

Parenting priorities: international attitudes towards raising children



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THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM



SOCIAL CHANGE INITIATIVE



Introduction

The World Values Survey (WVS) is an international research programme devoted to the study of people's social, political, economic, religious and cultural values around the world. Running since 1981, the WVS is the world's largest and most widely used social survey, with over 800,000 data downloads per year. The WVS covers 120 countries represented across seven waves of data, with the most recent wave – 7 – the largest wave yet.

The questionnaire has extensive coverage of a huge range of attitudes, beliefs and values. The WVS also has a 50% overlap with the European Values Survey (EVS), opening up comparisons with another five waves of European data.

In the UK, fieldwork was completed Mar-Sept 2022 by Ipsos, among a random probability sample of **3,056 adults aged 18+**. This included respondents in England (1,645) and boost samples in Scotland (523), Wales (437) and Northern Ireland (446). This means not only can we compare the UK against other countries around the world, but also the four UK nations against each other. (See the technical details section at the end of this report for more information on the UK sample and international samples.)

How countries were selected for inclusion in this report

This is wave 7 of WVS, which included around 90 countries and ran from 2017 to 2022. This report focuses on comparison with a cross-section of 24 countries from WVS wave 7 and EVS wave 5 (see table for fieldwork years).

Countries were initially shortlisted based on the availability of reliable and accurately weighted data and then narrowed down, focusing on global coverage (based on the [UN's standardised country coding system](#)), regional

coverage and population size. This selection gives coverage of 12 of the 17 UN M49 geographic regions across 24 countries, representing almost 50% of the world's population (source: [World Bank](#)).

The latest data for the UK was collected in 2022. However, for analysis of trends over time, data is for Great Britain due to a lack of available trend data from Northern Ireland.

Countries included and latest years for which data is available

Australia (2018)	Japan (2019)
Brazil (2018)	Mexico (2018)
Canada (2020)	Morocco (2021)
China (2018)	Nigeria (2017/2018)
Egypt (2018)	Norway (2018)*
France (2018)*	Philippines (2019)
Germany (2017/2018)	Poland (2017/2018)*
United Kingdom (2022)+	Russia (2017)
Greece (2017)	South Korea (2017/2018)
Indonesia (2018)	Spain (2017/2018)*
Iran (2020)	Sweden (2017/2018)*
Italy (2018)*	United States (2017)

* European Values Survey (EVS) country; 50% question coverage.

+ UK used comparing WVS7 data; Great Britain used for analysis over time due to data availability.

1. The qualities we want in our children: attitudes over time

Over the last three decades, Britons' views have shifted on the key qualities that children should be encouraged to learn at home, with the main changes being a decline in the perceived importance of obedience and unselfishness and an increase in how much people value hard work and imagination



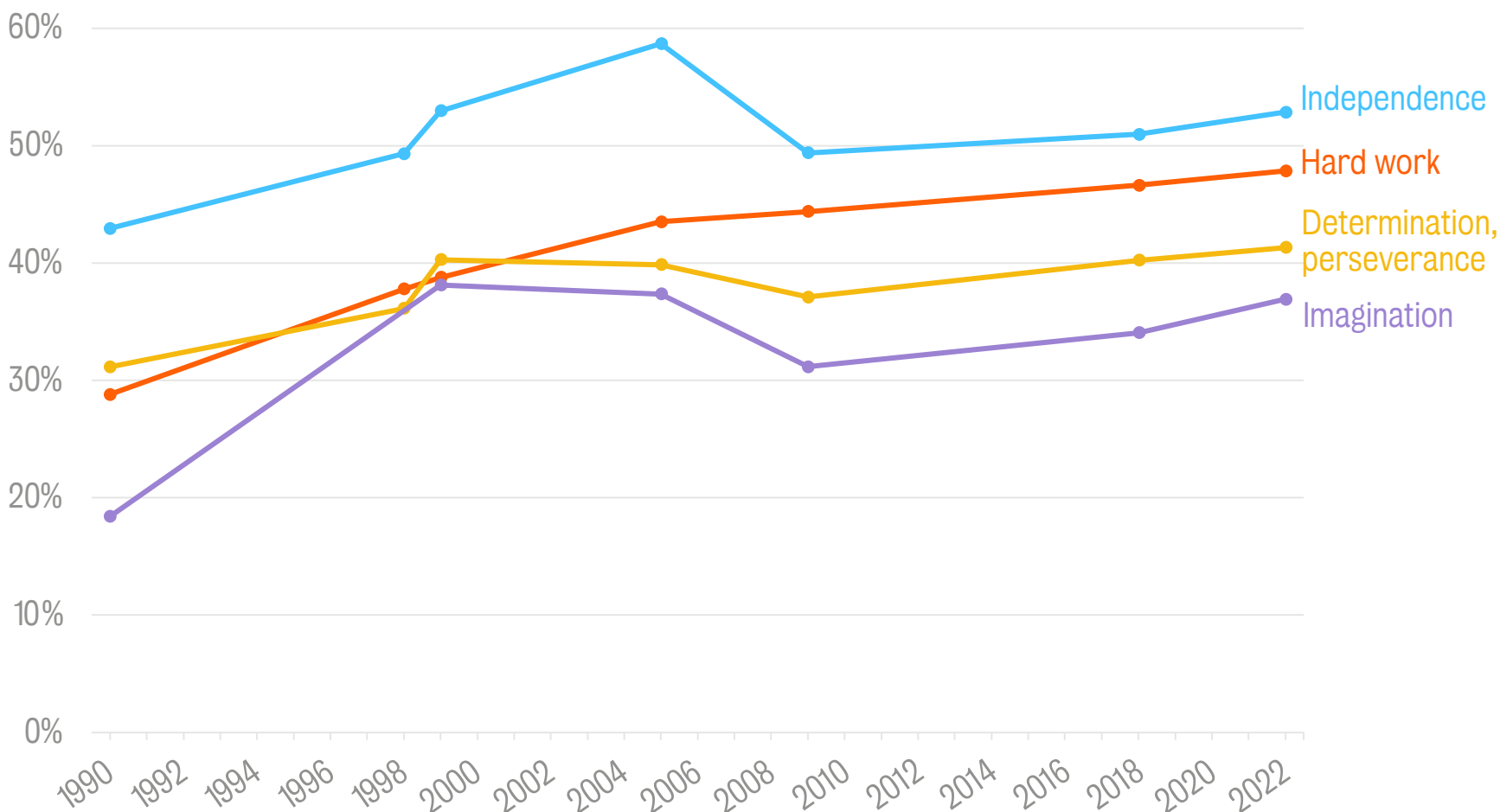
Compared with the early 1990s, Britons are now more likely to see independence, hard work, determination and imagination as important qualities to encourage in children

The perceived importance of various qualities in children has increased over the last three decades.

Below is the share of the public who thought these qualities were especially important in 2022 and how it has increased since 1990:

- Independence: 53%, up from 43%
- Hard work: 48%, up from 29%
- Determination, perseverance: 41%, up from 31%
- Imagination: 37%, up from 18%

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% of British public who selected quality)



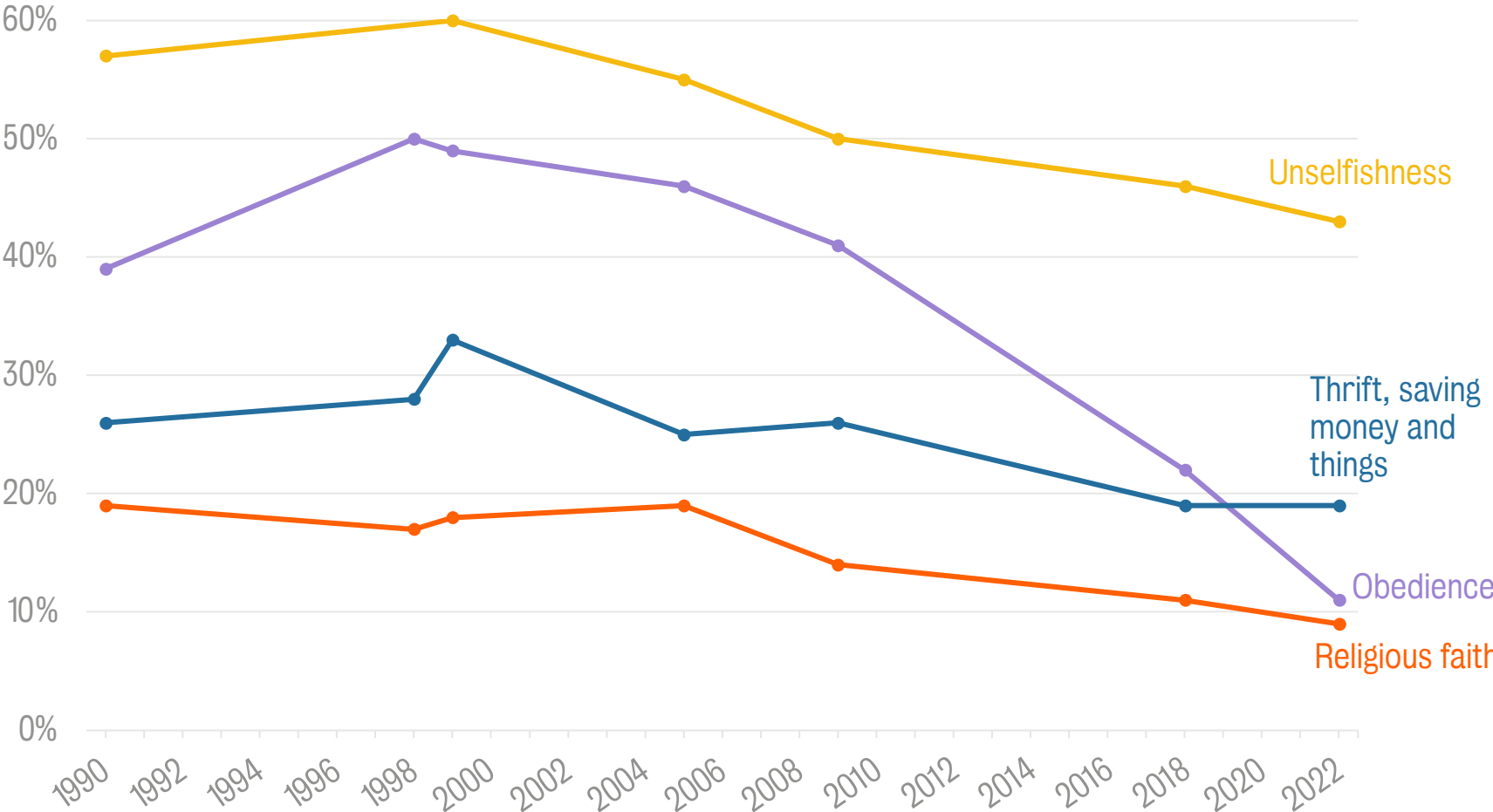
Base: minimum of 1,000 people aged 18+ surveyed in Great Britain per year. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information. Note in WVS waves 4 and 5, respondents were asked to select from a list of 10, rather than 11, child qualities, and in wave 6 “good manners” was not included in the list

Obedience is now seen as a much less essential quality for children to learn, while the perceived importance of unselfishness, thrift and religious faith has also declined

In 1998, a peak of 50% of the British population said obedience was an especially important quality for children to learn at home. But by 2022, just 11% felt this way.

Similarly, in 1999, 60% thought unselfishness was crucial – a figure which has since declined to 43% in the latest data.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% of British public who selected quality)



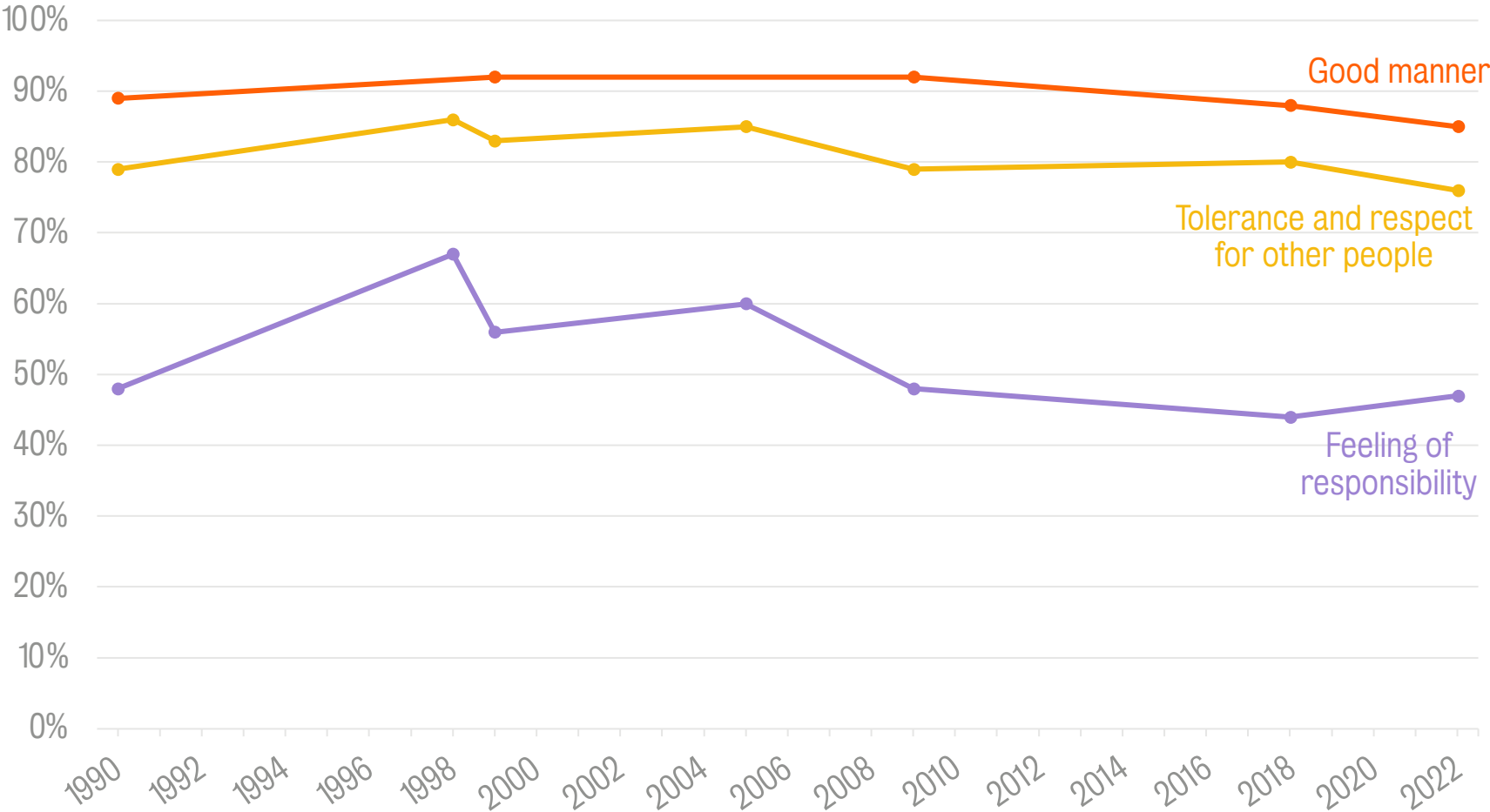
Base: minimum of 1,000 people aged 18+ surveyed in Great Britain per year. See WWSA website for sample information. Note in WWS waves 4 and 5, respondents were asked to select from a list of 10, rather than 11, child qualities, and in wave 6 “good manners” was not included in the list

Good manners, tolerance and respect for others and a feeling of responsibility are roughly as important as they were three decades ago

85% of Britons see good manners as especially important for children – virtually the same as in 1990 (89%).

