

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA 24A Anthropology
Title of case study: Transforming the Collection, Presentation, and Use of Data in the UK Migration Policy Debate
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research carried out at the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration Policy and Society (COMPAS) and disseminated through an accessible multimedia website, 'The Migration Observatory', has transformed public and policy debate on migration and changed the practices of government departments, media, and third-sector organizations regarding migration data. As a result of COMPAS's research on public attitudes to immigration, migrants' remittance payments, and employers' demand for migrant labour, these groups have been able to make stronger, evidence-based arguments and decisions.</p> <p>The impact has occurred in two main ways: (1) direct impact on public debates; and (2) changes in the practices of those participating in, or reporting on, those debates. The direct impact has included evidence for arguments against new restrictions on student immigration, and related arguments in favour of changing the way student immigration statistics are tracked. It has also included shaping deliberations on the potential for developing new measures of remittances by the Office of National Statistics. Changes in practice have involved the dissemination of research and data through the vehicle of the Migration Observatory. The Observatory has enabled journalists, civil servants, parliamentarians, and NGOs to use a more accurate and impartial evidence base in debates on migration issues, and to inform the public about such issues.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Researchers at Oxford involved in the research:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Scott Blinder: at Oxford since 2005; Senior Researcher at COMPAS since 2010; Director, Migration Observatory, 2013-present; 2. Dr Carlos Vargas-Silva: at Oxford since 2009; Senior Researcher at COMPAS since 2010; 3. Dr Martin Ruhs: Senior Researcher, COMPAS, 2008-2012; Director, Migration Observatory, 2010-2012; 4. Professor Bridget Anderson: at Oxford since 2003; Professor of Migration and Citizenship and Deputy Director of COMPAS, since 2012. <p>The team, based at COMPAS, covers an array of migration research interests, and convey their work to the public through the vehicle of the Migration Observatory, a high-profile web platform launched in 2011. Three key lines of research underpin the impact reported: Blinder's research on public attitudes towards immigration; Vargas-Silva's research on remittances; and Ruhs' work (including work with Anderson) on employers' demand for migrant labour. All of these were disseminated through the Migration Observatory website, and the existence of these research findings was essential to the initial creation of the Observatory.</p> <p>The majority of the British public express preferences for reduced levels of immigration to Britain, when asked. Yet immigration is heterogeneous, leaving an open question about what types of immigrants public opinion would like to see reduced. Blinder's research found that most respondents thought of asylum seekers and labour migrants in surveys, while surprisingly, only a small minority thought of international students, despite the fact that students comprised the largest of the four main channels of immigration to Britain in the last few years. Thus, the research shows a mismatch between immigration as imagined by members of the public and immigration as counted in government statistics and targeted in government policies. This has become a key data point in arguments against limitations on student immigration and for removing students from the net migration target or net migration statistics. [Section 3: R1]</p> <p>Vargas-Silva's research (with Isaacs and Hugo, Developing Markets Associates Limited, DMA; and with Jha and Sugiyarto, Asian Development Bank, ADB) examined remittances, or transfers of money, from residents of one country to residents of another country, often involving migrants sending money to families and communities in their home country. [R2,R3] In all cases Vargas-Silva was the sole academic member of the research teams and collaborated with private sector organizations (i.e. DMA) and multilateral organizations (i.e. ADB). Vargas-Silva provided the technical and academic background for the studies, while the other members provided</p>

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complementary insights from private and policy-sector perspectives. By many measures, remittances represent a larger flow of money to many developing countries than international aid from governments. Vargas-Silva's research compares how remittances are measured in other countries and by international organizations and provides comparative data on existing remittance estimates for transfer to and from the UK. Further, the research includes explanations of changes in remittances to the UK over time and detailed examination of remittances from the UK to Bangladesh and Pakistan, finding that the UK accounted for £626 million in remittances to Bangladesh and £1,228 million in remittances to Pakistan in the fiscal year 2012-2013.

Ruhs led a research programme (including articles written with Anderson and with Phil Martin of UC-Davis but culminating in a single-authored book) that has shown that immigration levels – particularly in labour migration – are not determined by immigration policy alone; levels of immigration are also determined by labour market demand and by related policies toward migrants' rights. [R4,R5,R6] A key example is the comparison between Britain and Sweden. Both countries (along with Ireland but unlike the rest of the EU) opened their labour markets to 'A8' migrants (nationals of the eight countries that joined the EU in 2004). By 2006, hundreds of thousands of Eastern Europeans had come to work in Britain, while only about 5,000 found jobs in Sweden in the same period. Ruhs and Martin argue that Sweden's tightly regulated labour market, which guarantees collectively bargained wages and rights to all workers in a given industry, was critical in reducing incentives for employers to hire migrants. [R5] Ruhs developed this argument into a book-length comparative empirical project showing trade-offs between openness to migrants and the rights accorded to migrants once they have arrived. [R6]

