# Nearly half of Britons feel like strangers in their own country, survey reveals



Almost half of Britons sometimes feel like strangers in their own country, a phenomenon attributed largely to remote working practices and failures in social integration. A recent survey conducted by More in Common, as part of the broader initiative titled This Place Matters, revealed a striking decline in social cohesion across the nation, with 50% of respondents expressing feelings of disconnect from society.

The survey, which gathered insights from over 13,000 adults, was released contemporaneously with Keir Starmer's controversial comments regarding the need for stricter immigration controls. In his speech, Starmer warned that without such measures, the UK risks being transformed into "an island of strangers." This remark evoked immediate comparisons to Enoch Powell’s notorious "Rivers of Blood" speech from 1968, which similarly lamented the integration of immigrants. Nevertheless, Downing Street has since distanced itself from the comparisons, asserting that Starmer advocates for the contributions of migrants while insisting on a fair immigration system.

Focus group discussions within the survey uncovered deeper insights into how modern life is affecting social bonds. Many participants attributed the rise in feelings of isolation to an increased reliance on technology, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ruqayyah, a support worker, noted the significant shift towards remote working, stating, "I think after the pandemic there's more of a 'work from home' kind of nature which has developed, which has actually destroyed our young generation." Teachers and bank employees echoed these sentiments, describing a societal shift where easy digital communication has replaced face-to-face interactions, leading to a waning sense of community.

Interestingly, the research found that younger Britons exhibited a growing distrust of others, signalling a worrying trend towards social fragmentation. While 73% of respondents agreed that more efforts are needed to foster integration across different ethnic backgrounds, nearly half believed that Labour’s proposed policies would make little to no difference in improving the situation.

Starmer’s immigration policies are aimed at addressing these public concerns, which have been intensifying amid the rising popularity of populist movements, particularly those championed by Nigel Farage's Reform UK party. His proposal includes limiting net migration—which peaked at 906,000 in June 2023—by reducing arrivals by 100,000 annually, promoting English proficiency requirements for migrants, and extending citizenship application periods. However, critics warn that such moves may disrupt essential sectors—like healthcare and education—that rely heavily on migrant labour. Analysts argue that unless the government invests significantly in training and education, these measures may ultimately hinder Labour's aspirations for reviving public services and stimulating economic growth.

The Prime Minister's recent remarks on social cohesion and the potential repercussions of integration failures resonate with a sizable portion of the population. Yet More in Common's director, Luke Tryl, cautioned against framing immigration and integration as the exclusive causes of society's fragmentation. He highlighted a multitude of factors, including the retreat from communal spaces and the digital shift that has shifted interactions from the physical to virtual realm.

Debates in the House of Lords have further illuminated the rising perception of division within the UK. Recent research indicated that the number of individuals who view the country as divided has escalated dramatically, from 57% to 78% since January. This increasing perception of societal rifts—a chasm particularly noteworthy between socio-economic classes—reinforces the urgency for a comprehensive national strategy that prioritises social cohesion.

