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Discourses of Control: A Discursive Institutional and Foucauldian Analysis of UK Immigration Policy

Abstract

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Keywords: Immigration Policy, Discursive Control, Border Sovereignty, Border Control, Political Discourse, Governmentality Power, Migrant Illegalisation, Policy Volatility, Narrative Framing, Immigration Acts UK

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Abstract

This paper covers the theme that the mass instability and the fact that the UK immigration policy has been ineffective since 2010 can not be attributed to material factors only or the sentiment of individuals. Instead, it is driven by powerful and unified discourses of power that render policy agreeable and the production. The presented study will provide a novel methodological instrument since Discursive Institutionalism (DI) and Foucauldian discourse analysis are merged together. DI illuminates the contribution of the political agencies in producing and challenging persuasive stories, but Foucauldian analysis offers an understanding of the manner in which persuasive stories control and define migrant people as powers by constructing regimes of truth. With the Hostile Environment and recent reforms, the regularity has become evident, which is then succeeded by the leaders adopting the issue of migration as either a sovereignty issue, a management issue, or a situation of crisis.

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Introduction

The UK politics is still crusading over the last ten years, with immigration as its volatile centre. It started in 2010 with such a promise on high stakes: a promise to bring down net migration to the tens of thousands. But one government after another did not come through. Such chronic deceit of saying good things and doing bad things ruined the trust of the people and created the preconditions of a crisis.

The problem was turned into a political weapon against the background of unstoppable media coverage and the sincere interest of the population. In the end, the unstable nature of that environment contributed to the message behind the Brexit campaign, the simplicity and strength of which lies in the fact that the country had to control its borders once again. In a brilliant move, the sociable phrase of the Leave movement Take Back Control



successfully allowed the amalgamation of sovereignty anxieties and the particular policy question of free movement and immigration.

In 23 years, the record high net migration figure had become the legacy of these years of ups and down the other way. According to official statistics, the figure of net migration had reached a record high of over 900,000 in the period through June 2023, a figure eagerly covered by the incoming Labour administration. In the former Conservative government, record levels of net migration had hit over 900,000, which is astonishing and depicted as the failure of the policy. It is this history of continuously rising immigration rates, with a background of fervent political election rhetoric that promises otherwise, that poses the major puzzle of our analysis. So, what is the explanation for such a long-standing policy instability and the gap between the proclaimed goals and results?

We propose that there can be no such understanding of this volatile environment which is not unravel its discourses of control, where legitimisation, maintenance, and ultimate constitutive processes are at work. The issue of policy is not only a technical answer to a form of an existing problem; it is wrapped in and generated through words, stories, and ideological structures. To unpack that, we will use a composite theoretical approach, which would be the combination of Discursive Institutionalism (DI) and Foucauldian discourse analysis. DI emphasizes the way in which political elites employ ideas and stories at various scale levels, between general popular philosophy and individual programmes in policy, to create coalitions and bring change in an institutional environment. The Foucauldian analysis, in its turn, shows the role that these narratives play as a larger *dispositif* (apparatus) of power: they make regimes of truth about migrants and use some biopolitical tools to manage and control them as a population.

There is the following progress in this paper. The first one is that we expound our built-in theoretical framework, and fit it into the context of pertinent academic literature. When we agree on other viewpoints (e.g., economic or institutional) to place our approach, we are only doing it briefly. Second, we describe our qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The current analysis part looks at four watershed events, namely (1) the discursive invention of immigration during the

Brexit referendum; (2) the Hostile Environment policy and the Windrush scandal; (3) post-Brexit policy changes (the Points-Based System and the Rwanda asylum plan); and (4) the new rhetoric of the new Labour government (202425). We demonstrate through this chronological and thematic approach how sovereignty, security, threat, and managerial expertise discourses have not merely informed the UK immigration policy, but have in fact created the two reasons of legal and illegal migrants, justifying increasingly expansive regimes of control (Agier, 2006). The conclusion offers a reflection on the consequences of such a discursive stranglehold on the future of the UK immigration policy and the democratic discourse.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In order to succeed in gaining a clear understanding of the UK immigration policy dynamics, one will have to go beyond strictly institutional or interest-based orientations and interact with the forces of ideas and discourse. Our methodology would be at the border of two quite different yet complementary theoretical traditions.

