

Inflammatory language on immigration negatively affects public opinion

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Students from the Department of Politics and International Relations have carried out a survey which found people are more sympathetic to Syrians settling in the UK when they are referred to as 'refugees' rather than 'migrants'.

The study was in response to several controversies around the language used to describe people fleeing Syria, such as David Cameron's use of the term 'bunch of [migrants](#)' made in the House of Commons on Wednesday (27 January).

The students carried out an online survey experiment where participants

were either asked 'Do you agree or disagree that Britain should allow more migrants from Syria to come and live in the UK?' or 'Do you agree or disagree that Britain should allow more refugees from Syria to come and live in the UK?' In both cases respondents could answer: strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree.

The 1850 respondents were more likely to 'strongly agree' with the statement that refugees from Syria should be allowed into the UK than with the corresponding statement about migrants (23 percent vs. 17 percent).

The project was overseen by Dr Kaat Smets and Dr Oliver Heath from the Department of Politics and International Relations, they said: "The responses indicate that talking about 'migrants' instead of 'refugees' has a [negative influence](#) on public opinion. The term 'migrant' is frequently associated with people coming to the UK to look for work and has developed a number of [negative connotations](#). By contrast, the term 'refugee' refers to people in genuine need who are fleeing from persecution.

More inflammatory language, such as describing people as a 'bunch of migrants' can only elicit stronger reactions. David Cameron might deny using inflammatory language, but that does not mean that the words he used haven't had a negative effect on the way people see refugees fleeing from Syria."

More information: The report is available online: cep.rhul.ac.uk/cep-blog/2016/1...camerons-inflam.html

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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