

“Benefit Tourism” and Migration Policy in the U.K.: The Construction of Policy Narratives

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I. Introduction

In 2004, ten new member states, eight from Central and Eastern Europe (the so-called “A8” countries), joined the European Union. European Union citizens have the right to freely move throughout and reside in (subject to conditions) all member states. At the time, though thirteen out of fifteen existing E.U. member states put temporary restrictions on migrants from these new member states, the U.K. decided to give these migrants immediate full access to the labor market. While in France, for example, fears about the “Polish plumber” taking French jobs became a hot topic of debate and caused the French to implement temporary controls, in the U.K. Tony Blair highlighted “the opportunities of accession” to fill in gaps in the U.K. economy (*The Guardian*, 27 April 2004). Blair’s Conservative opponents had also largely supported enlargement in the 1990s, noting the expansion of the E.U. would increase trade and “encourage stability and prosperity” (HC Deb 21 May 2003 vol 405 cc1021). The U.K. was hailed by members of the European Parliament as welcoming, and in spite of some fears of strain on social services and benefits, studies showed that the migrants had been a net benefit for the U.K. (BBC, 5 November 2014).

In 2013, however, it was a different story, as temporary movement controls on migrants from Bulgaria and Romania, which had joined the E.U. in 2007, were set to expire on January 1, 2014. Concerns about “benefits tourism,” or the assumption that migrants were being drawn to the U.K. by a generous welfare state, seemingly abruptly arrived at the forefront of the political debate. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government led by David Cameron moved

to further restrict the benefits available to E.U. migrants by introducing domestic policy changes such as lengthening the wait period to three months before migrants could access jobseekers' allowance benefits, reducing by 50% the amount of time for which E.U. migrants in Britain are eligible to receive certain benefits, introducing requirements such as a burden of proof on migrants to show they had a "genuine prospect of finding work," and rendering E.U. migrants ineligible for housing benefits (Wintour 2013). In addition to these changes which were enacted in 2014, Home Secretary Theresa May proposed the extension of transitory controls for E.U. migrants and changes to E.U. free movement rules. In 2014, Cameron even threatened that the U.K. might exit the E.U. absent changes which would allow the U.K. to "cut E.U. migration" and further restrict welfare benefits for E.U. migrants (Hutton and O'Donnell 2014). In the space of ten years, Cameron's party had gone from being pro-enlargement to threatening to leave the E.U., or at least demanding the renegotiation of a fundamental tenet of E.U. membership, over the issue of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants. What prompted this significant change? What made Bulgarian and Romanian migrants different from Polish, Hungarian, or Czech ones, who had all been granted immediate access to the labor market? Why did the "immigration" issue shift in political debate from non-E.U. migrants and asylum-seekers to the free movement of E.U. citizens, even despite early indications that the number of new Bulgarian and Romanian arrivals would be relatively small, and the fact that E.U. migrants still account for a lower proportion of total migration than non-E.U. migrants? Why did the narrative of "benefit tourism" drive policy change, despite evidence that migrants claim benefits at a lower rate than U.K. nationals?

This chapter looks at the perception of potential Bulgarian and Romanian migration to the E.U. as a policy problem and argues that “benefits tourism” emerged as policy narrative connected to E.U. migrants as the 2004 enlargement of the E.U. approached. As a narrative, benefit tourism drew on the context of Euroskepticism and the stigmatization of both immigrants and welfare recipients as threats to British values, the latter which was heightened in the context of austerity. This chapter draws on recent work in Political Science on the construction of policy narratives (Boswell, Geddes, Scholten 2011). A “policy narrative” is a claim which sets out beliefs about policy problems and appropriate solutions (Boswell, Geddes, Scholten 2011: 1). With regard to migration policy, states’ anxieties about the perceived inability to control migration and uncertainties about the causes of this phenomenon have meant political actors have competed over policy narratives (Ibid.: 3). Which set of elements composes a narrative at which time depends on contingent political processes and the ability of political actors to utilize ideas to construct policy regimes to solve problems, to justify the maintenance of an existing policy regime, or to destabilize an existing policy regime. This paper explains the processes by which benefits tourism as a narrative emerged, became linked to E.U. migrants and justified policy changes such as the restriction of benefits and the imposition of temporary controls on freedom of movement, and has now been linked to questions of whether the U.K. should exit the E.U. or whether fundamental changes are needed to E.U. law and institutions to alter freedom of movement.

This account of the narrative of “benefits tourism” also addresses the interaction between politics and “causal stories” behind defining immigration and asylum as a problem (Boswell

Geddes and Scholten 2011; Stone 1989). Migration is a complex policy area in which perceived lax migration control has been identified as a problem, but both the definition of this problem and its causes are contested, and the definition is shifted to include new elements by both actors in government and in the opposition in interaction with political events. “Migration policy” encompasses many sub-issues, including legal immigration policies such as the distribution of visas and eligibility for family reunification, border control measures including detention and removal of irregular migrants, and asylum policy, and now, E.U. free movement and welfare benefits. The very broadness or “boundary-spanning” nature (Sheingate 2012 [May and Jochim 2013]) of migration policy provides material for political actors to construct policy narratives which combine different elements. For example, the fact that immigration and asylum policy are often conflated in U.K. political discourse and policy as a means to an end for controlling migration is something that should be explained rather than taken for granted (cf. Squire 2008). Policy narratives articulating the “problem” of migration control may include different versions of what the nature and scale of the problem is (Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011: 5).

As described in Chapter 1, this dissertation examines the idea of fraud as a crucial component in the definition of certain types of migrants as a problem. In the U.K., political elites in both parties and as the media have constructed links between “bogus” asylum seekers, “economic migrants,” criminal gangs perpetuating fraud and sham marriages, and benefits fraud. These links can be demonstrated through a careful process tracing of the actors involved with the construction and diffusion of the narrative of “benefits tourism,” which will also reveal the causal impact the narrative has had on policy change, including the adoption of benefits

restrictions for E.U. migrants, the extension of temporary controls for migrants from Romania and Bulgaria, and potential policy change at the supranational level including changes to free movement or even a British exit from the E.U.

This account both modifies and questions other more linear accounts which suggest that migration control policies and the goal of restriction are adopted in either concern for electoral considerations, or as part of a more general logic of “securitization.” Political science literature has discussed the emergence of immigration and asylum issues on the political agenda in the U.K. (Layton-Henry 1997, Bloch 2000, Bloch and Schuster 2002, Geddes 2005a, Huysmans and Buonfino 2008, Mulvey 2010), in Europe (Guiraudon 2000, Guild 2006, Geddes 2005b, Huysmans 2006), and even in the industrialized world more generally (Cornelius et. al. 2004 [1994]). Several factors contributed to the rise in numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers (see Appendix for figures), including the end of the Cold War. The U.K. (as is true for many European countries) received increased flows of asylum seekers and immigration began to consistently eclipse emigration in the 1990s. Layton-Henry notes that since the post-colonial immigrations of the 1960s, the Conservative and Labour parties alike were aware that “immigration appeared to cause anxiety among the electorate and hence could be exploited by right-wing politicians”; as such, pursuing a “firm stance on immigration controls” was seen as electorally prudent (2004[1994]: 313). Other authors have also noted the “electoral logic” which drives states to adopt a “restrictive stance” toward migration and pursue these policies at the E.U.

level in order to backlash avoid national courts and migrant rights' organizations (Guiraudon 2000).

