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The Contentious Politics of Asylum in Britain and Europe

A Research Outline

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The Contentious Politics of Asylum in Britain and Europe

Asylum is currently a heated political issue and policy concern across Western Europe. In Britain, the status of asylum-seekers is publicly questioned by some mainstream politicians and newspapers who label them as 'bogus', claiming that they are 'economic' migrants not refugees. Extreme-right parties and local people have mobilised against asylum-seekers in some localities, whilst the pro-asylum case has been put forward by campaign organisations such as Asylum Aid, Asylum Rights Campaign and civil society organisations, such as the Church and Trades Unions. The question is, why has political asylum become so controversial? And what impact does this controversial nature of the topic have on the potential for making policies which address the actual problems?

Some authors have addressed asylum as a policy problem (Randall 1994, July 1996, Geddes 2000a). These authors account for what they perceive as procedural shortcomings in provision for asylum-seekers by referring to the British policy approach, which they argue is strongly shaped by the principal aim of reversing inflows of migrants and provides few opportunities for integration. Restrictive policies are seen the latest episode in a longstanding tradition among political elites for seeing strict immigration controls as pre-requisite for successful domestic 'race relations' policies for integrating Britain's own minorities (Layton-Henry 1994, Solomos 1993, Favell 1998). Other authors have focussed on the public dimension, arguing that immigration politics has a high potential for amplification into political contentions because it inherently locks into the emotive debates about race and ethnicity within national belonging, whereby some actors see the national culture under threat from 'aliens' and react through 'moral panics' and in some cases xenophobic mobilisation (Thraenhardt 1993, Husbands 1994, Kaye 1998). Although they provide important insights, these two perspectives –policy and symbolic contention- remain somewhat detached from one another. The proposed research will provide a more integrated approach, by systematically linking analysis of the policy field on immigration and asylum to analysis of the field of political mobilisation (collective action and claims-making) on issues relating to migrants in the public domain. It will focus centrally on political asylum within the immigration field, thus addressing a topic which is of current policy relevance and is a highly resonant issue in the news. There is as yet no substantive research that addresses the public contentiousness of asylum in Britain by empirically mapping the field of ideological cleavages and alliances between political actors on the issue. Nor is there any research which addresses how public understandings of asylum issues are formed, and what different sections of the public (ethnic majority/minority; old/young; men/women) consider the government's policy should be. Lastly, there has been no research on how the policy domain exists as structure of networks extending from the Home Office to organisations (media, political parties, NGOs) in the public domain, and to what extent policy decisions are influenced by public campaigns. The proposed research will provide a grounded empirical study of these dimensions of asylum politics. By relating the public contentiousness of asylum issues to the possible effects this might have on policy-making, it addresses a concern that was explicitly expressed by the Government's own White Paper on the topic.²

In addition to providing the first detailed British study on the 'contentious politics of asylum', we consider that it is also vital to place the British case within an international comparative framework, which will significantly increase the explanatory potential and scope of relevance of the proposed research. Firstly, through cross-national comparison, we will be able to gauge to what extent the British experience of asylum politics is nationally-specific or part of a Europe-wide trend. Secondly, by studying the transnational dimension, we will be

² 'The debate on asylum has been polarised between two extremes: those who oppose all immigration and those who oppose effective immigration controls. All asylum-seekers are 'bogus' to one group or almost all genuine to another. The real issue is how to run an asylum system which serves the British people's wish to support genuine refugees whilst deterring abusive claimants.' *Faster, Firmer, Fairer – A Modern Approach to Immigration And Asylum*. cm 4018, July 1998.

