THINKING ABOUT POST-BREXIT PUBLIC POLICY: VOTERS' PERSPECTIVE ON IMMIGRATION AND REGULATION

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INTRODUCTION

Now that the UK has left the EU single market and customs union, it has acquired responsibility for a range of policy areas that hitherto have lain wholly or in part within the competence of the EU. One of the key motivations for doing so, according to those who campaigned in favour of a Leave vote, was to ensure that all the laws that pertained in Britain were made in Britain by a government and parliament that were accountable to the citizens of Britain alone. The implication at least was that leaving would help ensure that post-Brexit public policy was better aligned with the wishes and preferences of the British public.

But what are those wishes and preferences? One possible approach to finding out is to survey a representative sample of the population, presenting them with questions on a range of policy issues and eliciting their answers. We have ourselves undertaken such an exercise on a number of occasions during the last two years, with a view to ascertaining the public's views on some of the possible policy decisions that the UK could take after Brexit in respect of immigration, food policy and consumer regulation (Curtice et al., 2020). However, the answers that people give in these surveys will, of course, often be top of the head responses given without a great deal of forethought and consideration. Arguably a better approach to ascertaining how the public would react if a particular policy decision were to be taken is to give them access to the arguments for and against that decision, the chance to discuss the pros and cons, and only then try to ascertain their views.

This latter approach is the one adopted by Deliberative Polling, a methodological technique developed by the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University (Fishkin, 1997; 2009; 2018). During 2019 and 2020 we undertook three such polls on the subject of Britain's post-Brexit public policy in respect of immigration, food policy and consumer regulation. Over weekends in May and June 2019 and then again in October 2020 we brought together three different subsets of the people who had originally responded to one of the regular surveys that we had conducted and provided them with impartial written briefing materials, the opportunity to discuss the issues with fellow participants in moderated small groups, and the chance to quiz balanced panels of experts on each subject.[1] In each case the deliberation was undertaken online, the first time that Deliberative Polling has been undertaken in this way in the UK. The version of the briefing materials used in 2020 together with videos of the sessions with experts are available at whatukthinks.org (nd).

A total of 385 people, stratified to be as representative as possible of the adult population, participated in one of the three events and in so doing completed two questionnaires, one shortly before their event took place and the other as it came to an end. In addition, the

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1 Each of the three topics was the subject of a 60-90 minute discussion in small groups, a plenary session with experts of a similar length, plus a shorter debrief session in small groups after the plenary.

discussions are being transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis. In this paper, we use these data (weighted to be as representative as possible of the general population) to present some initial findings on where the deliberation appears to have made a difference to people's views and try to provide some insight into why this proved to be the case. The analysis is based on the data that were collected across all three events.[2]

IMMIGRATION

Immigration was one of the central issues in the referendum campaign. Concern about what by historical standards had been relatively high levels of net inward immigration during the two previous decades appeared to play an important role in generating support for Leave (Clarke et al., 2017; Curtice, 2017; Sobolewska and Ford, 2020). Meanwhile the shape of the subsequent Brexit negotiations has been heavily influenced by the UK government's decision to end adherence to the EU's freedom of movement provisions, a step that ensured that the UK would also be leaving the EU single market.

Yet, more than one survey has found that attitudes towards immigration have become more positive since the referendum (Blinder and Richards, 2020; Ford and Lymperopoulou, 2017; Hudson et al., 2020). It might be thought that this is an indication that, as people have had more time to consider the issue, more of them have come to value the benefits of immigration. Certainly, one consequence of the discussions that we staged was to move people in that direction.

Before and after their deliberative event participants were asked the following two questions about the consequences of immigration into the UK:

> *On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely bad and 10 is extremely good, would you say it is generally <u>bad</u> or <u>good</u> for Britain's economy that migrants come to Britain from other countries?"*
>
> *And on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is undermined and 10 is enriched, would you say that Britain's cultural life is generally <u>undermined</u> or <u>enriched</u> by migrants coming to live here from other countries?*

In Table 1 we summarise the responses to these two questions across the two waves of interviewing by showing in each case the proportion who responded with a score of between 0 and 3, 4 and 6, and 7 and 10. Reflecting the changed national mood, over half of our participants came to our deliberations inclined to the view that immigration is good for Britain's economy and that it enriches Britain's cultural life, while only around one in eight (13%) gave a score that implied they thought immigration undermines the country's cultural life and less than one in ten (9%) stated that it was bad for the economy.

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2 One of the striking features of our research is that although the events conducted in 2019 and that in 2020 were undertaken independently of each other, the impact of the deliberation on the distribution of attitudes proved to be remarkably similar across the events. This is something on which we will report more fully later. All the changes that we report for the combined samples are statistically significant, using a paired sample t-test, at the 5% level of probability.

