

THE EFFECT OF IMMIGRATION ON UNEMPLOYMENT

The allegation

According to a BBC Newsnight investigation, Downing Street withheld research into the number of UK workers unemployed as a consequence of immigration.¹⁹

Timeline

- Dec 2012 Home secretary Theresa May delivered a speech claiming that “for every additional one hundred immigrants, they [the independent Migration Advisory Committee] estimated that 23 British workers would not be employed.”²⁰ The report May cited²¹ was criticised by Jonathan Portes of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research for cherry-picking one result from many that overall showed no statistically significant effect.²²
- 4th Mar 2014 Newsnight investigation alleged that civil service analysis of the same data was prevented from being published by the prime minister’s office, although “Downing Street sources told the BBC the report had not yet been completed and was not ready to be released.”¹⁹
- 6th Mar 2014 The Home Office’s analysis is published. It notes that the Migration Advisory Committee report found “there is relatively little evidence that migration has caused statistically significant displacement of UK natives ... when the economy has been strong”, and that displacement “dissipates over time.”²³ It also reported other research “failed to identify any statistically significant impacts of net migration on claimant count rates.”

How were government policy and public debate affected?

Reducing net migration to the tens of thousands per year is a long-standing government policy. It appears that ministers pointed selectively to supportive research to justify this policy, and suppressed the publication of a more comprehensive analysis that suggested that the “displacement effect” of immigration is not a significant problem. Economists and journalists were left poorly-placed to scrutinise the impact of a migration cap because this study was not published on time, and ministers and spokespersons continued to use dubious statistics in support of their policy.

¹⁹ Cook, C (2014)

²⁰ May, T (2012)

²¹ Migration Advisory Committee (2012)

²² Portes, J (2012)

²³ Devlin, C et al (2014)