There has been similarly little shift in how much people value tolerance, while views on the importance of responsibility have varied more, but are now around what they were three decades ago.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% of British public who selected quality)



Base: minimum of 1,000 people aged 18+ surveyed in Great Britain per year. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information. Note in WVS waves 4 and 5, respondents were asked to select from a list of 10, rather than 11, child qualities, and in wave 6 “good manners” was not included in the list

Of the 11 traits asked about, good manners and tolerance remain the two most important, while obedience has fallen from fifth to tenth and hard work has risen from eighth to fourth

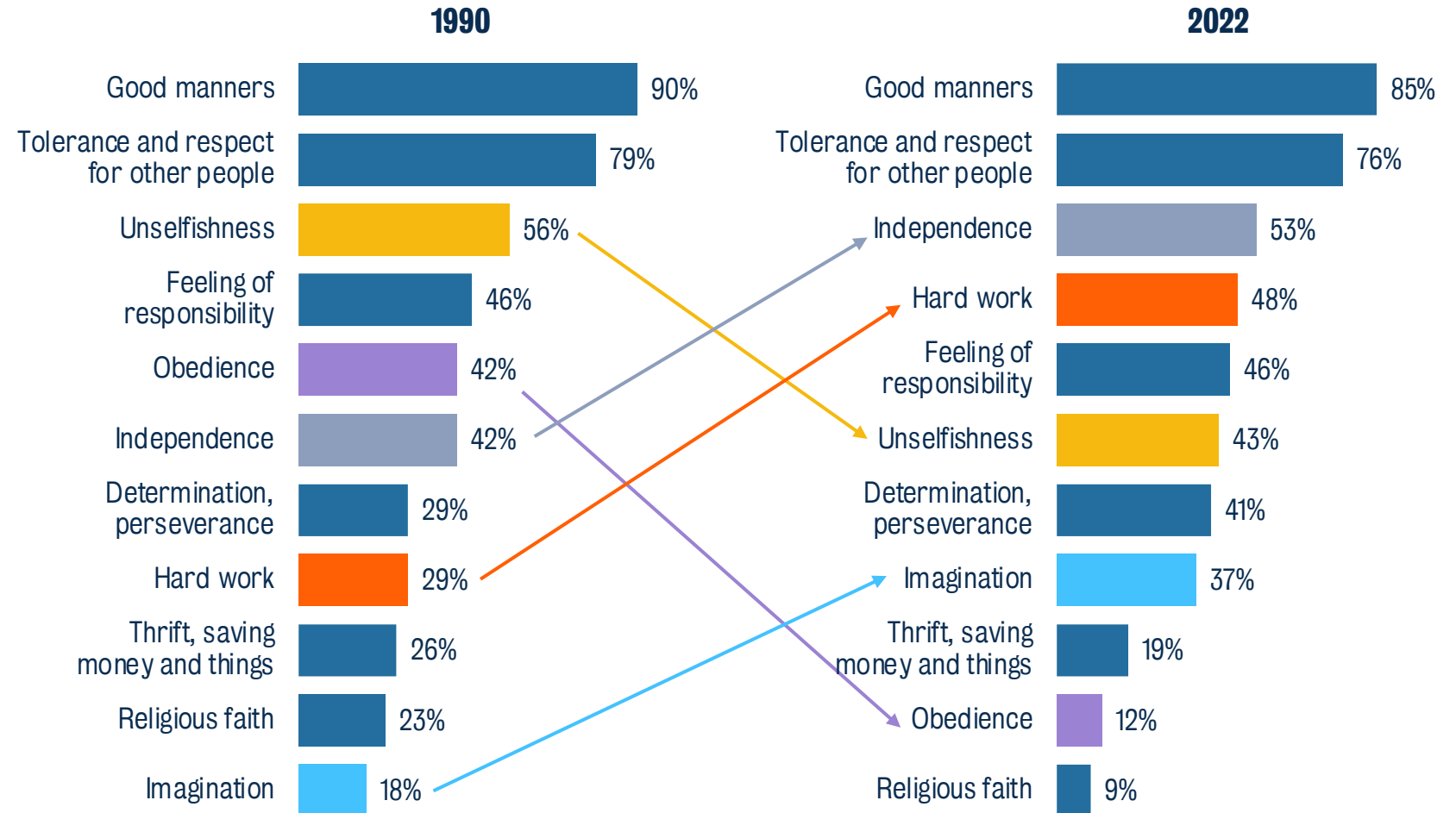
Good manners, and tolerance and respect for other people are still the qualities seen as first and second most important to the UK public – unchanged since 1990.

But over the last few decades, unselfishness has fallen from third to sixth place, while obedience had plummeted from fifth to tenth.

Moving in the other direction, hard work has risen to be fourth most important, up from eighth, and independence has moved up to third from sixth.

Note some figures differ from previous charts as these show results for the UK, rather than Great Britain.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% of UK public who selected quality; key changes highlighted)



2. How the UK compares with other nations

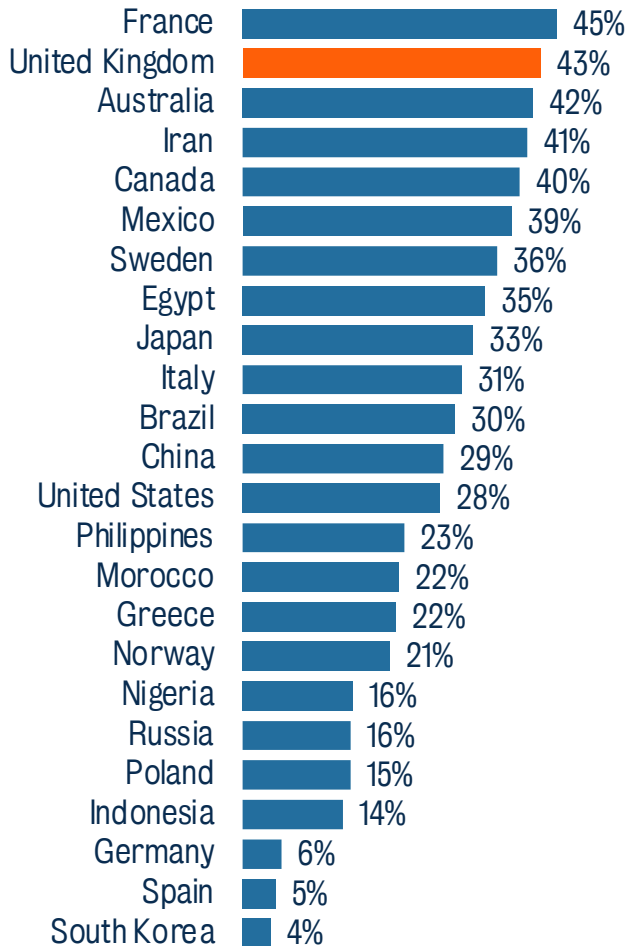
Of 24 countries, the UK is among the most likely to value unselfishness in children and among the least likely to value responsibility and obedience



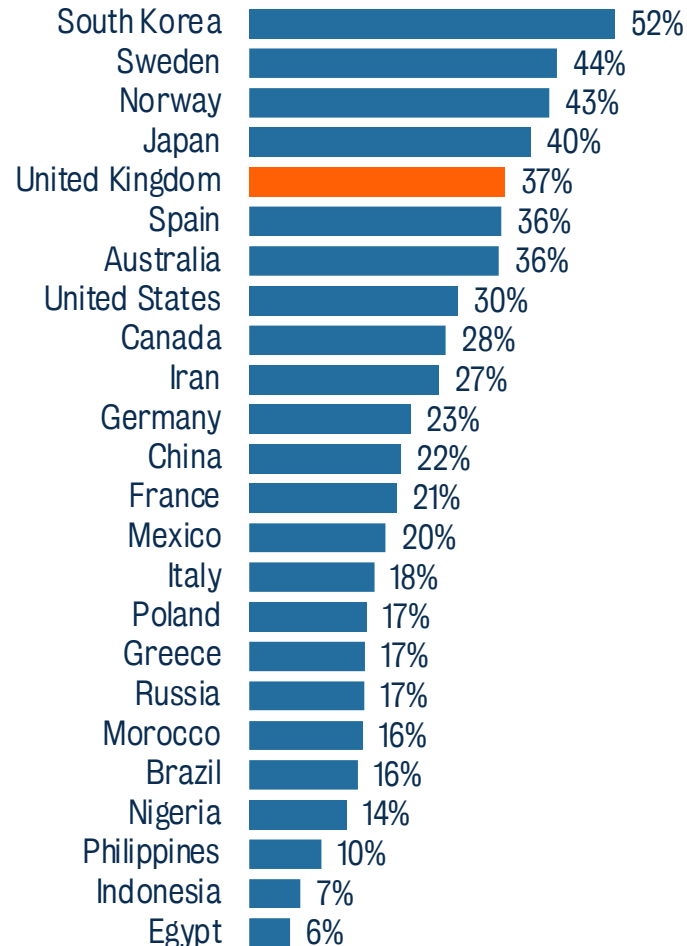
The UK is among the most likely to value unselfishness, imagination and good manners in children...

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% who selected quality)

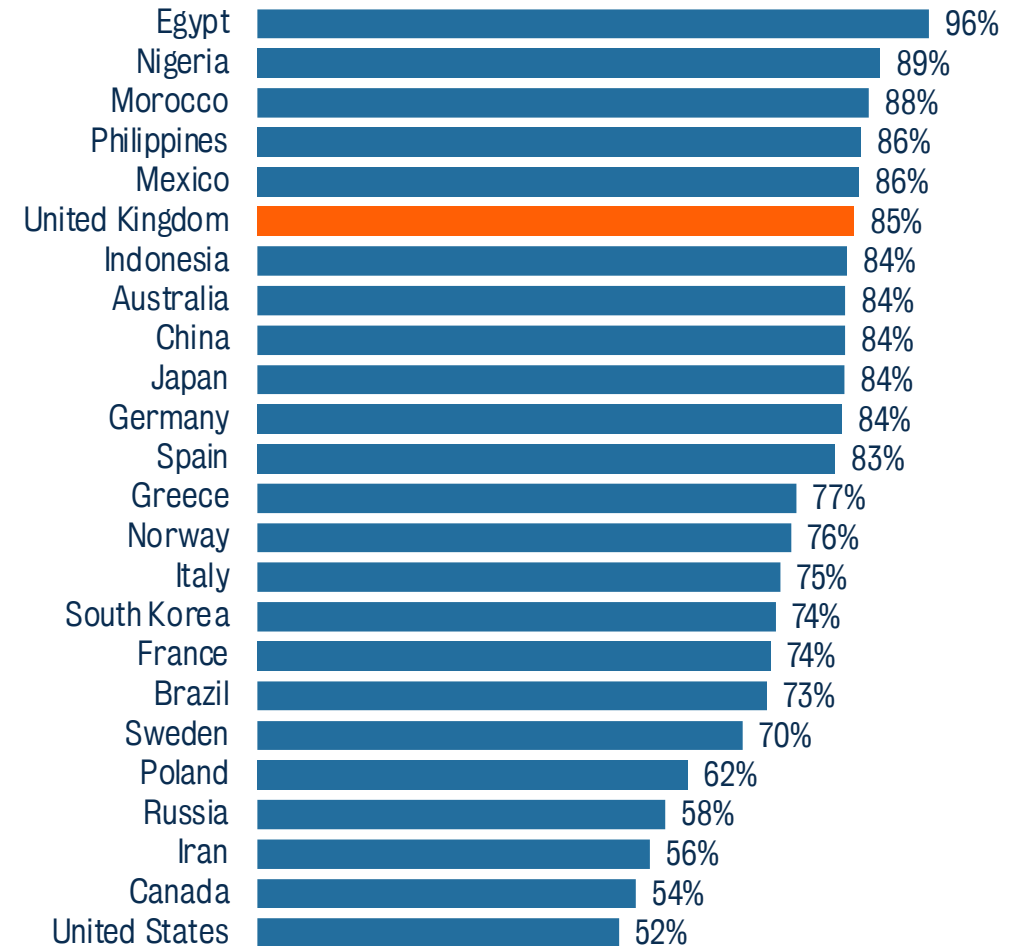
Not being selfish (unselfishness)