Table 1: Perceived Impact of Immigration on Britain's Economy and Cultural Life, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

Score on 0-10 scale	Perceived Impact of Immigration on…			
	Britain's Economy		Britain's Culture	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%
0-3 (bad/undermined)	9	6	13	7
4-6	34	30	32	31
7-10 (good/enriched)	56	63	55	62

This largely favourable view of immigration was seemingly reinforced by our deliberation. There was a seven-point increase in the proportion who gave a score that indicated that they thought immigration was good for the economy while there was a similar-sized rise in the proportion who reckoned that immigration enriches the country's cultural life. Our participants appeared to have become even more likely to regard immigration in a favourable light.

One reason why this may have happened is that a subject that often featured in the deliberation was the UK's heavy dependence on migrant labour in some sectors, with the reliance of farming on seasonal migrant workers cited as one example.

> *If we didn't have low-skilled European workers, in my view, we'd been in a hole. If it weren't for them, fruit wouldn't be getting picked, things wouldn't be getting packed. They do the jobs that our own citizens don't want to do, so they are technically helping our economy grow.*
> [Group 23]

Against this backdrop, we might anticipate that our participants would have become less keen on controlling immigration. But this is not what we found. Rather than moving in that direction our participants became more inclined to back control.

In order to ascertain participants' attitudes towards the principle of freedom of movement, we asked them whether they were for or against each of the following being part of the agreement that governed the long-term relationship between the UK and the EU.

> *Requiring people from the EU who want to come to live here to apply to do so in the same way as people from outside the EU.*

and

> *Requiring people from Britain who want to live and work in an EU country to apply to do so in the same way as anybody else from outside the EU has to do.*

These questions thus not only tapped attitudes towards ending freedom of movement for EU citizens wishing to enter the UK, but also for British citizens who wish to live and work in the rest of the EU, an aspect that has tended to receive rather less attention.

Table 2 reveals that, despite their relatively favourable evaluation of the consequences of immigration, before the deliberative events around three in five were in favour of requiring EU migrants to apply to come to Britain to live and work (60%) in the same way as non-EU citizens, while a similar proportion (63%) expected British citizens to have to apply to migrate to a country in the EU. Here is an initial indication that an electorate that is inclined to acknowledge the benefits of immigration is not necessarily one that is opposed to all immigration control.

Table 2: Attitudes towards Freedom of Movement, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

	Require application by…			
	EU migrants to Britain		UK migrants to EU	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour	34	36	33	40
Somewhat in favour	26	37	30	34
Neither in favour nor against	16	10	14	12
Somewhat against	15	12	14	9
Strongly against	8	5	9	6

That this is indeed the case is underlined by how attitudes shifted in the wake of the deliberation. Instead of around three in five thinking that potential migrants should have to apply to live and work elsewhere, now the proportion was closer to three-quarters. There was a 13-point increase to 73% in the proportion who said that prospective EU migrants should have to apply, and a 11-point increase, to 74%, in the proportion who said that UK migrants should have to do likewise. In short, the opportunity to consider the issue further resulted in even higher level of support for the government's decision to end freedom of movement than the relatively high level that was already in evidence in our regular survey data (Curtice et al., 2020).

Participants gave a number of reasons as to why the rules for EU and non-EU migrants should be the same. These included that it would be more practical to apply a 'universal' system and that people should be judged on merit and skills rather than nationality, while for some this change was symbolic of the new separation of the UK from the EU.

> *I think that …if we're leaving the EU then all countries therefore should be treated in a similar fashion. We're starting with, in effect - not a blank piece of paper - but it's a new start. So a clear and simple process for all countries and all people coming here.* **[Group 18]**

> *My view is I'm not sure that being neighbours makes a huge amount of difference. I tend to agree with T in that people should be assessed on their individual merits and what they can bring rather than because we've had that long-standing relationship.* **[Group 12]**

Concern was expressed that any system should be fair and it was thought an approach that did not differentiate would be easier to implement. True, some participants did also discuss the possibility that reciprocal arrangements on immigration might be needed in order to obtain security agreements or trade deals with other countries. But while developing 'special relationships' with countries might be able to achieve these sorts of benefits, there was also a

concern that such agreements were likely to take time to deliver and introduce delays, meaning that the UK failed to attract sufficient seasonal workers or people to work in the hospitality industry.

> *applying the same rules just does make sense. That being said, if that's going to create a lot of work to actually get to that point, then that could delay getting the people in that we actually need to get in.* [Group 5]

More generally, it was thought important that the UK should have an immigration system that met the UK's needs and that a degree of control was necessary to achieve that objective. The Australian system, to which many advocates of Leave have pointed during the Brexit debate, was referenced in this respect.

> *I think Australia's system's pretty good. The default is, if you want to come in, the answer's 'no' unless you meet certain criteria, or you work in a position that we're desperate for.* [Group 21]

In the main, people were balancing moral, ethical and economic considerations in their discussions as well as more explicit opinions about limiting overall population size. At the same time, there was some counter discussion that identified the historical and cultural links between the EU and Britain as a reason to retain the current system of free movement. However, people tended to concentrate more on the perceived contribution of migrants versus the costs to the UK rather than their country of origin.