Note that Ruhs' broader work is also the subject of a case study for the Social Policy panel (UOA22), but in this case study the focus is on a distinct set of impacts through the vehicle of the Migration Observatory.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Blinder, S. 2013 (forthcoming). 'Imagined Immigration: The Impact of Different Meanings of "Immigrants" in Public Opinion and Policy Debates in Britain' *Political Studies*.
- [R2] Isaacs, L., C. Vargas-Silva, & S. Hugo 2012. *EU Remittances for Developing Countries, Remaining Barriers, Challenges and Recommendations*, EuropeAid/129783/C/SER/multi Project No. 2011/266478-Version 1, Final Report.
- [R3] Jha, S., G. Sugiyarto, & C. Vargas-Silva 2012. 'Migration and Remittances in Bangladesh and Pakistan: Evidence from Two Host Countries' Chapter 13 in I. Sirkeci, J.H. Cohen, & D. Ratha (eds) *Migration and Remittances During the Global Financial Crisis and Beyond*. World Bank.
- [R4] Anderson, B. and M. Ruhs 2012. 'Reliance on Migrant Workers: Inevitability or Policy Choice?' *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 20(1): 23-30.
- [R5] Ruhs, M. & P. Martin 2008. 'Numbers vs. Rights: Trade-Offs and Guest Worker Programs' *International Migration Review* 42(1): 249-65.
- [R6] Ruhs, M. 2013. *The Price of Rights: Regulating International Labour Migration*. Princeton University Press.

Research Grants:

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4. Details of the impact

The research cited above has had impact in two distinct ways: (1) **directly informing the migration debate**, changing its terms and providing the information needed to make evidence-based arguments in the policy arena; (2) **changing the practices of parliamentarians and other participants in the migration debate, including journalists who influence public opinion**, thanks to the credibility of Ruhs' research, which enabled the establishment of the Migration Observatory.

1) Directly informing the debate

a) Public opinion on immigration in Britain. Blinder's research on public attitudes changed the terms of the debate over student migration, and in the process contributed to a decision to change the reporting of immigration statistics. These findings have introduced an important addition to the evidence base regarding policies and data on international students. The Chief Executive of Universities UK (UUK) cited the research in two contexts. First, it was used in evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills.[C1] Based on this evidence, the Committee recommended removing international students from the government's migration target. Within days of the hearing the government agreed to provide immigration statistics disaggregated into students and non-students.[C2] In addition, the Chief Executive of UUK cited the research in the media to rebut claims about attitudes toward student immigration that came from a poll conducted by a pressure group.[C3]

This impact occurred prior to publication of the relevant journal article [R1] because the findings were disseminated in a report ('Thinking Behind the Numbers') published on the Migration Observatory website in October 2011. The report reached a large audience, receiving extensive media coverage including BBC News, the *Daily Mail*, *Sunday Telegraph*, and the *Independent*, and was cited directly by Vince Cable (Minister, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) in a speech in December 2011.[C4]

b) Remittances. Vargas-Silva's research on migrants' remittances had a direct input to internal debate within the Office of National Statistics on methodologies for measuring remittances. Vargas-Silva's research was used in internal ONS discussions to develop the first official measures of remittances for the UK. The study of remittance flows between the UK and Bangladesh and Pakistan [R2,R3] provided the basis for Vargas-Silva's briefing paper for the Migration Observatory (Aug 2011), prior to the appearance of the scholarly articles above. Thus, the Migration Observatory acted as the vehicle for impact. An official in the Trade and Transfers team in the Business Indicators and Balance of Payments section of the ONS, who was charged with updating the UK's international reporting of balance of payments data, read this briefing and contacted Vargas-Silva directly by email and in person to discuss options for measuring remittances. The detailed explanations of the methods for measuring remittances and the discussion of their relative strengths and weaknesses, provided by Vargas-Silva's research [R2, R3], better informed the ONS. The current ONS official leading this project has testified that Vargas-Silva's research was quoted at a key internal ONS meeting of a methods committee, and was useful in shaping ONS deliberations. Vargas-Silva's discussion of the weaknesses of existing measures ultimately informed ONS's decision that present data do not offer an adequate method for measuring UK remittances.[C5] As a result, the ONS rejected the idea that it should simply adopt existing international measures of remittances, at least until better data and methods are available.

