

# People who want to prevent immigration to the UK are less happy than those who welcome it

April 4 2017, by Tony Trueman

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People who want to stop further immigration to the UK are less happy than those who welcome it, and politicians are part of the reason for this, new research shows.

The British Sociological Association's annual conference in Manchester heard today [that people who said they would allow "many" [immigrants](#) to enter were around 8% happier than those wanted none to enter.

Dr David Bartram, of the University of Leicester, analysed data from the European Social Survey on 5,995 people in the UK to correlate their opinion on immigration with how happy they described themselves on a scale of 0-10.

Those who wanted no more immigrants to enter scored an average of 7.16, and those who would allow "many" scored 7.91.

Dr Bartram, from the Department of Media, Communication and Sociology, found that the effect was strongest among those who were out of work because of sickness or disability, and those who had been unemployed in the past for three months or more. In these groups, those who would allow many immigrants to enter scored 7.07, and those who wanted none to enter scored 6.19.

Dr Bartram told the conference: "For the most part, immigration is not a

threat to the employment or wages of natives. Economic research on that topic finds that for the economy as a whole, immigration enhances the economic situation of natives – it expands [job opportunities](#) and doesn't undermine wages.

"Instead it's the beliefs themselves that people have about immigrants, the way people think about immigrants – they're not 'part of us' – that makes them unhappy about immigrants, and indeed perhaps less happy in general.

"The fall of 8% in happiness is significant – equivalent to the gap between the average level of happiness of people earning £50,000 and those earning £20,000 a year, for instance.

"Anti-[immigrant](#) discourses, political messages that highlight and bemoan how different immigrants are, contribute to undermining the subjective well-being of the natives themselves.

"We would likely see a significant benefit if politicians stopped talking about immigration and immigrants in the way many of them currently do. The current discourse is damaging to natives, and recognition of this idea could amount to reason for reflection.

"Perhaps this research could persuade politicians to reconsider the way they think and speak about immigrants, but I'm not going to hold my breath.

"It might seem that I'm telling a very pessimistic story about human nature – the notion that there's a deeply-rooted tendency to be suspicious of something that seems unfamiliar and thus a corresponding tendency to distrust and dislike foreigners.

"But in fact we have plenty of evidence indicating that this way of

engaging with foreigners can be unlearned – or at least that a new way of thinking about foreigners can be taught to the next generation. People in the youngest age group are twice as likely as those in the oldest group to say they want to allow this sort of immigration."

Provided by British Sociological Association

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