However, the line between electoral concerns and a restrictive stance toward migration is not as straightforward as it appears: no serious “right-wing” electoral challenge emerged to capitalize on the immigration issue until the more recent successes of Ukip, which occurred well after the Conservative and Labour parties had adopted this issue. The British National Party (BNP), for example, never enjoyed a national breakthrough similar to France’s Front National despite its opposition to immigration; as Goodwin (2013) notes, support for anti-immigrant attitudes and views toward restricting migration actually *declined* when associated in poll questions with the BNP. Therefore, the adoption of an anti-immigration platform is not sufficient to attract or retain voters. The timing of the Conservative and Labour adoption of immigration and asylum issues, further, cannot be explained by a simple correspondence with public anti-immigration attitudes. As Duffy and Frere-Smith (2014) pointed out in their analysis of longitudinal data from IPSOS/Mori, overall public concern with immigration as an issue has risen over time, but immigration competes with other issues for attention and concern notably fell off during the recent economic crisis. Further, it is not clear that the public’s concern with this issue has anything to do with policy or immigration flows as a majority of the public tends to agree that “there are too many immigrants” irrespective of actual increases in migration. On the other hand, the think tank British Future has conducted small focus groups and polling in conjunction with IPSOS/Mori and has found that “anti-immigrant attitudes” are largely a function of the types of questions asked in polls. In an interview, British Future’s founder Sunder

Katwala emphasized the large middle ground occupied by voters who did not have hardline anti-immigration positions, and indeed saw immigration as a positive thing provided the migrants “come to work hard, pay taxes, and contribute to Britain” (personal interview with author, January 31, 2014). Clearly, the framing of migration control as a problem is important, as well as the timing—what frames and events are significant, or not, when explaining the salience of immigration politics? Which groups of migrants become targets for restrictions, and why?

Many authors have examined the impact of terrorist attacks such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States and the 7/7/2005 attacks in London on immigration and asylum policy, arguing that the attacks led to a renewed focus on border controls; an emphasis on the nexus of internal and external security; and the discursive construction of migrants and asylum-seekers as threats along with the concomitant development of policy practices aimed at responding to those “threats” (Chebel d’Appollonia and Reich 2008, Huysmans 2006, Bigo 2002). These authors generally view political developments with respect to asylum and migration through the lens of securitization.

Both sets of approaches, whether focused on electoral considerations or securitization, aim to explain the politics and policies which drive restriction, defined here as reducing the overall number of migrants and asylum seekers. While the “securitization” literature, particularly Huysmans (2006), Bigo (2002), and Lahav (2003) has developed a more complex model of politics in which a focus on securitization leads to the adoption of particular discourses and policy practices, it remains grounded in an opposition between restrictive practices and liberal

ones. For example, Lahav writes “Western democracies are increasingly caught between their global market and rights-based norms on one side, and political and security pressures to effectively control their borders, on the other” (2003: 90). Focusing on fraud and benefits tourism, however, elides a binary distinction between restrictive and liberal ideas. Putatively liberal and illiberal dimensions may exist in a single concept: different actors saw different meanings and solutions in the problem of fraud, including those who rather than advocating a restriction of all immigration and asylum, saw fraud as a potential threat to the proper functioning of the asylum system and the protection of “genuine” refugees, or saw fraud as a problem because of its financial costs to welfare systems.

A focus on securitization as the response to terror attacks in the 2000s also downplays the impact of debates and strategies adopted in the 1990s, when immigration was also an important agenda item in the contest between Conservatives and Labour. Indeed, there are important ways in which the debate over Bulgarian and Romanian migrants and benefits echo other frames used to politicize migration control which securitization arguments do not capture. While it is certainly true that in the post-9/11 environment the Labour party in particular emphasized the security of borders, especially in its 2002 white paper, “Secure Borders, Safe Haven,” a myopic focus on security and threat subsumes the way in which Labour understood the migration control problems.

A focus on changes in the post-9/11 environment also overlooks the importance of political events in the 1990s which would reverberate into current day migration policy. The

characterization of E.U. migration as a problem is part of an evolving political process constructed through the work of political actors, who create both explicit and implicit connections between different policies. This chapter argues that a significant amount of this work is micro-political and is based on both small-scale policy change and the framing of policies by both governments and critics alike. In these micro-political processes, elements of politics are combined and recombined in reaction to events such as elections and policy changes. Both ideas and events become a part of a “kaleidoscopic shifting of political elements” (Hattam and Lowndes 2013) on which political actors draw to make claims, identify policy problems, and propose policy solutions. This work also stretches across temporal boundaries, as different governments have appropriated historical events (both big and small) to justify a focus on benefits tourism and other instances of fraud. Indeed, one of the key claims of this paper is that the political actors, whether they support the introduction of benefit restrictions, the reduction of E.U. migration, or argue that claims of the potential harm caused by Bulgarians and Romanians are overblown, have felt free to reach back to the debates about the last Central and Eastern European enlargement in 2004 to bolster their arguments. Internal “backbench” challengers within the Conservative Party in particular have attacked Cameron, the leader of their party, over many of the same points with which they attacked Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair’s government both during and after the 2004 enlargement. This challenges long-held associations of the U.K.’s parliamentary system with strong party discipline and coherence. Yet the roots of these challenges lie in splits within the Conservative party over the E.U., and in policies developed by the Conservatives themselves in opposition to Labour. It is to the emergence,

resonance, and recombination of benefits tourism as a policy narrative which I will examine in the following sections.

In section two, I argue the roots of benefit tourism as a policy narrative lie in the blending of Euroskepticism and the opportunity to pressure the Blair government on the consequences of E.U. enlargement in 2004. This opportunity was notably seized by Conservative leader Michael Howard, who seized a window of political opportunity to link Euroskepticism to opposition to immigration, and more specifically, to immigration from the new E.U. member states. Whereas benefit tourism had been associated with “asylum shopping,” or would-be asylum seekers attempting to choose their destination based on knowledge about a state’s welfare system and economic opportunities, Howard blended Euroskepticism and the potential for E.U. migrants to abuse the U.K.’s benefits system. Reframing Blair’s decision to refrain from imposing transitory controls on migrants from the new member states as indecisiveness, Howard forced Blair to reconsider his stance on E.U. migration and transitory controls and therefore the government introduced changes to the benefits available to these migrants. Even in spite of the introduction of changes to the availability of benefits, including the need for workers to register, an unexpectedly large number of E.U. migrants came to the U.K. post-2004, especially from Poland. The government severely underestimated the numbers of A8 migrants that would come, and again Howard seized on the opportunity to point out the miscalculation in order to pressure the government to institute controls on Romania and Bulgaria, who were set to join the union in 2007. Despite the fact that the government considered its handling of the A8 migration a success, it decided to institute seven year controls on the workforce eligibility of migrants Romania and

Bulgaria. The narrative of benefit tourism, now acknowledged and adopted by the Blair government, had re-defined E.U. migrants as part of a problem.