able to determine to what extent the asylum politics field has been ‘Europeanised’, by growing influence of European and transnational institutions (UNHCR, ICCPR, ECHR³), or transnational campaign organisations (e.g. Amnesty International), or by transnational framings of the issue (e.g. claims based on international human rights). This part of the research is potentially of wide-reaching relevance given that during the life-time of the project there are likely to be concrete steps to increase the harmonisation of asylum policies among EU countries, following the Amsterdam Treaty’s provision for more nation-state co-operation and a greater potential role for the European Court of Justice and Commission (van Selm-Thorburn 1998). This will have important repercussions on national politics and policy-making (Geddes 2000b, c). Although there has been considerable speculation about the extent of the transnationalisation of politics and the consequences of this for national approaches to immigration politics (e.g. Soysal 1994, Freeman 1998), there has so far been very few empirical accounts that are informed by original cross-national data-sets (Koopmans and Statham 1999a). The proposed project will compare the contentious politics of asylum in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, through systematic cross-national comparison, and in addition study the nature of relationships between the transnational and national political domains. The comparative study will be conducted in collaboration with institutional partners working on Germany (Koopmans WZB Berlin), France, Switzerland (Giugni/Passy - University of Geneva) and the Netherlands (Penninx – University of Amsterdam) – (See Annex IV). These partners already have finance in place to conduct their cases in strict parallel to the proposed British case.

To summarise, the main questions to be addressed are: a) How are asylum issues framed and constructed as contentious politics through mobilisation by collective actors in the public domain? b) What effects does the public contentiousness of asylum have on policy making? c) How do lay publics form opinions on this contentious political issue? d) Does British asylum politics follow a ‘national path’ or is it part of a European trend, and has the field ‘Europeanised’ in any sense? The structure of the project design can be summarised in three work-packages (see Annex II):

1. The Contentious Field of Asylum Politics in Britain and Europe: Mapping the field of political contention (i.e. structures of ideological cleavages and actor relationships), both longitudinally (1992-2002 - UK), and cross-nationally for UK, Germany, France, Switzerland and the Netherlands (at least seven years). By systematically comparing the form and discursive contents of political claims-making a) across time, to examine the relationship between pro- and anti-asylum claims-making and decision making by political elites, and b) across country, to examine the degree of convergence/divergence in national political issue-fields, and for signs of ‘Europeanisation’.

2. Public Campaigning and the Policy Domain in Britain: Examining the nature of the multi-organisational field extending from the ‘core’ policy domain to the public domain – i.e. networks and channels of political influence between a) ‘core’ policy actors, b) politicians, news editors, civil society organisations and c) pro- and anti asylum movements. This actor-level study will provide a grounded understanding of i) the *degree of elite ‘openness’ or ‘closure’* toward the public domain, and ii) the *campaign strategies* of public actors – party politicians, news editors, movements- for attempting to exert political influence.

3. British Public Opinion-Formation on Asylum: Contributing to knowledge on how the public (varied by age, gender, ethnicity) reaches understandings and forms opinions on asylum cases, and thereby to what extent the range of public positions on asylum differ from government policies. Here we will gain important information on the ‘cultural tools’ through which people construct and frame the relationship of asylum-seekers to the national community -collective identities (nationalist/internationalist; ethnic, racial/civic) and norms (human rights/national civil rights).

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, European Convention on Human Rights.

