

IMMIGRATION AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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IMMIGRATION AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

- Immigration and the economic well-being of UK-born individuals
 - relatively benign impacts on wages and unemployment
 - same when it comes to education, crime and other objective indicators
 - Net contributors to the public purse

- Still associated with hostile political reactions
 - Taking back control
 - Build a wall

WHAT ABOUT SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

- Could subjective well-being help us better understand the sharp division on immigration issues?
- **While immigration may not impose economic costs, it could be a source of psychological distress for UK-born individuals based on the *belief* that migrants are an economic or cultural threat, irrespective of whether this is true or not**

WHAT DID WE DO

- Large scale household longitudinal survey (Understanding Society) - geocoded
 - indicators of subjective well-being
 - *General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)*
 - *Life satisfaction*
- Matched survey with numbers of foreign individuals in each Local Authority area from ONS
- For the **same** individuals we look at how their subjective well-being changed over time in response to changes in the numbers (and share) of foreign born individuals living in their local area

WHAT DID WE FIND

- For the population as a whole immigration matters little for subjective well-being
 - a small statistically significant and negative association (not very substantive)

BUT

- A lot of heterogeneity

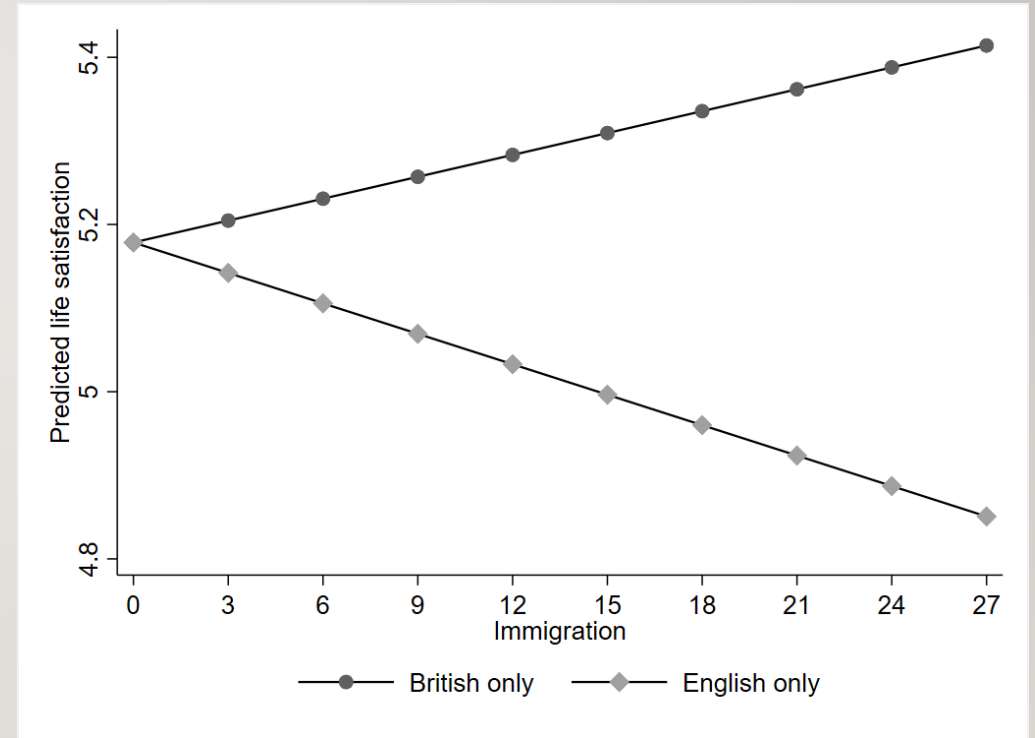
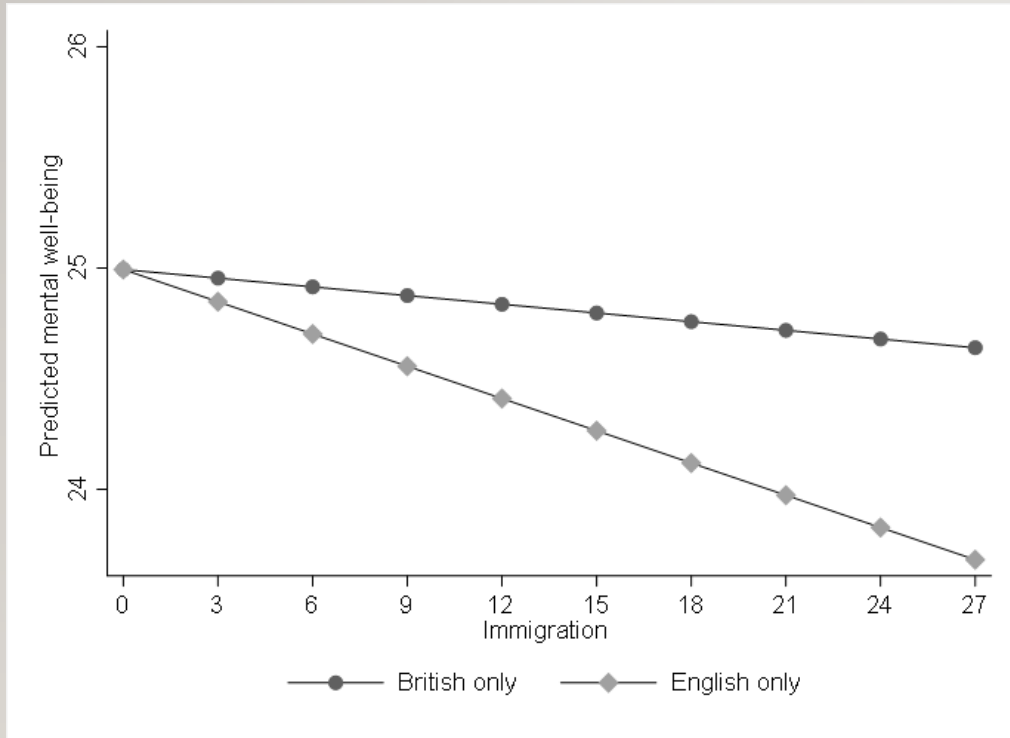
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