Discursive Institutionalism (DI)

DI was also a fourth institutionalism that focused analysis of institutions on ideas and discourse. In place of the older paradigms which often viewed institutions as material restrictions that delimit the behaviour of actors, DI (Schmidt, 2008, 2010) suggests that these actors were not merely rule-followers, but were sense-makers and meaning-makers, who deployed ideas to negotiate, to challenge and remake their institutional surroundings DI (Schmidt, 2008, 2010). Narratives are also stressed here; strategic narratives that will connect ideas to policy proposals to convince the public and to create coalitions. In our example, DI focuses on the way that political leaders create the story (e.g., of sovereignty or economic need) to ensure that this or that policy is necessary or unavoidable.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

On the other hand, a Foucauldian approach is based on the presence of a discursive practice in the structures of power/knowledge. It is based on Foucault (1980, 1997) and focuses on

governmentality: how contemporary states regulate people with legal means, but also in terms of creating truth regimes. Discourse is therefore perceived as an apparatus or a dispositif, which is comprised of language, institutions, and practices. Foucault analysis poses the following questions: How do discursive categories (such as illegal migrant) come into being, and how do they work together to legitimize surveillance, exclusion, and control? It accentuates the power/knowledge: the impossibility of knowing about migrants (as data, categories, images) without the participation of power over them. As an example, the discourses of risk, threat, or compliance are turned into means of controlling behaviors and other means of justifying enforcement (Benson & Sigona, 2024).

Integrated Framework

We argue that an integrated DIFoucauldian framework can provide a better understanding than one based on single elements. DI assists us in following the intentional framing of issues (strategic narratives) by policymakers, whereas Foucauldian analysis and research indicate the unintentional consequences on structures of these frames, creating subjects of power. An example that can be taken is when a DI account finds that politicians defined some policies as a defense of British values; a Foucauldian account would enquire how such labels serve to legitimize some behaviors and devalue opposition. They both are necessary to gain an extensive view of the immigration policy construction and maintenance (Boswell & Hampshire, 2017).

Other Possible Schools of Thought

We accept the fact that other schools of thought do exist. The structural labor demand or welfare needs are highlighted in political economy approaches, such as the focus on welfare needs. According to James Hampshire, the capitalist model that was developed in the UK has created a pattern where the country became dependent on a migrant labor force, implying that the tendency to migrate a lot might be considered an economic need. On the same note, the concept of path-dependence suggests that the initial policy decisions limit subsequent decisions: Dias-Abey (2022) demonstrates that the New Labour reforms of the 2000s established institutional channels, which continue to influence the points-based system of Britain even today. These points of

view matter: economic forms and institutional traditions are evidently impactful. Nevertheless, we propose that even the forces, such as those, are read and taken into action by overbearing discourses. The framing of material pressures as crises of "control" (or none whatsoever), in other words, the mediation of interests by ideas, can be observed by focusing on the discourse. We continue in part knowing that there are material and institutional factors, but we predetermine the ideational aspect on the basis that it assists us in understanding why similar material issues (e.g., labor shortages) continue to spawn policies defined by taking back control or fighting an invasion, as opposed to other definitions.

Methodology

We analyze it through the integrated DI Foucauldian framework approach based on qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA considers language as social and socially constitutive: the language is reflexive and constitutive of social structures, texts, and speech. We have gathered a wide range of materials pertaining to UK immigration discourse in 2010-2025. This involved government legislation and white papers (e.g., the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, the 2025 White Paper), transcripts of important parliamentary debates in the Hansard, speeches and interviews by government ministers, party manifestos, and limited media opinion pieces (primarily The Guardian and Reuters). Political campaign materials (e.g., the slogans and posters of the Brexit referendum and statements by high positions) and open words by the prominent people (Prime Ministers, Home Secretaries, and shadow Home Secretaries) were also analysed.

Our sampling strategy was purposive with the aim of capturing key instances and changes (e.g., before/after Brexit, Windrush, etc.). Our total number of coded documents was more than 100. The theory informed our coding, yet the emergent thematic code purview. First, we have performed an inductive open-coding to point out any recurring concepts and metaphors of migration (e.g., "sovereignty, rule of law, threat, compassion). We then named codes into future categories based on our DI and Foucauldian issues. As an illustration, under DI we would categorize themes of strategic narrations (e.g., claims of "invasion, or once of benefit to the economy, or of security), whereas under Foucauldian we would connect a process of othering (e.g., the creation of an illegal migrant category) with a process of regulation (e.g., paper checks as a discipline).

