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Brexit and immigration: the pendulum swing still has momentum, new report argues

A major new report from The Constitution Society and the Federal Trust tackles the role immigration policy played in causing Brexit, and that Brexit has since played in driving UK immigration policy.

In *Brexit and Immigration: The Arc of the Pendulum*, immigration researcher Jonathan Thomas tracks the arc of UK immigration policy and politics from the liberal 2000s to the restrictionist approaches to immigration seen today, considering the political and cultural forces behind this huge swing.

Notwithstanding the polarising nature of Brexit, immigration policy post-Brexit saw relative calm, the political consensus supporting a relatively liberal approach. But a doubling of immigration numbers compared with before Brexit, alongside the visible challenge to control posed by small boats crossing the Channel, saw public concern over immigration spiral back up, triggering a political reaction from the major parties.

The restrictiveness of today's immigration policy proposals goes far beyond anything envisaged by Brexit. Some are even at odds with it. Yet Brexit can also be seen to have fuelled these developments, 'take back control' living on as an everlasting slogan for a quest for immigration control now pushing to greater extremes.

Politically, the UK's huge pendulum swing on immigration policy has now delivered a mirror image of the more liberal immigration era of the 2000s. The pendulum may now be nearing the opposite extreme but, despite the recent fall in immigration numbers, Jonathan Thomas argues that:

"There are now so many and so much invested in the political battles around immigration that notwithstanding how far the pendulum has now travelled since Brexit, its momentum may mean it has further yet to go before moving back the other way."

Welcoming the report, Constitution Society Director of Research Dr Dexter Govan commented:

"In the wake of Brexit no issue has been so controversial in the UK as immigration. It continues to drive policy and too often defines the terms of political debate. This report is a refreshing and authoritative account of the facts of immigration, with insightful analysis about how this debate has taken shape. It's essential reading for anyone who wants to know about the defining issue in UK politics of the last decade."

Brexit and Immigration: The Arc of the Pendulum is available online at: <https://fedtrust.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Brexit-and-Immigration-The-Arc-of-the-Pendulum.pdf>. For further information or interviews, please contact the author Jonathan Thomas at: Jonathan@smf.co.uk or on 07940 573358.