- Looking at the net population effects masked a lot of differences across groups
- Relatively older, poorer, less well educated and the unemployed seem to be most impacted
 - **close correspondence between what we found and the Brexit vote**

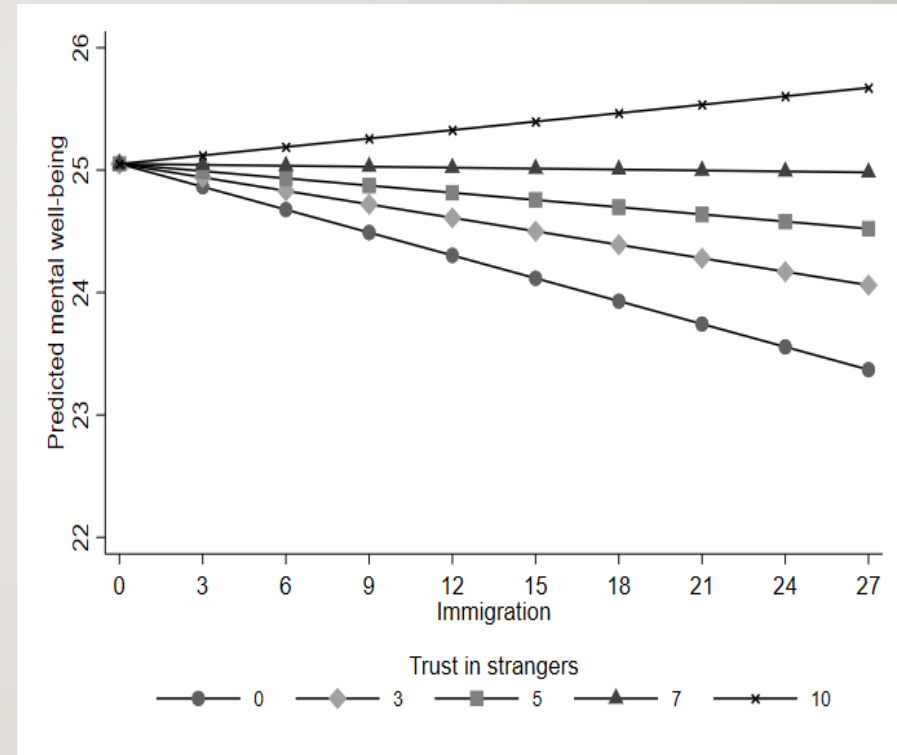
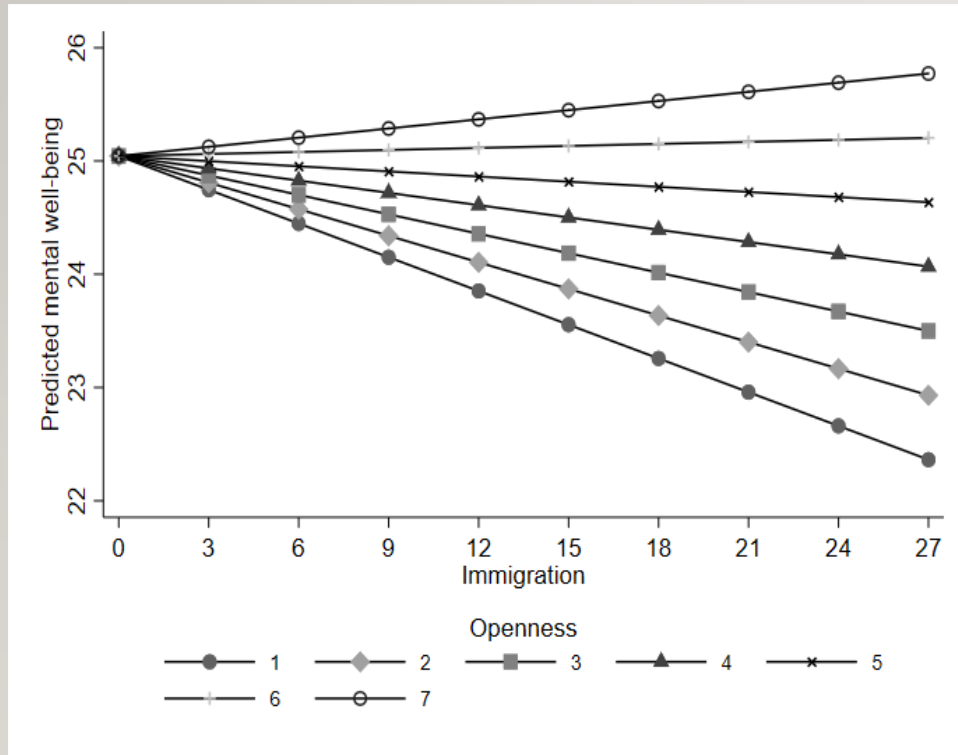
WHAT LIES BEHIND THESE DIFFERENCES

