

The state of social trust: how the UK compares internationally

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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. Can most people be trusted?

The share of the British public who say most people can be trusted is now at a high, with all generations becoming more trusting – and the UK ranks high internationally on this measure

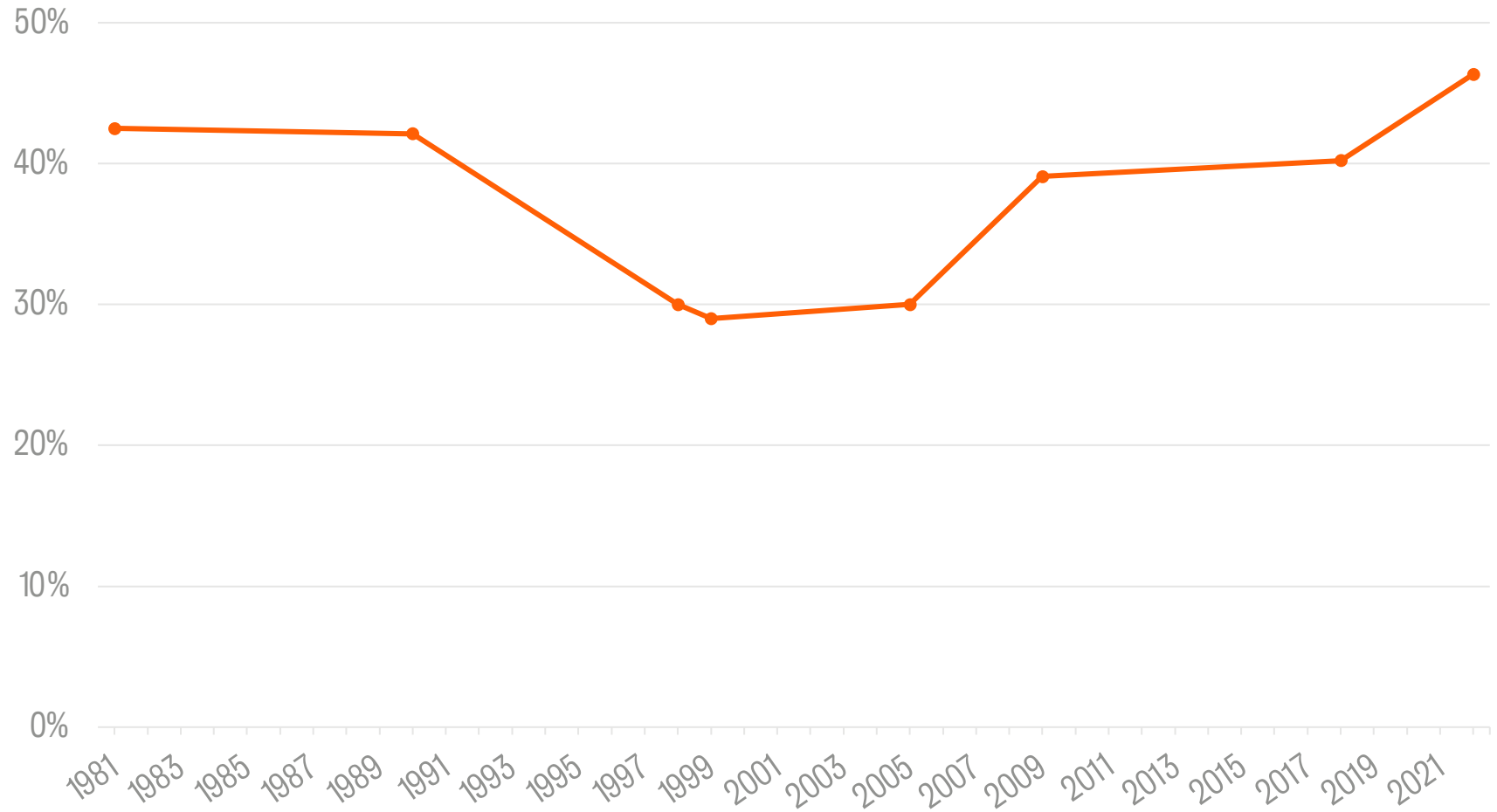


The share of the public who say most people can be trusted is at a high

In 2022, 46% of Britons said most people can be trusted, marking a significant increase since 1999, when 29% felt this way – the lowest recorded.

This sense of trust is now at a high – up slightly on the previous high point of 43% back in 1981.

