

Immigration

Immigration is a top concern for the British public. Four in ten rank it as among the top three important issues facing the country - second only to the cost of living. While this issue is much more salient for some segments than others, there is relatively strong public consensus in favour of lower net-migration. When asked about overall levels of migration, more than three in five (63 per cent) say numbers should be reduced. More in Common will be publishing a more detailed stand-alone report on immigration attitudes in late 2025 looking at how Britons approach different dimensions of immigration policy.

Most Britons (62 per cent) believe current immigration policies bring more costs than benefits to the UK. While most want to reduce overall numbers, the public is particularly concerned about illegal migration. The public strongly believe stopping illegal immigration on small boats (74 per cent) should take priority over reducing net migration (14 per cent). In focus group conversations, people point to channel crossings as a clear illustration of a system that is out of control, unfair and dangerous. Perhaps more than anything else, failure to meet promises to control immigration reinforces Britons' broader sense that the government lacks the agency to address the problems that affect us.

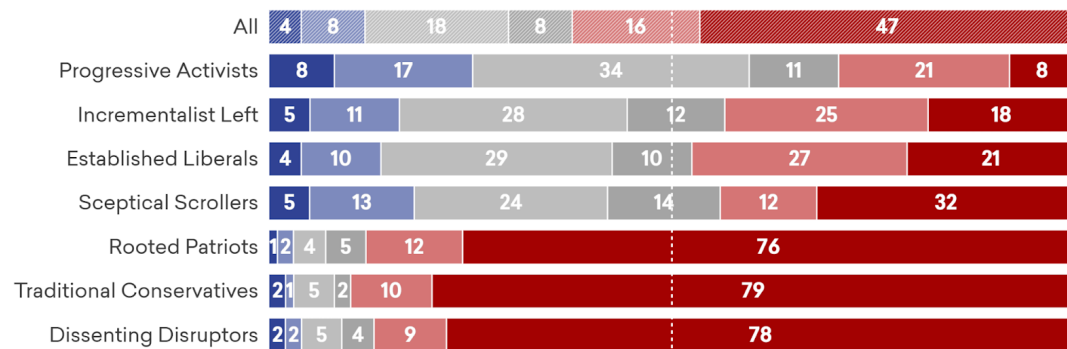
I think if you apply to come into this country legally and you will work and be a benefit to this country, then I welcome you with open arms. What I don't like is coming over on a boat and jumping the queue on everything.

Ray, Traditional Conservative, Great Yarmouth

Figure 96 | Attitudes towards the levels of immigration by segment

Thinking about the number of immigrants the UK Government accepts into the country each year, which of the following comes closer to your view?

- Government should significantly increase the numbers
- Government should slightly increase the numbers
- Government should keep the number the same
- Don't know
- Government should slightly reduce the numbers
- Government should significantly reduce the numbers



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The British Seven Segments broadly split into three groupings on questions of immigration and integration.

First, the immigration sceptics – Rooted Patriots, Dissenting Disruptors and Traditional Conservatives. Three in five Britons want to see net migration reduced, and for these three segments in particular, issues of migration and asylum are highly salient. These groups believe Britain is “full” and, at a time when resources feel scarce and services stretched, they think the government needs to put British people first. Many in this group also feel they cannot express legitimate concerns around immigration publicly without fear of being branded racist. They are relieved to hear immigration-sceptic voices ‘telling it like it is’.

All the millions of pounds are paying for hotels to house these people. When we have people on the street that are born and bred in the UK.

Paul, Dissenting Disruptor, Dudley

They're trying to take away the gas and electricity extra payments for the elderly, for people that have lived in the country and paid taxes their whole life. Well they'll give 41 grand a year for someone who's just come over on a boat.