Imagination



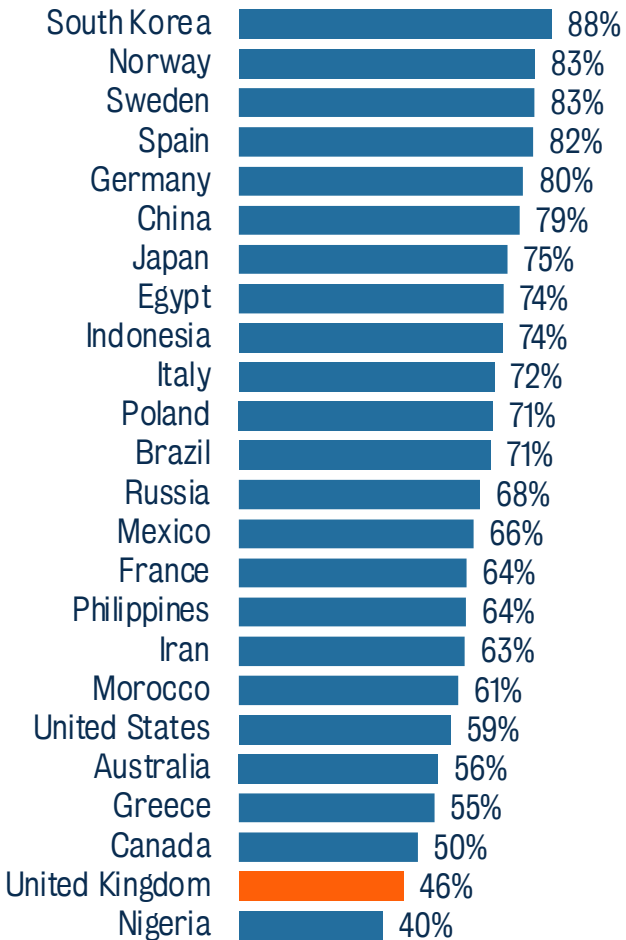
Good manners



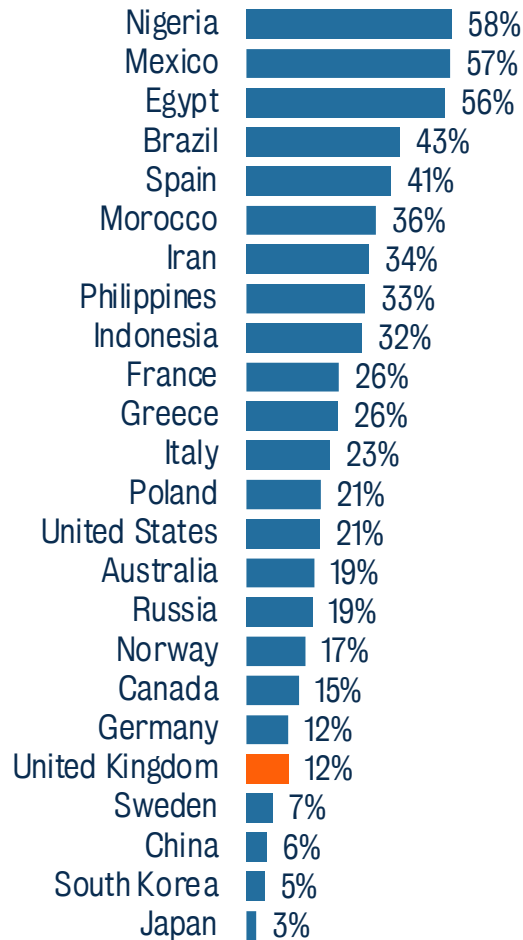
...and among the least likely to prize responsibility, obedience, thrift and religious faith

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% who selected quality)

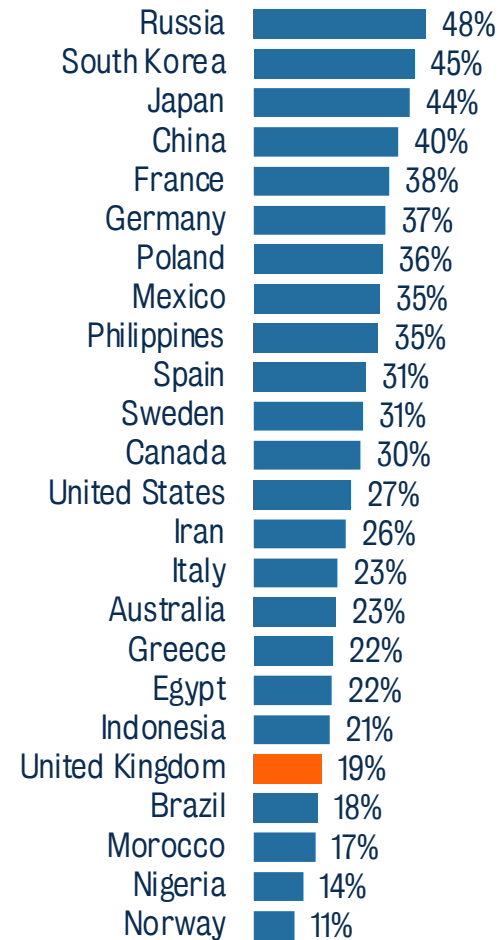
Feeling of responsibility



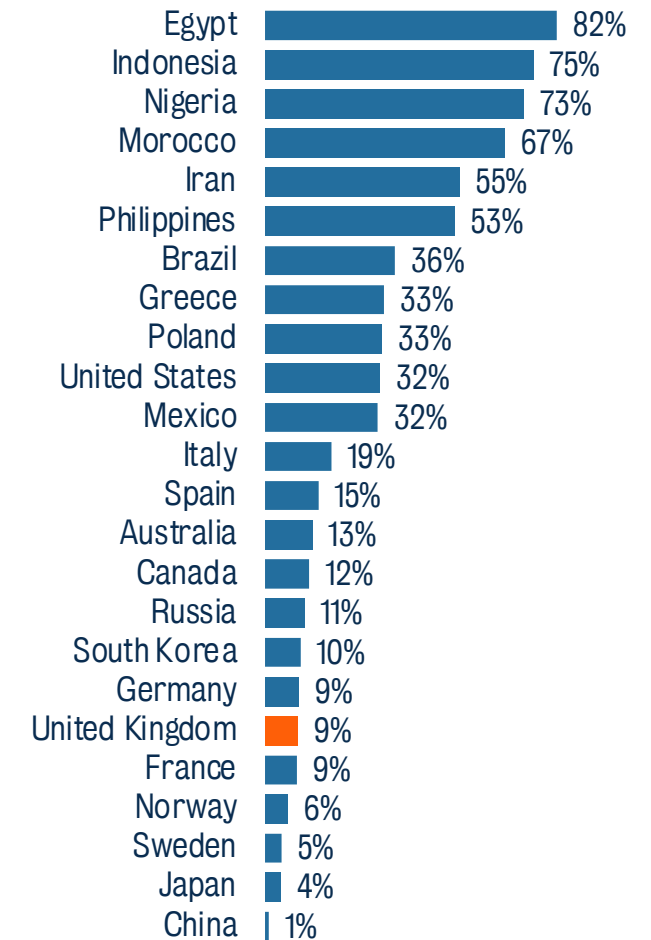
Obedience



Thrift, saving money and things



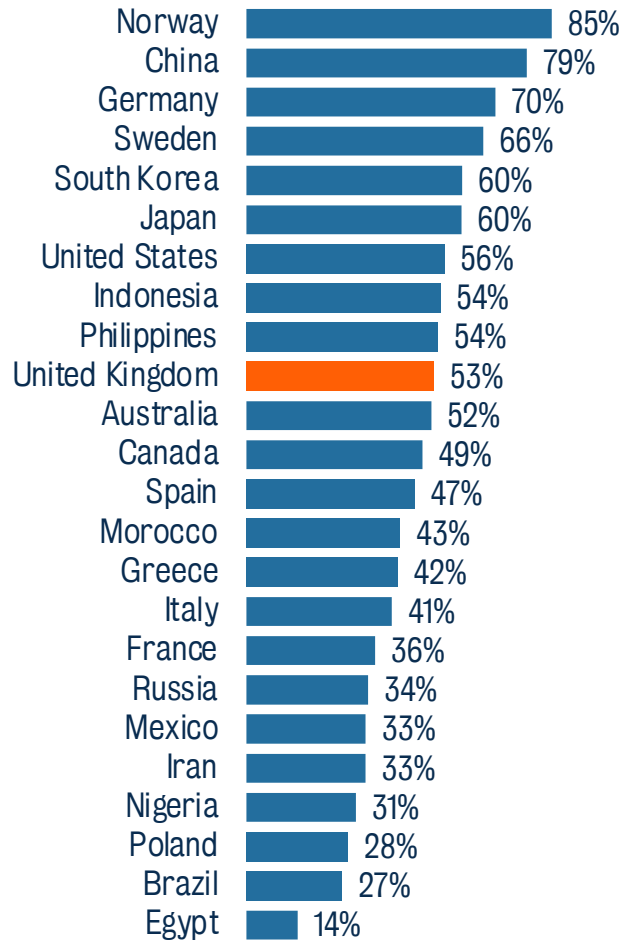
Religious faith



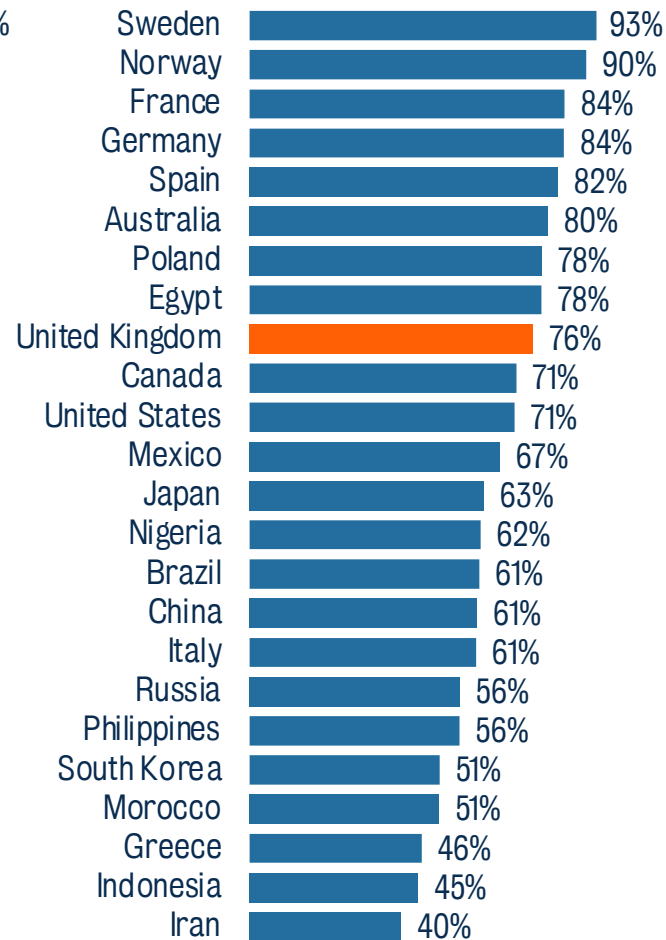
The UK ranks more mid-table for perceived importance of independence, tolerance, determination and hard work

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% who selected quality)

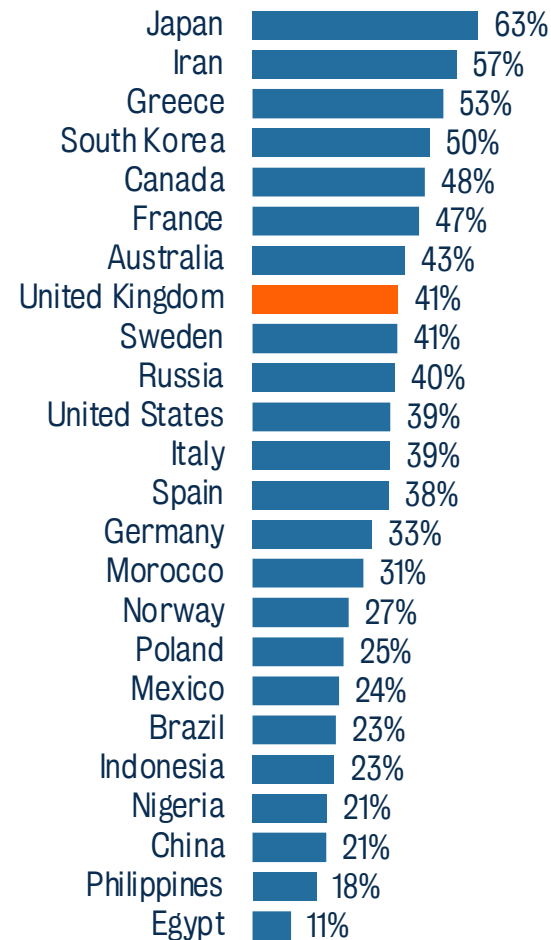
Independence



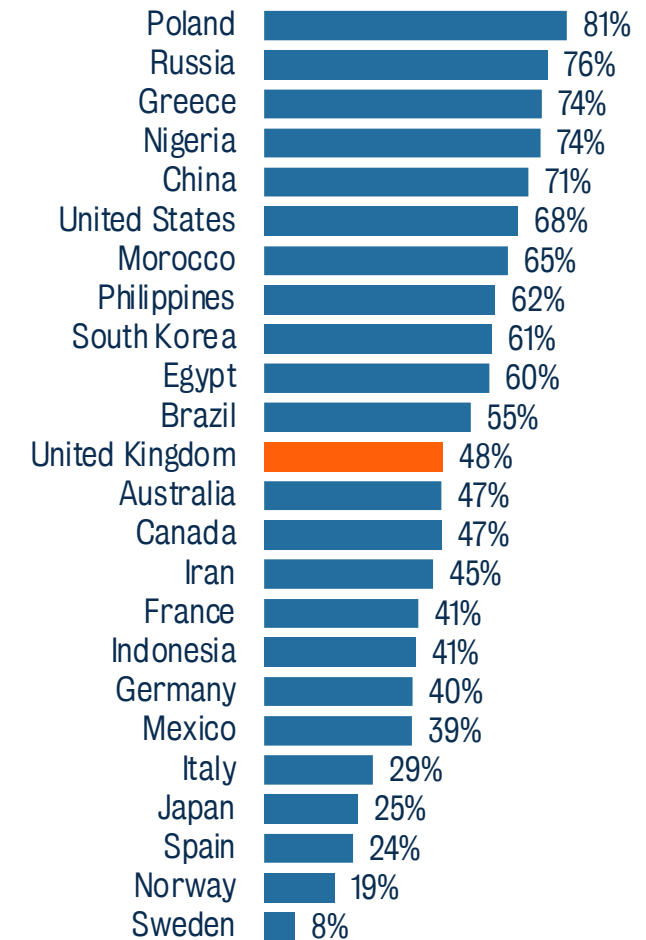
Tolerance and respect for other people



Determination, perseverance



Hard work



3. Key UK and international findings

The UK places a high value on unselfishness in children, but the perceived importance of this quality has nonetheless declined in recent years. Meanwhile, the US is least likely to see good manners as essential