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? (% who say most people can be trusted in Britain)



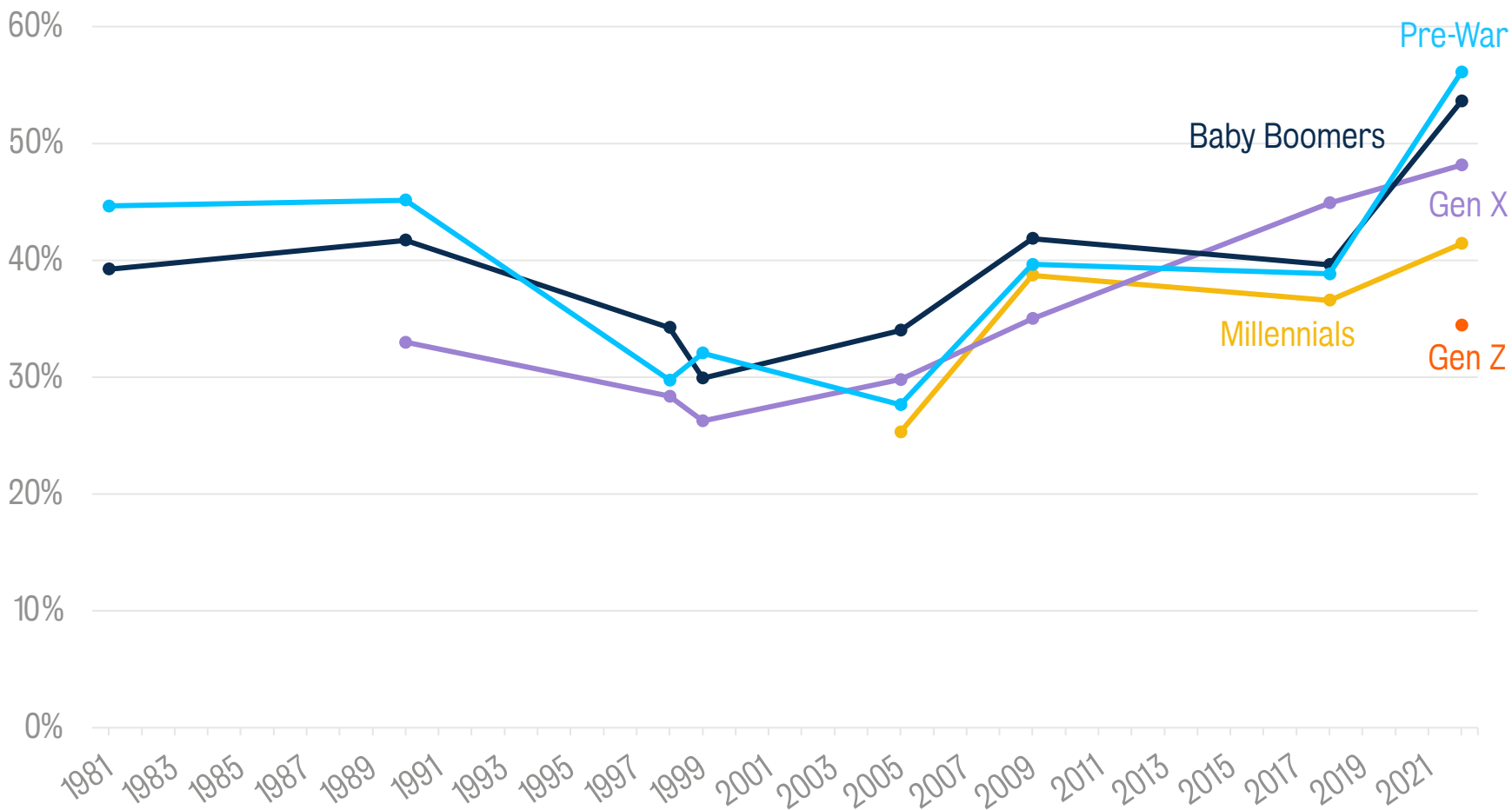
The sense that most people can be trusted has grown considerably among all generations – but particularly among older cohorts in recent years

Since at least the mid-2000s, all adult generations have become more likely to say most people can be trusted.

For example, the share of the Pre-War generation who feel this way doubled between 2005 and 2022, from 28% to 56%. And a large part of this increase has occurred rapidly: as recently as 2018, this figure was just 39%.

