

## 'GO HOME':

# Mapping the unfolding controversy of Home Office immigration campaigns

Interim Findings November 2014

In July 2013, the UK Home Office launched a series of high-profile initiatives aimed at directing public attention to what the government was doing to control 'illegal immigration'. The most controversial of these was a billboard which asked 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest', which was mounted on a van driven around London boroughs. Our research project is about studying the impact and implications of these initiatives. We have also been interested in the responses of activists to them, including ongoing developments as the research takes place between 2013 and June 2015.

This briefing highlights our findings so far, but it is not the end of our research. We would like to know what you think about our findings, to help us to add to our understanding. If you would like to tell us your views, you can email [micresearch@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:micresearch@warwick.ac.uk) or contact us through Twitter [@micresearch](https://twitter.com/micresearch). You can also find out more about the research on our website, <http://mappingimmigrationcontroversy.com>

## What is the research project?

Our research began in 2013, with the following aims:

- To document high-profile Home Office campaigns against irregular immigration, in six local areas of the UK and at a national level
- To identify how government communications on migration interact with public debate and activism
- To produce analysis that informs debates, community action and policy, and that is useful to community organisations
- To develop new research methodologies that link digital, face-to-face and 'traditional' communications and policy channels
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the research and dissemination methodologies used in the project, and the project's impact

Our research seeks to answer these questions:

**What are the impacts of the Home Office high-profile publicity campaigns about migration?** *How are the messages of these government campaigns understood by residents in targeted areas? What forms of activism and community organising are being developed in response to these campaigns?*

**What are the relationships between public attitudes to 'illegal' migration, migration policy, racism and good community relations, particularly in a context of austerity?** *Who is aware of the government campaigns and activist responses to them? What are the class, ethnicity and gender dimensions of public debates at a UK level on migration? Do these differ at a local level? What is the role of social research in this?*

The research has been carried out by academics from the University of Warwick; Birmingham City University; University of Bedfordshire; University of East London; University of Glasgow; Goldsmiths, University of London; and University of South Wales, all working in partnership with local and national community organisations.

## What research have we done?

The research has been based in 6 areas: Barking and Dagenham; Bradford; Cardiff; Glasgow; Ealing and Hounslow; West Midlands (Birmingham and Coventry). Some of these areas (Barking and Dagenham, Ealing and Hounslow) were targeted by the Go Home van. Others (Glasgow, Ealing and Hounslow) include reporting centres for migrants where similar advertising were used. All of them have experienced high-profile immigration raids and local news items where reporters accompany border agents, have signs about limitation of migrant rights displayed in public places (e.g. hospitals), and/or are involved in national debates about race and migration.

Across these areas, we have conducted 12 focus groups with approximately 60 people (including new migrants, long-settled migrants, ethnic minority and white British citizens), to understand the local effects of government campaigns on immigration. We have also interviewed 24 local activists about the effects on their work, and spent

time documenting local events and protests. Nationally, we have interviewed policy makers about the intentions and thinking behind such campaigns, and commissioned a survey of 2,424 people from Ipsos MORI<sup>1</sup> to investigate awareness and reactions to the government campaigns. We have participated in and documented online debates about key elements of the campaigns and reactions to them.

## What have we found so far?

### *How are the messages of government campaigns understood by residents in targeted areas?*

We found a range of responses, from people who had uncertain migrant status, who were settled migrants with legal right to remain, who were ethnic minority and white British citizens. All of the responses were emotionally charged, most notably with **anger** and **fear** – both from people who were angered and scared by the Home Office campaigns, and people who were worried about migration. Some people who had not heard about the publicity before we asked their opinions found it **unbelievable that it was a government campaign** – several thought the ‘Go Home’ van had been produced by groups such as the English Defence League or the UK Independence Party, and noted how the language echoed slogans of violent racists in the 1970s. In Scotland, we frequently heard the Home Office tactics being **rejected as a Westminster imposition**, not suited to Scotland, and used to support arguments for Scottish independence. The vast majority of people we spoke to in the focus groups thought that the Home Office publicity was a **political stunt** rather than an effective policy – whatever their political stance on immigration.

