



The Southampton Conversation The People's Poll

Immigration is one of the most topical issues in Southampton. On Saturday 13th December 2014, 28 citizens attended the Southampton Conversation to discuss immigration policy with fellow citizens and experts. After all, everyone has a view on immigration. What we found was that people's views changed after becoming better informed and more engaged with the issues. And people even developed their own policies to tackle some of the issues raised. **Everyone who attended the People's Poll said they thoroughly enjoyed the event, and would attend another!**

The event was run by the Southern Policy Centre, an independent cross-party think tank for central Southern England with support from the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies and the University of Cambridge. The event began with a warm welcome from the chair, John Denham MP. Participants completed a questionnaire, saying how strongly they supported or opposed each of the four proposed reforms on immigration. While the organisers do not endorse the policy ideas they assist in helping get the conversation started. Here are the four policy propositions:

1. Law enforcement officers should single out employers who employ migrants to ensure employers pay the minimum wage, comply with health and safety law and anti-discrimination law.
2. All migrants should be expected to work in this country for two years before they can get access to benefits, tax credits or social housing.
3. EU countries should agree that 'free movement' can be temporarily suspended if any EU country is receiving more EU migrants than its labour market, housing or public services can cope with.
4. Local authorities should provide free English language tuition to all legal migrants.





After completing the questionnaire, participants heard from experts arguing the pros and cons of each policy idea. Experts included: Tim Finch of IPPR, Professor Jane Falkingham of the University of Southampton, Richard Beauchamp of Population Matters, and Dr Paulina Trevena of the University of Glasgow.

Participants then engaged in small group discussions with moderators about the four policy ideas. As part of the small group discussions, participants developed questions to ask experts on each issue, and participants even put forward their own counter-policies. The chair then took a hand poll to gauge whether there was support from participants for the counter-policies. After the discussions participants repeated the initial survey in order to measure whether their views had changed.

The polling process reveals the conclusions the public would reach if people had the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the issues. As you can see from the results, participant's views changed after discussions.

With declining numbers of citizens turning out to vote in general elections and local elections, policy-makers need a new way to engage citizens in politics. The People's Poll is a fantastic way of getting citizens together to discuss issues that matter to you, your family, and your community in an environment that encourages the sharing of diverse views. It's also a great opportunity for policy-makers to understand why people have strong opinions about immigration, the reasons citizens support certain policies over others, and it's a forum to discuss new policy ideas with citizens to gauge public opinion.





The Results of The People's Poll

The following four tables show the results of a number of questions that were polled on the day. **Table 1** shows the results of a poll about participant's opinions concerning a wide range of political issues. **Table 2** highlights participant's opinions about the four policy propositions before and after the Southampton Conversation. **Table 3** illustrates the counter-proposals developed by participants and the numbers of participants who supported and opposed the propositions.

Table 1:

Here are some things that people find more or less important for themselves or society. On a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 is "extremely unimportant", 10 is "extremely important", and 5 is exactly in the middle, **how important or unimportant would you say each of the following is to you?**