In order to achieve reliability, the two authors coded sample documents individually and only agreed on the differences. Our triangulation involved conducting an analysis to determine how much of a discourse came out the same in various types of sources (e.g., political speech vs. media reportage). We did not apply quantitative content analysis, but we had close, contextual attention to how the language, including the choice of words, metaphor, the narrative structure, and who and where (speaker identity and the location). We were dual in this as well, in that we expressly sought both ends of the spectrum, the conscious strategy (what leaders claim they are doing and why) and the power impacts of the discourse (what the conversation produces in society, even unstated).

We are using an interpretive approach methodology and are aware of its weaknesses. We pay attention to higher discourse in the public arenas and not interviews or internal memos. We, then, are snatching the narratives which are so publicly visible, but no secret negotiations, do we. Moreover, CDA does not allow demonstrating the causality between discourse and results, yet it might disclose the possibility and potentiality (Davies, 2025). To reduce bias, we base our assertions on written quotes, and we also consult the scholarly literature at hand. Finally, we would like to follow the reason of the discourse and its infiltration with policy, but not to test the hypothesis in statistics. This is why we write on the construction of the immigration debate in Britain and what this would mean in terms of governance and power.

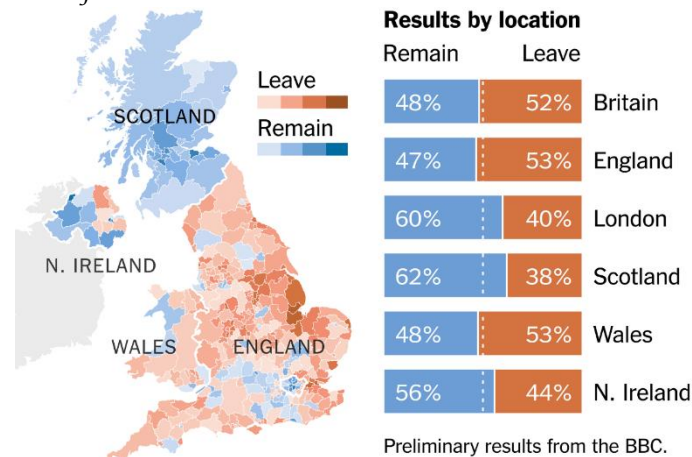
Analysis

The Brexit Referendum (2016): Sovereignty as a Master Signifier

The Brexit referendum was the perfect example of the merging of immigration issues and national sovereignty. A slogan by one of the Leave campaigns, Take Back Control, branded the EU's free movement of people as losing British sovereignty. The leave campaign evoked images of an independent UK taking care of its borders. As an example, Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson often associated membership in the EU with the lack of control over who enters the nation. To structure arguments, Leave leaders used control as a panacea: control of the laws, control of money, and control of migration (Foucault, 1980). This was a strategic discourse that rendered immigration anxieties negotiable because it established them as part of a larger value, something like sovereignty, which cut right across the political divide.

In DI terms, the discourse on the referendum reveals that there is a strategic attempt by the leaders to make a concrete policy subject to a moral purpose. Take Back Control was not actually concerning the issue of immigration, but rather symbolic and guaranteed a British resurgence of independence. Repeating this refrain, campaigners made sovereignty a master signifier, a general concept which voters could fill with their own anxieties (economic loss of jobs, cultural transformation, etc.). This uncertainty made the slogan so significant: every voter of the Leave could think of a threat that is otherwise behind the word control (Foucault, 2007). This slogan, in the terms of DI, was an associative narration between nationalist discourse and particular policy requirements.

Figure 1
How Britain Voted in the E.U. Referendum



(<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/24/world/europe/how-britain-voted-brexit-referendum.html>)

This is supplemented by the Foucaultian analysis, which poses what the consequences of this narrative were. It describes EU migration as a loss of control, and this puts EU citizens themselves as a problem to be controlled. A legendary poster of the Leave campaign, a well-known picture of long queues of refugees, intentionally merged the topic of asylum seekers with the topic of EU immigration and border protection in one crisis. It served as a symbol of national engulfment as a biopolitical symbol. With its help, this dispositif made foreign migrants seem as people who could potentially invade the country, and their appearance justified the tightening of borders. It even used progressive rhetoric (e.g. supporting the NHS by importing doctors) as evidence that Brexit will resolve labor shortages to turn the discussion around from we need migrants to we say when we want to employ migrants (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). Such an understanding, referred to as Foucaultian, is that this narrative did not simply mirror the already existing views; it generated a new reality in which to view immigration. Practically, the discourse of Brexit has changed the nature of the difference between the us and the them: the EU inhabitants became not merely friendly European citizens, but parts of a perceived sovereignty crisis.