Stuart, Dissenting Disruptor, Wigan

For many in this group, attitudes towards immigration policies are influenced by cultural concerns. Almost nine in ten (88 per cent) immigration sceptics worry increasing ethnic and religious diversity has undermined British culture and have concerns about British identity being replaced. For the one quarter (26 per cent) of immigration sceptics who believe some races are born more intelligent than others, anti-immigration sentiment may be exacerbated by racism. However, even most immigration sceptics do not believe that Britain should shut the door on immigration entirely, but instead a far greater degree of control is needed over who comes in and that numbers should be significantly lower.

For those who do come, the migration-sceptic segments place a high premium on contribution. They expect newcomers to assimilate to British culture. To them this means following British laws, speaking English, getting a job and contributing to community life.

However there are also concerns about integration. Around half the public think that those from Muslim backgrounds have values too different to the rest of the country to make effective integration either possible or likely. In focus group conversations, this group sometimes share concerns about potential import of laws and customs that do not align with British values and a frustration that there is not a greater expectation of cultural conformity.

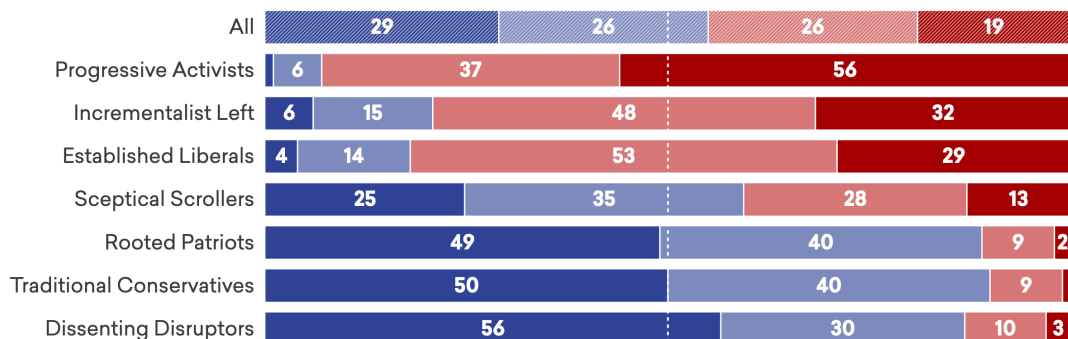
At the end of the day, this is our country, you're a guest in our country, so absorb what we do, our culture and don't try and change us.

Damien, Dissenting Disruptor, Wigan

Figure 97 | Attitudes towards the impact of multiculturalism on British identity

Which comes closer to your view?

- 1 - Immigration has undermined British culture and society
- 2
- 3
- 4 - Immigration has enriched British culture and society



Second are the immigration agnostics who represent 40 per cent of the population. These three groups - the Incrementalist Left, Sceptical Scrollers and Established Liberals - do not see immigration as a top concern facing the country, nor are they active enthusiasts for more immigration. They are divided over whether levels of immigration should be decreased or should be maintained or increased.

In general, these segments see immigration as having some benefits, but many think that public services are struggling to cope with levels of immigration. They also worry that some people who come to the UK take advantage of its healthcare and social security system. Immigration agnostics would prefer a system that offers more of a say over who comes into the country. Some of this group feels pressure to discuss immigration in the "right" way and would rather avoid the topic entirely.

