Australians, Americans, New Zealanders in the UK. They are all made welcome as they should be. picking on just Eastern Europeans is racist.

Comment number 548

Funny that many people who don't like immigrants (well, some kinds of immigrants - they probably think Australians etc. are fine, but they're not being racist, no...) are the same people who will be cared for by immigrants and will rely on immigrant tax revenue.

With the demographic 'bubble' of baby-boomers, low childbirth rates and perpetual economic 'growth' immigration is the sensible solution.

Formulating Figures

A number of comments made reference to statistical information in some way or other. These formulations tended to be used, as would be expected, to support a rhetorical claim. Those arguing against tended to used figures relating to unemployed British nationals (e.g., Comment 1381), the cost of living in the UK being too high for most immigrants (e.g., Comment 1107), or figures relating to net immigration and the rising numbers within the UK relative "dissatisfied Britons" leaving (e.g. comment 1035).

Comment number 1381

Some in the media are stating working immigrants contribute to the UK government through their taxes - that is because in the majority of cases they are taking jobs that could be filled by

UK nationals. We have 965,000 unemployed 16 - 24 years olds and a total of 2.47 million unemployed. I see many Eastern European workers locally in jobs traditionally taken by our youth. This can't continue.

Comment number 1107

Most immigrants cannot afford to live in this country. To live in the south without any assistance from the government requires an income of £50000 a year. To buy a bog standard house requires an income of £60000 a year. A monthly food bill for a family of four is £400+ My basic point is that 90% of immigrants should not move here unless they can earn the above...

Comment number 1035

It is not just the numbers immigrating (503,000) but the number of dissatisfied Britons leaving (321,000). These are not the rich nor the poor, but the normal British people. So the proportions of foreign to native-born is increasing more rapidly than the 'net immigration' figures imply with an increasingly detrimental effect on the British culture. good-bye GB.

Those in favour of a liberal immigration policy tended to support their argument through 'official' statistics. This kind of quoted use of statistics lends an external evidential basis to the claims being made in favour of immigration (comments 1407, 1032 and 471).

Comment number 1407

Facts: Between 2001 and 2011 EEA immigrants contributed to the fiscal system 34% more than they took out, with a net fiscal contribution of about 22.1 billion GBP. In contrast, over the same period, natives' fiscal payments amounted to 89% of the amount of transfers they received, or negative fiscal contribution of 624.1 billion GBP.

http://www.cream-migration.org/publ_uploads/CDP_22_13.pdf

Comment number 1032

A study last year by the Office for Budget Responsibility said that GDP would grow by 2.3% in a decade under a scenario of high migration, 0.2% higher than if there was zero migration, and said the gap would widen in succeeding decades.

The OBR also said that migrants would have a beneficial effect on national debt. By 2062, with high migration, debt would be 50% of GDP; with low migration 90%.

Comment number 471

A recent DWP report found that overall 16.6% of working age UK nationals were claiming a DWP working age benefit compared to 6.6% of working age non-UK nationals. So, based on data from National Insurance numbers, UK nationals are around two-and-a-half times as likely to be claiming working age benefits than non-UK nationals.

Asserting motives

A number of posts addressed the issue through asserting unstated or underlying political motives. Those who took an anti-immigration line directed these assertions at EU or accession country political leaders. In other words, they were directed at drawing attention to sinister motives outwith the UK (Comments 1388, 1310 and 610).

Comment number 1388

In response to Comment number 1283

Why do the EU want freedom of movement?

They see it as an essential part of free trade, without it they reckoned some countries would deliberately maintain a low wage environment to undercut other members but with freedom of movement (free trade in Labour) then the best workers would get jobs in the higher wage countries leaving the undercutters with "the dross".

Comment number 1310

In response to Comment number 1283

The EU wants free movement in order to destroy national identities and create on big European superstate modelled on the USA. It's about diluting cultures by breaking down boundaries. The intent is to spread wealth for which we won't benefit and prevent another world war. Problem is that it will start one.

Comment number 610

Why is the Bulgarian President keen for all his skilled workers to migrate to the UK? He knows the type of citizens that will want to move and it certainly won't be the high earners. Cable says that immigrants pay more tax than claim in benefits, but who does Mr Cable think that these migrants are taking available UK jobs from?

Comments made in favour of immigration asserted the underlying motives of the UK Government Conservative politicians with an eye on the populist vote and electoral advantage.

Their rhetorical construction is based upon pointing out that political leaders are seeking to manipulate the masses through 'facing up' to the EU (Comment1391) or by keeping in step with the populist media (Comments 1391, 1390, 1052 and 64).

Comment number 1391

Here we have a Government acting irresponsibly,

We, the people, are being fed misinformation and propaganda, for that's what it is.

All this engenders fear among the unthinking masses.

We are no more at risk from floods of 'immigrants' -(awful word) it's a government with nothing positive to do except pretend to be bossy with the rest of the EU.

It does us no favours, and makes us look idiotic!

Comment number 1390

Many frightened Tories citing the demise of the liberals - do they think the shambles of a Clown Party harbouring large factions of swivel-eyed tea party acolytes is likely to fare any better? Really?

Cameron is a u-turning marketeer with less substance than candy floss -his tenure is characterised by utter subservience to corporate interests and media posturing as a replacement for action.

Comment number 1052

What we need is truth speaking from Cameron and his party. If the Sun poll shows people think more than half of immigrants are on benefits, he needs to tell the truth - it is nowhere near that. He needs to say business loves cheap hard working East Europeans, prepared to live 6 to a 2 bedroom house and send their wages home. He won't, he's a coward.