1. Mapping The Field of Contentious Asylum Politics

1.1 Approach - Political Opportunities for Claims-making:

Asylum-seekers -as non-nationals and non-citizens- possess no institutional channels of access to the national polity and very few resources for autonomous mobilisation. As a consequence, most political contentions over asylum are conflicts *about* asylum-seekers and take place between actors of the host society. For this reason, the public construction of asylum as a contentious issue has the characteristics of a '*symbolic struggle*' (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Eder 1993). The contentious issue is the relationship of these 'new migrants' to the national community. Conflicting opinions, political demands and collective identities are mobilised by pro- and anti-asylum actors, which shape the ideological cleavage structure of the political issue-field. Historically, the public construction of symbolic boundary markers of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' was an important part of nation-building (Smith 1995, Gellner 1983), and current political contentions over asylum can give important information on the way that Britain sees itself as a political nation in response to pressures of globalisation (increasing European integration) and pluralisation (increasing ethnic and racial difference), in part brought by migration. At one extreme, anti-asylum activists mobilise an image of Britain as an homogenous ethno-cultural community which ought to resist foreign infiltration at all costs, and at the other, pro-asylum activists define Britain as part of a world community, duty-bound to uphold international norms of human rights and be open to newcomers. Between these poles, there are many different intermediary positions taken up by institutional and public actors. The important point is that asylum contentions are strongly linked to questions of national identity and take symbolic forms. Although they take symbolic forms, however, the political claims that are mobilised by collective actors in the public domain also relate to the *institutional domain of politics* and thus involve actual stakes in political power. Within the literature, the nature of the impact of public debates on the framing and direction of immigration policies has been much discussed. Some authors argue that under certain conditions public debates can shape the timing and outcomes of policy decisions (Thranhardt 1993, Husbands 1994, Faist 1994, Guiraudon 1998), whilst others claim that political elites are well able to manage policies away from the distortions and noise of public discourse (Freeman 1995, 1998, Joppke 1997, Jacobs 1999). At present these academic debates have been largely speculative and conducted in the absence of systematic data on political discourses in the public domain. This means that they tend to fall back on descriptive impressionistic accounts rather than empirically grounded analysis, and they often fail to systematically link public discourses to policy domains. In order to overcome these limitations we propose to use a 'political opportunity' approach drawn from social movement research (see especially, Tarrow 1989, 1994, Kriesi et al 1995, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). This has the benefit of using an analytic framework that relates to both the discursive and institutional dimensions of politics, which relates the policy approaches of political elites –i.e. political opportunity structures- to the 'claims-making' by collective actors in the public domain, and which is also suitable for both longitudinal and cross-national comparative analyses.

In the proposed research, we will build on an analytic approach that was developed and successfully applied during a previous project on a different topic (Koopmans and Statham 1999a, b, c, 2000a, b, c; Statham 1998, 1999; Martiniello and Statham 1999). For this project we conceptualise immigration and asylum politics as a field where political and social rights, and cultural obligations to the nation are contested –i.e. 'contested citizenship' (Tilly 1997). National institutional approaches and policy positions on immigration and asylum politics are specified as the key variables for the 'political opportunities' which confront potential pro- and anti-asylum claims-makers in the field. By determining the criteria for granting access to the national community for new migrants, they structure the political field –discursive and institutional- that is available for collective actors to mobilise claims that challenge these

terms. By ‘claims-making’ here, we refer to all types of collective action which mobilise political demands into the public domain (ranging from protest to conventional action forms; from non-verbal physical acts to verbal statements; and by institutional and civil society actors). The first aim of the proposed research is empirical and descriptive, it will map the field of political claims-making by analysing the nature of ideological cleavages (types of frames) and relationships between actors (alliances/divisions) in the contentious political issue field. This will give information on the level and discursive contents of claims-making that can be compared across time, and cross-nationally. For example, it is possible to identify three general types of claims-making:

1. *Anti-asylum*: by groups from the national community against recognition/rights for asylum-seekers⁴
2. *Pro-asylum*: by groups from the national community on behalf of the recognition/rights for asylum-seekers
3. *Asylum seeker*: by asylum-seekers demanding recognition/rights from the national community.

By relating these to state political approaches -that may vary either across time, or cross-nationally- it becomes possible to define the main research questions for this work package, that will be answered using the original data-set:

1.2 Research Questions

- 1) How do national public debates and state policies on asylum (opportunity structures) shape the levels, forms (radical/moderate; institutionalised/non-institutionalised) and contents (frames) of the three types of claims-making a) longitudinally b) in cross-national comparison?
- 2) The second question reverses the direction to investigate ‘outcomes’ of mobilisation. How do the types of claims-making influence national debates and asylum policies? For example, has anti-asylum claims-making by the extreme right altered national political debates giving rise to restrictive policy changes?
- 3) How do the three types of claims-making relate interactively to one another in the public domain (movement v. countermovement dynamics)? E.g. Are cycles of escalation evident in claims-making between competing factions?
- 4) To what extent do policy changes correlate with high or low levels of claims-making in the public domain? Do high levels of public thematisation of asylum issues generally precede or follow important policy decision changes in the field?
- 5) To what extent is asylum politics becoming transnationalised or ‘Europeanised’? Are transnational actors –e.g. EU, UNHCR, Amnesty International- becoming important ‘sources’ and ‘addressees’ of claims-making, or are claims increasing framed with transnational references – on basis of international human rights- a) across time b) in cross-national comparison?