In section three, I focus on the contextual factors enhanced the resonance of benefits tourism as a narrative. Keck and Sikkink (1998), drawing on work in Sociology and Political Science, have described frame resonance as involving “the relationship between an organization’s interpretative work and its ability to influence broader public understandings... the latter involve both the frame’s internal coherence and its experiential fit with a broader political culture” (17). Bringing this insight to policy narratives, I argue that broader frames enhance the resonance of narratives. In the case of benefits tourism, particularly the broad frame of “abuse” as a problem that threatens migration and asylum systems, which was salient in the construction of Labour’s broader policy of “managed migration.” Managed migration was premised on the distinction between wanted migrants and “genuine” refugees who contributed to the country on the one hand, and criminals, the jobless, and welfare state “takers” on the other. Thus, a narrative of E.U. migrants as benefit tourists resonated with prior framing of asylum seekers as “bogus” and illegal immigrants as “criminals” perpetrating crimes such as document fraud. The media also played an amplifying role (Hall 1978; Vukov 2004), reinforcing the association of certain types of migrants (particularly Romanians) with criminality. Politicians have also played an important role in amplifying the association between Romania, criminality, and E.U. migration, and I briefly examine the role of Ukip politicians Paul Nuttall and Nigel Farage and former Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett. I also explore the phenomena of “number games” (Vollmer 2008; Vollmer 2013), which suggests that the ongoing debate over

the size of immigration “influxes” and the ongoing suggestion of looming threats have played a role in the continuous adjustment of migration policy to deal with problems. The threat of these “growing” phenomena meant that policy changes were justified as providing the government with tools to detect and prevent criminal activity.

In section four, I turn to the question of how benefits tourism as a narrative became linked to broader policy changes such as welfare reform in the U.K., the reform of free movement rules of the E.U. and a possible British exit from the E.U. (“Brexit”). While most accounts have emphasized that the rising popularity of Ukip has forced Cameron’s hand (Wintour 2014), I look at the policy platform that Cameron developed as leader of the opposition during the Labour government between 2005 and 2010. In particular, Cameron developed strong positions in opposition to Labour’s handling of the Lisbon Treaty of the E.U., specifically the promise of a referendum on future E.U. treaties which transferred new powers from the national level to the E.U. On the question of linking welfare reform to migration, once the Conservatives were elected in 2010, Cameron and his cabinet developed a clear strategy in the context of austerity policy following the financial crisis, taking the Labour strategy of “managed migration” and combining it with domestic reforms of the welfare state (some of which had been started under Cameron’s predecessor, Labour PM Gordon Brown). From 2009 onwards the continuing rise of Ukip has also become more salient, as Nigel Farage has persistently connected Romanians to crime and linked the U.K.’s E.U. membership to an inability to control migration.

II. The context and political opportunity of Euroskepticism

Domestic politics and U.K. politics vis-à-vis the E.U. have long been intertwined.

Whether or not the U.K. should join the European Community was a matter of political debate as far back as the 1950s, with the U.K. finally joining in 1973. Though disagreement over certain aspects of European membership, particularly surrounding the Common Agricultural Policy and the expansion of power in Brussels, were particularly prominent during the Thatcher regime, many members of the Conservative Party were pro-European-- indeed, Thatcher herself had signed the Single European Act creating the common market. The Conservatives, including Thatcher, mostly agreed on the benefits of the European Community as a large market for trade and as a collective defense project. Though Thatcher notably protested the single currency and became a more vocal critic of Europe, especially toward her latter years as Prime Minister, Iain Begg (2013) notes that Thatcher's foreign policy approach to the Soviet bloc states paved the way to E.U. enlargement: as early as 1988 Thatcher gave a speech in Bruges noting "Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest as great European cities." Thus, the Conservatives and Labour were largely in favor of the enlargement of the E.U. to former Soviet bloc countries, as a matter of historical obligation, defense, and as the expansion of markets (HC Deb 13 March 1996 vol 273 c915). Indeed, as Labour MP and former member of the European Parliament Joyce Quin noted in a parliamentary debate in 1996, support for enlargement "has tended to be common ground among hon. Members on both sides of the House" (HC Deb 12 Dec 1996 Col. 501). Even more Euroskeptic members of both parties actually favored enlargement as a check on what they saw as the growing federalism of the E.U. In other words, the negative connection between enlargement and E.U. migrants had not yet been made.

A growing vocal section of the Conservative Party under John Major and following utilized the U.K.'s signature and ratification of E.U. treaties (including the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the failed E.U. Constitution in 2004, and the Lisbon Treaty in 2009) to challenge the government on the grounds of Euroskepticism. The Maastricht Treaty was crucial for the political development of the European Union, including its transition from a largely economically-based community to more of a political union. However, the Treaty caused major dissension within the ranks of the Conservative party. The lack of unity amongst the Conservatives on E.U. issues led to backbench revolts against Prime Minister Major, quelled only by the threat of resigning and dissolving the Parliament (Darnton 1994). Perhaps even more significantly, this issue heralded the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip), who formed around the issue of Britain's relationship to the E.U. (originally, this did not pertain to migration, but to issues of sovereignty). Still, despite splits in the Conservative Party over larger questions of E.U. participation, with regard to enlargement to new member states the position within the party was largely positive. Debate over enlargement was largely confined to the policy issues of Common Agricultural and Fisheries policies, and of the new member states abilities to control their external borders, as confirmed by a review of Hansard debates. There was only one mention of potential immigration to the U.K. by nationals from E.U. member states in 2001 in the House of Lords in a debate over the EU Committee report: Viscount Astor mentioned "a large number of people from those countries will come here to work, albeit for only short periods" (HL Deb 23 July 2001 vol 626 c1742).

The linkage between migrants from the E.U. member states, benefits tourism, and Euroskepticism was notably made by Conservative leader Michael Howard in the run-up to the 2004 enlargement, in which eight Central and Eastern European countries (the “A8”) along with Cyprus and Malta would join the E.U. on May 1st. It was the political opportunity seized by opposition leader Michael Howard to blend Euroskepticism, claims about threats to migration control and the chance to challenge Tony Blair, the new Labour Prime Minister, which placed E.U. enlargement on the political agenda. Michael Howard utilized this narrative to critique Tony Blair’s government and the decision to not place any restrictions on new E.U. migrants in the run-up to the 2004 enlargement. The narrative of “benefit tourism” had already emerged in the tabloid press in Britain and through a right-wing think tank, Migrationwatch UK in 2003, and in earlier in connection to asylum seekers, but had not yet been connected to E.U. migrants.

Howard, now leader of the opposition, pro-actively adopted a more critical stance of Blair’s government and criticized them for making too many concessions to the E.U. In the background of this policy area (enlargement) was a broader debate about the E.U. Constitution, which had been signed by Blair but not yet ratified. Meanwhile, the E.U. was also preparing to welcome 10 new member states (the A8 plus Cyprus and Malta) on May 1, 2004. Britain had planned to open its doors to workers from these new member states, without any transitional controls as other older E.U. member states had imposed. Howard took advantage of the opportunity to link his newfound Euroskepticism to his insistence that Blair’s government should impose transitional controls on the new E.U. migrants who would be able to work and reside in the U.K. absent any restrictions as of May 1, 2004. In a series of public standoffs in the House

with Blair in January and February 2004, he asked why the government was not imposing any transitional controls on the new member states (Wintour and Black 2004). During that same time frame, E.U. member states Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden had all reversed course on initial proposals to allow the new migrants full access to employment and benefits. Blair, publicly backed into a corner by Howard, called a “crisis meeting” of his cabinet and rolled out a new policy toward the end of February restricting the benefits available for migrants by imposing a two-year waiting period on eligibility for benefits for the unemployed and by imposing a one-year waiting period on certain benefits for migrants in work (Brown 2004; BBC 23 February 2004). Still, despite the restriction in benefits, the U.K. was one of the only countries to not impose transitional controls on free movement (most countries had instituted a waiting period of seven years before A8 migrants could come to live and work).