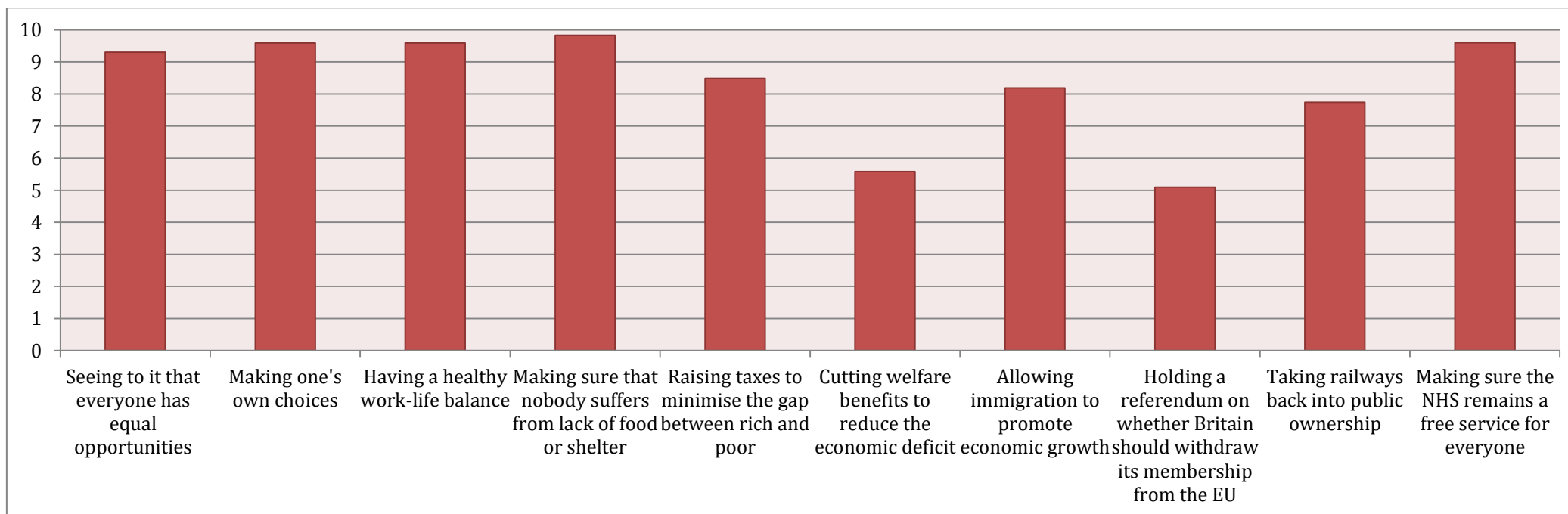
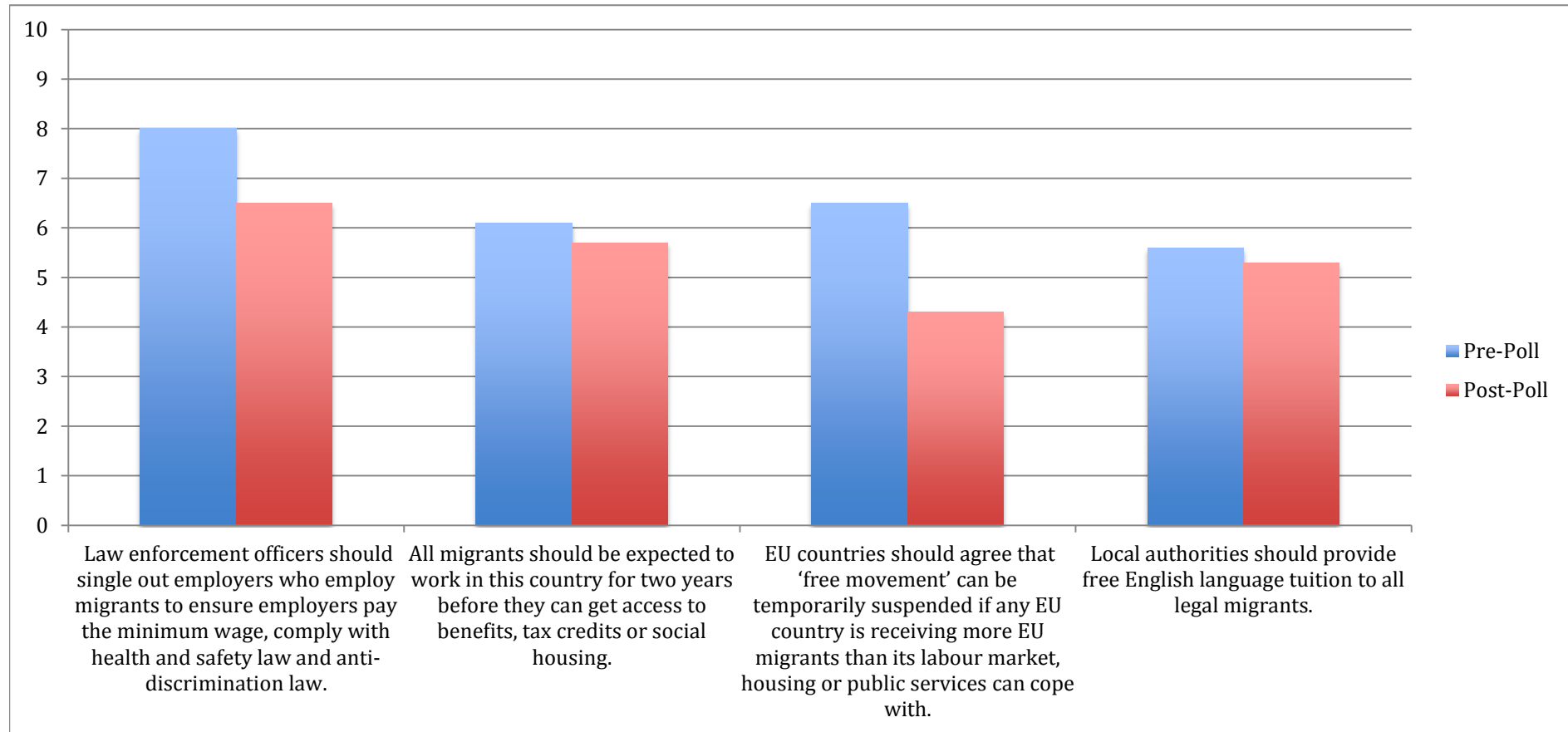