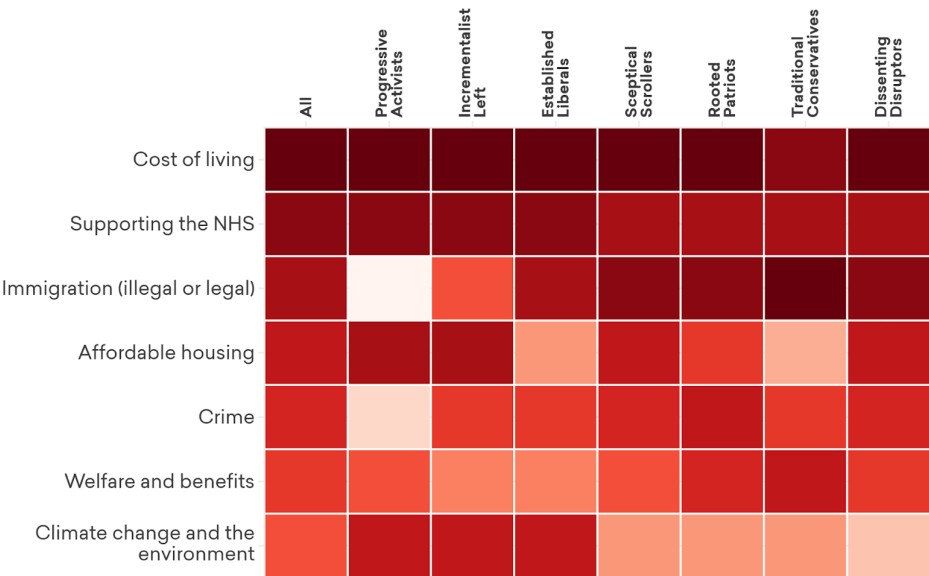
I think we're absolutely shooting ourselves in the foot by limiting migration for international students. I think that is a soft power that's about actually being global players and they would be our ambassadors going out. And I just think it's absolute madness to sort of lump them in with bigger concerns about the welfare state and benefits and health systems because they're not particularly a drain on those systems. They're actually contributors.

Kate, Established Liberal, Chippenham

Figure 98 | Biggest issues by segment

In your opinion, which are the most IMPORTANT issues facing the country today? Please select up to three

1st  14th most selected issue



The third segment group is the immigration enthusiasts, with just one segment - Progressive Activists. Only among this segment does a majority want to maintain or even increase current levels of immigration. Just six per cent of Progressive Activists rank levels of immigration or asylum seekers crossing the Channel among the top issues facing the country, compared to 40 per cent of the whole British public.

This segment has a more globally-oriented mindset than other groups - they tend to feel embarrassed by the history of the British empire and do not think British people should get any preferential treatment in this country. In their view, those who criticise immigration are often motivated by racism. They believe this is the reason refugees from Ukraine were welcomed, while non-white refugees from other countries are treated differently. They believe concerns about immigration are often driven by the media, which they consider guilty of scapegoating immigrants for wider problems with the country.

[On immigration] I don't think that's the problem with this country. I think everything's blamed on it.

Natalie, Progressive Activist, East Dulwich

I don't think it should be that difficult for people to ... work and to pay taxes and to contribute to society and the richness of society. And I can't see why immigration - legal immigration - would ever be an issue.