Still, how did this increase in support for ending freedom of movement arise at the same time as participants became more likely to regard immigration as beneficial? As Table 3 shows, what happened is that those who held a more favourable view of immigration became markedly more likely to favour (either 'strongly' or 'somewhat') requiring potential migrants to apply. This is especially true of attitudes towards requiring EU migrants to apply to come to the UK. Support for this proposition among those who prior to deliberation held a favourable view of the economic and cultural consequences of immigration increased by no less than 20 points, whereas the increase among those who had a less favourable outlook on the consequences of immigration, around four in five of whom were already in favour of requiring people to apply, was only three or four points.[3] In the case of requiring UK citizens to apply to come to the EU, the difference in the rate of increase was less stark, but even so among those with a more favourable initial view of the consequences of immigration there was a 13-point increase in support for requiring people to apply compared with an increase of 7-8 points among those with a less favourable view.

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3 The pattern is much the same if we analyse the change in attitudes by respondents' evaluations of the impact of immigration after their deliberative event.

Table 3: Attitudes towards Freedom of Movement by Evaluations of the Impact of Immigration. Pre- and Post-Deliberation.

| | Perceived Impact (Pre-Event Score out of 10) of Immigration on… | | | |
| | Britain's Economy | | Britain's Culture | |
% in favour of requiring EU migrants to apply	0-6	7-10	0-6	7-10
Pre-Event	80	45	81	43
Post-Event	83	65	85	63
Change	+3	+20	+4	+20
% in favour of requiring UK migrants to apply				
Pre-Event	77	52	76	52
Post-Event	84	65	84	65
Change	+7	+13	+8	+13

As a result of these trends, what was already only a modest link between attitudes towards freedom of movement and perceptions of the consequences of immigration became even weaker. After deliberating, just over four in five of those who had a less favourable perception of the consequences of immigration were opposed to freedom of movement, but so also were nearly two in three of those who viewed the consequences of immigration more positively.

A potentially important implication follows. As we might anticipate, those participants who voted for Remain in the 2016 EU referendum were more likely to evaluate the consequences of immigration positively. Thus, the pattern we have uncovered implies that during the course of the deliberation support for ending freedom of movement rose primarily among those who had voted to stay in the EU. This is indeed the case, at least so far as attitudes towards potential EU migrants having to apply is concerned. Among those who voted Leave in 2016 there was actually a slight fall – from 85% to 82% – in the proportion who felt that EU migrants should have to apply to come to the UK, whereas among those who voted Remain support for the proposition rose by 16 points, from 41% to 57%.

Between them these analyses suggest that it may be a mistake to assume that debate about UK immigration policy in post-Brexit Britain will simply replicate the division between Remainers and Leavers that developed during the Brexit debate. Many of those who voted Remain appear to have been doubtful about the merits of freedom of movement in the first place, and that deliberating with others about immigration policy underlined those doubts. It appears that for many people, a belief in the benefits of immigration does not necessarily entail support for uncontrolled immigration policies. Rather our evidence suggests that, even if they have not done so already, people can quite readily come to the conclusion that they do not go together at all.

The tendency for our participants to become more supportive of a less liberal approach to immigration is also apparent across a number of more specific questions about the rules surrounding immigration. Consider for example, the results that we obtained when we asked people whether someone who wishes to migrate to the UK should have to be earning a minimum income, and also the responses to an equivalent question about a British citizen who wishes to bring a non-British spouse into the UK. The questions read:

How much do you think somebody from another country should have to earn before they are allowed to come to Britain to live and work – or do you think there should not be any lower limit?

and

I would like you to think about someone who is a British citizen who is married to someone who is not a British citizen. They would like to bring their husband/wife into the UK to live.

How much income do you think the British citizen should have before they are allowed to bring their husband/wife into the UK – or do you think there should not be any lower?

In both cases the possible answers offered are as detailed in Table 4, which shows the proportion choosing each option in the pre- and post-surveys.

Table 4: Attitudes towards Minimum Income Requirement for Migrants and Spouses, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

Minimum income should be…	Migrant		Spouse	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%
£40K	2	2	7	2
£30K	14	12	16	18
£20K	26	31	19	27
£15K	21	24	16	18
None	36	31	42	35

As we have reported elsewhere (Curtice et al., 2020), a majority of voters seem willing to support a lower minimum income requirement than the UK government has initially decided to put in place. For most people this has been set at £25,600, though the figure can be lowered to £20,480 if an applicant scores highly on other criteria. The income required by a British citizen hoping to bring a spouse into the UK is lower at £18,600, but this figure is increased if the spouse is to be accompanied by dependent children. Yet both figures are higher than the one backed by a majority of our participants prior to deliberation; in both cases over half felt that either there should not be any minimum income requirement at all, or that it should be no more than £15,000.

One reason why this is the case is that participants thought that many migrants might move to the UK at starting salaries below the income threshold but then move up the income scale, while it was felt that migrants needed to be recruited into some job sectors – such as care work – that were low-paid but important. At the same time, there were also concerns about the impact on family life of not allowing someone's family to join them in the UK.

Does that mean we don't show humanity for people wanting to have their family with them because there might be the odd person who's going to take advantage of that? **[Group 19]**

In some discussions, the thresholds themselves were also considered arbitrary. Where specific figures were discussed, there was some view that £18,600 (or any amount) lacked meaning because cost of living varies according to lifestyle and where you live in UK.