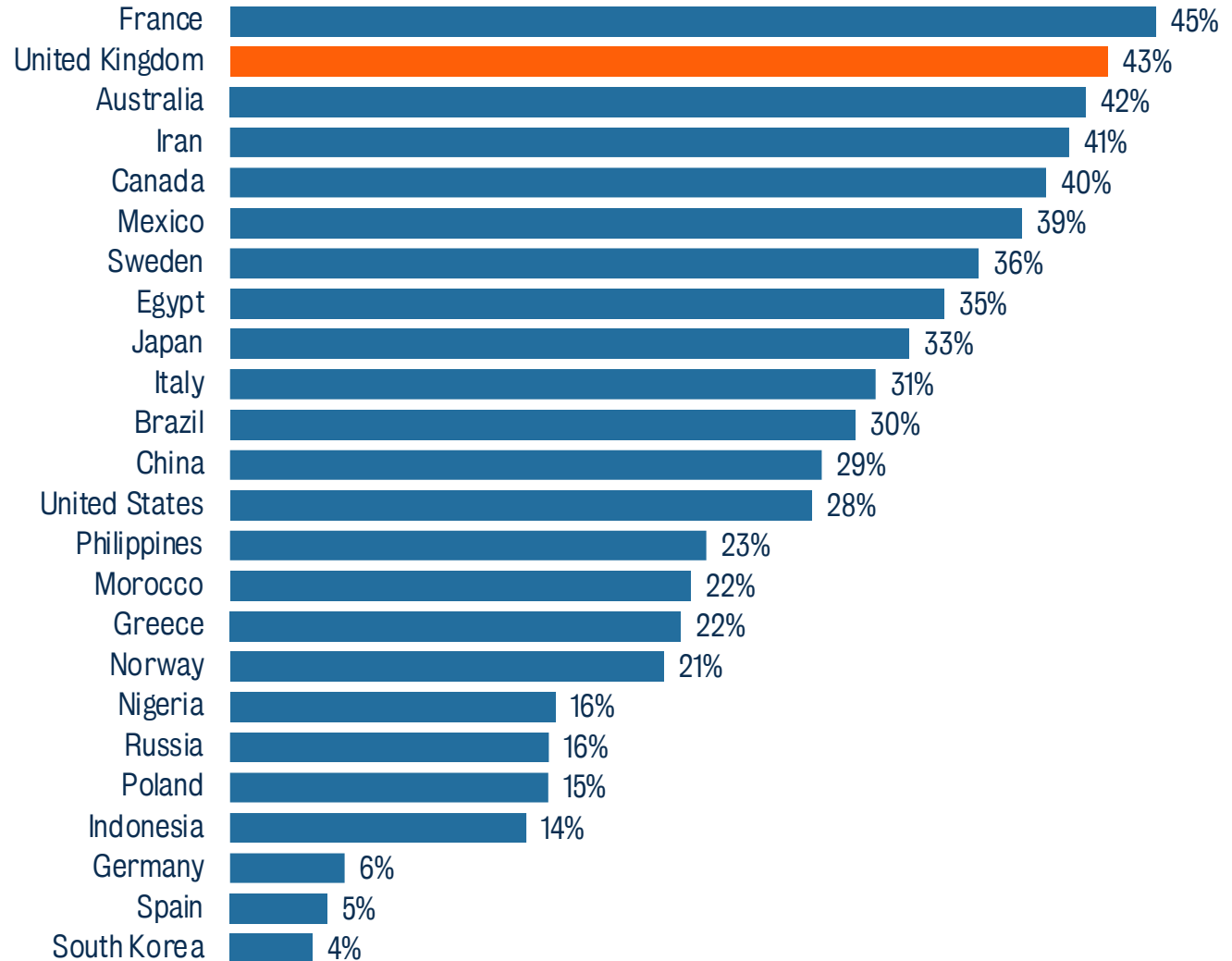


The UK is among the most likely to value unselfishness in children, while Germany and Spain are among the least

43% of the UK public say unselfishness is an especially important quality for children to learn – second only to France (45%), which comes top on this measure, though on a par with Australia (43%) and Iran (41%).

The UK also ranks above peer nations such as Sweden (36%) and the US (28%), while the bottom of the table shows the extent to which responses vary even among comparable western countries. In Germany and Spain, for instance, just 6% and 5% respectively prize unselfishness as a trait in children.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Not being selfish (unselfishness)** (% who selected quality)



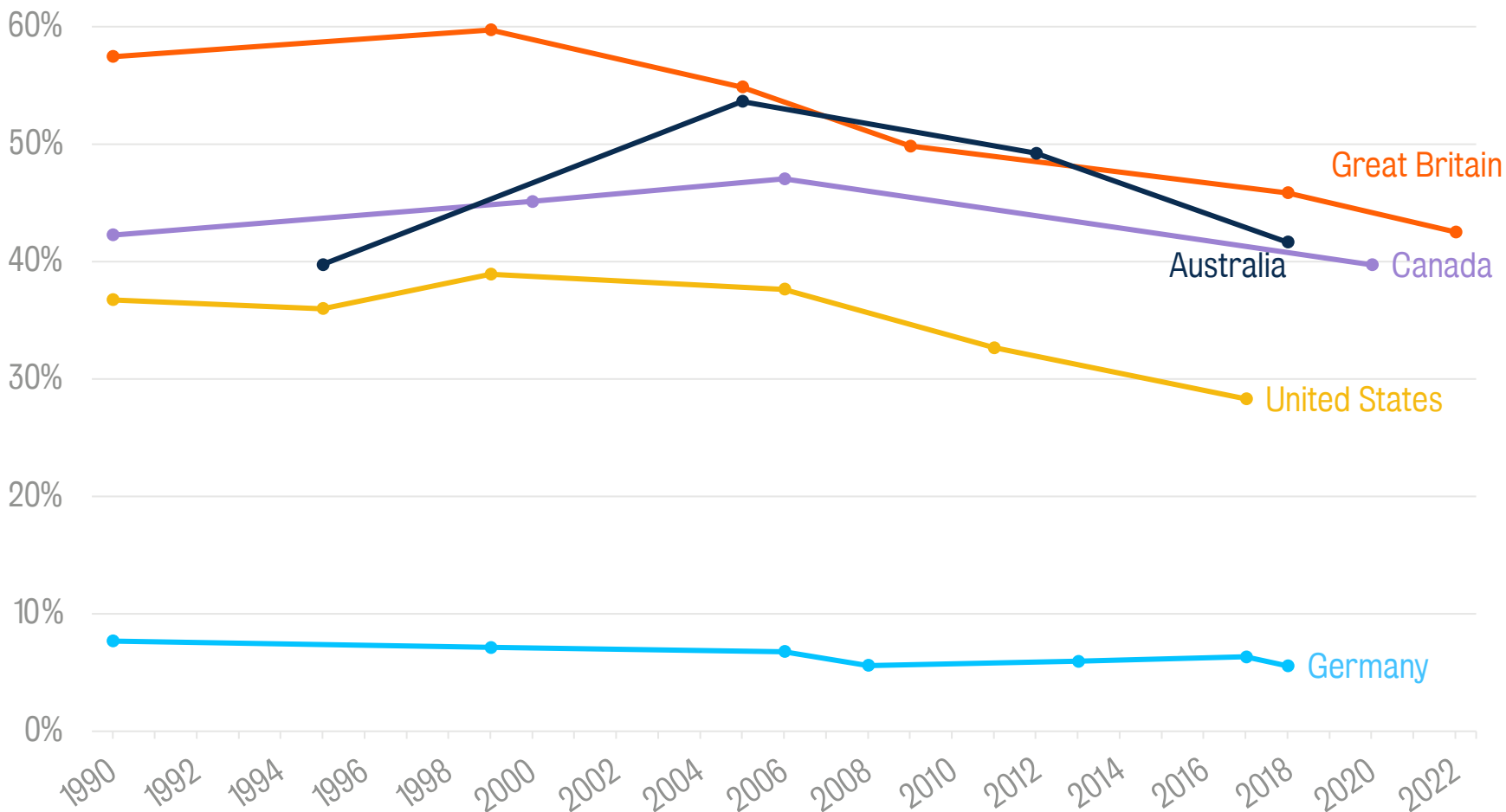
In several western countries, unselfishness has either declined in importance or remained roughly as important for people, with Germany notable for the consistently low value placed on this quality

In Australia and Canada, the perceived importance of unselfishness is roughly what it was when trends began.

The same is true of Germany, although this quality is seen as much less essential there, with a very consistent trend of fewer than one in 10 people saying it's especially important.

And, in the US, as in Britain, unselfishness has become less essential to the public over time.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Not being selfish (unselfishness)** (% who selected quality)



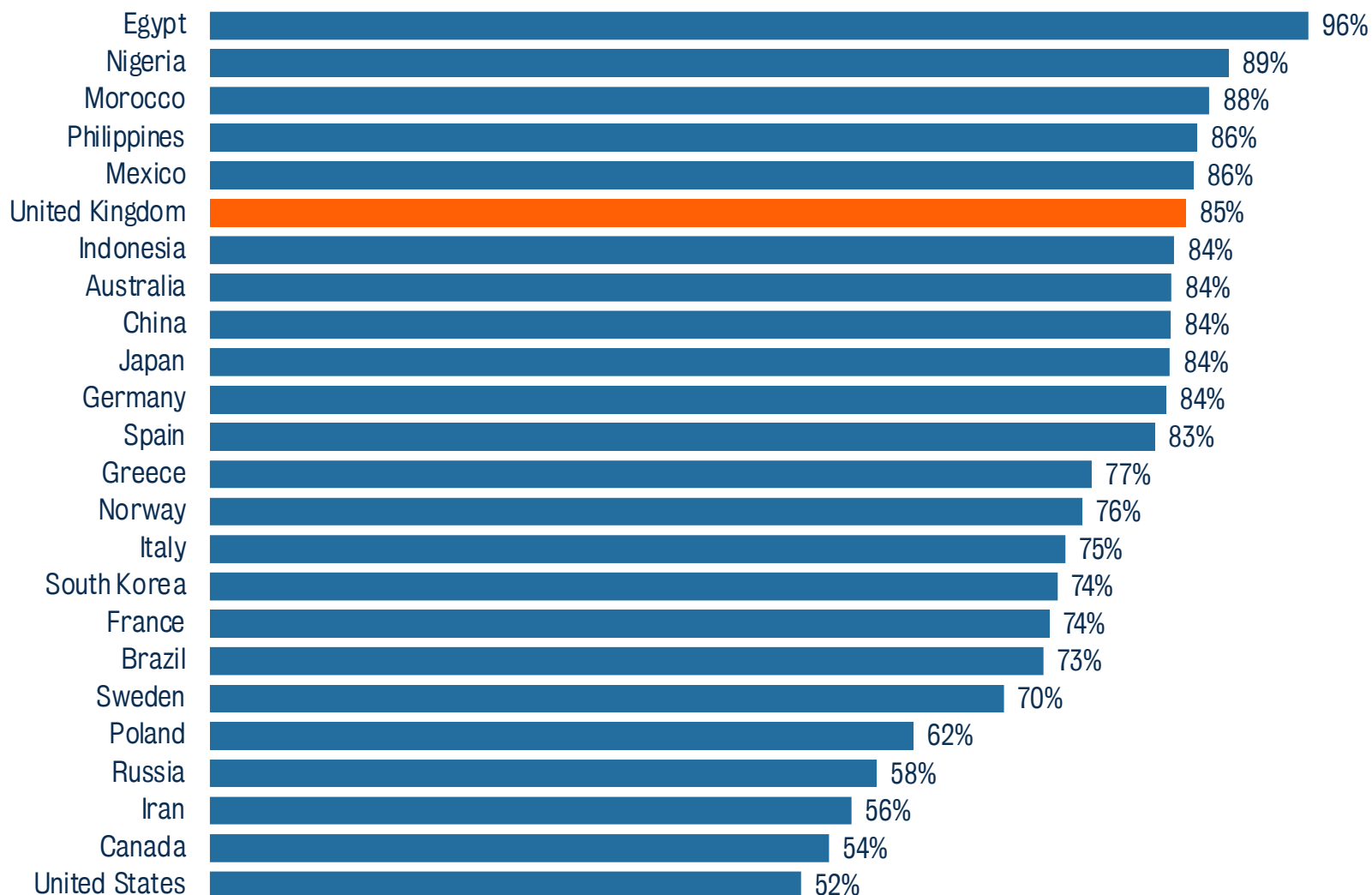
Base: minimum of 1,000 people aged 18+ surveyed in Great Britain per year. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information. Note in WVS waves 4 and 5, respondents were asked to select from a list of 10, rather than 11, child qualities, and in wave 6 "good manners" was not included in the list

The UK ranks highly for the perceived importance of good manners, with the US valuing this the least

85% of people in the UK say good manners are particularly important for children – similar to many other nations where more than eight in 10 say the same.