Even the pro-Remain leaders took matters into their own hands to concede in parliament. Prime Minister David Cameron, in support of Remain, however, stated that Britain would not join a European superstate, retain the pound, and, more importantly, maintain our borders. He intended legal jurisdiction, but campaigners parroted the same as providing discovery in the name of control. In doing so, mainstream actors supported the frame according to which sovereignty = border power (Hayton, 2025). According to academics, this appeal to sovereignty was itself a narrative that was strategic, and which appealed to both left (underlying self-determination) and right (national security). It sewed various interests around a mere narration: the free movement of people, the lack of control, "we need to remedy it."

The Hostile Environment and the Windrush Scandal: Disciplining the "Illegal"

After the 2016 referendum, discussions on migration shifted their focus to another area: not only the EU

citizens, but also any migrant who is illegal. The Conservative party redoubled its efforts to maintain the Hostile Environment policy first implemented by the Home Secretary Theresa May (2012-2016) when she stated that the goal was to make here in Britain a truly hostile place to illegal immigrants. These policies were incorporated into the law by the Immigration Act 2014 and the 2016 extension (Lehman et al., 2016). As an example, a new law mandated landlords, employers, banks, and even the NHS to verify the status of immigrants before renting property, hiring, or rendering services. According to Davies (2022), the policy made the mindset of border control enter the social and economic life of people daily since it compelled both landlords and employers, as well as banks and NHS services, to conduct immigration status checks. Practically, any interaction between a resident and an official (landlord or the doctor) had a risk of turning into a border enforcement moment. Some of the commentators described it as weaponizing paperwork, implying that even through the daily dealings, migrants without flawless documents had to encounter traps.

DI analysis shows the way this strategy came to be framed in the popular discourse. The government put it on the question of equity and rule of law: the illegal immigrants should not be allowed to access governmental services when other people act according to the regulations (Migration Observatory, 2025). Home Office communication focused on the safety of public services and the employment of legal residents. E.g., a fine on employers who are aware they are employing illegal workers was introduced as a tough justice measure. The egalitarianism proposed in the rhetoric implied a goal of making the system just for everyone who is supposed to be here. As a matter of fact, though, the strength of the discourse was that of ambiguity. Such terms as illegal or undeserving summed up a heterogeneous group (overstayers, long-term residents without papers, even visa violators) into one guilty "class."

Figure 2

Family Visas Issued Report

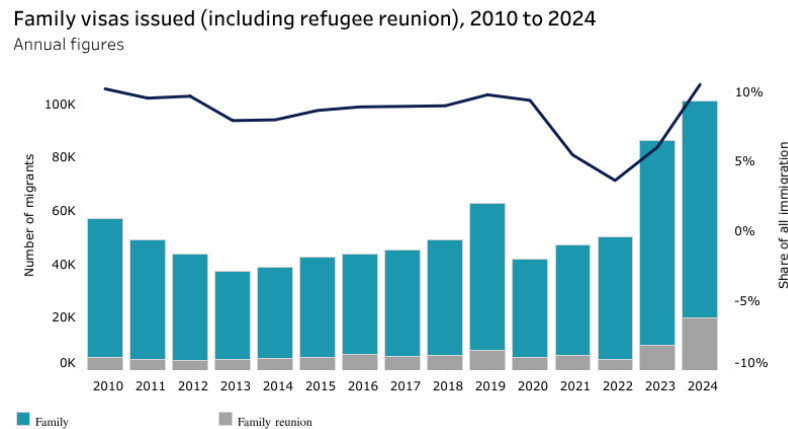


Figure 1 (Source: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/who-migrates-to-the-uk-and-why/>)

According to the Foucauldian approach, Hostile Environment is the technology of control in action. It was not merely a complex of policies, but a machine (dispositif) that gave rise to an illegal migrant subject. Undocumented status was considered to be the ultimate disqualification for common citizens who, at the same time, became the people of suspicion themselves (Mirallas and Grimalt, 2016). This standardized documentation is verified. In fact, such sweeps of rules were reported in the field, including Windrush-era Britons (legal citizens). In one editorial, the policy was said to have demanded that long-term residents demonstrate their right to stay in the UK. The Foucauldian perspective recognizes the shift of disciplining others and subjecting all people to the logic of border control. The citizens stayed under the threat of being regarded as illegal in case they had no paperwork. Essentially, the migrants were always being suspects and it was via identity papers that they were being interrogated by the discourse of Hostile Environment.

