

Public Opinion & Voting

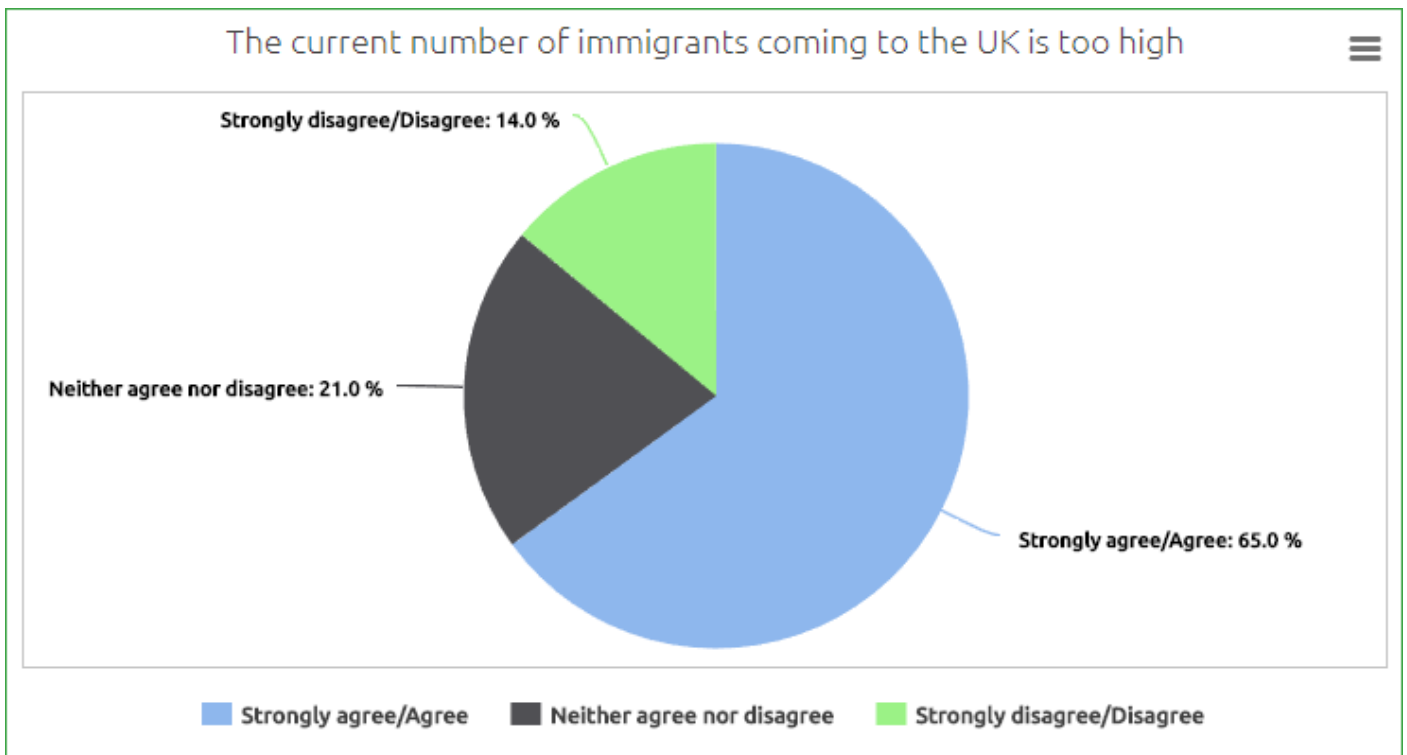
Public Opinion & Voting: MW 436

Concern about the level of immigration to the UK

Deep public concern about the present level of immigration was a major factor in the June 2016 referendum on our membership of the EU. (See [here](#) and [here](#))