Howard would lead the charge from the Conservative side for a call for a referendum on the Constitution. Blair was loathe to put the Constitution to a vote since he was strongly in favor of the E.U. and a leadership role for Britain within it, but he conceded that the Euroskepticism from “certain parts of the press” had forced him to reconsider (Tempest, *The Guardian*, 2004). Howard considered Blair’s about-face on this issue a personal victory. However, the British referendum ended up being indefinitely postponed after both the Netherlands and France rejected the Constitution in their own referenda.

While the press noted that Howard was trying to “ride a rising tide of Euroskepticism” Ukip’s profile was rising thanks to Nigel Farage’s dramatic increase in votes earned in the

European Parliament elections (rising from 9.7% in 1999 of the vote to 19.5% in 2004, with a tripling of electoral turnout). Ukip also won 12 seats in the European Parliament and came in third in the U.K.'s E.U. Parliament elections (behind Labour and the Tories), who had both lost seats (Watt 2004). Despite Ukip's performance in the European elections, Lynch and Whitaker (2013) note that the Conservatives did not yet take Ukip seriously as a challenger. Instead, "soft Euroskepticism... arose primarily from intra-party divisions and inter-party competition with Labour" (298). In early 2004, Howard believed he had forced Blair's hand on the issue of both E.U. migrant benefits and the referendum on the Constitution. Even supporters of Blair tended to agree, as Keith Best, chief of the legal specialist organization Immigration Advisory Service, noted with respect to the imposition of benefit restrictions: "This is a knee jerk reaction to Michael Howard... It's pandering to the Daily Mail and Daily Express. It's to demonstrate that the government is not a soft touch on immigration. I do wish they would stop trying to play this populist game" (The Guardian, Feb. 4, 2004).

A further opportunity to challenge Blair came shortly after the E.U. migrants began entering the U.K. Despite the restrictions in benefits put in place, the Blair government had drastically underestimated the numbers of migrants who would come. While the government had predicted 5,000 – 13,000 new migrants a year following the 2004 expansion, the actual numbers were much higher, around 521,000 (NYT). Boswell (2009) notes the Conservatives seized upon this discrepancy, with shadow Secretary of Home Affairs David Davis and Michael Howard bringing up this number as a show of the government's ineffectiveness (123). Howard, running as a presumptive future Prime Minister in 2005, made immigration the centerpiece of his

electoral campaign, headed by strategist Lynton Crosby, who had successfully made the restriction of immigration a cornerstone of Australian PM John Howard's platform.

After the Conservatives lost the 2005 election and Howard stood down from leadership of the party, Blair and the Labour party took this as a sign that the Conservatives had overplayed their hand on immigration. Yet when it came time to decide whether or not to introduce controls on Romania and Bulgaria, which were set to enter the E.U. in 2007, Labour decided in spite of what Home Secretary John Reid described as the "success" of 2004 in ensuring "people came to work and not claim benefits," that it would adopt a strategy of "managed migration" and impose restrictions on employment except on those who were self-employed or working in food processing and agriculture (BBC 24 October 2006). The U.K. was one of nine member states to do so. Labour's focus on "managed migration" was premised on the potential "potential economic and social contributions by immigrants to host societies" (Menz 2008). "Managed migration" was thus premised on an "oppositional logic" (Squire 2008) which was based on the state's ability to identify potential contributors (either social or economic) and potential receivers, takers, and detractors who would harm the system.

Balch (2009) argues that that the decision by Labour to extend controls to Romania and Bulgaria conflicted with "expert opinion" provided to the government and that the managed migration frame was "displaced by political imperative" (617). Yet Reid, in a speech announcing the controls in 2006, precisely framed the decision in terms of managed migration, using the targeted economic sectors and the need to "assess" and "ameliorate" local pressures on social

services, especially housing and English language training (BBC 24 October 2006). The Labour government's policy had shifted from treating E.U. migrants as an economic positive and a historical obligation to framing them as part of a larger set of problems with migration policy. A 2004 speech from Tony Blair confirmed this logic:

We are putting in place tighter rules to restrict migrants' access to benefits and social housing. Migrants will not be able to access social housing unless they are here legally and are working. No-one will be able to come to the UK from anywhere in the enlarged EU simply to claim benefits or housing. There will be no support for the economically inactive. And let me be clear: the same goes for migrants from elsewhere in the world.

(The Guardian, 27 April 2004)

This section has explained the emergence of the policy narrative of benefit tourism by examining the intra- and inter-party dynamics which provided the context for Michael Howard to publicly connect E.U. migration to abuse of the U.K.'s benefits and to an immigration and asylum system under threat. With regard to intra-party dynamics, the Conservative roots of a strategy of "soft Euroskepticism," rather than a challenge from Ukip, should be emphasized (Lynch and Whitaker 2013). This intra-party dynamic becomes important for understanding David Cameron's strategy toward the Bulgarian and Romanian enlargement, which I will return to in section four. With regard to inter-party dynamics, the challenges from Michael Howard and the Conservative party to the Labour government played a key role in legitimating "benefit tourism" as a problem and in provoking policy change from the Blair government, including the restriction of benefits for A8 migrants despite the lack of temporary controls on free movement in 2004, and later, in 2006, the imposition of temporary controls on migrants from Bulgaria and

Romania in the name of “managed migration.” The next section will examine the contextual factors that played a role in the ongoing resonance of benefit tourism as a policy narrative.

III. The stigmatization of immigrants as abusers of the system

This section lays out the multiple interacting processes which contribute to the stigmatization of immigrants, factors which helped increase the resonance of benefits tourism as a narrative. As mentioned in the introduction, a policy narrative’s resonance depends on its connection to broader frames. The frame of “abuse” of the U.K.’s immigration and asylum system is very salient to the resonance of benefits tourism, and impacted the development of Labour’s strategy of “managed migration.” Arguably, Michael Howard’s broaching the issue of benefits tourism in January 2004 would not have persuaded Blair’s government had the Labour party not already accepted that certain types of “abuse” threatened the system. The role of the media as an amplifier in enhancing the suspicion that the U.K. was under threat from various immigrant groups also contributed to the resonance of narrative of “benefits tourism.” Further, the difficulty of determining any objective figures on how widespread the phenomenon of “benefits tourism” really is does not preclude the resonance of the narrative. An examination of “number games” (Vollmer 2008; Vollmer 2013) will show that “benefits tourism” is an example of a broader phenomenon with respect to migration where the implication of an invasion, influx, or flood of migration presents on the one hand, an “unimaginable” number, while on the other hand, is subject to the manipulation and contest over statistics in order to prove the existence of the phenomenon and justify policy intervention (Vollmer 2008: 50). Lastly, politicians

themselves contribute to the resonance of “benefits tourism” as they repeat associations of E.U. migrants, particularly Romanian migrants and the Roma or “gypsies” with criminality. Ukip politicians including MEPs Paul Nuttall and party leader Nigel Farage and former Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett have contributed prominently to these associations.

As mentioned above, the Labour party’s selection of “managed migration” as a broader policy narrative stressed a logic of opposition between those migrants who would add to the U.K. in economic and social terms, vs. those who would detract. While “managed migration” as a policy narrative marked an explicit acknowledgement of this strategy, the process of constructing migration and asylum “problems” as a dichotomy between “genuine” refugees and migrants on the one hand and those with criminal or exploitative intentions drew on a series of interlocking issues. The depiction of certain types of migrants and asylum-seekers as undesirable included the problem of “bogus” refugees and the criminalization of migration through a focus on problems of “sham” marriages, for example.