However, as Table 4 shows that there was something of a dip in our post-deliberation surveys in the proportions saying that there should not be a minimum income requirement, one of five points (from 36% to 31%) in the case of migrants themselves and of seven points (from 42% to 35%) in respect of someone bringing in a spouse who is not a British citizen. True, this still meant that a majority felt that the £15,000 should be enough to permit the admission of a spouse, though the equivalent figure for migrants was now £20,000 – still below the normal figure proposed by the government.

In deliberations, the earning potential of potential migrants and their ability to support their spouse and dependent children were often uppermost in people's minds – not least because they might otherwise be dependent on welfare – as this exchange between participants demonstrates:

> *R: I guess what you're saying is that if somebody comes to the country who's highly skilled and they've got more of an earning potential, so they've got more money to look after people potentially, whereas if you have people who come in who are low skilled, then their future earnings might be low.*
>
> *J: Yes. So their future earnings may not support a family, and in that case, who's going to support them?*
>
> *K: Yes, I do think the wage criteria is a big thing, how much money they could be potentially earning, definitely, because you wouldn't be able to support a family on basic wage at all. No way, you'd barely support yourself.* [Group 7]

A similar shift in a somewhat less liberal direction is also to be found in how participants responded to two further detailed questions about immigration policy – about linguistic competence and access to welfare benefits. These read as follows:

> *And thinking about the same British citizen who wishes to bring their non-British husband/wife into the UK, to what extent to do you agree or disagree that the husband/wife should only be allowed to come to the UK if they can speak everyday English.*

and

> *"Thinking about migrants from other countries who are working and paying taxes in Britain.*
>
> *How soon, if at all, should they be able to access the same welfare benefits as British citizens?"*

Table 5a: Attitudes towards Requiring a Non-British Spouse to have Everyday English, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

Only allow spouse if have everyday English	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%
Strongly agree	14	19
Agree	34	38
Neither agree nor disagree	27	22
Disagree	15	14
Strongly disagree	11	7

Table 5b: Attitudes towards Length of Time a Migrant should wait before being able to access Welfare, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

Migrants should have access to welfare…	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%
Immediately	19	15
After 1 year	24	21
After 3 years	22	26
After 5 years	24	33
After 10 years	8	6
Never	2	*

* Less than 0.5%

It will be noted that prior to the deliberation, participants were more inclined to back a relatively tough position on these issues, in contrast to the question of income thresholds. As the first half of Table 5 shows, nearly half (48%) agreed that a migrant spouse should have to be competent in everyday English, while only around a quarter (26%) disagreed. Meanwhile (see second half of Table 5), the median participant felt that a migrant should have to wait three years before they can access welfare benefits. This was reflected in the tenor of the general discussion of what requirements migrants should have to satisfy before coming to the UK.

Although, as we have seen, participants often appeared sympathetic to the moral and ethical arguments for allowing family life, they did share concerns about the integration of spouses – of which language was thought an important component. These concerns were both about people's ability to engage in and benefit from being part of wider society as well as the need to avoid the creation of closed communities:

> *What would happen in some communities is that you bring people over… that are never going to have the opportunity, or don't get the opportunity because of cultural restrictions, of moving with the general population. Of learning to communicate. I know people that have been here a long time and still can't speak English, so this communication is important…* **[Group 2]**

Indeed, when considering the requirements that migrants should be expected to meet more generally, some participants wondered whether restrictions would be better focused on 'practical issues, rather than monetary value' [Group 6]. In a separate group, a participant gave an example from Germany.

> *…but in Germany, they make it, I think, a bit easier for families to come together. Then they have quite a strict regulation about how you learn German and how quickly you learn German once you're in the country, which helps families to assimilate, which deals with the issue about people not being isolated when they enter the country, but they don't make that a barrier to families being together in the first place.* [Group 3]

As this last quotation indicates, there was a lack of agreement on whether restrictions or requirements should be placed on individuals before or after they have arrived in the country. This issue also arose when discussing access to welfare.

> *On the other hand, they said you see they come and take our taxpayers' money. Nothing stops you from putting a ban on access to public funds. It's a completely different thing. Why not grant them access to their loved ones, allow them to come in here? Don't allow them to use the taxpayer money free of charge without contribution. These are two completely different things.* [Group 18]

People tended to be in favour of restricting access to social security so that entitlement is proportionate to contributions. However, broadly speaking, it was seen as wrong to make it difficult for migrants to bring family members here just because they might become a burden on taxpayer-funded services e.g. by having large families where only one adult is working and the rest are dependent on benefits. Rather, the trend in the discussions was that living in the UK with family members is a right afforded to anyone who works here and contributes to the tax system.

Given the tenor of this discussion, it is thus perhaps not surprising that the first part of Table 5 shows an increase of nine points – from 48% to 57% – in the proportion who agreed that a non-British spouse 'should only be allowed to come to the UK if they can speak everyday English'. Meanwhile, the second part shows a seven-point fall – from 42% to 35% – in the proportion who felt that a migrant should be eligible to receive welfare on the same conditions as British citizens within no more than a year.