Egypt (96%) is the country where good manners are prized the most, while the US is where they are valued the least, with 52% saying they are crucial for children.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Good manners** (% who selected quality)

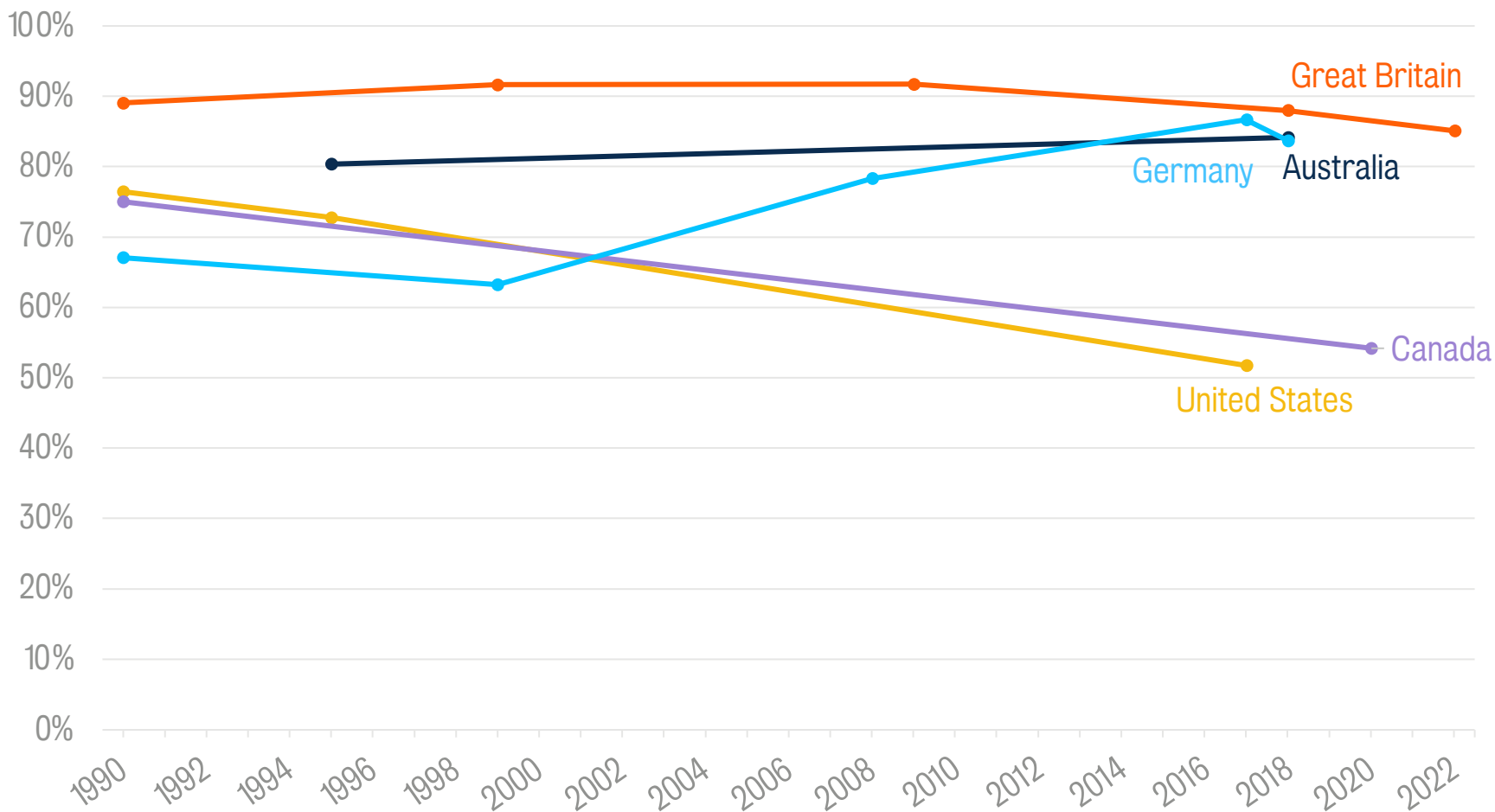


Good manners have become less important to those in the US and Canada, in contrast to trends elsewhere

In 2017, the latest year for which data is available, 52% of people in the US said good manners were an especially important quality for children to have – down from 76% in 1990. And over a similar period, the equivalent figure for Canada declined from 75% to 54%.

Meanwhile, in Britain, Australia and Germany, the perceived importance of good manners either rose or remained stable.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Good manners** (% who selected quality)

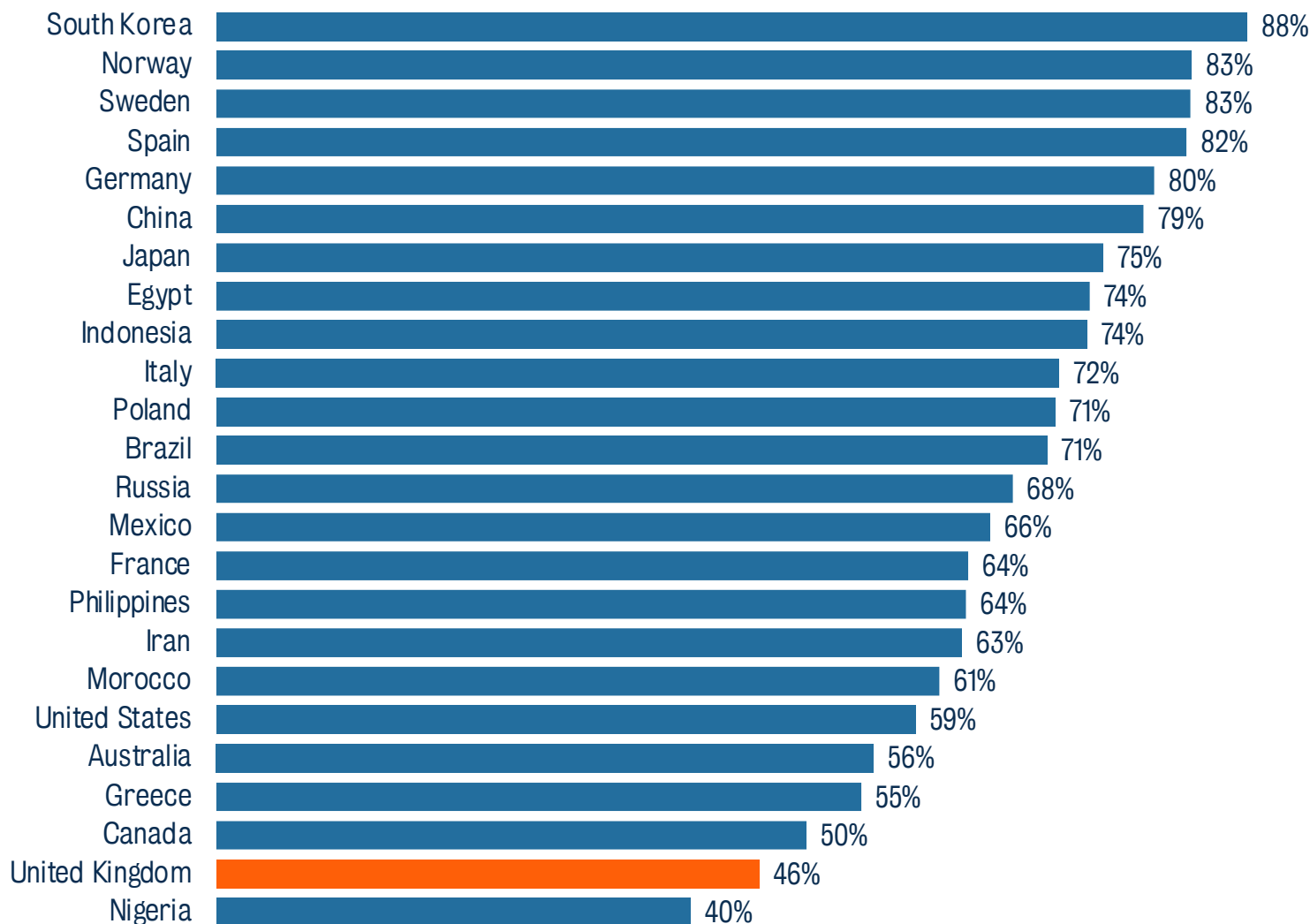


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Only Nigeria is less likely than the UK to say it's important for children to have a sense of responsibility

46% of the UK public consider a feeling of responsibility to be an important quality in children, with only people in Nigeria (40%) less likely to hold this view. And the UK is the only western country where less than half the population feel such a sense of responsibility is crucial.

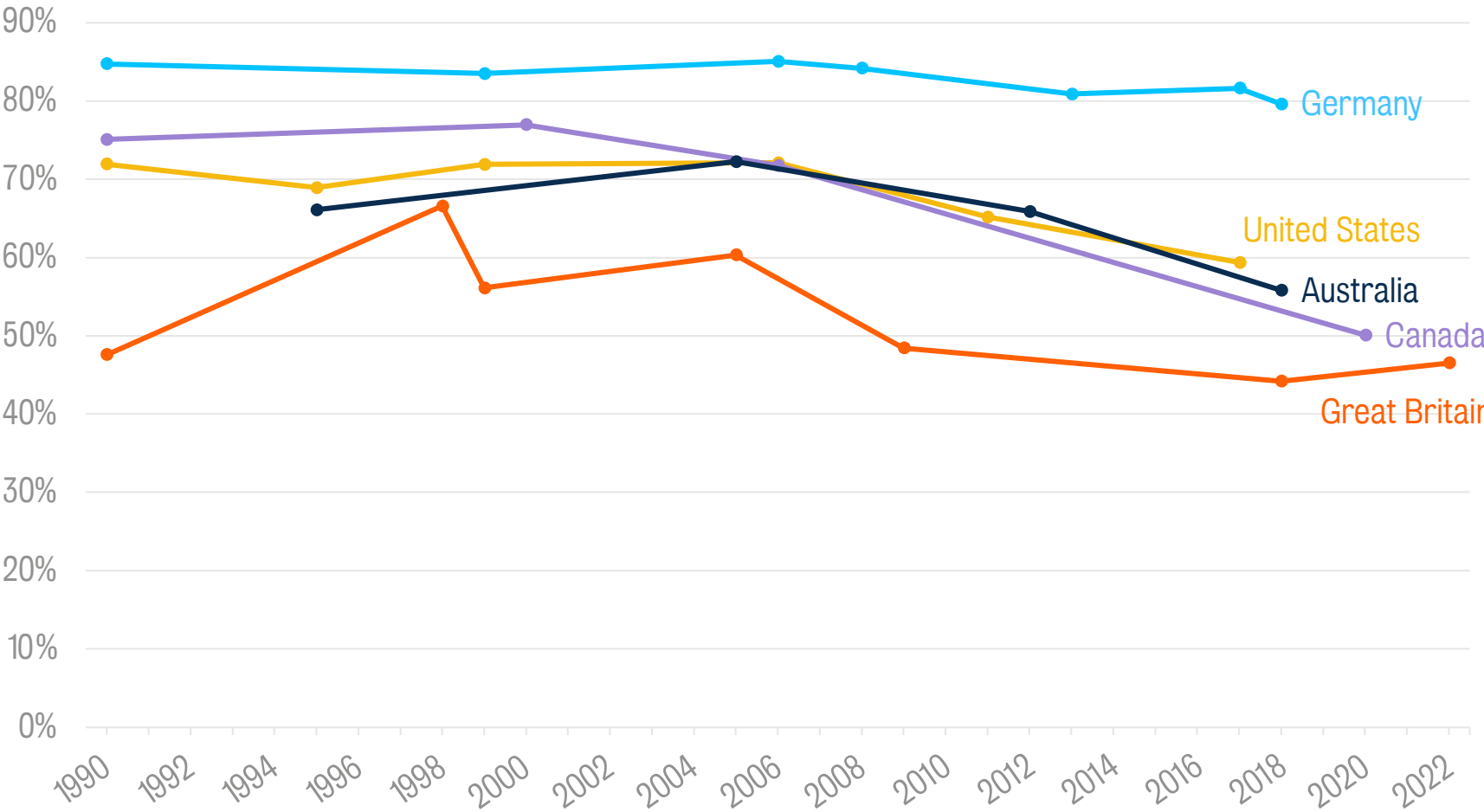
Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Feeling of responsibility** (% who selected quality)



In several high-income countries, a feeling of responsibility has declined in perceived importance, but in Germany it has remained stable

In the early or mid-2000s, the need for children to develop a feeling of responsibility started to become less of a priority for people in the US, Australia, Canada and Britain – but for those in Germany, this trait is still virtually as essential as it was when trends began in 1990.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Feeling of responsibility** (% who selected quality)