2) Changing practices in how migration is debated and reported to the public

Ruhs' research on labour markets and migration [R4,R5,R6] was critical in establishing the intellectual credibility and independence of the Migration Observatory, which has in turn changed practices for many participants and observers of the migration policy debate, in the following ways.

First, previously, parliamentarians, civil servants, NGOs, and journalists had relied on organizations such as IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) and Migration Watch for data and analysis on migration, yet these organizations have clearly stated political agendas and are thus less impartial. The Observatory has changed practices in a variety of ways among these stakeholders by introducing an accessible and impartial source of data that can be used to increase the evidentiary basis of policy debates and media coverage. For example, MPs from three different parties cited Observatory research in debate in the House of Commons:[C6] in this instance, Migration Observatory analysis provided an evidence base for discussing proposals to limit to the UK's population below 70 million, as two MPs cited the report during the debate (one Conservative, one SNP), while a third MP (Labour) cited many of its key findings, including the Observatory's recognizable term the net migration 'bounce', referring to reductions in emigration that follow from earlier reductions in immigration.[C6, cols 447-448] In another instance, the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee made recommendations for improved collection and public communication of migration statistics, drawing on written evidence from the Observatory and oral testimony by Blinder.[C7] Journalists use Observatory work extensively. As one journalist put it, "Before (the Migration Observatory) I'd use Migration Watch quite a lot. I think

of them as credible but they are partial, so while I still use them, I now use them more for quotes than for information.”[C8] Observatory work also has allowed journalists to write about new aspects of the migration issue where they previously lacked access to data or analysis.[C9]

This impact extends beyond reporting on migration. Civil society organizations have also benefited from the Migration Observatory, which offers impartial evidence that they can use to support their arguments.[C10] The creation of the Observatory as a reliable source has also changed parliamentarians’ practices, making elements of the migration debate better grounded in reliable evidence, as testified in the *Observer* editorial of 2 Sept 2012.[C11]

These impacts are directly linked to Ruhs’ research, which was essential for establishing the Observatory as a reliable, credible, and non-partisan source of public information. First, the Observatory is widely trusted because it is rooted in Oxford University research, particularly that undertaken by Ruhs prior to 2011.[R4-R6] Second, Ruhs’ research on labour markets led him to prominent roles that bestowed public trust for political impartiality. As a direct result of his research, he became Specialist Advisor to the House of Lords Inquiry into the economic impacts of migration to Britain (2008) and member of the Migration Advisory Committee, the politically neutral body that advises the government on migration data and policy (2007-present). These roles have helped his research and the Migration Observatory to gain credibility and prominence within UK policymaking circles.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [C1] Parliamentary Evidence given by Universities UK:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmbis/425/425.pdf> (Business, Innovation and Skills Committee - Minutes of Evidence HC 425, Oral Evidence Taken before the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, Tuesday 26 June 2012, see Chief Executive of UUK’s response to Q10, page Ev 3, p.27).
- [C2] ‘Foreign Students to be Marked Out in Immigration Figures’ *Daily Telegraph* (13.9.2012):
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9541141/Foreign-students-to-be-marked-out-in-immigration-figures.html>
- [C3] *Times Higher Education*. ‘Poll Claims Public in Favour of Cap on Foreign Students’ (17.9.2012): http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/421167_article
- [C4] Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, Minister’s speech to British Council:
<http://news.bis.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?ReleaseID=422411&NewsAreaID=2>, para 8.
- [C5] ONS official in the Trade and Transfers team in the Business Indicators and Balance of Payments section confirms impact on decision on remittances measurement. (on file)
- [C6] Hansard HC Deb 6 Sep 2012, vol 549, cols 424, 433, 439, 447-448
(<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm120906/debtext/120906-0002.htm>)
- [C7] House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee report on migration statistics:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-select-committee/news/migration-statistics-report-published/> (see p.12, pp.16-17, p.20, p.23 (n63 ,n64), p.24, p.Ev1 - Ev9)
- [C8] Firetail Evaluation of Migration Observatory on change in media/parliament/civil society practice (Confidential document, held on file), p. 25.
- [C9] Columnist for the *Guardian* (Confidential document – Comment made in follow-up Firetail Evaluation) confirms broader coverage of migration issues due to Migration Observatory work (held on file).
- [C10] Policy Director of the Migrants’ Rights Network (Confidential document – Comment made in follow-up Firetail Evaluation) confirms use of Migration Observatory data and analysis to improve the evidentiary basis of policy arguments (held on file).
- [C11] The *Observer*, ‘Migration Confusion is Costing Britain Dear’ (editorial) (2.9.2012):
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/sep/02/observer-editorial-immigration-policy>.