The “abuse of the system” became a salient frame as early as the 1980s and 90s, when concerns about the abuse of the asylum system and the problem of economic migrants and “bogus” refugees rose to prominence (personal interview with legal NGO, February 2014). The Major government, reacting to mounting pressure that asylum reform was needed, ushered in policy change through the 1991 Asylum and Immigration Act, aiming to tackle the problem of fraudulent asylum applicants. In a speech introducing the Act, Secretary of State Kenneth Baker identified the problem, described as fraudulent or “bogus” applicants being the impediment to

justice for the “genuine” applicant, with a number of practices proposed: requirements for photographs and possibly fingerprints, and “the acceleration and simplification of procedures” (HC Hansard 7-2-91, Col 165). In the mid-1990s, Michael Howard, Secretary of State for the Home Department under Conservative Prime Minister John Major, introduced an Asylum and Immigration Bill. Linking “‘bogus’ refugees and other illegal immigrants” as a threat to immigration control, Howard argued that “the present benefit rules are an open invitation to persons from abroad to make unfounded asylum claims” (HC Deb 20 November 1995 vol 267 cc335-48). The Secretary of State for Social Security Peter Lilley also reformed benefit regulations for asylum seekers, arguing over 90% of benefit were not going to “genuine” refugees (HC Deb 11 January 1996 vol 269 cc331). Fraud was used to signal blame on the individual asylum-seekers, but also to point toward deficiencies in the system for apprehending the perpetrators of fraud.

The emphasis on abuses of the system continued under Labour as Blair’s “New Labour” platform focused on reform to make the system “swift and fair” and to “crack down on the fraudulent use of birth certificates” (Archive of Labour Party Manifestos, 1997). The 1998 Labour report “Fairer, Faster, and Firmer,” aimed at overhauling the system, linked economic migrants to practices such as “use of fraudulent documentation, entering into a sham marriage, or abuse of the asylum process” (Fairer, Faster, and Firmer, 1.18). However, the report also linked these practices to “unscrupulous legal representatives,” “fixers” of marriages of convenience, and immigration advisers (ibid. 1.19). Squire (2008) argues that interparty dynamics also played a key role in the development of asylum policy, as Labour and the Conservatives tried to take

ownership of the issue. Crucially, Michael Howard would remain a key player both in shaping the Conservatives' positions when in opposition on immigration and asylum and on attacking Labour for being a "soft touch" with respect to these issues (Squire 2008: 246). Still, despite the early process of articulating links between the perceived abusive intentions of asylum seekers and immigrants, this narrative did not yet extend to E.U. migrants.

While successive governments had interpreted different problems with asylum and irregular migration as abuse of the system, the media also contributed its perception as a widespread problem. Luedtke (2007) has noted that the "vocal anti-immigrant" tabloid press in the U.K. has contributed to the high salience of immigration and put pressure on the government (25-26). The media also contributed to what Stuart Hall called "amplification spirals" in which a circle of communication between the media, politicians, and government officials reinforce the notion of certain groups as deviant, problematic, or threatening (Hall 1978; Vukov 2004). The association of immigrants with crime in both policy and the media created an environment in which the policy narrative of benefits tourism resonated. The media, by focusing on selected stories of "bogus" refugees and crime rings of immigrants perpetrating sham marriages, cashpoint fraud, and fraudulent benefit claims, underscored the notion that the political system was being abused. In particular several cases of Romanian or "gypsy" immigrants committing benefits fraud and trafficking children for the purposes of benefits fraud drew prominent headlines from 2010 to 2012. The newspaper *The Daily Express* also more directly joined the fray in 2013 by launching a petition, online and in print, to extend the transitory controls on

Bulgaria and Romania after January 1, 2014, which was signed by 150,000 people and delivered to the Prime Minister (*The Express*, November 2013).

The conflation of migrants from Bulgaria and Romania with the Roma also intensified the media and politicians' portrayals of these new E.U. migrants as associated with criminality. In particular, politicians on the right picked up on the Roma as a "problem" and suggested that the Bulgarian and Romanian migrants coming to the U.K. would seek benefits and housing. Ukip MEP Paul Nuttall, for example, made a visit to a Roma camp in Bulgaria and noted in the European Parliament in 2013 that "many will be headed to the U.K." after the expiration of transitory controls in 2014 and that this amounted to the E.U. "foist[ing]... child prostitution... and Dickensian pickpocket gangs" on the U.K. A study conducted by the Barrow Cadbury Trust in advance of the European Parliament election noted Ukip's strategy of deploying the interlocking frames of mistrust of E.U. power as anti-democratic and the threat to an idealized version of Britain as traditional and safe (*Counterpoint* 2014).

Yet Ukip was far from isolated on the issue of the Roma as former Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett, who remained an MP from Sheffield, caused an uproar in 2013 when he warned an influx of new Roma migrants could cause "riots on the streets" unless the Roma changed their behavior and culture. Blunkett had previously called a gypsy site in Sheffield a "tinderbox of tensions" and connected the situation there to towns in the U.K. which had previously been the sites of riots, including Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham (BBC 12 November 2013). These riots had been the product of complex causes, but were chiefly thought of as

“ethnic” riots exposing tensions between British minority citizens of Asian and Caribbean descent the majority white population. Ukip leader Nigel Farage, had previously broadened his party’s message from a single issue (exiting the E.U.) to include an anti-immigrant stance, particularly with respect to Islam and the perceived failures of multiculturalism. He had repeatedly tried to bring the issue of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants to the political spotlight, had long emphasized the differences between British and Romanian culture and in 2013 reiterated the connection he saw between potential E.U. migrants and a “Romanian crime wave in London.” In response to Blunkett, Farage asked, “if they won't listen to the dangers of opening the door to Romania and Bulgaria next year when UKIP speak out on it, will they listen to David Blunkett? I certainly hope so” (BBC 12 November 2013).

In addition to associations of new E.U. migrants with the Roma, criminality, and ethnic tensions, which provided a context in which the policy narrative of benefits tourism might resonate, the role of uncertainty with regard to prediction of migration and the manipulability of migration statistics plays a key role. As Bastian Vollmer (2013) has highlighted, policy on irregular migration is subject to “number games.” In 2001, the Home Office commissioned a study in order to determine the size of the “illegal” migrant population in the U.K., and these numbers became the subject of a media debate as they were contested by the think tank MigrationWatch UK. Vollmer notes the “traditional ‘numbers game’ pattern” results in an “outcry for action” as the contestation of numbers implies a loss of control. Similarly, the number of E.U. migrants, as shown above, became the subject of political contestation as

Howard and others utilized the government's errant prediction of post 2004 enlargement E.U. migration to justify the restriction of benefits for Romanian and Bulgarian migrants.