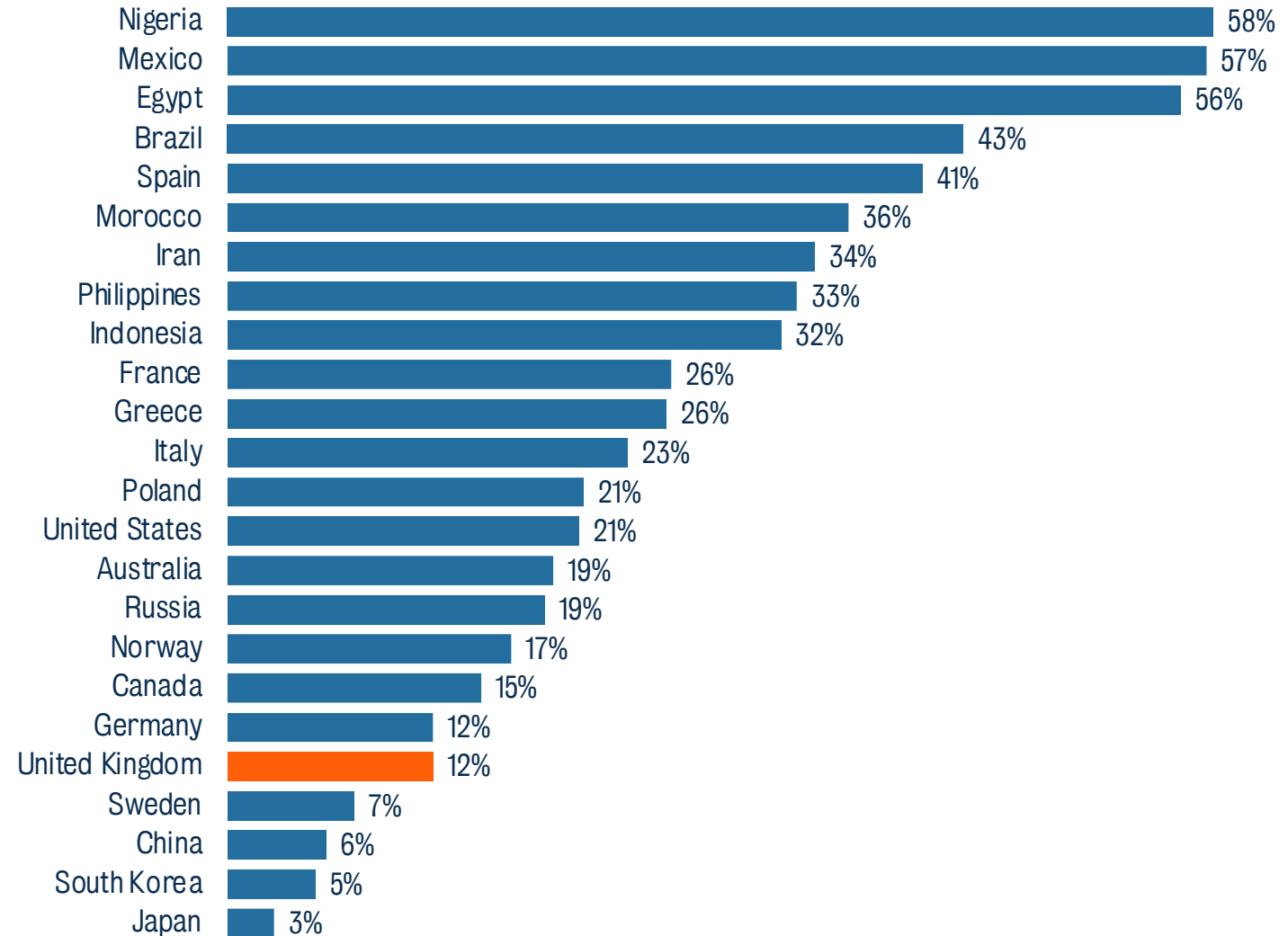
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The UK is among the least likely to value obedience in children

12% of people in the UK say obedience is an especially important trait for children to learn at home. Of 24 countries, only four are less likely than the UK to hold this view, with Japan (3%) the least.

At the other end of the ranking, Nigeria (58%), Mexico (57%) and Egypt (56%) value obedience in children the most.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Obedience** (% who selected quality)

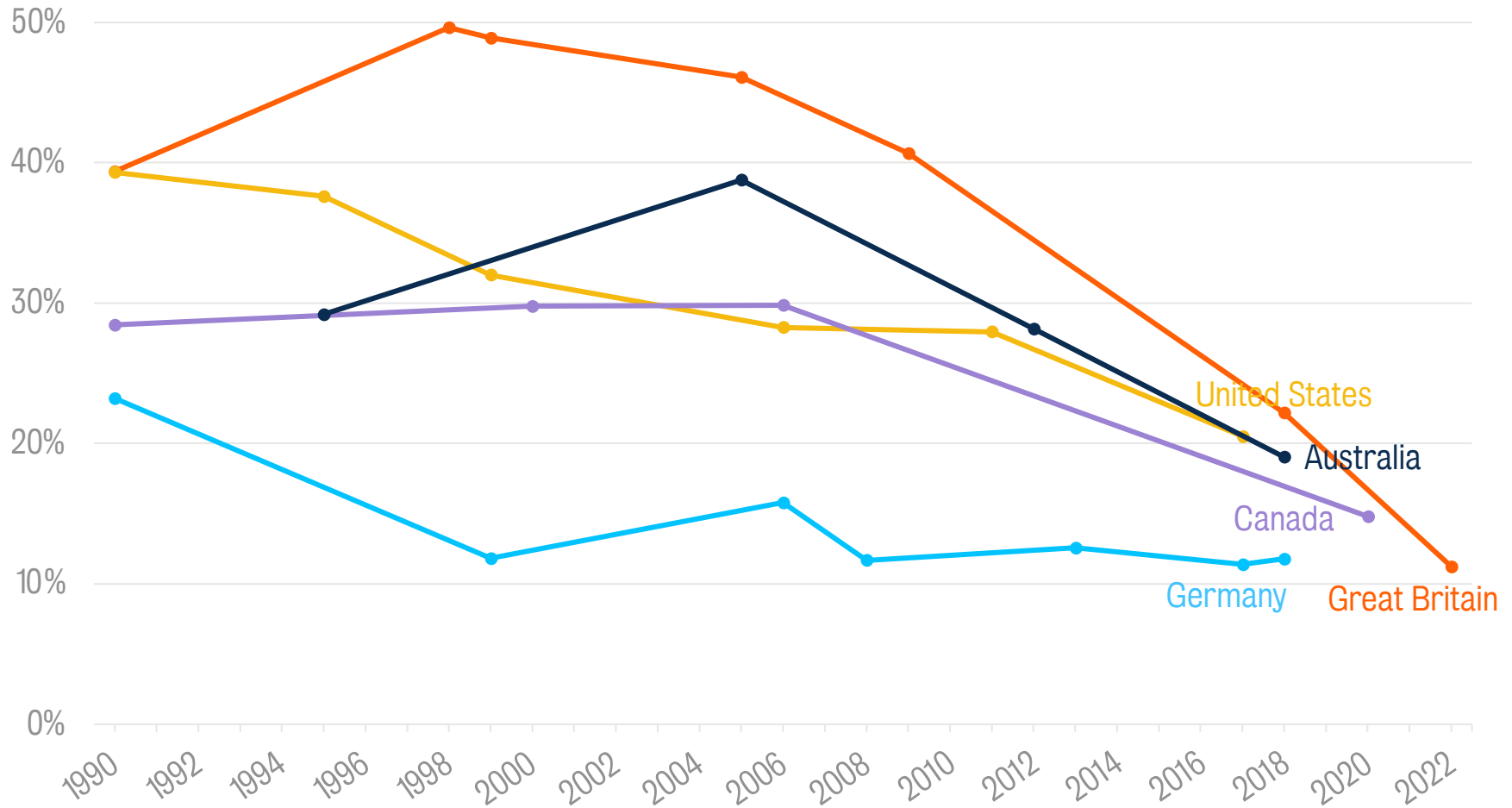


Several western nations now value obedience in children much less than they used to

Britain is not alone in experiencing a large decline in the perceived importance of obedience in children.

For example, in both the US and Australia, the share of the public who think this trait is especially important has roughly halved. In the former, it fell from 39% in 1990 to 21% in 2017, and in the latter it dropped from a peak of 39% to 19% between 2005 and 2018.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Obedience** (% who selected quality)



Base: minimum of 1,000 people aged 18+ surveyed in Great Britain per year. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information. Note in WVS waves 4 and 5, respondents were asked to select from a list of 10, rather than 11, child qualities, and in wave 6 “good manners” was not included in the list

4. Generational perspectives

Gen Z stand out as least likely to say tolerance for others, good manners and unselfishness are especially important in children, while all generations now value obedience far less than they once did



Gen Z are least likely to say tolerance for others, good manners and unselfishness are especially important...

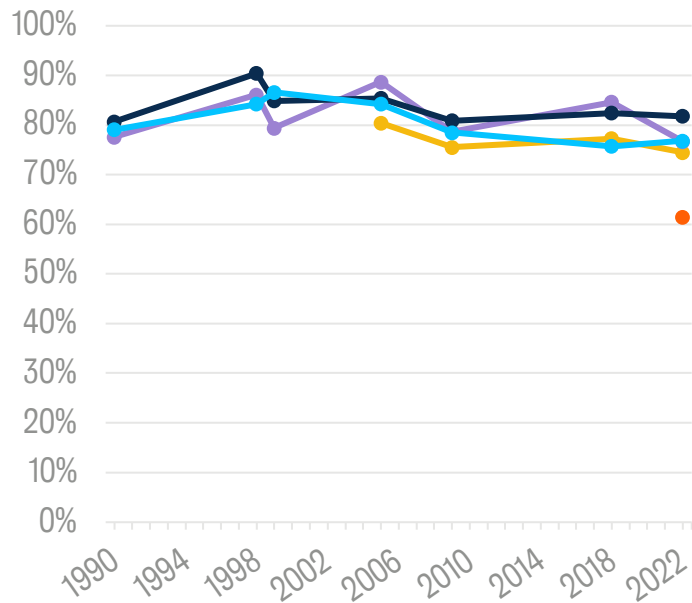
In 2022, 61% of Gen Z said tolerance and respect for other people are important child qualities, while three-quarters or more of all other generations say the same. Similarly, this youngest cohort is notably less likely to think good manners are essential: 75% feel this way, compared with at least 85% among older cohorts.

And while for many years all generations had similar views on the importance of not being selfish, opinions have begun to diverge, with Millennials (37%) now prioritising this quality less – though it is still Gen Z (33%) who value it the least.

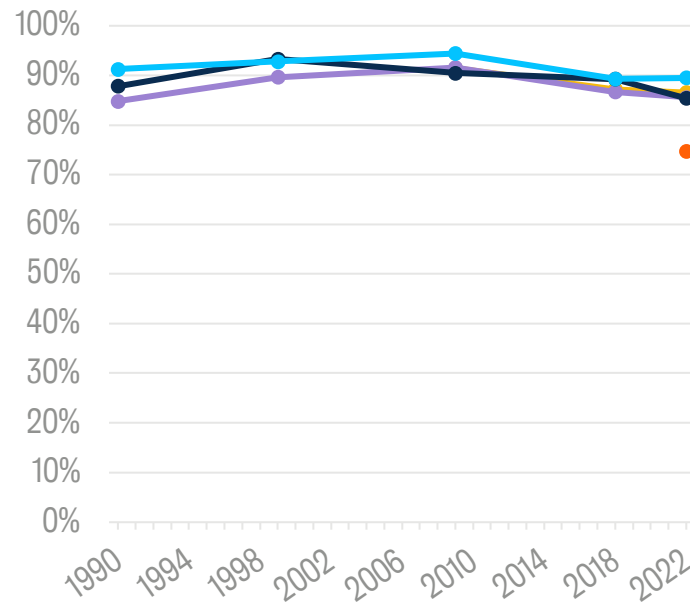
Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five (% who selected quality by generation in Britain)

—●— Gen Z —●— Millennials —●— Gen X —●— Baby Boomers —●— Pre-War

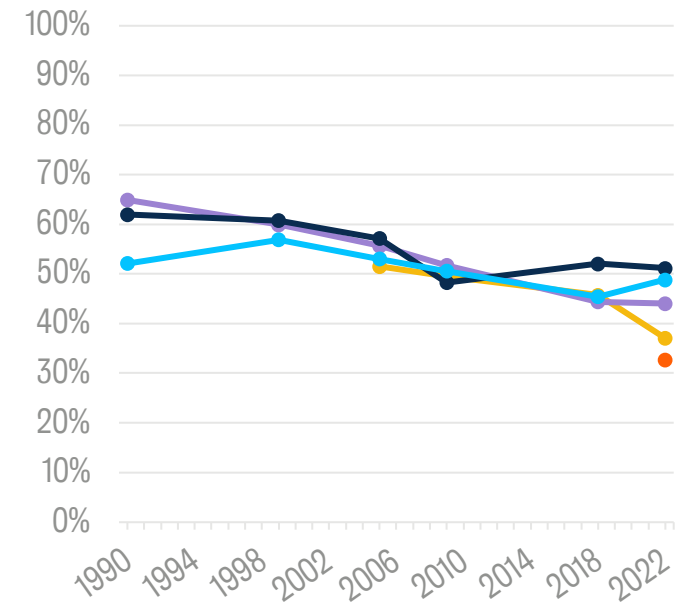
Tolerance and respect for other people



Good manners



Not being selfish (unselfishness)