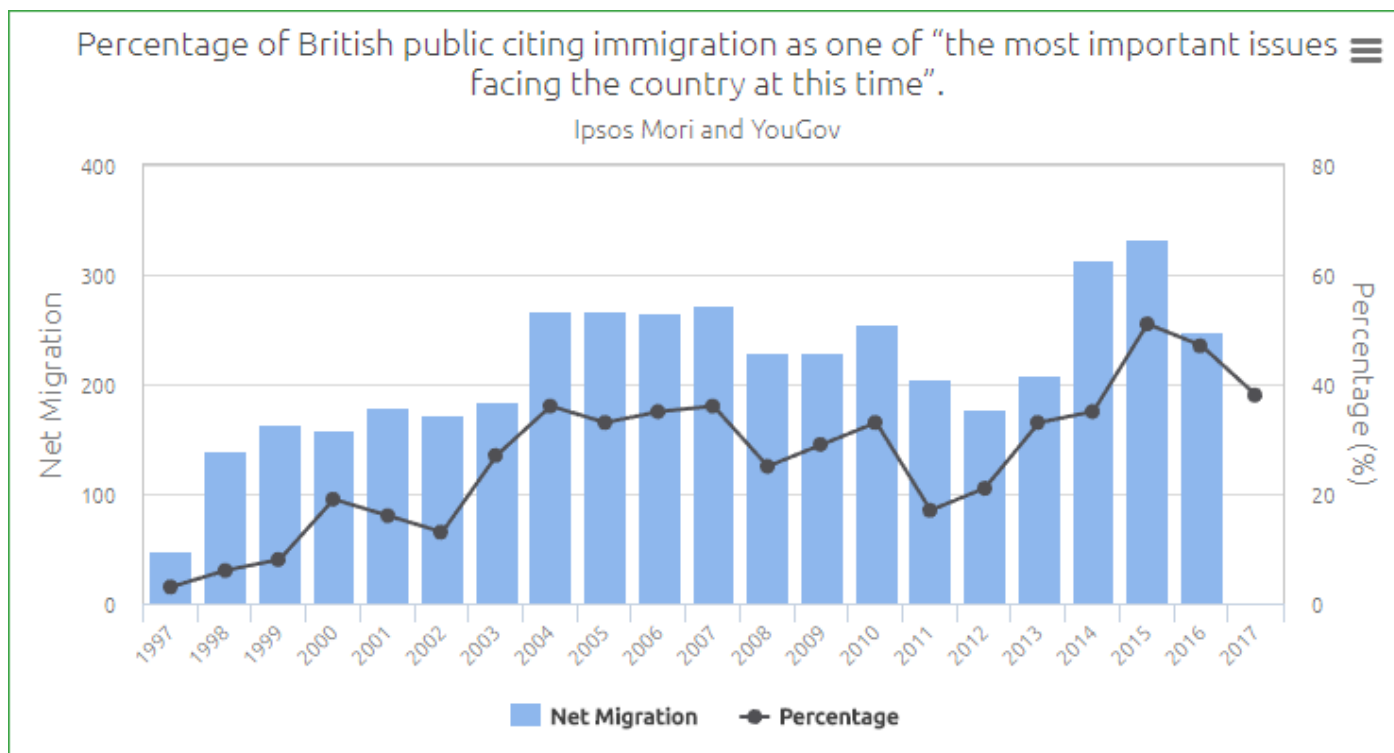
Recent opinion polls show that nearly two thirds of the public think that immigration is too high. (See [here](#))

Figure 1. “The current number of immigrants coming to the UK is too high”



The proportion of people citing immigration as one of the main issues facing the country has, over the past 20 years mirrored net migration to a remarkable degree, as shown below.

Figure 2. Percentage of British public citing immigration as one of “the most important issues facing the country at this time”. Source: Ipsos Mori and YouGov.



Prior to 2000, when a number of policy changes by the then Labour government that led immigration to rise rapidly, less than 10% of the public cited immigration as one of the main concerns facing the country. (For more on this see [here](#))

Since then, immigration has consistently ranked in the top five issues facing the public, alongside other major issues such as the economy and the health service. In October 2017, it was named as the third most important issue facing Britain by respondents in an Ipsos Mori poll (see [here](#)).

It is important to note that the public are hostile to high levels of immigration but not to immigrants themselves and generally see the issue of immigration through the prism of policy failure on the part of successive governments.

Concern about the impact of immigration

Concern about the impact of immigration on our population is a major factor. A poll carried out last year by Migration Watch UK found that 73% of the public thought that Britain was ‘crowded’ compared to just 7% who said that it was not crowded.

The public are also concerned about the prospect of further population growth. Almost three quarters expressed ‘concern’ that the UK population was set to rise to 70 million in the next ten years.

Immigration and the resultant population growth places pressure on public services and housing. This is keenly felt by people in their everyday lives. A July 2017 poll carried out by YouGov found that 58% agreed that immigration has placed too much pressure on public services. (See [here](#))

Almost 70% of the public believe that immigration has had a negative impact on the availability of housing. (See [here](#)) This is unsurprising considering that successive governments have failed to build enough homes to meet demand.

Some feel the impact of immigration in the workplace as well. As many as one third of respondents to a global YouGov poll carried out in July 2017 agreed with the statement that “Immigrants in your country have made it more difficult for people of your nationality to get jobs”. (See [here](#))

Future Migration Policy

Looking ahead, some have suggested that the government should abandon its target of reducing net migration to the tens of thousands. However, an Ipsos MORI poll, published in May 2017, found that, when those answering ‘don’t know’ were excluded, more than 70% of the respondents believed the level of net migration to be sustainable only at a level of 100,000 a year or less. (See [here](#)).

The government is currently negotiating Britain’s departure from the EU. There is an on-going debate about whether Britain should remain in the Single Market or not. Remaining a member of the Single Market would require Britain to continue to accept free movement of people, giving the government no control over the number or type of EU migrants who could come to the UK in the future.

The public believe, by a margin of 64%, that lower skilled migration from the EU should be reduced after Brexit while skilled EU migrants should continue to be able to come to Britain as now (see [here](#)). This would imply leaving the Single Market.

This is in line with the general view that the immigration system should prioritise migrants likely to make the most significant economic contribution. 55% of the public believe that priority should be given to those with high levels of skills and education and who can fill shortages within certain professions. (See [here](#))

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