‘Where I live, there have been a few racist things going on, every time they’ve seen me they’ve always told me to go back to my country. But now imagine if they saw this and they know this has come from the Government... They won’t care to know whether I’ve got my stay or not ... if I saw this van, even though I’ve got my stay and I know I’m safe, I would still feel very bad about it and thinking of where I’ve come from, what I’ve gone through, and the people who it affects.’ *Bradford*

‘They’re trying to give the impression that they’re doing something about it: “We are doing our job, we are catching these illegals, we are putting them in the van and we’re taking them to the jail” and half an hour later they’re going to let them go again, they’re not saying that bit, are they?’ *Barking and Dagenham*

‘I saw so many UKBA people they were there, I saw them with large dogs, blocking the entire area. I had a visa and have it now also. But I got really scared because I could see the place blocked... I got so panicked and scared that I went and sat in the wrong train... When I got on the train I started crying. I was thinking how long will I live with this fear... I started to think to myself, if I can’t move around at all, that people are blocking the way like this, and I’m so scared then perhaps suicide is better.’ *Ealing and Hounslow*

**Does this reflect your experience? Do you have a different reaction to the Home Office publicity? Have you noticed other reactions among people you know?**

### *What forms of activism and community organising are being developed in response to these campaigns?*

We found that activist reactions to the Home Office campaigns varied across our local areas. This often seemed to be **related to the local histories of organising** in the different places. For example in Glasgow and in Ealing and Hounslow there were existing networks of migrant campaigners and charities who organised quickly in response to the posters in reporting centres there, including through street demonstrations, rallies and organising for questions to be asked in the Scottish Parliament. The government’s campaigns appear to have given rise to **new waves of political activism**, mobilising people who had not previously been involved in demonstrations or political comment.

<sup>1</sup> Note on survey methodology: Questions were placed on the Ipsos MORI Omnibus (Capibus) amongst a nationally representative quota sample of 2,424 adults (aged 15 and over). Interviews were conducted face-to-face in respondents’ homes, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing software. Interviews were conducted between the 15th August and 9th September 2014. All data are weighted to the known national profile of adults aged 15+ in Great Britain.

In other parts of the UK, pressure on the voluntary sector around both funding and scope for campaigning were affecting what activities could be organised. In Cardiff and in the West Midlands in particular, we found debates were ongoing about the balance between migrant self-organising and servicing models of the voluntary sector. Getting the balance between engaging in political debate and supporting people in extreme difficulty put **pressure on activists and organisations**, and the risks for making political statements could also vary between people with migrant and citizen statuses. The most active campaigning against the Home Office publicity that we found was in the London and Scotland case studies, which may be related to the more high-profile interventions from the Home Office being targeted there. Online campaigning against the Home Office tactics was also significant, both through social media, on news comments pages, and in the way that street protests were linked to social media.

**If you are involved in anti-racist or migrant organising, does this reflect your experience? Do you have specific examples of civil society reactions to the Home Office publicity on migration control that you could tell us about?**

### ***Who is aware of the government campaigns and what are their responses?***

In our national survey, conducted by Ipsos MORI<sup>1</sup>, we asked a nationally representative sample of 2,424 people about their awareness of different elements of Home Office publicity about migration control. Though the 'Go Home' vans and Twitter images of raids promoted by the Home Office made national headlines, only 26% and 6% of people respectively knew about them. To compare this with less media-publicised measures, 31% of people had noticed branded border control signs introduced in 2006, and 20% of people had seen NHS signs stating 'NHS hospital treatment is not free for everyone'. People with higher incomes were more likely to be aware of the publicity than those on lower incomes. White people were more likely to be aware of the 'Go Home' vans (28%) than 'non-white' people (22%). More 'non-white' people (23%) than White people (16%) were aware of Immigration Enforcement branded vans on UK streets.

In the same survey, we asked people who had heard about the campaigns what they thought of them. We found that **more people were concerned that unfair treatment might result from the Go Home vans (34%), than were reassured by them (28%)**. A similar pattern was true of the Home Office tweets of immigration raids (33% and 20%). However, the reverse was true for more everyday interventions such as adverts in hospitals stating 'NHS hospital treatment is not free for everyone' and local news stories about immigration raids; they tended to reassure more people (41% and 31%) that action was being taken than worry them that people might be treated unfairly (19% and 26%).