1.3 Method - Mapping the Field of Political Claims-Making

Given that there are no other available data-sets on contentious claims-making, and other types of data such as opinion surveys lack the required rigour and sensitivity for the type of analyses envisaged, it will be necessary to produce our own data-sets. Our methodological approach follows the tradition of protest event analysis (Tarrow 1989, Rucht et al 1998, Franzosi 1994) and frame analysis (Snow et al 1986, Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Eder 1993) from social movement research, and builds on methods successfully applied in a previous project (ESRC R000236558). Newspaper print media coverage of reported acts will be used as the primary data source for claims-making. Newspapers are selected in preference to other media (TV, radio) as this allows the ability to go backwards in time, facilitating longitudinal study. The information from news reports is used as a record of significant political events in the field. The coded acts for

⁴ The three types of claims-making are strongly interrelated, due to overlapping concerns (2 and 3), and movement/countermovement dynamics (1 versus 2 and 3).

claims-making range from protest events (demonstration, riot, arson, etc.) to conventional action forms (public statement, press conference, policy decision, etc.). All acts of pro- and anti-asylum-seeker claims-making are coded, plus acts by all actors in the issue fields of asylum/immigration. Important variables are: actor types; action forms; the size, target and intensity of protest mobilisation (if present); and the institutional or civil society actor on whom demands are made (addressee). Regarding the semantic contents of the claims, these are coded for political aims, causal reasoning devices, and symbolic frames. The different claims made by one actor in relation to a specific event are coded as part of a unitary act. The journalist's own comments on events are not coded - we are not interested in the media's own agenda here (on media campaigns, see 2 below). To control for possible distortions arising from reporting biases and political affiliation of the newspaper, two broadsheet newspapers with reputations for consistent and detailed coverage will be used as primary sources –Guardian (centre-left); Times (centre-right). All news reports on the topic will be collected from two daily newspapers –Guardian and Times- for three editions per week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) from 1992-2002. In addition, to control for newspaper type the same method will be applied to other national newspapers (Mail, Sun, Express, Mirror) for one year (2001 - using actual newspaper copies that will be ordered). CD Roms will be used to collate news reports for the two main newspapers as this enables retrieval of information in machine readable formats. This will allow text to be pasted into the memo fields of the coding scheme. Coded data will be analysed using SPSS.

The resultant database will have a high level of flexibility for different types of analyses. It will give detailed information on a particular actor, and specific types of claims and frames, and their strategic location within the national issue-field. In addition, it is suitable for the macro-level analyses of general issue-fields and actor positions that will be required for the international comparison. For cross-national comparison, a common coding scheme of summary variables will be designed, using one newspaper of similar affiliation (time period at least seven years) for each country. This common coding scheme will be used by our institutional partners in Germany (Koopmans WZB Berlin), France, Switzerland (Giugni/Passy - University of Geneva) and the Netherlands (Penninx – University of Amsterdam). For the cross-national comparative studies, control for news selection and reporting bias will be at the national level, and research will be collaborative, to give the important input of local knowledge.

2. Public Campaigning and the Policy Domain in British Asylum Politics

2.1 Approach

Some interactions between political elites, officials, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) occur directly through institutional channels that are partly hidden from the public domain. These institutional forums where political elites negotiate with expert advisers, interest groups and NGOs can be conceptualised as ‘policy domains’ (Kingdon 1984) or ‘policy communities’ (Burstein 1999). Given that a key aim of our research is to gauge the potential influence of public contention over asylum policy decisions, it is particularly important to gain an understanding of a) to what extent, b) under what conditions, and c) to whom, the asylum policy domain is ‘open’ and ‘closed’ to public organisations. Determining this degree of accessibility to ‘*core*’ *policy-makers* is a key dimension for the ‘political opportunities’ that are available to pro- and anti-asylum claims-makers. We aim to do this by gaining an understanding of a) the ideological positions of the ‘core’ policy-makers that underpin official discourses, and b) their networks/relationships with organisations in the public domain. Key questions are: To what extent are policy decisions based a) on assumptions of general public opinion on the issue or b) on information mobilised by specialist campaign organisations, e.g. submissions to Parliamentary Committees? What influence does the intensity and framing (pro-/anti-asylum) of the public debate on asylum have on a) the framing of policies b) the effectiveness of implementing policies? In what ways is asylum different from other issues in the immigration policy domain, such as family reunification, which is also based on humanitarian norms, but where there is a more ‘liberal’ approach? More generally, we aim to determine whether elite positions are as ‘restrictive’ and resistant to change as they are often portrayed in the literature (Layton-Henry 1994, Favell 1998).