The uncertainty of measuring the phenomenon of "benefits tourism" and the uncertainty of predicting migration flows both are examples of "counting the uncountable" (Vollmer 2008). The amplification of the supposed "influx" of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants by both the media and opportunistic politicians contributes to a more general pattern in migration politics in which an invasion, influx, or flood of migration presents on the one hand, an "unimaginable" number, while on the other hand, is subject to the manipulation and contest over statistics in order to prove the existence of the phenomenon and justify policy intervention (50). "Benefits tourism" provides an example of just such a phenomenon, when fears about a rise in the phenomenon are corroborated not by any statistical evidence, but mostly by anecdote (Benton 2013) and illusion to general increases. Ironically, the Conservative Party, which had hammered Labour for its inaccurate forecast of E.U. migration in 2004, acknowledged in 2013 that they had "no idea" how many Bulgarians and Romanians would come to the U.K., and that the government had no numbers on benefits tourism (BBC 19 March 2013). Yet the very lack of statistics or evidence of the problem was not considered enough of a reason to discard considerations of policy change. As Home Secretary Theresa May responded when asked to provide figures on "health tourism," she refused to "quantify the problem," noting, "the public believe 'there is an issue out there'" (Eaton 2013). In response to an inquiry from the Commission, the Home Office's reply stated that "We consider that these questions place too much emphasis on quantitative evidence" and that no figures were collected to determine the

nationality of those claiming benefits nor the number of fraudulent claims by nationality (Waterfield 2013). As Jonathan Portes (2013) noted, tabloid press and politicians also often take numbers out of context to create the impression of E.U. migrants as an undue burden on the system, when reports show that migrants are more likely to be employed and less likely to be receiving benefits than U.K. nationals.

The difficulty of measuring the phenomenon of benefits tourism, when combined with uncertainty about migration figures in general, the amplification of problems of crime and fraud associated with migration by the media, and the general policy narrative of “abuse of the system” combine to make the policy narrative of “benefits tourism” resonant and resilient to empirical challenge. When political entrepreneurs like Michael Howard or Nigel Farage or the press associated E.U. migrants with criminality or deceitful or exploitative intentions, the uncertainty of accurately measuring these phenomena combined with the institutional and discursive environment of systemic abuse made the *possibility* of fraud by E.U. migrants difficult to entirely discount. This possibility is why the government, in its own articulation, feels that policy change is necessary: “Claims that abuse of free movement is not widespread ignore the reality that such abuse exists, and if not dealt with effectively is likely to increase. The UK considers that the fact that such abuse is possible under current conditions is sufficient to warrant effective action” (European Scrutiny Committee, 2013, underline original).

This section has explained why the policy narrative of “benefits tourism” resonated in U.K. politics and public discourse. While the prior section focused on the political opportunities

and action by politicians both within the government and in the opposition to initially link the narrative of “benefits tourism” to E.U. migrants, this section has focused on more contextual factors including broader frames such as the “abuse” of the system, the work done by media and politicians to amplify both the broader frame of abuse and the narrative of benefits tourism through the association of E.U. migrants with criminality and ethnic tensions, and the resonance of benefits tourism within a broader environment of “numbers games.” Post-2004, “benefits tourism” stayed in the public and media spotlight even after the Blair government decided to put temporary controls on the entrance of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants until 2014. The impending expiration of those controls brought a flurry of activity by politicians, especially Nigel Farage, but the media and the government had kept the problem of “abuse” of the immigration and asylum systems on the agenda. Though the financial crisis in 2008 became a governmental and political priority and thus brought a slight decrease in attention to migration policy, I will now consider more specifically the role the financial crisis and austerity played in linking domestic welfare reform to benefits tourism by E.U. migrants and the linkage made by Cameron between benefits tourism and E.U. policy change.

IV. Domestic and supranational issue linkages made by David Cameron

This section looks at the “re-emergence” of the “benefits tourism” narrative in the run-up to the expiration of the controls on Bulgaria and Romania on January 1, 2014. Despite other countries, such as Ireland and Italy, lifting the restrictions on free movement even before the seven year limit expired, Conservatives proposed further extending the restrictions past January

1st, even though this would be incompatible with E.U. law. As mentioned in the introduction, Cameron also linked a reform of free movement to the potential referendum on the U.K.'s E.U. membership. Other countries also experienced a heightening of political rhetoric in advance of the expiration of controls, such as Germany, who moved to change access to benefits for E.U. migrants due to concerns about "poverty migration." In another country associated with anti-Roma sentiment, France, the expiration of the controls passed more peacefully, despite protests from the Front National, as the Hollande government had already expanded the number of fields in which Bulgarians and Romanians were eligible to work in fall 2012. Explaining why the debate went much further in the U.K. requires bringing together the strands which make up the narrative of benefits tourism, as already explored in this paper, and linking it to the environment of Euroskepticism. This section considers some already mentioned factors including the role of inter- and intra-party politics and debates over the E.U. and considers how the debate changed, if at all, from a decade earlier. Challenging the notion that Cameron's speeches linking "benefits tourism" to welfare reform, the reform of E.U. free movement rules, and a possible "Brexit," are all solely due to pressure by Ukip, this section will examine the development of two strategies by Cameron including the shift from a soft Euroskeptic strategy of a referendum on future transfers of power to the E.U. to an in-out referendum on the E.U. and the linking of immigration reform and welfare reform. Given the contextual factors discussed in the last section, the growing popularity of Nigel Farage and Ukip is also important. Farage is the one political figure who has most directly and openly linked a "Brexit" to the U.K.'s ability to control migration. In essence, political pressure by both Farage and Euroskeptics within the

Conservative Party have forced Cameron to double-down on his soft Euroskepticism and threaten to leave the E.U. *in absence of reforms*. This strategy ties in with his new pledge that the U.K. will hold an in-out referendum on British membership in 2017 after a period of renegotiation. Free movement has become an essential issue to be renegotiated, at least in part because of the narrative of “benefits tourism,” which the Cameron government has identified as one of the key “abuses” of free movement to be addressed. Lastly, the domestic politics of welfare reform in the context of austerity have also played a role in providing Cameron an opportunity to link welfare reform to immigration. Thus, the policy narrative of “benefits tourism” has become combined and re-combined with two broader policy narratives: the need to reform the E.U., and the need to end a culture of “something for nothing” with respect to welfare.

Welfare changes related to asylum and immigration are not new. As Andrew Geddes (2000) notes, new policies under Labour included “internal welfare-state related measures designed to separate asylum seekers on the grounds that they were suspicious and a prevailing sense that they were bogus applicants” (134). The rationale of fraudulent applicants coming to Britain to claim welfare benefits has catalyzed multiple policy changes, from fingerprinting and administrative separation of asylum-seekers from other benefits recipients to more recent changes limiting the benefits which E.U. migrants can receive, as described in the opening of this chapter. The linkage between reform of the welfare state and migration was openly stated by Cameron in a 2013 speech. With regard to proposed changes to the eligibility for benefits,

Cameron noted “ending the ‘something for nothing’ culture is something that needs to apply in the immigration system as well as in the welfare system” (*Evening Standard* 2013). Under pressure with the impending expiration of controls on Bulgarian and Romanian migrants, Cameron made several policy changes which took effect on January 1st 2014. These restrictions included a waiting period of three months to apply for benefits; a cut-off period of six months for benefits for the jobseekers unless they demonstrated a “genuine” prospect of employment; the deportation with a twelve-month re-entry ban of migrants found sleeping on the street or begging; the removal of housing benefits for jobseekers; and the imposition of an earnings threshold to demonstrate “genuine” employment (Prime Minister’s Office, 25 March 2013).

The context of U.K. austerity politics was particularly relevant with respect to benefits (Cabinet Office 2010). In an emergency budget in June 2010 the government cut 6% of the welfare budget, with deep cuts intended to contribute to economic reform and recovery. Chancellor George Osborne also noted that cutting welfare benefits was a way to “change the welfare system so it doesn’t trap people in poverty and a culture of dependency” (*Daily Mail*).