In the most recent data, Gen Z are least likely to share this feeling – a third (34%) think most people can be trusted, compared with over half of Baby Boomers and those born pre-1945.

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? (% who say most people can be trusted by generation in Britain)

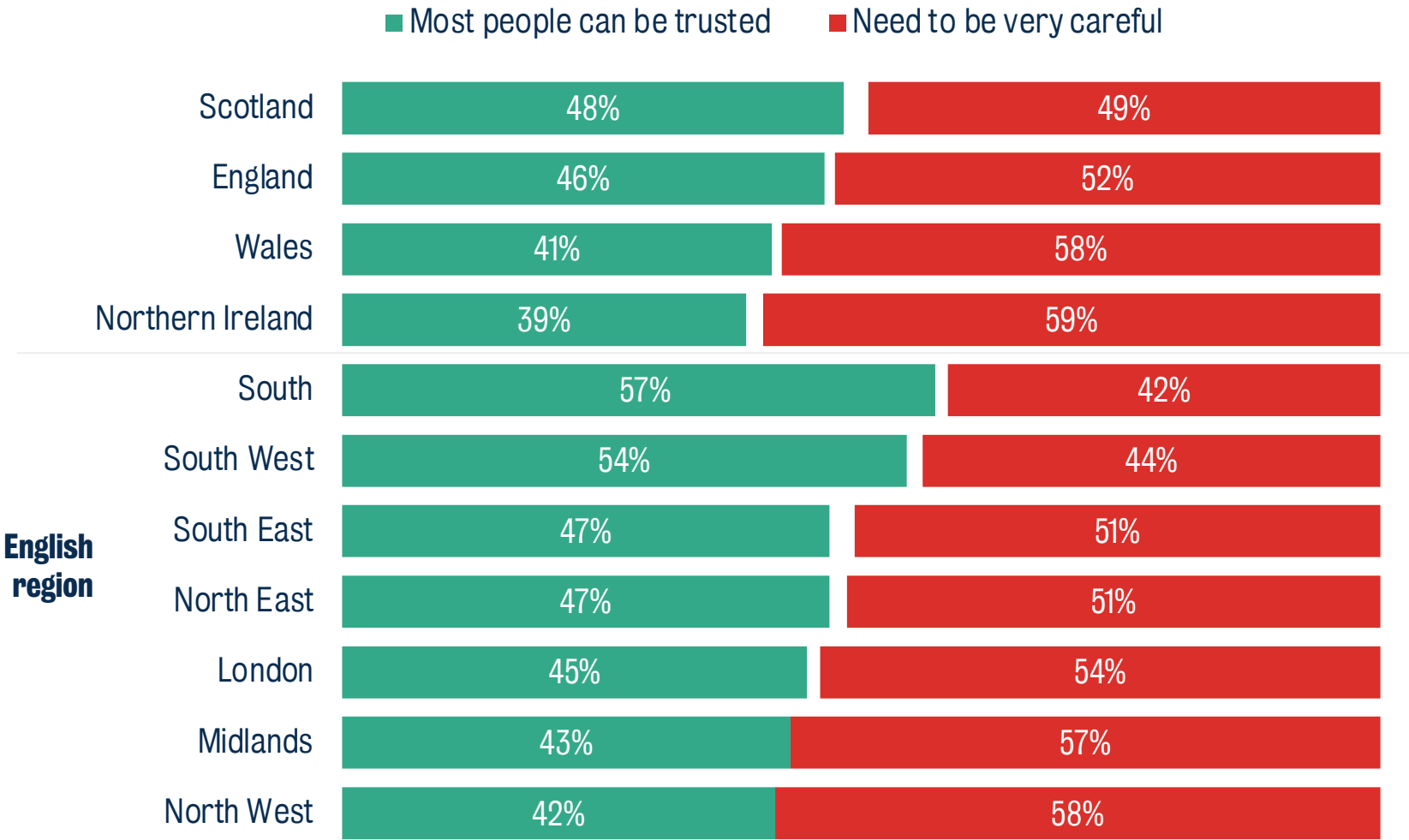


Among UK nations, people in Scotland and England have the highest levels of social trust, while among English regions those in the South and South West come top

People in Northern Ireland (39%) and Wales (41%) are less likely than those in Scotland (48%) and England (46%) to say that most people can be trusted.

And looking across English regions, it is people in the South (57%) and South West (54%) who have the highest levels of social trust, as the only areas where a majority say most can be trusted.