In addition, it is also important to reach an understanding of the role played by two specialist ‘intermediary’ actors in linking the policy and public domains: *political parties* and *news editors/broadcasters*. At what times and under what conditions are the activities of these intermediary actors likely to influence the positions of the ‘core’ policy elite? Here we propose focussing on a) **electoral campaigns** (political parties and MPs) and b) opinion-leading **media campaigns** (news editors and commentators) to reconstruct party political agendas and media agendas on asylum. What factors govern the decisions of politicians and news editors/journalists on whether to campaign on the issue, and how do they frame the issue in the public domain? Is there a potential for political parties to play the ‘race card’ and asylum to become subject to party political competition (left v. right)? Under what conditions does asylum become a topic for media thematisation, and on what basis do news editors and commentators take a stance (political affiliation of newspaper, news values, event-driven)? Does the type of media have an effect on representation of the issue (television v. newspaper; broadsheet v. tabloid)?

Thirdly, we will address the ‘bottom-up’ dimension of claims-making and **movement campaigns**. Here we study the perceptions of ‘political opportunities’ by the *pro-asylum movement* and their *civil society allies* (e.g. Churches), and how they attempt to exert political influence. First, it is important to gain an understanding of the structure of the internal networks of the movement. For example, do protest organisations (Campaign to Free Campsfield) have links to conventional campaign organisations (e.g. Asylum Aid), and do these networks extend into broader alliances with mainstream civil society organisations, such as Churches and Trades Unions? Secondly, what channels of political access do different sectors of the movement use to exert political influence, either a) indirectly through public constituency-building, or b) through direct lobbying to the policy domain? This requires looking at the movement’s organisational forms, action repertoires, types of political claims, framing, targets and addressees. In addition, we will focus on the activism of the pro-asylum movement as a potential case of ‘political altruism’ (on this see Statham 2000) by reconstructing the norms which ‘core’ activists use to justify their actions on behalf of asylum-seekers. Lastly, attempts will be made to study *anti-asylum movements*. Approaches will be made to local anti-asylum protest campaign groups in Dover and the British National Party, but previous experiences of interviewing such types of

organisations, indicate that this part of the research will be on a smaller scale due to difficulties in gaining access. This will not detract in any significant way from the overall research, however, as anti-asylum positions tend to be dominated by mainstream institutional political actors.

Fourthly, it is necessary to address the extent to which asylum is located within national politics or becoming ‘Europeanised’ or ‘localised’. This can be achieved by referring to representatives of *transnational elites* (e.g. EU, UNHCR) and *transnational campaign organisations* (e.g. Amnesty International), as well as representatives of *local authorities* (e.g. Local Government Association), and *local campaign groups*. For example, are European initiatives to harmonise asylum legislation, or national attempts to devolve responsibility to local levels, shifting the context of asylum politics to the transnational or local levels?

In general this actor-level study will be used to test hypotheses drawn from the primary ‘claims-making’ analysis (see 1 above), thereby giving a better understanding of the nature of the organisational field linking the public domain to the policy domain, and the role of public campaigns.