While the newspapers, Farage and other Ukip MEPs had done their best to keep the potential Romanian and Bulgarian migrants in the spotlight between 2007 and 2013, the global financial crisis to a certain extent put immigration issues on the backburner. Although immigration remained one of the top three concerns listed by voters, attention to the economy skyrocketed in 2008 and it remained the top issue throughout the first half of 2014 (even though immigration had nearly pulled even) (Blinder 2014). While the financial crisis provided an

interruption to the high profile of migration debates in the government of Gordon Brown, Blair's successor, E.U. politics remained in the spotlight when Brown presided over the U.K.'s signature and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, an E.U. treaty which packaged many of the legal changes of the failed E.U. constitution in a more standard treaty format. Once again, Euroskeptic Conservatives and Ukip criticized Labour for what they saw as a broken promise a referendum on the E.U. constitution (Summers, *The Guardian*, 2009). David Cameron, now the Conservative party leader, promised in the party's 2010 manifesto that if elected he would require a referendum on any new E.U. treaties which transferred new powers to the E.U. (Chapman 2010). As Lynch and Whitaker note (2013), this was an example of the E.U.'s "soft skepticism," as the Conservative platform balanced the call for a referendum with a statement of the benefits of the E.U. (300). In his platform, Cameron had also pledged to cut migration to the "tens of thousands" and to impose transitional controls on all new E.U. migrants "as a matter of course;" other than these transitional controls, the Conservatives did not directly mention E.U. migration. Yet Cameron also pointed out that the U.K. wanted to continue to attract the "best and the brightest" who could "contribute to our economic growth" (Chapman 2010). Thus, Cameron's target of reduction of migration still considered certain types of immigration to have a positive economic impact.

The Conservatives came in first in the election but did not obtain a majority. For the first time in more than thirty years the U.K. formed a coalition government with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, and Cameron as Prime Minister. The coalition agreement noted it would seek to impose an "annual limit" on non-E.U. migration and kept the promise of a

referendum for any further transfer of power to the E.U. Despite the imposition of these restrictions in 2013, approximately 47,000 Bulgarians and Romanians came to the U.K. in 2014. There were debates over how to interpret this number, with tabloids reporting that it had confirmed the suspicions of Ukip and Nigel Farage, while think tanks such as the Migration Observatory pointed out that 45,000 migrants from Romania and Bulgaria had come to the U.K. in 2013 *before* the expiration of labor controls and imposition of restrictions on benefits, as students or as self-employed, suggesting that the lifting of restrictions had not prompted a significant increase (The Times, Dec. 30, 2014). Meanwhile, the impending 2014 European elections, a sense of growing Euroskepticism, and the eventual expiration of the temporary controls on Bulgarian and Romanian migrants meant a political opportunity for Ukip's leader Nigel Farage. As mentioned above, Farage, a frequent commentator in the U.K. media, had linked the lack of border controls within the E.U. as a cause of a rising number of immigrants in the U.K. He grew more strident in linking E.U. migrants with criminality in the run-up to the 2014 E.U. Parliament elections, noting several times in 2013 that London was under threat from a "Romanian crime wave" and that an "immigrant crime wave" would proceed from the expiration of transitory controls on migrants from Romania and Bulgaria (Morris 2013). A Ukip pamphlet suggested 29 million migrants from Bulgaria and Romania would be "let in" to the E.U., a gross miscalculation since that number is higher than the population of those two countries combined (BBC 21 April 2013). Still, Farage's party swept to victory in the 2014 E.U. elections, ahead of Labour (2nd) and the Tories (3rd) (Phipps, Sparrow, Quinn 2014). Ukip also

won its first two seats in the British Parliament in 2014, marking a transition from success only in the European election to domestic elections (James and Obsorn 2014).

Near the end of 2014, the press and the opposition had skewered Cameron over reports that total migration had increased, despite his campaign pledge to cut migration. Supposedly concerned about the May 2015 Parliamentary elections, Cameron gave a speech promising further reforms to benefits available to E.U. migrants including a four-year wait on in-work benefits and access to social housing and a potential ban on E.U. migrants from new countries until their economies had “converged more closely” with the E.U. (Morris 2014). Cameron, in 2013, had already pledged an in-out referendum on the U.K. after negotiations with the E.U. over a “new settlement,” calling for the referendum to occur in 2017. His November 2014 speech linked changes to freedom of movement within the E.U. to the in-out referendum, saying that cuts to E.U. migration and welfare reform were “an absolute requirement” (Ritchie 2014). Some of these changes would likely require alteration of E.U. treaties which necessitate the consent of all of the member states.

As of 2014 the shifting political context has made the direction of future policy change unclear. The Conservatives were worried about growing splits within their party, both on the issue of the E.U. and immigration. Ahead of the 2012 elections, they hired Lynton Crosby, Michael Howard’s old election strategist to run their campaign, who was well known for his “dog whistle” campaigns on immigration (White 2012). However, in 2013 the Conservatives also wanted to sharpen their messages on the economy and hired Jim Messina, one of Barack

Obama's former advisors to work under Crosby (BBC 2 August 2013). As a Financial Times article notes, senior Tory MPs worried that a focus on immigration played into the hands of Ukip (Parker and Barker 2013).

On the E.U., the question of how to persuade other E.U. countries to permit reforms to free movement loomed. Though other E.U. countries including Germany were allies with the U.K. in terms of tightening benefits for E.U. migrants, Angela Merkel warned the principle of free movement was at the core of the E.U. and was not up for debate (Mason and Oltermann 2014). Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for European Affairs of Poland, a country with a growing influence in the E.U., wondered whether Cameron's proposed changes would be discriminatory towards E.U. citizens (BBC 2 December 2014).

The narrative of "benefit tourism" was alive and well in 2014 despite rhetorical and empirical challenges. Cameron had linked benefit tourism to policy changes at the domestic level, including welfare policy. He had also linked it to potential policy changes to E.U. free movement, and perhaps even to a "Brexit." The domestic political context, particularly inter-party competition, was crucial to explaining Cameron's actions, as the 2014 successes of Ukip and the impending 2015 elections certainly impacted the Conservative party. However, this section has noted the intra-party dimension was once again significant as well, as Cameron sought to address Euroskepticism within his own party. Overall, the contextual factors that had made the rise of the narrative of "benefits tourism" possible, especially a connection with a

broader frame of abuse of the system, made this narrative not only remarkably resilient but central to U.K. politics and, perhaps, the future of the U.K. in the E.U.

VI. Conclusion: The policy narrative of benefits tourism and policy change

This paper has analyzed the factors which have contributed to the emergence, resonance, and resurgence of the policy narrative of “benefits tourism” in the U.K. Departing from perspectives which emphasize the role of political actors in shaping and interpreting beliefs about policy problems, and de-emphasized linear explanations of interests and electoral considerations, the central argument of this chapter has been that “benefits tourism,” as a policy narrative which drew on a broader frame of abuse of the immigration and welfare system, provided an opportunity for U.K. politicians to link E.U. migrants, who had previously been thought of as beneficial for the U.K. economy, to a perceived problem of fraud and abuse. In turn, the political context of Euroskepticism in the U.K. meant that this issue not only became linked to policy changes with respect to benefits and the legal extension of temporary controls on migrants from new E.U. member states, but also became linked to a broader questioning of free movement in general and the U.K.’s membership in the E.U.