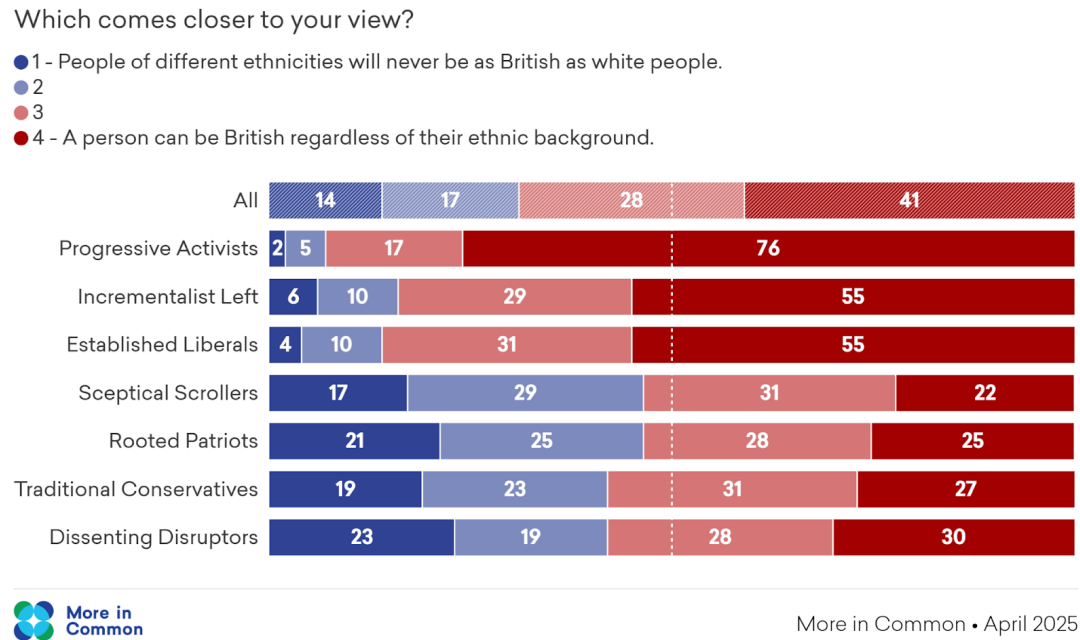
Tamara, Progressive Activist, Hackney

I think the majority of people that come here and work here, and they work hard and they pay their taxes, and I think immigrants are being made to look at as if they are a problem and I just really don't think that they are.

Katy, Progressive Activist, Edinburgh

Across these three broad groupings, there are elements of common ground. Most Britons think that qualified immigrants who contribute to the British economy and assimilate into British society should be welcomed. Clear majorities support Britain doing its bit to support refugees from conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. All segments support tying citizenship to language aptitude and tests of culture. Across the board, Britons speak well of those who have made Britain their home and socially integrated - with a majority of every segment saying people from any ethnic background can be British.

Figure 99 | Attitudes to race and British identity by segment



Segment Profiles - immigration

Immigration Sceptics

Traditional Conservatives - Consider immigration the UK's most pressing issue. They believe the immigration system is out of control and rewards rule-breakers. They want to drastically cut immigration numbers, particularly illegal immigration and view multiculturalism as a threat to British identity.

Dissenting Disruptors - Shaped by twin concerns about immigration and cost of living, they view Britain as "full" and want dramatic reductions in immigration levels. They feel silenced when they try to speak out about immigration's negative impacts and believe increasing diversity has undermined British culture. They are particularly likely to express strong concerns about multiculturalism and Islam.

Rooted Patriots - Concerned about the link between immigration and overstretched public services, they want British people to come first during times of scarce resources. They welcome contributors such as NHS workers who "pay their own way" but oppose those who do not work. Sceptical of multiculturalism's impact on British identity, they are most concerned about illegal immigration and what it means for the safety of their families.

Immigration Agnostics

Incrementalist Left - Think multiculturalism has benefits and are proud of Britain's history of welcoming refugees. Some are immigrants themselves. They view community responses to Ukrainian refugees as "Britain at its best". This group is split evenly on whether levels of immigration should decrease or be at least maintained, but do not see immigration as the top national concern.

Sceptical Scrollers - Hold views on immigration lightly, with many born abroad. They're split roughly evenly on whether levels of immigration should decrease or be maintained, seeing it as one problem among many facing the country. They feel pressure to discuss immigration in the "right" way and would rather avoid the topic entirely. However, they are also the most likely to hold racist beliefs that some races are more intelligent than others.

Established Liberals - Not particularly concerned by immigration but want a more selective, controlled system that prioritizes the right skills and those in genuine need - international students and qualified professionals rather than "unemployed men and their families." They support refugees and think multiculturalism benefits Britain, but want a stronger points-based system to prevent people coming over to take advantage of perks like free healthcare.

Immigration Enthusiasts

Progressive Activists - Stand out as the most pro-immigration segment, embarrassed by Britain's imperial history and proud of the multiculturalism they see as enriching modern Britain. They think globally rather than prioritising British people and believe concern about immigration is often motivated by racism. Only six per cent see immigration as a top national issue and they are the only segment where a majority want to maintain or increase current immigration levels.