All four of the trends in Tables 4 and 5 were more apparent among those who came to the event with a more favourable view of the impact of immigration, and especially so in respect of its cultural consequences (see Table 6). For example, among those who were inclined to the view that immigration enriches Britain's cultural life there was as much as a 13-point drop in the proportion who said that there should not be a minimum income requirement for bringing a spouse into the UK, while among those having a less favourable view of the cultural consequences of immigration there was just a one-point fall. So here too the link between people's perceptions of the consequences of immigration and attitudes towards the rules that determine who can come under what conditions weakened as a result of deliberation.

Table 6: Attitudes towards Specific Immigration Policies by Evaluations of the Cultural Consequences of Immigration, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

| | Perceived Impact (Pre-Event Score out of 10) of Immigration on Britain's Culture… | | | | | |
| | 0-6 | | | 7-10 | | |
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Change	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Change
	%	%		%	%	
No income limit for migrants	19	20	+1	50	41	-9
No income limit for spouse	26	27	+1	55	42	-13
Agree spouse should have everyday English	64	70	+6	34	47	+13
Migrants access welfare after one year or less	19	16	-3	63	51	-12

It is, perhaps, not surprising that we should anticipate that those who think immigration is beneficial for Britain should favour a relatively liberal approach to the management of immigration. We might expect them to want to encourage people to come to Britain. However, it appears that while this link is present to some degree, it is a relatively fragile one. We cannot presume that an increase in the proportion of people who believe that immigration is beneficial will necessarily engender an increase in the proportion who support liberal policies in this area. Indeed, the very opposite happened in the wake of our deliberation. This perhaps helps explain why the rise that has been evident in regular polls and surveys in the proportion who take a favourable view of the consequences of immigration has not been accompanied recently by any discernible increase in support for retaining freedom of movement (Curtice, 2020). Even those voters who think that immigration can be beneficial may still feel that Britain should have some control over who comes here and over the conditions attached to their entry and settlement. After all, they may well think that by controlling immigration the country may be better placed to ensure that those who come are indeed those who are most likely to make a positive contribution to the nation's economic and cultural life.

FOOD POLICY AND CONSUMER REGULATION

There are two different issues of principle that might be thought to affect people's attitudes towards post-Brexit food policy and consumer regulation. One is whether the UK should in some instances at least retain the policies and regulations that have hitherto been in place as a result of EU membership or whether the country should assert its new-found sovereignty by always putting its own regulatory regime in place. The other is whether the UK should be aiming for a heavily regulated economy that seeks to ensure that business takes into account the interests of consumers, workers and society generally, or whether it should take a minimalist approach to regulation on the grounds that such an approach is more likely to foster economic growth.

Our deliberation provided participants with the opportunity to consider the merits of these two sets of arguments via a range of specific examples. Some of them addressed areas where the EU has up to now played a leading role and participants were asked whether the UK should retain the existing EU regime. These included the labelling of foods of protected origin such as Cornish pasties and stilton cheese, the rights of airline passengers to compensation in the event of the cancellation of their flight, and the elimination of roaming charges for mobile phone users

in the EU. Other examples covered areas where the EU has played or is playing a role, such as banning the sale of large vacuum cleaners and incandescent light bulbs, but where participants were asked to consider the desirability of different policy options irrespective of the position of the EU.

The questions that we asked about whether or not the UK should continue to follow EU rules after Brexit were as follows:

> *Following the decision to leave the European Union, the UK is having to negotiate a new agreement with the EU. For each of the following things, to what extent would you be in favour or against it being part of any agreement?*
>
> *Requiring British mobile phone companies to follow EU regulations that limit what they can charge customers for calls made abroad.*
>
> *Requiring British-owned airlines to follow EU rules that require them to pay compensation to passengers who have been seriously delayed.*
>
> *Requiring shops and supermarkets in Britain to follow EU rules on what foods can be called a 'Cornish pasty' or 'Stilton cheese'.*

Table 7 reveals that before our participants deliberated retaining these EU regulations after Brexit was relatively popular. Three-quarters (75%) were in favour of retaining the limits on roaming charges, while as many four in five (80%) backed keeping the rules of compensation for delayed flights. This perhaps was not surprising given that both sets of rules are favourable to customers. Somewhat more contentious was retaining EU rules on the labelling of food, where the benefit to the individual customer is less direct and where the issue raises questions of culture and identity. However, even here prior to deliberation just over half backed the retention of the existing EU regulations.

Table 7: Attitudes towards following EU Regulations on Roaming Charges, Flight Compensation and Food Labelling, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

	UK should follow EU rules on…					
	Roaming Charges		Flight Compensation		Food Labelling	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Strongly in favour	52	61	52	55	29	41
Somewhat in favour	23	22	28	31	23	29
Neither in favour nor against	16	12	16	10	31	24
Somewhat against	6	5	2	2	11	5
Strongly against	2	1	1	1	5	2

Yet despite being already relatively popular, all three proposals became somewhat more popular after the deliberative event. Now around three-fifths (61%) were strongly in favour of curbing roaming charges rather than just half (52%). As many as 86% were now supporting the retention of the EU rules on flight compensation, compared with 80% beforehand.

