



University
of Glasgow

Nasar Meer

The cruel optimism of

Racial Justice



P

**WORLD
CHANGING
GLASGOW**

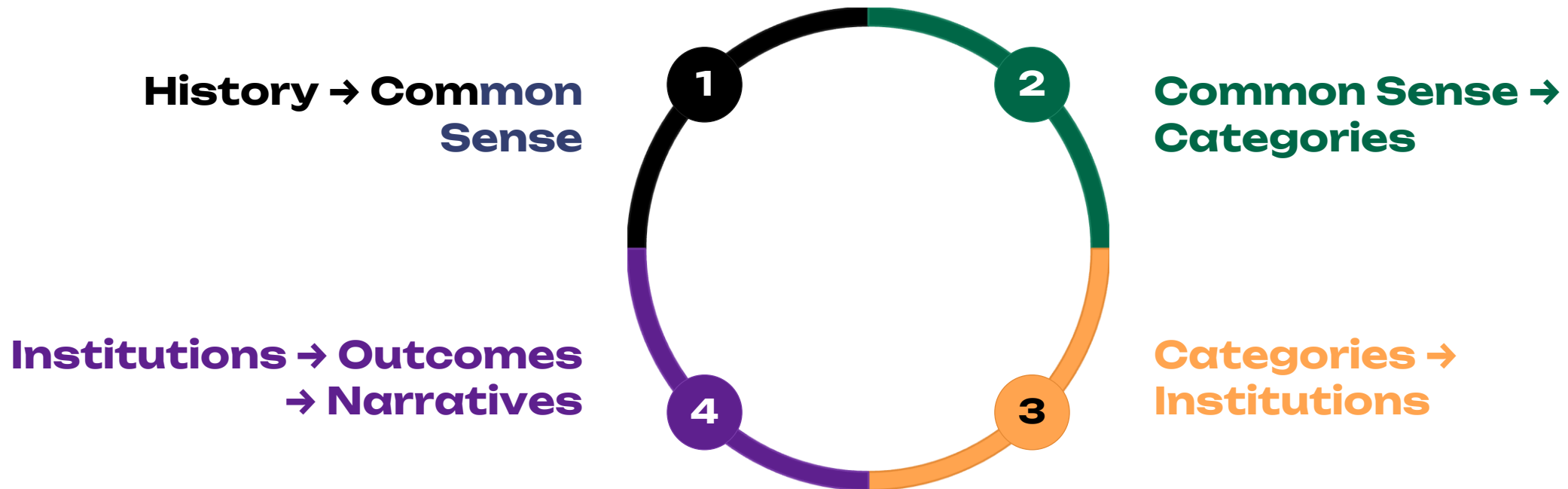
Professor Nasar Meer FRSE FAcSS FBA
University of Glasgow
nasar.meer@glasgow.ac.uk

Racialisation as a Social and Political Process



Racialisation as a Social and Political Process

📄 **Racialisation** is the social and political process through which meanings are attached to bodies, cultures, and religions to distribute credibility, risk, dignity, suspicion, and belonging.



Three Lenses for Institutional Diagnosis

Institutions reproduce racial inequality through apparently neutral categories, procedures, and routines

Institutional Racism

Organisational rules and routines that produce unequal outcomes without individual prejudice.

Structural Racism

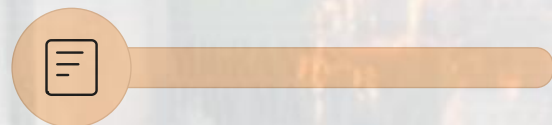
Historically sedimented inequalities in wealth, geography, and political power.

Systemic Racism

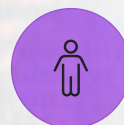
Feedback loops through which institutions, law, media, and markets reinforce each other.

Migration Governance as Racialised Infrastructure

Neutral instruments distribute security and vulnerability unevenly across racialized populations.



Legal routes that
produce
irregularity



Racialised legal
categories



Crisis framing
legitimizes
deterrence

research article

How crisis discourse shapes UK asylum governance: from framing to administrative practice

Nasar Meer , nasar.meer@glasgow.ac.uk
University of Glasgow, UK

Emma Hill , Emma.Hill@strath.ac.uk
University of Strathclyde, UK

This article explores how discourses of crisis shape aspects of UK asylum governance. Bringing Teun A. van Dijk's 'ideological square' into conversation with framing and political-communication literatures, it suggests that an evaluative pattern (foregrounding 'our' positives and 'their' negatives while backgrounding counterexamples) informs agenda-setting, legislative change, and some administrative routines. Drawing on interview accounts from residents on their experiences of accommodation, precarious support systems, and administrative burden, it traces these dynamics through examples that include the issue of 'asylum hotels', showing how privatised contracts, backlog-driven contingency accommodation, and media optics convert bureaucratic failure into a spectacle that legitimises deterrence while obscuring governance design. Conceptually, the article extends the ideological square from discourse analysis to the epistemic architecture of government, showing how issue bias curates what counts as policy relevant truth. It concludes by advocating the 'good governance of evidence' and systematic auditing of administrative burdens as countermeasures to crisis-based legitimacy, recentring proportionality, legality, and protection within asylum policy.

Keywords asylum governance • crisis discourse • ideological square • framing • policy communication • administrative burden • contingency accommodation • UK migration policy

To cite this article: Meer, N. and Hill, E. (2026) How crisis discourse shapes UK asylum governance: from framing to administrative practice, *Policy & Politics*, Early View, DOI: 10.1332/03055736Y2026D000000097

Introduction

Despite the United Kingdom's long history of pre- and postcolonial migration, and its established ethnic and racial diversity, to say nothing of the ongoing social and economic need for inward labour migration across multiple sectors, a prevailing public and policy discourse has come to render 'migration' as a *problem* and the

Five Policy Priorities for Institutional Anti-Racism

Translating anti-racist commitment into concrete institutional reform.

From Attitude Correction to Institutional Redesign

States should audit rules, incentives and accountability systems for racial equality.



Context-Sensitive Equality Data

Equality data must be lawful, participatory and designed to reveal structural disadvantage.



Administrative Burden as Discrimination

Measure the extra friction different groups face when accessing rights and services.

Engagement with Public Narratives

Public authorities must avoid language that amplifies racialised suspicion.



Linking Prevention, Remedy and Accountability

Reforms need stronger scrutiny, participation and outcome tracking.

Council of Europe bodies can help states identify the mechanisms of racism and treat equality as both a legal norm and an institutional practice.