This dynamic was revealed in a harsh way due to the Windrush scandal in 2018. Decades-long immigrants from the Caribbean took their place in the list as illegal people without jobs and healthcare. In the case mentioned in the Guardian, the Windrush generation was approximately 160 individuals (the majority of Caribbean origin) detained or expelled, and as many as 8,000 were trapped in this mess of misery (Saleh-Hughes, 2025).

With the pressure of politics, the Prime Minister Theresa May apologized, promising that the people who came into the Caribbean before 1973 have a right to stay in the UK. However, Foucauldian analysis poses the question: why prove it at all? The solution is the ingrained system of checks. Things have not changed following Windrush, as the government merely renamed the policy, which is now known as the compliant environment presented by the Home Office, changing only the logic (Schmidt, 2010). This change was reflected in a Guardian editorial: it described the new words as a change of name, but not a change of product. That is, the mechanism of control still worked under another brand.

Post-Brexit Shifts: Points-Based System and the Rwanda Plan

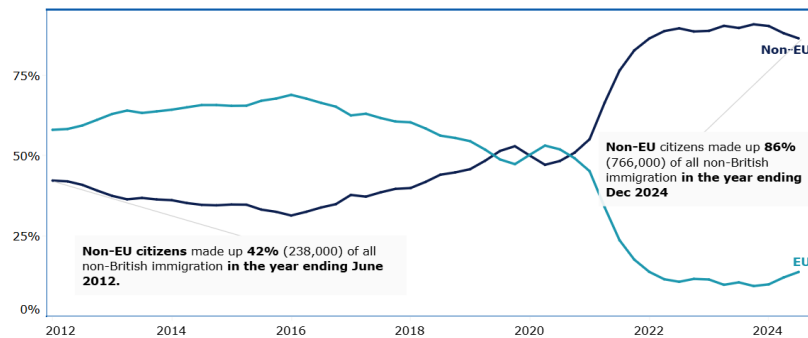
Since Brexit was attained, a discourse of sovereignty changed to other control discourses. A new Points-Based System (PBS) introduced in 2020 was framed as a new, more modernized, and meritocratic way to conduct immigration. The internal minister, Priti Patel, highlighted the fact that the system will help people arrive in the country with the ability to contribute to the nation and economy in terms of the right skills. The official press releases boasted that the scheme would lead to an end of depending on cheap labour from Europe as it would focus on the high-skilled migrants of other parts of the world. DI-wise, the PBS was being sold as the work of

economic logic of Brexit: freedom to attract global talents, not being tied to the EU. The government discourse presented the old regime (free movement) as selective and the new one as being fine-tuned to the needs of Britain (Vaughan-Williams, 2010). There was a shift in the level of discourse, but this was no longer calling sovereign deficit (you are taking our jobs), but economic choice (we will

choose the best and the brightest). Britain was discussed as receptive to talent in other countries, but on British terms, through social media and press releases. Even the citizens of the EU, starting in 2021, would have the same requirements as the rest of the population; one more point to stress that Britain has taken charge of who gains access now.

Figure 2

More than eight in ten people who moved to the UK between 2021 and 2024 were non-EU citizens.



(Source: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/who-migrates-to-the-uk-and-why/>)

At the same time, a lot of attention was paid to the small boats crisis. In 2018, thousands of crossings of the Channel were made illegally. These migrants were described in mature terms by politicians. The Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in April 2022 that approximately 70 percent of small-boat arrivals were men under 40 years old, who paid people smugglers to jump the asylum system. He promised that using Brexit Britain could eventually control illegal migration (Walters, 2015). The arrival of boats in this story was not the consequence of war or international displacement but the invasion of criminals. The Rwanda plan is the radical solution that was introduced by Johnson in his speech. Presented as an innovation that came about as a result of Brexit, it made a promise that every person who enters the country illicitly would be sent back to Rwanda. The government amalgamated two meta-discourses by constructing Rwanda as a safe third country and migrants as the possible perpetrators of abuse (of the UK system), namely a discourse of humanitarian (rescuing genuine refugees abroad) and punitive (punishing “illigals with removal).