This paper has been attentive to the ways in which the policy narrative evolved over time. Though the issue of Bulgarian and Romanian migration has become central to this assemblage, I show that the roots of the issue of “benefit tourism” stretch back to the early 1990s and the emergence of Euroskepticism. E.U. migrants went from being a non-issue with respect to larger “problems” of migration and asylum policy to the central problem. The rise of “benefits

tourism” as a narrative is explained by the political opportunities provided by an environment of Euroskepticism, inter- and intra-party politics. The narrative’s resonance is explained by its fit with a broader frame of “abuse” of the migration and asylum system, and this resonance is enhanced by politicians and media outlets repetition of stories and claims which associate migrants with criminality. Additionally, the contestability of claims about the size of migration flows and claims about the prevalence of abuse of the system, including “benefits tourism” has meant that, far from weakening these narratives, they have remained remarkably resilient.

Individual political actors have also played an important role in this story. Leader of the Conservative opposition during the Blair years, Michael Howard ensured that the “benefits tourism” narrative would be tied to the entry of E.U. migrants in 2004 and undoubtedly contributed to Blair’s imposition of cuts to eligibility for benefits. Ukip’s leader Nigel Farage has been one of the most publicly vocal proponents of the association of E.U. migrants with criminality and other undesirable consequences, helping to link E.U. migrants, especially Bulgarians and Romanians, to concerns about abuse of the system—and to membership in the European Union more generally. Lastly, David Cameron who has widely been characterized as reacting to electoral pressures, has linked the narrative of benefits tourism to policy changes including further cuts to eligibility for benefits for migrants as part of larger changes to the welfare system. Most recently, he has also linked benefits tourism and other instances of fraud and abuse to the system to free movement, proposing changes to E.U. policy (and perhaps, an exit from the E.U.)

To a certain extent, the U.K. represents a unique case precisely because of its “special” relationship with the E.U.: the U.K. has negotiated many opt-outs from E.U. treaties and does not participate in the Schengen area or the Euro, yet it is (as of 2014) still considered a full member of the E.U. As this paper has shown, Euroskepticism has had a long and influential history in the domestic politics of the U.K., perhaps more so than in other E.U. states. However, the case of the policy narrative of “benefits tourism” in the U.K. has important comparative implications, not least because Euroskepticism is rising across the E.U. There are many similarities between the U.K. and other European countries which receive large numbers of migration and asylum seekers, and there have been indications that many states wish they had the flexibility that the U.K. has with respect to E.U. rules. As mentioned, Germany has been an ally to the U.K. on the issue of reform of the availability of benefits for E.U. migrants, even if not on the broader question of free movement. Countries such as France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands have all expressed concerns with various types of abuse of migration and asylum policy and have experimented with changes to implementation of E.U. rules, such as those with respect to asylum procedures and family reunification, in order to curb abuse. Further, as a practical matter, the U.K.’s narrative of benefit tourism necessarily will involve all of the E.U. member states now since it has been linked to potential E.U. policy changes.

Conceptually, the argument sketched in this chapter suggests a need to continue to rethink studies of migration and asylum policy solely as the product of restrictive national interests or electoral pressure due to anti-immigrant attitudes. The ways in which policymakers think about migration and asylum problems are important and have far-reaching effects in

determining the combination of different policy elements. One of the implications of the benefits tourism case is to show how a focus on the perceived problems of fraud and abuse can lead to the identification of certain groups of migrants as problematic. Lastly, the resilience of benefits tourism as a policy narrative suggests a need to modify perspectives in both scholarly work and policy circles which focus on “evidence-based” policymaking. Benefits tourism as a policy narrative and the policy changes it has engendered have shown that not only is evidence contestable, it is sometimes ignored. One potential implication of this paper when studied with other narratives of migration policy may be that narratives of migration policy are particularly resistant to empirical challenge, precisely because as Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten pointed out, policy in this area relates to “states’ anxieties about the perceived inability to control migration and uncertainties about the causes of this phenomenon.” Or, it may be the case that there is nothing particularly special about migration policy other than that it more openly reveals state anxieties over the perception of control and a lack of certainty. Thus, the arguments advanced in this chapter could potentially be applied to a broader range of policy areas and to broader questions about challenges to state capacity.

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Appendix

Total long-term international migration estimates, UK, 1970 to 2014

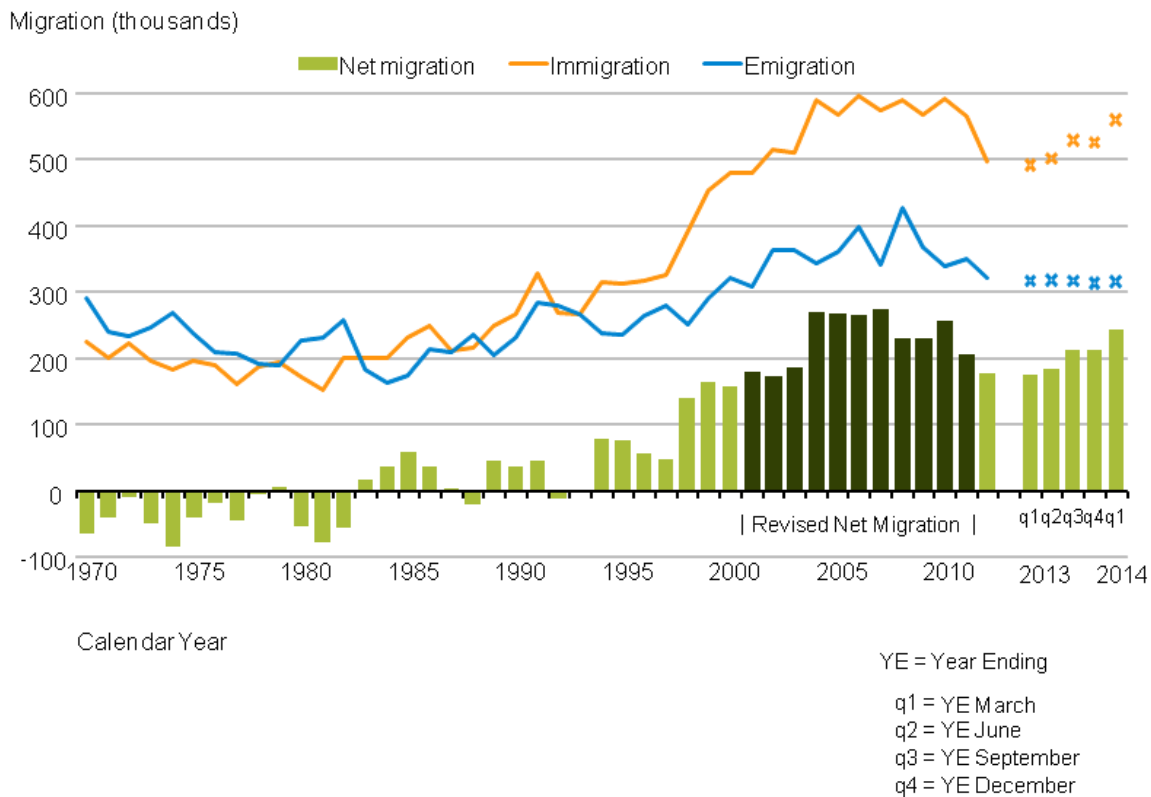


Figure 1. Source: Long-term International Migration - Office for National Statistics. Accessed 11/26/2014.