- *Perceived economic threat?* – may be subjective but nonetheless real
 - Any negative impacts are more apparent in times of economic stress
- *Perceived cultural threat?*
 - differences according to *national identity* are instructive here
- Common distinction in the literature between ethnic and civic forms of national identity
 - We used *English v British* as a useful proxy

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMMIGRATION AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING FOR UK-BORN INDIVIDUALS WHO IDENTIFY AS ENGLISH AND BRITISH



PERSONALITY TRAITS: OPENNESS AND TRUST



FINAL THOUGHTS

- **Focusing on subjective well-being can help us better understand the sharp variation in public attitudes to immigration**
 - if immigration 'hurts' some people then this can pose a challenge for integration
- Our main message is however **not** that immigration is harmful for peoples well-being (or beneficial for that matter), rather the relationship between these variables varies across the population
- **The experience appears to be very different for older, poorer, unemployed individuals and those who feel more English than British, than other groups in society**

WHAT CAN/SHOULD WE DO

Suggestions as opposed to being prescriptive

- Tackling misleading stereotypes will likely be a good start
- Anything that promotes a civic as opposed to ethnic conception of national identity may help (educational system?)
- Fostering an environment where it is safe to interact with strangers, and one which encourages openness and engagement with others from different backgrounds from a young age may be beneficial
- Interventions aimed at encouraging civic engagement may help to foster trust

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- My collaborators on various aspects of this work: Mirko Moro (University of Stirling), Muhammad Waqas (University of Bradford), Liam Delaney (London School of Economics and Political Science) and Tony Heron (University of York)

For more details - Papers/Working papers

- Howley, P. Moro, M. Waqas, M., Delaney, L. and Heron, T. (2020) It's *not* all about the economy stupid! Immigration and subjective well-being in England. *Work, Employment and Society*, 1-18. Free to access version available here: <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/148014/>
- Howley, P. and Waqas, M. (2021) National Identity and Brexit. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3464210
- Howley, P. Ocean, N. and Waqas, M. (2021) Open minds, open borders: Individual differences in the relationship between immigration and psychological well-being. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3321720.

Blogs

- Howley P. *How immigration can make some UK-born residents feel worse off even if they aren't* Published in [The Conversation](#), September 6, 2019
- Howley P. and Moro, M. *Measuring the impact of immigration for subjective well-being*. Published [here](#)