On both these points people were concerned about the continuity of regulation, given that they benefitted from the consumer protection currently in place in these areas. People also felt strongly that these regulations were there for '*the consumers….the little people*' as opposed to big business and companies.

There was also some sense that if changes were made to roaming charges and flight compensation rules, companies would pass on the costs to the consumer.

> *After Brexit, if these regulations aren't replicated, then anything goes. In my mind, that's one of the real strengths of having EU regulations, to prevent national governments from caving in to interest groups that are operating in their own contexts and it often is big business, as you say, in the case of the UK.* [Group 14]

However, the biggest increase was in the level of support for keeping the EU regulations on food labelling, which now stood at 70% rather than 52%. Here participants were prompted in their discussions to reflect on the reliance they had on the 'known standards' governing the production of food under current EU regulations, a move away from which introduced the potential for these standards to drop.

> *I want the option to know exactly what it is and where it's come from. I think we've actually come a fantastically long way with food labelling, and we are really doing well. I think to go back a step, so we don't know what we're eating or what we're putting into our body, that's taking our choice from us. Also, the use of things like the pesticides and things like that…, my opinion on it is to steer clear.* [Group 9]

These discussions also included references to animal welfare, standards of food production, and the transparency with which food produced to lower standards would be made available. However, the way that food labelling facilitated consumer choice was thought to be the principal issue at stake.

Across all three topics, much the same pattern underlies all three movements in the wake of deliberation. As can be seen in Table 8 before deliberation those who had voted Leave in the 2016 referendum were much less likely than those who voted Remain to be supportive of each of these proposals. This was especially true of the issue of food labelling, where only around one in three (36%) of Leave voters said that they were in favour of retaining EU regulations, compared with nearly three-quarters (74%) of Remain voters. It appeared that for some Leave voters ending regulations inherited from the EU was a point of principle. However, in all three cases nearly all of the increase in support during the deliberation occurred among those who had voted Leave. It would seem that consideration of the particular issues at stake resulted in the point of principle being regarded as less important in some Leave voters' minds. As a result, the gap between Remain and Leave voters in their attitude towards the retention of existing EU regulatory regimes was much diminished.

Table 8: Attitudes towards following EU Regulations on Roaming Charges, Flight Compensation and Food Labelling by EU Referendum Vote, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

Follow EU regulations on…	EU Referendum Vote 2016					
	Remain			Leave		
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Change	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Change
	%	%		%	%	
Roaming Charges: Strongly in Favour:	69	72	+3	43	56	+13
Flight Compensation: In Favour	95	96	+1	69	83	+14
Food Labels: In Favour	74	78	+4	36	63	+27

But what about those examples where our participants were invited to consider the policy options without specific reference to any action that may have been taken by the EU? Three referred to aspects of food safety, where EU policy has emphasised the precautionary principle in deciding what food can be provided and sold. Two practices that are allowed in the US but not in the EU, the chlorination of chickens for human consumption and feeding hormones to beef cattle, have received particular attention in recent months because it has been suggested that such food might be allowed in the UK as a result of striking a trade deal with the USA. Meanwhile, following intense controversy about GM food in the 1990s, the EU has granted only limited permissions for the cultivation and sale of GM food. No commercial cultivation of GM food currently takes place in the UK, but post-Brexit the UK is able to make its own decisions about whether GM food should be grown and marketed domestically.

The questions that we asked about these issues were as follows:

Chlorinated chickens are chickens that are sold for human consumption after they have been washed with chemicals designed to kill possible infections.

Do you think that the law should or should not allow such chicken to be sold in Britain?

Hormone treated beef is beef that comes from cattle that have been feed hormones designed to make them grow more quickly.

Do you think the law should or should not allow such beef to be sold in Britain?

You may have heard of genetically modified or 'GM' foods. These are made from plants which have had their genes altered. Some people say that growing these plants may damage other plants and wildlife and that food made from them may not be safe to eat. Other people say that growing these plants may mean lower food prices and less use of pesticides and weedkillers.

Would you say that the growing of genetically modified foods should or should not be allowed in Britain?

As Table 9 shows, before deliberation our participants were already wary of allowing the sale of chlorinated chicken and hormone treated beef. Only around one in five (19%) backed the former and only one in ten (10%) the latter. The participants' discussions of these topics exhibited a concern about lowering animal welfare standards, and about the possibility of having to accept this kind of produce in food items if we struck a trade deal with the US. There was rather more support for allowing the cultivation of GM food but even so those in favour (43%) were outnumbered by those against (57%).