This rhetoric escalated under the rule of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Home Secretary Suella Braverman came under fire after she informed Parliament that the nation was being invaded by migrants in small boats. Foucauldian analysis is dramatic in this case: the frame of invasion is made as a military one that repositions asylum seekers as enemies. This rhetoric (the formation of a stereotypical image of a security threat) justifies exceptional action (processing abroad, naval patrol, etc.). It removes the agency and needs of the refugees as well. Even the opposition members in the parliament echoed the language of control at times. The most significant fact is that both leaders are guided by a set of skills or security, but they all act in the same discursive sphere: migration is something to be controlled, regulated, or fixed all the time, instead of being considered the basic characteristic of a globalized society.

These control narratives were successful in mixed ways in terms of results. The PBS decreased the net inflows of EU nationals, but did not manage to bring down the total migration because there are other causes (global labor demand, humanitarian admissions). Later in 2023, the net migration level

actually started to decline based on the level at the time of Brexit. Nevertheless, the narrative impacts were observed: policymakers could hardly discuss migration in any other aspect than control. The Foucaultian vision is that the economic demands of movement (labor shortages and demographic requirements) were constantly recast as issues of sovereignty or enforcement. Even the pressing gaps in the workforce were not described using the economic models, but rather by the open-border critics or the inadequate training policies. That is, the discourse of control assimilated or neutralized other explanations.

Recent Labour Government Rhetoric (2024–25): Continuity in Rebranding

The election of May 2024 made the Labour Party come to power following 15 years of Conservative rule. Some of the supporters had some hope that the discourse would tilt towards the left, as the Labour Party does. In fact, leaders of the Labour Party used more direct thematic expressions related to safe and legal ways and compassion towards refugees. The general format was, however, still more or less the same. Even with a promise to have improved policy management, labour continued insisting on toughness against illegal immigration. In fact, their manifesto promised to put an end to the lawlessness and to pursue vile gangs helping in crossings of the channels (Schwiertz, 2025). It offered a new Border Security Command consisting of counter-terrorism authorities to destroy boat gangs. This language gang's security and enforcement are conservative in nature. In reality, the Labour government was inheriting much of the same priorities (detention, returns, more stringent checks) and could boast of the same in near identical language.

The continuity of Labour may be directly traced in their official speeches. An example of this can be the comments of the Prime Minister in March 2025, after attempting to take office, he stated that the ministers had deported over 24,000 people who had no right to be here. He compared this number with the previous Rwanda scheme having deported only four people, implying it will be more efficient at removals under the new government (Tabacsko, 2023). Although the Labour ministers are more concerned about other values (e.g., humanitarian consideration of those who are in real need), it still comes down to the same issue definition: irregular

migrants are illegal or need to be taken away in order to restore order.

The similarities were pointed out immediately by advocacy groups. Law Enforcement Enver Solomon of the Refugee Council called on the government to calm down and be more serious about safe routes rather than overpromising the government on enforcement. The same criticism can be made: every government is pressured to show some measure of authority, in most cases, through proclaiming arrests or returns. Nevertheless, Foucauldian analysis cautions that it is also not enough to analyze each smuggler or boat separately and repeat the same paradigm (Tournier-Sol, 2025). The very infrastructure of administration, the production of the illegalized migrant, survives administrations.

Overall, we find that the discourses concerned with immigration in the UK have been very constant in one way, namely, all the major parties have worked within a self-reinforcing discourse of control. On the one hand, both Conservatives and Labour have positioned immigration as a controllable menace. DI makes us realize that politicians of various colors continue to use the concept of security, justice, and professional skills as a means to attract voters. Foucaultian critique reveals that these concepts constitute a strong apparatus that constitutes migrants as other people to be controlled, despite the philosophy manifested.