Comment number 64

Here we go again. Another chance for everyone to vent their anger against immigration. This is all part of the Tories re-election campaign orchestrated by their new strategist Lynton Crosby aided and abetted by the Sun and the Mail among others. Vote for the nasty party. They will give you plenty of scapegoats to blame for your problems while making sure their friends in the City are protected.

Discussion

This paper has provided an analysis of the thematic rhetorical construction of comments about UK immigration policy in relation to Business Secretary Vince Cable's remarks about the illegality of capping EU immigrant numbers. The themes emerging from the data - resources, the citizen-contributor, voices of experience, politicians and the populace, comparing counties, using figures, and asserting motives - provide a means of charting the rhetorical strengths and weakness of either pro- or anti-immigration supporters. In the case of arguments about resources the power of this construction favours an anti-immigration stance. The claims made appeal to aspects such as housing, education and health and how these have been the subject of cutbacks during the recession such that increased immigration is claimed to add to an already worsening resources situation. This is constructed as a rational argument that is neutral in its political stance and is in effect, just 'telling it like it is'. In the context of EU enlargement this can be seen as a legitimate argument without any of the negative connotations of cultural or national superiority.

The citizen-contributor theme is addressed in different ways by each side of the argument. Anti-immigration comments draw their rhetorical strength from focusing upon the UK national as contributing to the taxation system and thereby being able to legitimately claim benefits. Immigrant as positioned in a dichotomous way as either skilled contributors or as benefit tourists. Such discursive constructions cohere to rule out Eastern European immigrants from coming to the UK: they are positioned as either they taking UK citizens' jobs or taking benefits. This kind of rhetoric is countered in two ways: (i) through constructing immigrants as necessary for the economic and cultural benefit of the country and (ii) by alluding to the easy-to-blame rhetoric of those who either through misfortune or their own failings are struggling economically or who are out of work.

Comments based upon the personal experience are the weakest rhetorical construction of either side of the argument. Whilst they attest to actual lived experience and circumstance this

amounts to simply that a person's own experience. It can both be seen as sincere and authentic but at the same time seen as being less than representative. Nevertheless, this kind of rhetorical construction lends a personalised and experiential dimension.

A number of comments were directed at the portraying politicians as 'out of touch' with the populace or as extremists who were whipping up irrational fears. The rhetorical force of the 'out of touch' construction is that it asserts the views and experiences of the 'ordinary citizen' as opposed to the political elite. This in effect creates a dichotomy between the 'reality' of everyday life versus the world of political discourse. Those who argue that extremism has taken hold construct a rhetoric of irrationality and fear and that the public has unthinkingly gone along with this. Both sets of constructions trade upon the notion of reality versus fantasy.

The comparison of countries is a familiar rhetorical move when discussing immigration policy. Those arguing in favour of curbing immigration drew parallels with familiar and popular countries for those with relative who may have emigrated from the UK. Hence it was no surprise to see Canada and Australia mentioned the points-based immigration system they operate. Of course these countries are not part of the EU and therefore their mention sidesteps the issue of EU freedom of movement policy. This also leaves open the implication that the UK should not be part of the EU. Others countered such a view by draw attention to the fact that UK nationals have moved in large numbers to other EU countries such as Spain, Bulgaria or France for different reasons and often related to retirement, second homes and leisure. It is also the case that comparisons are made with Australians, Canadians and American moving to the UK where there is little questioning of such immigration. Pointing out these sorts of inconsistencies is a powerful rhetorical strategy in countering anti-immigration discourse.

It was also interesting to see the different use made of statistical information on both sides of the argument. Anti-immigration arguments did not rely upon 'official' immigration statistics

but instead pointed to figures such as numbers of UK unemployed. Pro-immigration arguments in almost all cases drew upon official immigration statistics to make the case for a liberal policy. By drawing upon external sources in this way the agency of the person making the comment is removed and the figures left to 'speak for themselves'.

Finally, in asserting the unstated motives of politicians anti-immigration arguments adopted a 'them and us' rhetorical construction in which the 'real' motives of 'them' - the EU or Bulgarian President - were somehow underhand and being 'hidden' from us (the 'British'). The counter rhetoric to this was constructed in terms of Conservative Government politicians of covering up the truth about immigration in order to appeal to populist sentiment as a means of securing electoral advantage.

In each of these themes the rhetorical force of the arguments deployed adopts a particular stance on the British citizen versus other (East) European immigrant in a dialectical manner. In the context of EU enlargement it is therefore evident that the discourse of integration is met with a range of populist representations that seek to counter this with an anti-immigration stance based rational argument rather than of rooted in xenophobia. Those who support immigration therefore find it difficult to challenge these arguments on racist grounds and are left in the position of having to engage on an evidential basis rather than through the expression of approval towards an integrationist EU position. The findings lend support to the Mintchev's (2014) view that the rhetoric of immigration as posing a threat to community cohesion is now used to justify calls to curb entry to East Europeans entering the UK. Based on the simple argument that there are now too many immigrants to cope with and that some communities are now stretched, it is easy to see how this arguments seeks evades any charge of racism. However it is also evident that the 'us' and 'them' nature of this discourse (van Dijk, 1998:33) betrays any sense of a common European citizenship. The findings also provide more detail on the sort of rhetorical constructions Andreouli and Dashtipou (2014) found in their examination of

immigration officers. As they note, the ambivalence between ‘good immigrant’ rhetoric which shows Britain as a place of tolerance, freedom and humanitarian values is counter-posed in a binary way that of the ‘bad immigrant’ who is seeking to exploit the welfare system and where Britain needs to be protected from cultural threats and being drained economically.

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