2.2 Main Research Questions

- 1) What effects do the level/intensity/framing of public thematisation have on the degree of access for claims-makers to the ‘core’ elite of the policy domain?
- 2) Under what conditions is lobbying likely to lead to a) more restrictive or b) more liberal decisions, by ‘core’ policy elites?
- 3) What types of diagnostic and prognostic arguments and symbolic references (framing strategies) do elites use to justify their policy positions?
- 4) How do electoral campaigning by political parties (party agendas) and ‘opinion-leading’ by news editors (media agendas) influence the framing of asylum in the public and policy domains?
- 5) Does party competition have an effect on the policy direction, or governmental change on the nature of policy? Do different media/different newspapers take up different positions?
- 6) How do pro-asylum movements and their allies attempt to target a) the political elites b) potential allies c) public constituencies? Does this collective action constitute ‘political altruism’?
- 7) What types of diagnostic and prognostic arguments and symbolic references (framing strategies) do pro-asylum movements use to justify their positions to a) the core policy elite b) potential allies c) public constituencies?
- 8) To what extent is power located in the national ‘core’ policy elite relative to transnational elites/institutions –e.g., UNHCR, ECHR, EU? What is the power balance between the levels (transnational/national/local) of asylum politics?

2.3 Method

To give a more grounded understanding of a) the ideological positions b) networks of actors in the multi-organisational field of asylum politics, 60 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with: ‘core’ national policy-makers (10); party politicians and news editors/journalists (15); civil society organisations, pro-asylum movement, anti-asylum movement (22); and transnational and local elites and campaign organisations (8). The interview schedule for each category of actor will be specifically designed to determine where they locate themselves in relation to other actors in the field (allies/opponents). For the ‘core’ policy elite, official documents on policy positions (e.g. HMSO 1998) will be used as a secondary data source on the actor positions. For civil society organisations and movements, we shall collect the organisations own publications on the issue, including pamphlets, websites and submissions to Parliamentary Committees. As political parties and the media may run their own *campaigns* on asylum, and thereby influence the shaping of the political issue in the

public domain, it is important for our study to collect primary data on a) party programmes and statements b) media coverage. For political parties we will follow election campaigns that occur during the study (2000-2002), collecting national party programmes (Labour, Conservative, LibDem, BNP), as well as information from constituencies in SE England where asylum is most likely to be an electoral issue. Lastly, as the media's own agenda -level of media attention, type of coverage, editorial position- is an important factor, we will undertake a thematic contents analysis to determine how different national broadsheet and tabloid newspapers (Mail, Sun, Times, Guardian, Express, Mirror, Independent) frame asylum politics. We shall collect all newspaper editorials and commentaries on asylum and immigration in 2001 for these newspapers, as well as recording the main TV news bulletins (BBC, ITN, C4) during phases of high media attention identified from the newspaper coverage. This material will be coded to give the ideological position of the media actor, using the same actor position codes as the 'claims-making' data set. This will facilitate a reconstruction of the media's own agenda on the issue (across media type; political affiliation/genre of newspaper) of current relevance.

3. British Public Opinion-Formation on Asylum Politics

3.1 Approach

According to the theory of democratic representation (e.g., Burstein 1999) political elites in liberal democracies cannot ignore public perceptions of issues indefinitely, although they may do so in the short or medium term. For sensitive political issues like asylum, which is innately tied into the emotive topics of ethnicity and national identity, it is reasonable to assume that the stances taken by governments and politicians are in part driven by *their* perceptions of public opinion on new immigrants, and the electoral ‘costs and benefits’ of taking up either a pro- or anti- asylum stance. Likewise it is reasonable to assume that the political stance taken by newspaper editors is in part based on *their* assumptions of the opinions of their readership, and the ‘costs and benefits’ of taking a leading pro- or anti- asylum stance. The proposed study will contribute to a better understanding of public opinion formation on asylum, and test empirically to what extent public perceptions of asylum politics are close to or differ from official stances expressed in a) government policies, b) party political manifestos, and c) editorial stances expressed in the media. It thus links in directly with the findings of the actor-level part of the study (2 above).