As Starmer navigates these treacherous political waters marked by populist discontent and calls for stronger migration controls, his challenge is to foster a more inclusive and cohesive society while regaining public trust. The stakes are high: failing to address these growing divisions could lead to further alienation, potentially jeopardising both Labour’s political fortunes and the fabric of the community at large.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
2. Paragraphs 2, 5
3. Paragraphs 5, 6
4. Paragraphs 5, 6
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraphs 5, 6
7. Paragraphs 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14725717/Almost-HALF-Britons-living-Keir-Starmer-island-strangers-home-working-failures.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/f9b2cf94-a4f0-4d32-94f2-5fe274f764b2> - This article discusses Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's recent speech on immigration, where he warned that the UK risks becoming an 'island of strangers' without stricter immigration controls. His comments drew comparisons to Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 'rivers of blood' speech. Downing Street rejected these parallels, emphasizing that Starmer supports the contributions migrants make and merely calls for a fair and controlled immigration system. Critics within the Labour Party expressed concern over Starmer’s language, warning it could foster division. Planned policy changes include stricter English language requirements, extended citizenship application periods, and higher skill thresholds for foreign workers—excluding key sectors facing shortages.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/92070e36-921a-458d-ab37-6c682b9da645> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has unveiled a stricter immigration policy in response to growing public concern and the surging popularity of Nigel Farage's Reform UK party. While aiming to control net legal migration—which peaked at 906,000 in the year to June 2023—Starmer's rhetoric and proposed measures closely mirror populist narratives, reflecting pressure from both public sentiment and his own MPs. Labour's plan includes reducing net arrivals by 100,000 annually, promoting English proficiency among migrants, and closing abused visa routes such as those for care workers. However, critics warn that these measures may impair key sectors like healthcare and academia and fail to address the politically sensitive issue of small boat crossings. The strategy also shifts focus towards attracting high-skilled migrants while delaying settlement and citizenship opportunities, potentially deterring talent. Analysts argue that to truly reduce immigration, the government must tackle underlying issues such as skills shortages and economic inactivity among the UK workforce. Without substantial investment in education and training, the reforms may hinder Labour’s goals of revitalizing public services and economic growth.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/8579af75-0d05-4ab6-abe8-4792620f41c0> - In this episode of the Financial Times' Political Fix podcast, host Lucy Fisher explores the Labour Party’s new immigration policy and other pressing political issues ahead of her maternity leave. Labour aims to reduce net migration, which previously peaked at 900,000 under the Conservatives. Key measures include limiting skilled work visas to graduate-level jobs, reworking student visa policies, and extending the settlement application period for migrants to 10 years. These efforts may lower net migration by 100,000 annually. Commentators question the potential economic consequences, noting the UK's reliance on migrant labour for sectors like healthcare and construction. The policy’s political language has drawn criticism, particularly Keir Starmer's reference to the UK becoming an 'island of strangers,' which evoked comparisons to Enoch Powell's controversial 1968 speech. Internally, Labour faces tension between appealing to former supporters and risking alienation of left-wing voters. Additionally, Labour’s pivot away from generous international aid and plans to reform prisons by early release schemes highlight fiscal pressures and ideological shifts.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/087f35aa-6d0b-49ec-af6c-9b30b87d787d> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer now identifies Nigel Farage's Reform UK as his primary political opponent amid rising support for the party and waning Conservative influence. Starmer believes a major political realignment is underway, referring to the Conservatives under Kemi Badenoch as nearing 'the end of the road.' Public opinion polls confirm this shift, showing Reform UK ahead of both the Conservatives and Labour. Despite mounting criticism from within his party over welfare cuts and his tough rhetoric on migration, Starmer continues to push his agenda. He recently visited Albania to firm up his migration policy ahead of next week's EU-UK summit. Starmer is also proposing 'returns hubs' for failed asylum seekers, though Albania has declined involvement. Farage, capitalizing on record-high small boat crossings and the government's inability to curb illegal migration, has called for a national emergency. Starmer's approval ratings continue to decline sharply, especially among Labour voters, despite his attempts to refocus political debate around migration and economic control. His warnings about the increasing threat from Farage underscore concerns about the efficacy of his strategies and the challenge of converting political messaging into tangible results.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/3daf7366-fe7f-4b6b-9e23-652499082b34> - Keir Starmer's newly proposed immigration policy has drawn criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. Right-wing commentators argue it does not go far enough, particularly in addressing illegal immigration via small boats, while liberals find the language inflammatory and the measures damaging. Key sectors like universities and social care lament the tighter visa controls, though these areas have seen visa misuse. Despite these challenges, Starmer seeks to address genuine public concerns over immigration's impact on services and integration, with polling data showing declining support for immigration's economic and social benefits. Starmer's strategy is to regain public trust and neutralize populist threats like Reform UK by demonstrating responsiveness without succumbing to hardline rhetoric. However, he walks a tightrope; curbing immigration may hinder economic recovery and exacerbate labor shortages. The political context is marked by voter disillusionment with mainstream parties' broken promises and the lingering effects of Brexit. The broader dilemma lies in trying to restore democratic trust while balancing economic imperatives and electoral strategy. Starmer aims for moderation and realism, but the risks remain high in an environment shaped by populist discontent and institutional erosion.
7. <https://www.hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-12-06/debates/7BB00D76-D522-4D0B-AAB2-A260CF3553E3/SocialCohesionAndCommunityDuringPeriodsOfChange> - This debate in the House of Lords highlights the importance of social cohesion in the UK. Research by More in Common indicates that since January, the proportion of people who describe the UK as divided has increased from 57% to 78%. The main divisions identified are between the rich and poor, between immigrants and those born in the UK, and between left and right. Additionally, 71% of respondents believe that the UK is more divided now than at any time in their lifetime. The debate underscores the need for a long-term, cross-departmental national social cohesion strategy to address these growing divisions.