Table 9: Attitudes towards Aspects of Food Policy, Pre and Post-Deliberation.

| | Allow… | | | | | |
| | Chlorinated Chicken | | Hormone Treated Beef | | Grow GM Food | |
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	3	2	2	*	10	8
Probably should	16	12	8	7	33	28
Probably should not	30	24	30	26	30	37
Definitely should not	50	61	58	66	28	27

* Less than 0.5%

Not that our participants were unaware of the trade-offs involving in maintaining a high regulatory regime, as illustrated by this exchange:

> *T: I think the problem is, it's all very well to go for higher welfare standards if you can afford it. If you're in the fortunate position of being able to do that, that's great, but the fact is, you do pay a premium for welfare. You pay extra for free-range eggs. You pay extra for outdoor-reared pork. Not everybody can afford to do that, so…*
>
> *F: Eat less of it.*
>
> *M: Well, yes, or just say there are certain minimum standards we're not prepared to go below, and maybe the EU standards are those. We might want to have higher standards for ourselves, but there's got to be a space where it's a matter for consumer choice. [Group 23]*

In contrast to the previous items where we asked explicitly about whether or not to follow EU regulations, in none of these cases did attitudes align with how people voted in the EU referendum. For example, at 18% the proportion of Remain voters who were in favour of the sale of chlorinated chicken was little different from the 21% of Leave voters who held that view. Meanwhile, although 48% of Remain voters were in favour of the sale of GM food, so also were 40% of Leave supporters.

Meanwhile, in all three cases there was a further swing in favour of tighter regulation during the course of the deliberative weekends. After the deliberation, the proportion who said that the sale of chlorinated chicken should definitely not be allowed had increased by 11 points to 61%, while there was an eight-point increase to 66% in the proportion who said the same thing about

hormone-treated beef. Meanwhile there was a seven-point increase, to 64%, in the proportion who said they were probably or definitely opposed to the cultivation of GM food.[4]

There was a tendency for attitudes towards these three foods to go together. That is, those who were inclined to ban the sale of chlorinated chicken were also more likely to favour banning hormone treated beef and, albeit to a lesser degree, the cultivation of GM crops. Prior to deliberation, no less than 84% of those who favoured banning the sale of chlorinated chicken also supported banning the sale of hormone-treated beef, compared with just 33% of those who would allow the sale of chlorinated chicken. Meanwhile, 58% of those who would definitely ban the sale of chicken were opposed to the cultivation of GM crops, compared with 39% of those who took a different view on chicken. In short, to some degree at least our questions appear to have been tapping an underlying dimension of being more or less keen on regulation, at least so far as food is concerned.

This observation is also supported by the fact that those who became keener on the banning of one food were also particularly likely to make a similar switch in respect of other foods. Thus, for example, among those after the deliberation said that the sale of chlorinated chicken should definitely be banned but had not expressed that view beforehand, the proportion who said that hormone treated beef should definitely be banned increased from 47% to as much as 92%. Meanwhile, among this same group there was a 12-point increase to 70% in the proportion who would ban the cultivation of GM food, rather more than the five-point increase that was in evidence in the rest of the sample.

Three other issues covered by our poll concerned aspects of consumer regulation where the law has been tightened for environmental reasons. One is the sale of large vacuum cleaners, where the sale of cleaners with motors of more than 900 watts has been outlawed by the EU. A second is a ban by the EU in 2012 on the sale of incandescent light bulbs (and more recently halogen bulbs), which was the subject at the time of some controversy. A third is the ban on the sale of single-use plastic straws, a step that the UK itself took in 2020 but one where moves are afoot for the eventual introduction of a ban of a wider range of plastics across the EU. Our questions on these three topics read as follows:

> *Do you think the law should or should not ban the sale for use in ordinary homes of:*
>
> Vacuum cleaners that are very powerful but use more electricity
>
> Light bulbs that come on quickly but use more electricity
>
> Plastic straws that can only be used once

Table 10 reveals that of the three possible bans by far the most popular was the one on the use of single-use plastic straws. No less than three in five (60%) said that these definitely should be banned, while another quarter (25%) said they probably should be. Least popular was a ban on the sale of large vacuum cleaners, where supporters (44%) were outnumbered by opponents (56%). Meanwhile two in three (67%) backed a ban on the sale of incandescent light bulbs. Of the three only, the ban on the sale of large vacuum cleaners, an EU decision that is still contested, exhibited any relationship with how people voted in the EU referendum. Among those

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4 There was also a seven-point increase in opposition when our participants were asked separately about allowing GM food to be sold.

who voted Remain a little over half (54%) were in favour of a ban, whereas only 40% of Leave voters expressed that view. In the case of the other two items the differences were minimal.[5]

Table 10: Attitudes towards Aspects of Consumer Regulation, Pre- and Post-Deliberation

	Ban…					
	Large Vacuums		Incandescent Bulbs		Plastic Straws	
	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event	Pre-Event	Post-Event
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Definitely should	8	21	23	34	60	66
Probably should	36	43	44	45	25	16
Probably should not	44	27	25	16	8	5
Definitely should not	12	9	8	5	3	3

Similar to what we have seen happened in respect of adhering to EU regulations and food policy, on these items too there was a modest but discernible increase in support for banning these items. In particular, after deliberation no less than 64% were in favour of a ban on the sale of large vacuum cleaners, 20 points up on the position beforehand. Meanwhile there was a 12-point increase in the proportion supporting a ban on the sale of incandescent light bulbs, and a six-point increase in the proportion who definitely thought that there should be a ban on single-use plastic straws.[6]