Public opinion is a construct that is significant not only quantitatively in an aggregate sense, but also qualitatively in the range of opinions that are available in the social world to attribute meaning to specific problems. There are contextual factors which affect the ways in which publics view the world and interpret events, and which shape individual and collective action. Public information is filtered through an interpretative screen that is shaped by personal experiences and cultural heritage, e.g. common ethnic or migrant background, age, gender etc.. Such opinions formed among peers are a basis for making rational decisions about politics and whether (or not) to take an interest in, passively support, or collectively mobilise over an issue – i.e., perceptions of ‘political opportunities’. A survey would be unsuitable for our purposes of empirically gauging this aspect of public opinion, as it lacks the sensitivity which is necessary for ‘unpacking’ how groups speak and form opinions on a topic on which they may be unwilling to speak directly about. To investigate public understandings of asylum, moderated group discussions have the advantage of making the participants feel comfortable in a more ‘natural’ setting. Also the group interview has an advantage over individual interviews, in allowing insight into how groups *collectively* form opinions, negotiate their differences, and take up positions by framing issues in relation to their own experiences. This approach is therefore ideally suited for a) mapping the cognitive terrain and cultural cleavages through which different sections of the general public (men/women; old/young; British ethnic minorities/Whites) interpret asylum issues, and b) gauging how closely public opinions match that of received ‘official’ information – policy statements, party programmes, news editorials/commentaries, movement propaganda- on which private understandings are likely to be based. Hence the findings of the proposed research will feed-back important information to policy-makers, politicians, news editors, and movements about a) whether *their* assumptions about public opinions on asylum are accurate, and b) whether public opinion has a potential to shift when confronted by alternative viewpoints. For example, when confronted by the actual moral dilemmas of real asylum cases, are the general publics likely to make judgements that are a) more, or b) less inclusive toward asylum-seekers than the actual decisions taken by the Home Office?

3.2 Research Questions

1. *Public and official representations of asylum-seekers*: What do groups think about the normative limits of media representation of asylum-seekers, and opinions expressed in official Home Office policy documents, political party and movement publicity (is it accurate, is it fair, does it stigmatise etc..)?

2. *Asylum as a public problem*: How groups define the public problem. What interpretative frames do they use (injustice, agency, identity – Gamson 1992), what is the potential for the ‘hot cognition’ necessary for mobilisation, and how do they attribute causal and political responsibility? Are opinions resistant/open to change?

3. *Group ‘self’ and ‘other’ perceptions and collective identities*: How do the groups construct ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ symbolic boundary markers that define the relationship of asylum-seekers to the national political community? On what basis are these distinctions made (nationality, ethnicity, colour, religion)?

3.3 Method - Editing groups

Public opinion will be studied using a variant of the ‘editing group’ method –derived from classical ‘focus group’ methods (Merton and Kendall 1946)- developed and applied successfully at the ICS, Leeds in two ESRC funded studies (R000233365; R000236558). Editing groups move beyond traditional focus groups (Morrison 1998, MacGregor and Morrison 1995) by making the group ‘edit in’ and ‘edit out’ their ‘preferred readings’ on a topic from the political issue-field, in order to gauge their interpretation, evaluation process and the normative limits of their position. This ‘focusing’ technique has the advantage of reducing dependence on abstract linguistic accounts that occur if the group is just left to talk about a topic, and produces actual qualitative empirical outputs. Groups will be made to question their original judgements on actual asylum cases by confronting them with different visual/textual accounts representing a range of alternative opinions. These will be drawn from the thematic contents analyses of newspaper/TV news commentaries, political party campaigns, policy documents, and movement propaganda (see 2 above). The empirical data outputs are the group’s ‘preferred reading’ of asylum decisions, derived from their decisions on actual asylum cases, and the group process of negotiating consensus/dissent in the discussions by which they reach decisions. Each group will be video-recorded (with the group’s permission and after assurances of anonymity) and their discussions transcribed and subject to frame analysis. Groups will be varied by ethnic background (migrant/non-migrant background), age, and gender, and finding will be compared as these variables may explain different perceptions on the topic (on ethnic background - IPPR 1997). To guard against the unrepresentative composition of groups a professional recruitment agency will be used. The technique will give information on a) the group’s perceptions of official positions, b) their perceived nature of the problems, c) how the group positions itself and defines its collective identity in relation to asylum-seekers. In addition, a special group will undertaken with members/activists of pro-asylum organisations to reach an understanding of their motives and incentives for collective action, and what distinguishes them as a group from the general public - are they ‘political altruists’?