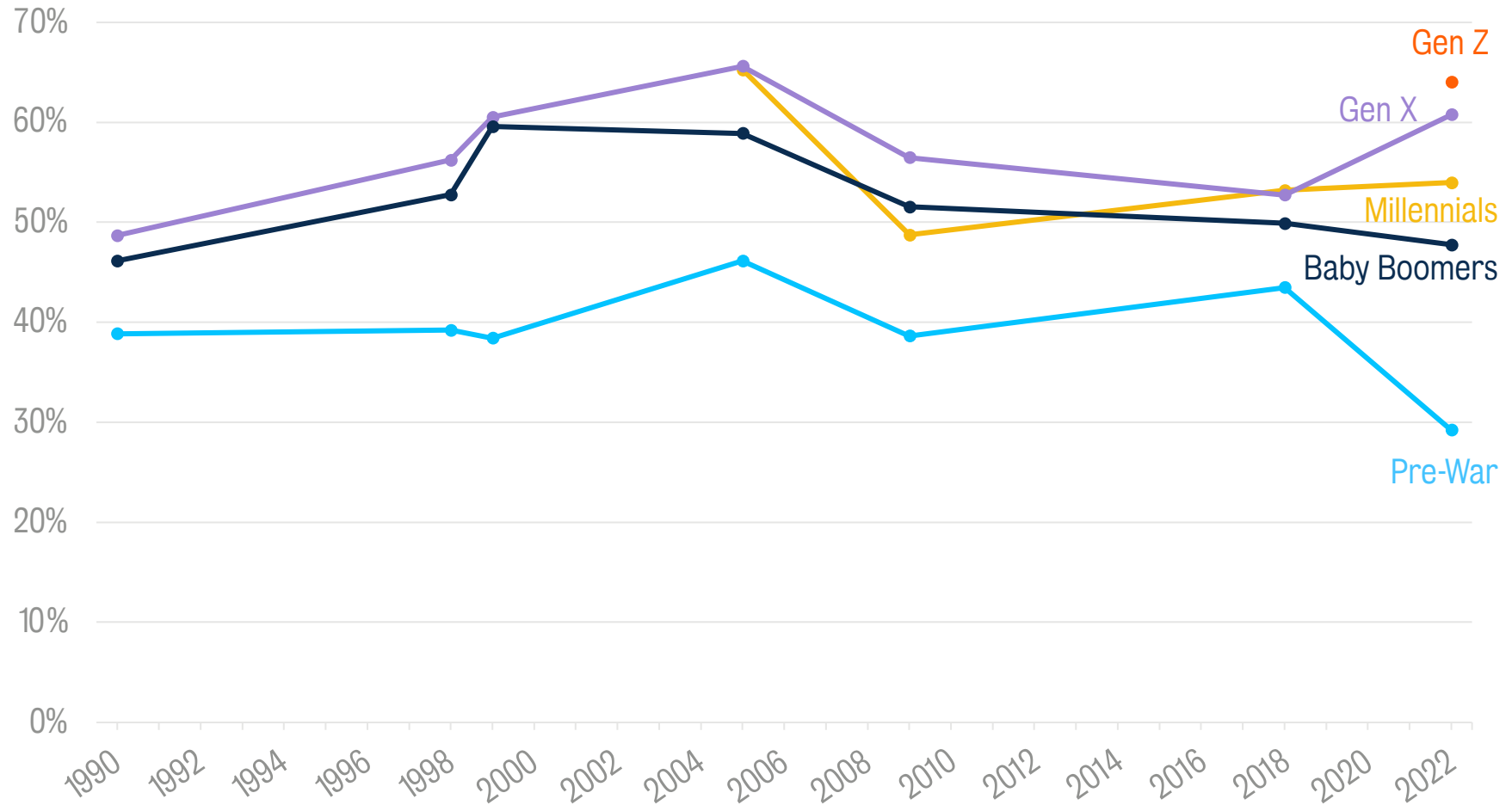


...but most likely to value independence

64% of Gen Z now say independence is an especially important quality for children to learn at home – the highest proportion of any generation, although Gen X (61%) come close.

Meanwhile, the share of the Pre-War generation who think this is a crucial quality fell from 43% in 2018 to 29% in 2022.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Independence** (% who selected quality by generation in Britain)



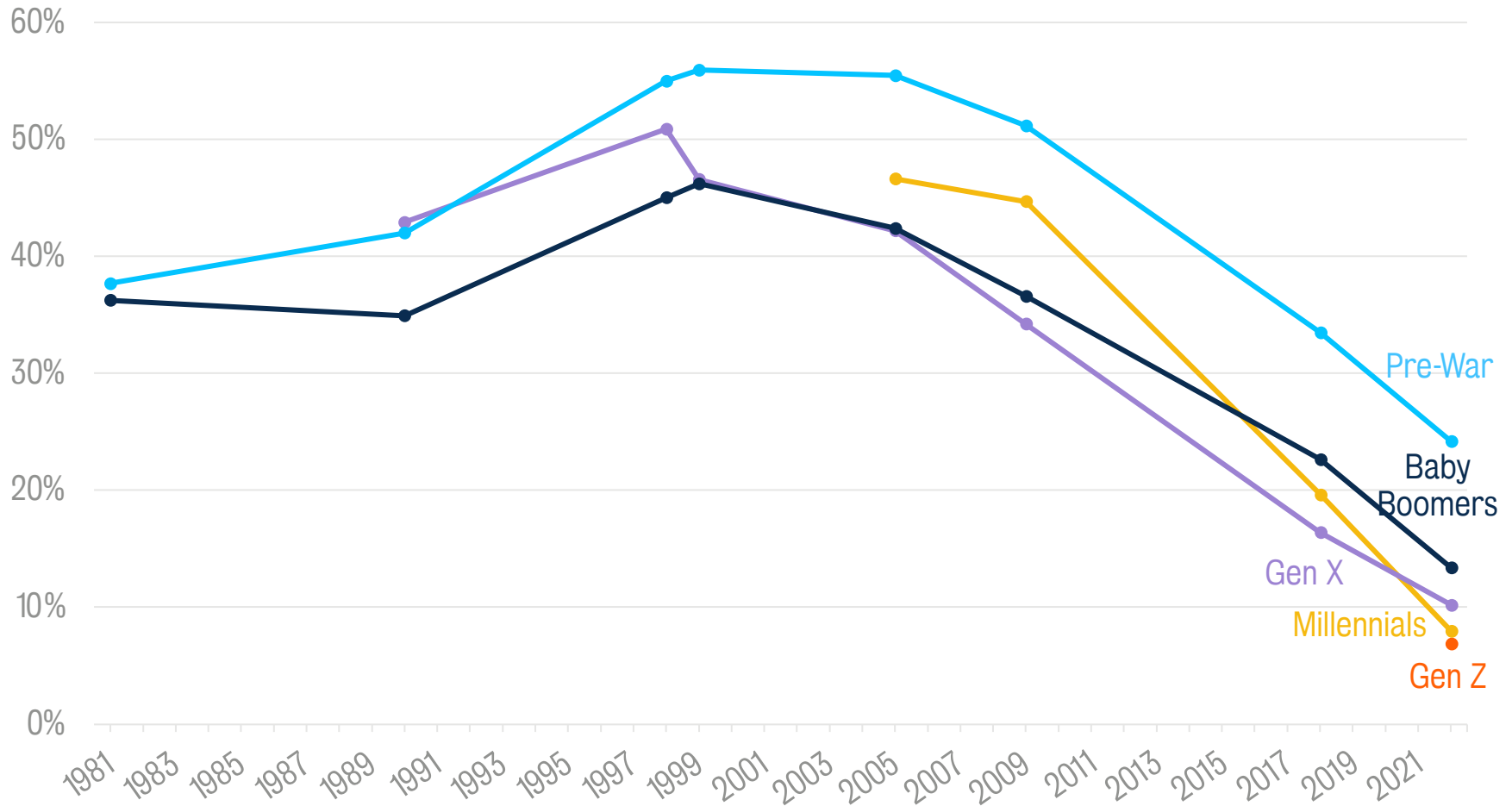
All generations have become much less likely to prize obedience in children

Obedience is now seen by all generations as a much less important quality in children than it once was.

This is the case even among older cohorts. For example, the proportion of the Pre-War generation who value obedience more than halved, from 56% to 24%, between 1999 and 2020 – even if they are still the most inclined to say it is especially important.

Similarly, the share of Baby Boomers who prize this quality fell from 46% to 13% over the same period.

Below is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. **Obedience** (% who selected quality by generation in Britain)



5. Parenting and caring: duties and goals

The UK public rank low internationally for the belief that people have a duty to have children or to care for their parents, and they have a relatively average view of the need to make their parents proud



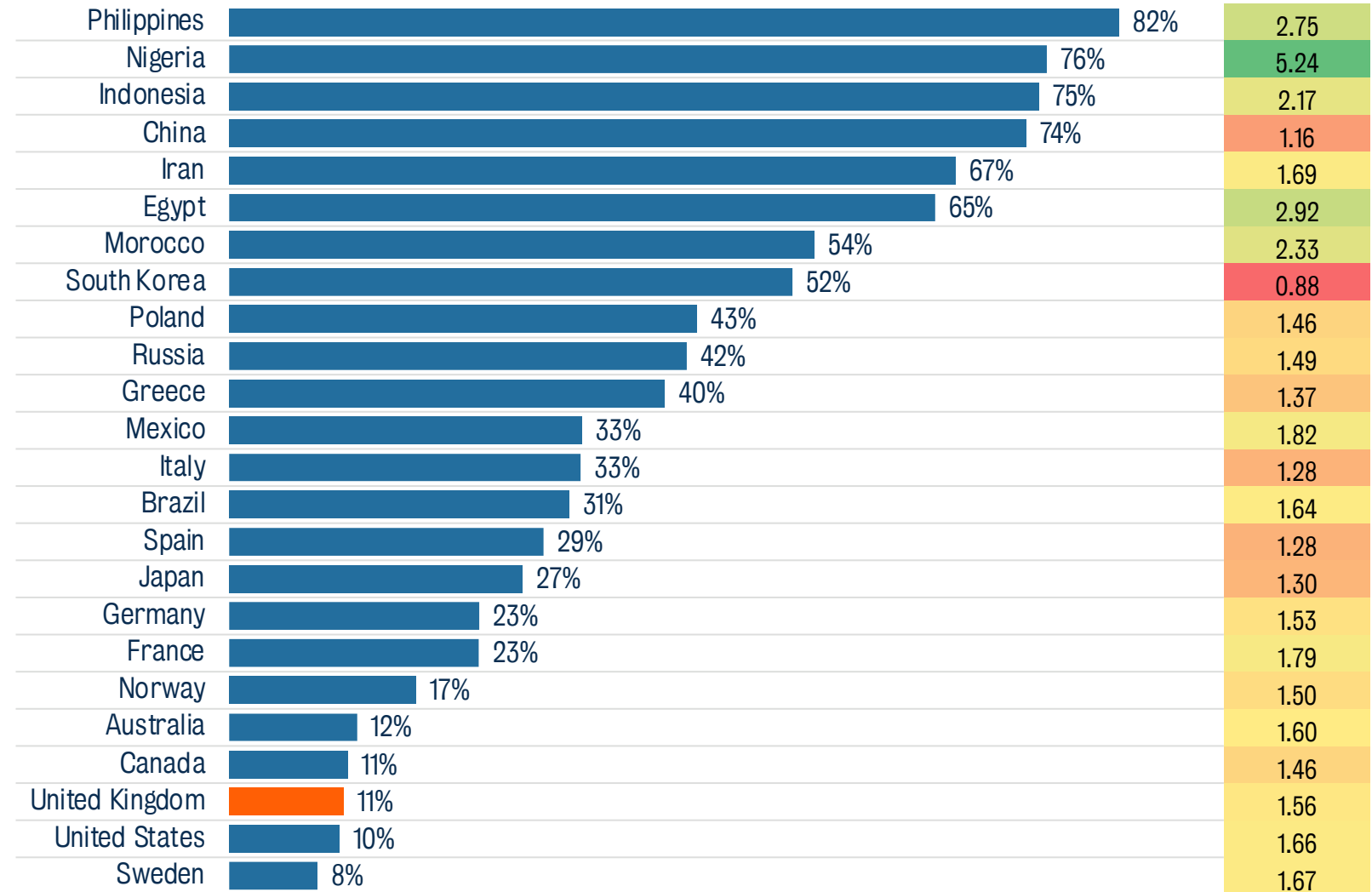
The UK ranks low internationally for the belief that there is a duty to have children

Few in the UK feel it is a duty towards society to have children: 11% agree with this view – similar to several other western nations, with Sweden ranking bottom on 8%.

Some of the countries that are among the most likely to agree this duty exists – such as the Philippines, Nigeria, Indonesia, Egypt and Morocco – do have high fertility rates, indicating a potential link between attitudes and behaviour. But at the same time, some other nations with high agreement have low fertility rates, namely China, Iran and South Korea.