However, **all of these measures caused some people to become more worried about irregular migration** as a problem: 15% of people said the Go Home vans made them 'concerned that irregular immigration might be more widespread than they had realised'; this was 14% for the NHS signs, 18% for local news stories, and 22% for tweets.

**Does this reflect your experience? Are these reactions surprising to you? What do you think is behind these findings?**

### ***What are the class, ethnicity and gender dimensions of public debates at a UK level on migration? Do these differ at a local level?***

In the survey conducted for us by Ipsos MORI<sup>1</sup>, we asked people across the country to respond to a situation experienced by one of our focus group participants:

'Person A is a migrant to the UK and has a legal right to remain here. She has seen a Home Office immigration check taking place on public transport, where suspected irregular/illegal immigrants are taken away in vans or other vehicles and she found it frightening. She has decided to go out less and avoid certain places.'

In response, **the majority of people felt that 'immigration checks and raids should not be frightening to anyone'** (53% of respondents). More women (55%) than men (51%) had this reaction. More white (55%) than 'non-white' (48%) respondents felt this way. **60% of people felt it would unacceptable for immigration checks to be carried out on the basis of someone's skin colour** (26% had no opinion or didn't know). In no demographic group did less than 51% of people think this would be unacceptable, or more than 21% of people think it was acceptable.

In our local research studies, we found that some people who are British or EU citizens, or have legal leave to remain, felt that people with this status did not have anything to fear; but others felt this wasn't true and that

knowing such messages were being put out by government could reinforce and support existing racist/xenophobic abuse they had experienced. One activist in Bradford described how British-born British Asian citizens were asking him if they would be allowed to stay in the country.

'You talk to people and they say... "Are we going to be allowed to stay here?" This is third generation, they've contributed, you know. There's this sort of slight feeling with what's going on, not necessarily the neighbours, but with the rhetoric.' *Bradford*

However, in other areas (Barking and Dagenham), white British people told us they now felt that they were the ethnic minority. Distinctions were made between migrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, versus more recent EU migrants, with the more recent arrivals seen more negatively. Participants who were hostile to new migration described it as a problem of not enough resources such as jobs and healthcare (for existing residents), and also said that they did not see new arrivals assimilating into British life.

**Does this reflect your experience? Are these reactions surprising to you? What do you think explains these findings?**

***What is the role of social research in analysing and informing these government campaigns and the activist responses to them?***

We have not come across any evidence that there is a social scientific evidence base for Home Office publicity campaigns about immigration (though admittedly it has been difficult to gain access to policy makers directly involved in administering this publicity). **Policy makers we spoke with said, in fact, that both government and campaigners deliberately avoided quoting social and economic research within public debates on immigration.**

'The public are not going to believe any immigration statistics. So while the Treasury might be believed on its growth figures, it will never be believed on its economic impacts of immigration. There's more mistrust about immigration... **With immigration you have every reason to disbelieve data, because the government has told you it's crap at collecting it.**' *Policy interview*

It appears that some research is being used, specifically a set of reports conducted by think tanks and private research organisations which suggest that public attitudes to immigration policy are emotion-driven, that messaging using statistics will be rejected because people think that 'statistics can't be trusted'. As a result, the approach that seems to be advocated by Westminster policy communities working on immigration messaging (from whatever political stance) seems to be (a) an assumption that the general public sees immigration as excessive, and a problem, and is anxious about this; (b) there is no room for debate, and people will only be reassured by seeing evidence of tougher immigration controls.

On the other hand, we found a huge appetite for social research on these issues among civil society organisations, reflected in particular in their involvement in our research.

**If you are involved in policy on immigration, does this reflect your experience? Do you have examples of where social research has influenced Home Office? Do you have examples of where social research has influenced activism on these issues?**

### ***Get in touch!***

***We would like to know what you think about our findings so far, so we can feed this into our research and analysis. If you would like to respond to any of the questions above, or if you would just like more information on the research, please get in touch in one of the following ways:***

Email: [micresearch@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:micresearch@warwick.ac.uk)

Twitter: [www.twitter.co.uk/micresearch](https://www.twitter.co.uk/micresearch)

More information on our website: <http://mappingimmigrationcontroversy.com>