Nearly a decade after voting to “take back control” of their borders, a growing number of Britons now say they preferred the immigration system that existed before Brexit.

According to new polling by research group *More in Common*, voters now favor the pre-2021 immigration framework by more than two to one. Forty-one percent of respondents said they would rather return to Britain’s pre-EU-exit policies, while just 19 percent support the post-Brexit rules that have shaped migration since 2021.

Brexit’s Promise Fades

Immigration was at the heart of the 2016 referendum, with the Leave campaign promising tighter border controls and a “fairer” system once Britain left the European Union. But those promises appear to have fallen short.

Instead of declining, migration has surged. Official figures show net migration reached **431,000 in 2024**, well above levels typical of the 2010s, which fluctuated between 200,000 and 300,000. The spike has been fueled by new visa schemes allowing more workers from non-EU countries—an outcome critics now dub the “Boriswave,” referencing former Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s immigration reforms.

Discontent Across the Spectrum

Support for the pre-Brexit system cuts across party lines.
Green Party voters were most nostalgic, with **60 percent** preferring the old system. Among Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters, **46 and 49 percent** respectively shared that sentiment. Even backers of Nigel Farage’s Reform UK were hesitant to defend the current approach—only 21 percent support it, while 37 percent said they preferred the pre-Brexit policy.

But experts caution against assuming this reflects a desire to rejoin the EU. Sophie Stowers of *More in Common* said that voters’ frustration stems less from missing free movement and more from dissatisfaction with rising migration numbers and ongoing small-boat crossings across the Channel.

A Complex Picture

Analysts say Britain's current system—an "Australian-style points-based" model—was intended to balance control with openness. Ironically, it's now the *least* popular immigration policy tested in the survey, with a net approval score of **-39 percent**.

Yet many respondents still rated an "Australian-style" system most positively, apparently unaware that Britain already uses one. "People's knowledge of immigration systems is limited," said Georgina Sturge of Oxford University's Migration Observatory. "They're rating impressions, not policies."

No Easy Way Back

Experts agree that nostalgia for the pre-Brexit era cannot easily translate into policy change. "Even if people prefer how things felt before Brexit, the government can't simply turn back the clock," Sturge said. "The small boats crisis didn't exist then, and rejoining the EU wouldn't make it disappear."

As frustration mounts and migration continues to rise, Britain finds itself in a political paradox: after voting to leave the EU to control immigration, the country now faces higher inflows—and growing public regret over the system that replaced what once was.