How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them?
It is a duty towards society to have children (% who strongly agree/agree)

Fertility rate (children per woman, 2021)*

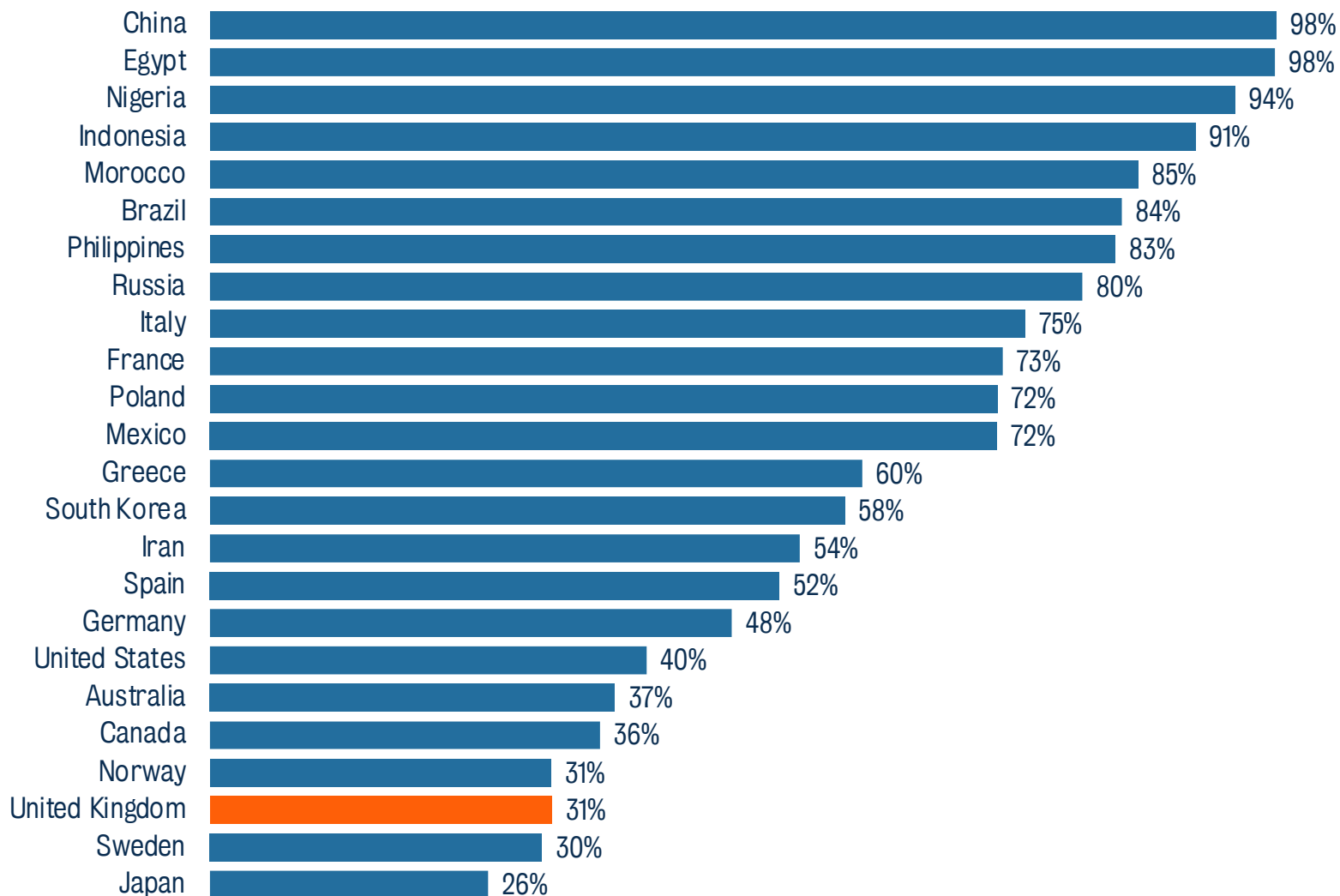


The UK public are among the least likely to say adult children have a duty to care for their parents

31% of people in the UK say adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents, with only those in Sweden (30%) and Japan (26%) less likely to agree with this view.

Two of the UK's peer nations, Italy (75%) and France (73%), are more than twice as likely as the UK to feel such a duty exists – but China (98%) and Egypt (98%) come top, with nearly the whole population agreeing there is a duty to care for parents.

How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them?
Adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents (% who strongly agree/agree)

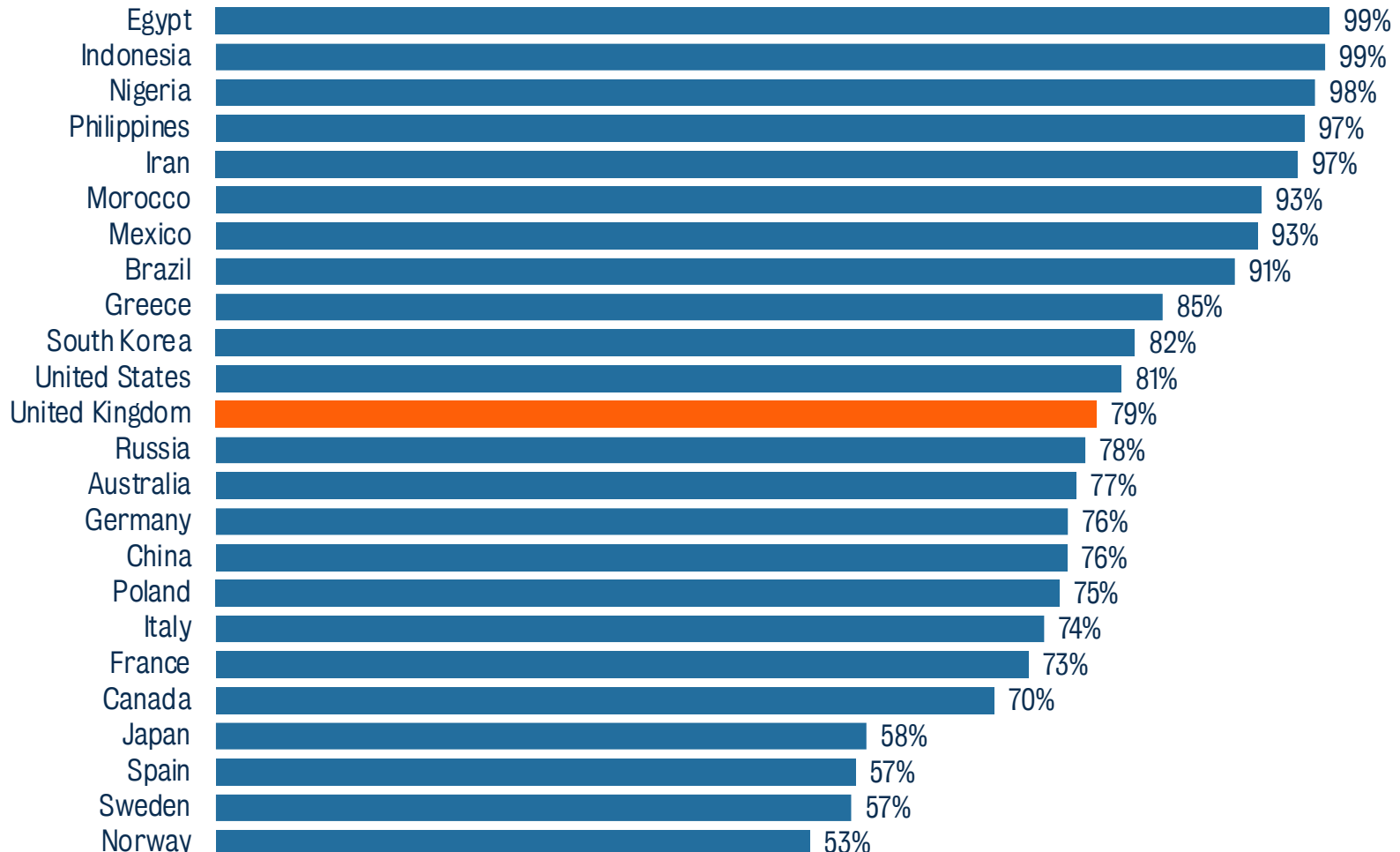


By international standards, the UK is around average for the proportion who say making their parents proud is a key goal in life

The UK (79%) ranks mid-table internationally for the share of the public who agree one of their main goals in life has been to make their parents proud.

Among other western countries, a comparable proportion say the same in the US (81%), Australia (77%) and Germany (76%), while those in Norway (53%) are least likely to agree with this view.

For each of the statements below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with it.
One of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud (% who strongly agree/agree)



6. Beating children

Of 18 countries, the UK is among the most likely to say that parents beating children cannot be justified, while Nigeria is by far the most inclined to think this is acceptable

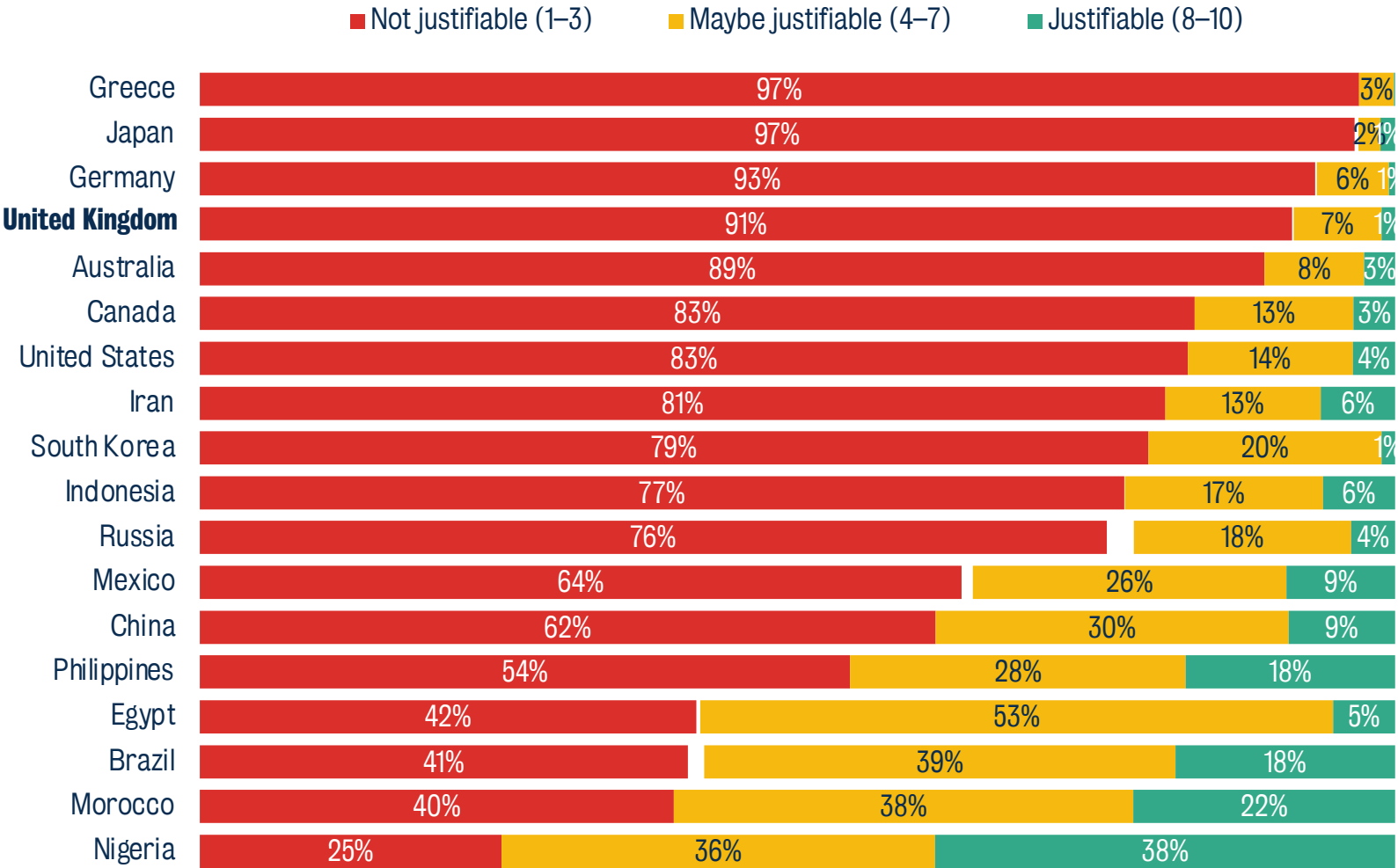


Of 18 countries, the UK is among the most likely to say it is not justifiable for parents to beat children, though a small minority have a different view

91% of the UK public say it is not justifiable for parents to beat children – behind only Germany, Japan and Greece, where a greater proportion feel this way. However, 7% of the UK indicate they believe it may be justifiable, and another 1% think it is justifiable.

In most countries, fewer than one in 10 people say such behaviour is justifiable, but in Nigeria four in 10 (38%) think this is acceptable, while around two in 10 say the same in Morocco (22%), Brazil (18%) and the Philippines (18%).

Please indicate for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between.* **Parents beating children**



*Responses given on numerical scale. UK base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. Other countries all surveyed in wave 7 of WVS at various points between 2017 and 2022. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

7. Technical details



Technical details

For latest 2022 data, Ipsos interviewed a random probability sample of 3,056 adults aged 18+ across the UK. This included respondents in England (1,645) and boost samples in Scotland (523), Wales (437) and Northern Ireland (446). Data has been weighted by region, education and age interlocked with gender to be nationally representative. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic respondents were able to complete the survey either through a face-to-face survey (1,509 completes), an interviewer-led video interview through MS Teams (86), or through either a self-completion paper survey (592) or an online push-to-web follow-up (869). Fieldwork ran from 1 March to 9 September 2022. Ipsos is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

Further information on the sampling methodology for other countries included in this report is available via the [World Values Survey Association website](#).

Figures in this report may vary from those in the official WVS dataset because of the exclusion/inclusion of non-responses, use of different weighting, or different rounding procedures used by statistical software. Data points for non-WVS years are taken from the European Values Survey, with weights to compare samples provided by the World Values Survey Association.

Unweighted sample sizes for UK nations

England	1,645
Northern Ireland	446
Scotland	523
Wales	437
Region unknown	5
Total	3,056

Years of birth for generations used in report

Gen Z	1996 onwards
Millennials	1980-1995
Gen X	1966-1979
Baby Boomers	1945-1965
Pre-War	1944 or earlier

The **UK** *in the* **WORLD** **VALUES** **SURVEY**

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