Table 2: Four Policy Propositions

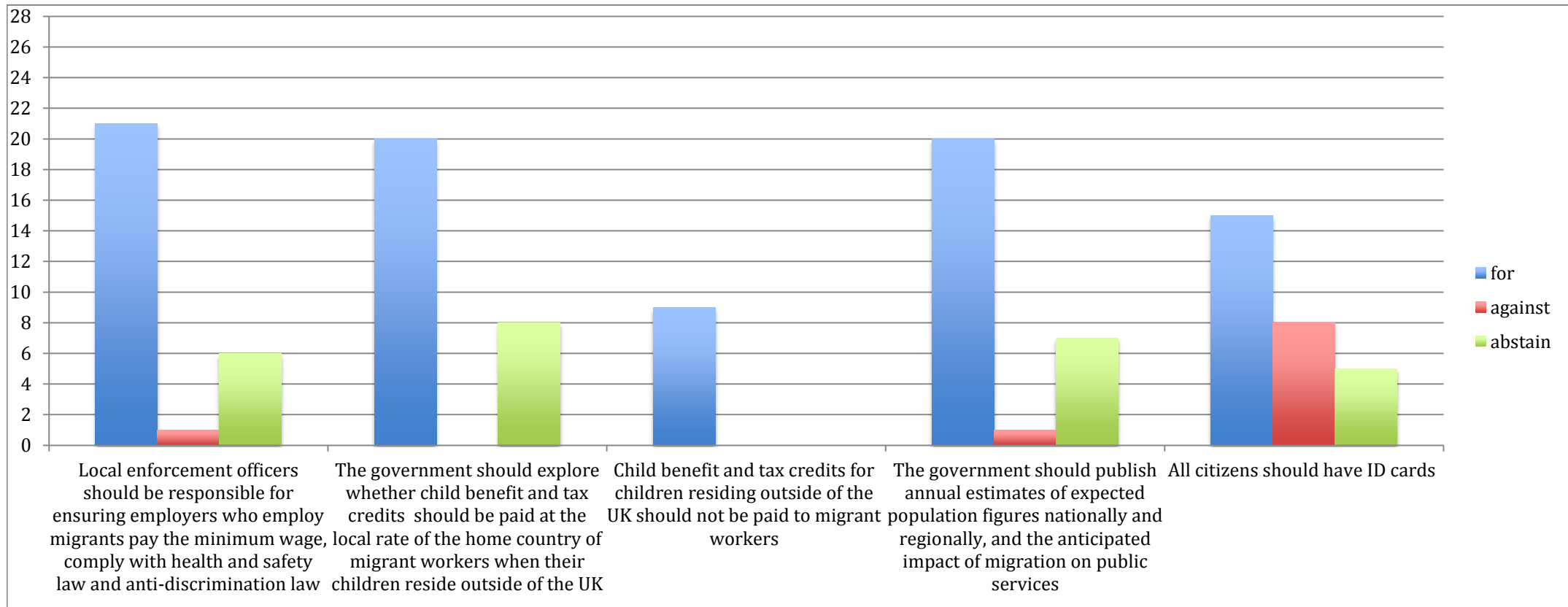
Now here are some proposals we would like your opinions on. On a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 is "extremely undesirable," 10 is "extremely desirable," and 5 is exactly in the middle, **how desirable or undesirable would you say are each of the following:**



The chart shows that participants changed their views about each policy with support declining for each proposition after engaging in the discussion. Participant's views changed a lot in relation to proposition one and proposition three. There are a number of reasons participant's views changed. Some reasons include: designing counter-proposals that participant's believe would tackle the issues more effectively, and a more thorough and detailed understanding of the implications of adopting the policy proposals. For instance proposition three, temporarily suspending the principle of 'free movement', could potentially involve leaving Europe, once participants weighed up the pros and cons of leaving Europe, many were less supportive of proposition three.

Table 3: Counter-policy proposals

Participants designed their own counter-policy proposals. Four policies were put to a hand poll. 28 participants voted.



Overall there was broad support for all counter-policies proposed by participants. The **first proposition** centres on 'local' enforcement officers being responsible for ensuring employers comply with relevant laws, this would involve the devolution of power to local communities who are arguably best placed to map local employers who employ migrant workers to enable a more focused enforcement approach. The **second and third propositions** relate to perceived fairness of welfare benefits for British and non-British residents. The **fourth and fifth propositions** were developed in order to map the need for service provisions in areas with high numbers of migrant workers.

**A hand poll was not taken for the third proposition to measure the numbers of people against or who abstain.*



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FURTHER INFORMATION

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