British ‘White’ Majority: six groups - 3 male, 3 female; by age cohort 16-24, 24-45, 45+ years

British ‘Minorities’: six groups - 3 male, 3 female; by age cohort 16-24, 24-45, 45+ years⁵

Pro-asylum activists: two groups

Total groups N=14, Total participants N=112 - see Annex III for diagram of group composition.

⁵ Rotated by ethnic background for Jewish, black African-Caribbean, Asian Pakistani.

Annex I: References

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Annex II: Summary of Approach, Methods and Outputs

Work-package	Data	Data sources	Methods	Outputs
1. Mapping the Contentious Field of Asylum Politics in Britain and Europe	<p>'claims-making': public acts and political claims made by collective actors in events in the immigration and asylum field</p> <p>a) nationally 1992-2002</p> <p>b) cross-nationally UK, F, D, CH, NL</p>	<p>Coded from newspaper reports</p> <p>a) longitudinal sample for UK 1992-2002 from CD Roms of <i>Times & Guardian</i>:</p> <p>for 2001 control sample, hard copy <i>Sun Mirror, Express, Mail</i></p> <p>b) cross-national sample (seven years) one newspaper selected locally</p>	<p>'political claims-making analysis': coding of main variables in events: actor types; action forms; size, target, and intensity of protest (where present); addressee of claims; political aims; reasoning devices; and symbolic frames.</p>	<p>a) highly flexible longitudinal national data-set on claims-making: able to give information on ideological cleavages and actor positions, and alliances in the field across time.</p> <p>b) five country comparative data set on claims-making: able to give information on patterns of European convergence and divergence</p>
2. Public Campaigning and the Policy Domain in Britain	<p>a) positions and relationships of political elites and the policy core to organisations in the public domain.</p> <p>b) public campaigns by political parties, media, and pro- and anti- asylum movements</p>	<p>a) perceptions and opinions of relevant national and transnational political elites and policy core and positions expressed in policy documents</p> <p>b) perceptions and opinions of politicians; news editors, journalists; and public campaigners. Campaign positions expressed in: seven national newspapers for 2001 – <i>Times, Guardian, Independent, Mail, Express, Mirror, Sun</i> – and television news during key periods for media campaigns; electoral material and publicity for party political campaigns; movement propaganda, websites for movement campaigns.</p>	<p>60 semi-structured interviews with: political elites and policy core (10); party politicians and news editors/journalists (15); civil society organisations and pro- and anti- asylum movement (22); and transnational and local elites and campaigners (8).</p> <p>Thematic contents analysis of: seven national newspapers and TV news for media's own campaign agenda; political party publicity for electoral campaigns; movement publications for movement campaigns</p>	<p>a) political openness/closure: detailed information on the accessibility of the immigration and asylum policy domain to influence from public campaigning, and on the networks and relationships in the organisational field.</p> <p>b) detailed information on the campaign strategies of the national media, political parties, and pro- and anti- asylum movements in the field.</p>
3. British Public Opinion-Formation on Asylum Politics	<p>Range of opinions expressed and framing of asylum issues by different public groups</p>	<p>Recordings of 12 editing groups varied by ethnic background, age, gender, and activism on issue (see annex III for composition)</p>	<p>Editing group moderated discussions to determine public perceptions on asylum cases relative to government policy positions, media positions, political party positions and movement positions.</p>	<p>Detailed understanding of range of public interpretations of : asylum as a public problem; campaign and official representations of asylum-seekers; 'self' and 'other' symbolic boundary markers and collective identities formed in relation to asylum-seekers</p>

Annex III: Composition of Editing groups

Age Cohort	Male			Female		
	16-24	24-45	45+	16-24	24-45	45+
<i>British 'White' Majority</i>						
<i>British Ethnic Minority*</i>						

* rotated by ethnic background for Jewish, black African-Caribbean, Asian Pakistani to account for older and newer migrants.

In addition two groups with pro-asylum activists recruited from organisations, such as Amnesty International, Campaign to Free Campsfield etc..

Total groups N=14

Number of participants per group N=8

Total participants N=112

Annex IV: Institutional Addresses of International Partners Committed to Project

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