Conclusion

This paper has followed the discursive path of the takeover of the UK immigration policy discourse by immigration discourses of control since the year 2010, regardless of the colour of political administration. This has brought together two important contributions by taking Discursive Institutionalism and Foucauldian discourse analysis together. To begin with, we demonstrate how political actors have politically constructed immigration as a national sovereignty, national security, and administrative control issue. Victims of these narratives were intended to be close to popular feelings and official limitations: these are stories like take back control and smash the gangs. They demonstrate the understanding by DI that ideas are not merely epiphenomenal but controlling tools in politics. Second, we demonstrate how these stories are embedded, and that becomes an effective mechanism: they give birth to a set of available

categories of legal and illegal migrants, a normalizing effect of regular checks and monitoring, and a masking of other policy rationalities (like market demand or human rights). Herein, the Foucauldian argument is that discourse has the power to create social realities and not merely describe them.

In our evaluation, we believe that DI and Foucauldian viewpoints need to intersect to provide a more detailed explanation than either of them does. DI reveals the agency of leaders to curb the field of potential policies, whereas Foucauldian analysis sheds light on a structure of thought that restricts the field. These, in addition, serve to make sense of the vicious cycles UK policy has been forced to take: as every policy change (EU referendum, new Acts, new systems) is announced, the same master narrative of control is re-enacted with new symbols (points system, NGOs) added but rarely ever challenged in substance.

Other explanations were just brushed through. We accept the contribution of economic needs (as Hampshire and others proclaim) and institutional legacies (as Dias-Abey records) to this. A structural reliance on a migrant workforce can serve as an instance: it can push governments to tolerate some migration rates. Equally, the historical legal frameworks (e.g., the implementation of a points system by the New Labour) have brought about path dependencies. This is certainly the influence of these factors and restricting choices. Nevertheless, according to our results, even those factors are often construed by the ruling discourse. Migration is not just a reaction to economic demand; migration has been politically characterized as a failure to restrict borders. Of the rest, in other words, structural realities can be the terrain underlying it, yet discourses can establish which things about that terrain are visible and what solutions are acceptable.

Limitations

Our research is more qualitative in nature and is more UK-oriented. We have not undertaken the statistical analysis of the public attitudes or policy effects. Neither have we looked to cross-national comparisons, which would put the uniqueness of the UK case to the test. The published discourse: speeches, laws, manifestos, and significant media, is also the focus of our attention, to which we attach the label of exclusion of the subaltern narratives

(one of the voices of migrants, some internal memos). Future studies might be able to measure the impact of discourse (e.g., through questionnaires or experimental vignettes) or refer to the experience of other countries. Nevertheless, even within these confinements, our integrated discourse approach gives a profound understanding of the manner in which UK immigration policy has been influenced, more by words and ideas than by mere economic or institutional requirements.

Contributions

The key scholarly value of this article is that migration control did not succeed in the UK for a significantly long time, and it is impossible not to trace it to the language through which the entire thing of migration control is framed. We demonstrate, by reconciling DI and Foucauldian strategies to the analysis of the UK immigration policy empirically, how ideas form circles of self-fulfillment. Such an integrated view has the capability to inform important policy and migration research through the understanding that both policy stability and change cannot be comprehensively understood without studying discourse. In practice, this would imply that any radical policy change (by either politicians or activists) would have to respond to the existing narrative, as well as take into account the situation with the policy mechanics. More generally, our analysis highlights that the policies of such issues as immigration are not only technical solutions but also projects of immense significance that are highly political in nature.

Limitations and Future Work

As it has been mentioned, we are conducting an interpretive and qualitative analysis. It does not by any means gauge the extent to which public opinion has been influenced by these discourses and how the statements by politicians have been translated into votes or alterations of policies. We also failed to systematically examine migrant perceptions and the experiences they get out of these discourses. These gaps could be filled with future work. The generalizability of the integrated DI–Foucault model could be tested by comparing the examples of similar control stories used in other countries (e.g., in the US or EU states) and determining their impact. Additionally, longitudinal studies may analyze whether and how discourses change (e.g.,

whether new facts or phenomena change the storyline). Lastly, given our results, it could be experimented with whether discourse interventions, such as advocating other frames of migration (economic partnership, global justice, etc.), could help policy discussion to leave the control paradigm.

To sum up, according to our research, UK immigration policy has traditionally been a politics of meaning as much as of economics or demographics on its part. These recurrent policy

failures and blunders are explained after observing that, to the policymakers and the citizenry, immigration is principally viewed through the prism of control. To change policy outcomes, it might be necessary also to change the discourse, which is, however, a tall order, yet it is absolutely clear that our combined analysis shows it as a necessity as well as a challenge.

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