As in the case of food policy, our three items appear to have tapped an underlying common dimension, in this case about the use of regulation to protect the environment. Of those who before deliberation supported a ban on the sale of vacuum cleaners, as many as 92% were in favour of banning incandescent light bulbs, compared with only 47% of those who were not in favour of the ban on vacuums. At the same time, whereas 78% of those who favoured a ban on vacuums were definitely in favour of a ban on single-use plastic straws, only 46% of those who opposed a ban on vacuums expressed that view. Meanwhile, nearly all of the increase in support for banning incandescent light bulbs and for definitely banning plastic straws appears to have occurred among those who changed their mind on large vacuum cleaners.[7] Indeed, environmental protection was the basis on which participants in the deliberations were in the main accepting of the place of regulation on these items, while some participants also viewed these regulations positively – as 'spurring innovation' in technology towards greater environmental protection.

One of the most difficult issues in the negotiation of a post-Brexit trade deal between the UK and the EU has been how to manage the possibility that the regulatory regime might diverge from that of the EU (and vice-versa) and thereby give rise to what might be thought to be unfair competition between companies operating in the different jurisdictions. The UK

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5 Among Remain voters, 70% backed a ban on the sale of incandescent light bulbs, as did 67% of Leave supporters. Meanwhile, 62% of Remain voters felt that there should definitely be a ban on single-use plastic straws, as did 67% of Leave supporters.

6 A separate item on single-use plastic cups (such as those used to dispense tea and coffee) uncovered a nine-point increase in the proportion saying that they should definitely be banned.

7 Among those who swung in favour of a ban on large vacuum cleaners, there was a 40-point increase (from 48% to 88%) favouring a ban on incandescent light bulbs and a 15-point increase (from 50% to 65%) in the proportion who would definitely ban straws. In contrast, among the remaining participants attitudes towards the two issues barely shifted at all (increases of one and three points respectively).

appeared particularly keen to minimise the constraint on its freedom to diverge, a freedom that the EU appeared to fear might be used to put in place a lighter regulatory regime than the one pertaining in the EU. However, our deliberative polling casts doubt on whether these considerations were as important as those on both sides of the negotiating table appeared to think they were. In most instances, voters in Britain are inclined to back regulation, and once they are given the opportunity to consider specific regulatory issues that tendency becomes more pronounced. A UK government that attempts to introduce a markedly lighter regulatory regime could well find itself courting unpopularity. Moreover, this mood even extends to the retention by the UK of some specific EU regulatory regimes, where even an apparent hesitancy among some Leave voters weakens after deliberation. Any wish to be 'sovereign' is seemingly sometimes trumped by the perceived merits or otherwise of the regulatory regime in question.

CONCLUSION

Our research casts doubts on some of the assumptions that those on both sides of the Brexit debate have brought to the arguments about the policy options that the UK should pursue in the wake of the decision to leave the EU. On the Remain side of the argument there has been a tendency to believe that if voters were to be persuaded of the benefits of immigration then the pressure to end freedom of movement between the UK and the EU would dissipate. However, evaluations of the impact of immigration and a liberal approach to the control of immigration do not necessarily go hand in hand – and especially so when voters are given the time and opportunity to consider the issue. Even if the recent trend towards a more favourable evaluation of immigration remains in place, it cannot be presumed that this will necessarily generate pressure for the introduction of a more liberal immigration regime. Voters may well come to the conclusion that the benefits of immigration are more likely to be realised through a measure of control.

Meanwhile, some on the Leave side of the Brexit debate have given the impression leaving the EU will create the opportunity to put a sword to the regulatory regime to which the UK has had to adhere by virtue of its EU membership. Yet when voters are invited to consider some of the specific issues at stake, it is far from clear that this is a vision that is shared by the wider public. Indeed, after deliberation even those who voted Leave appear to lose some of their enthusiasm for moving away from the regulatory regime that has been inherited from the EU. Irrespective of how they voted in the referendum, voters do not necessarily easily acquiesce in regulatory changes that might affect their rights as consumers.

Indeed, there is a striking parallel in how attitudes shifted across the subjects that we addressed. On immigration, the views of Remain voters drew closer to those of Leave supporters. Meanwhile where initially the two groups of voters had rather different outlooks on EU regulation, the views of Leave supporters moved closer to those of Remain voters. Now that Britain has left the EU perhaps future debates about immigration and regulation will no longer prove to be an extension of the debate about Britain's relationship with the EU but, rather, will be issues that are discussed on their own merits.

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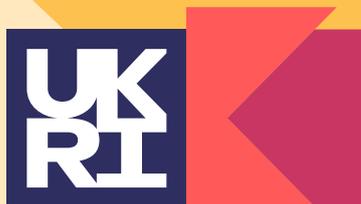Whatukthinks.org (nd), 'Future of Britain Project'. Posted at https://whatukthinks.org/eu/future-of-britain/

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