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?

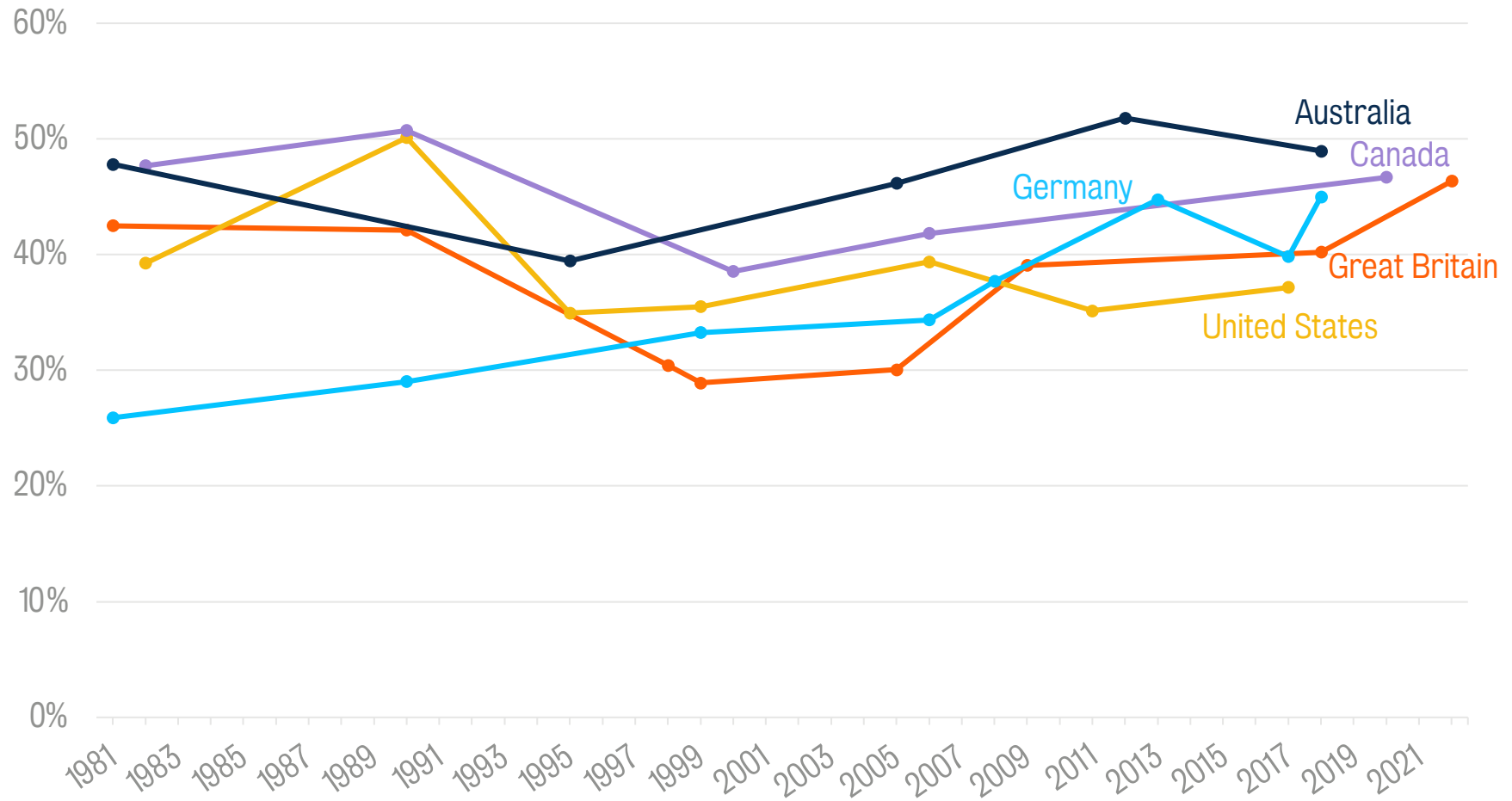


Rebounding social trust in Britain is mirrored in several other high-income nations

Australia and Canada have also experienced rebounding social trust, while the share of the public in Germany who think most people can be trusted has risen steadily since 1981.

By contrast, in the US, 50% of the public thought most people could be trusted in 1990. This then fell to 35% by 1995 and has since hardly recovered.

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? (% who say most people can be trusted)



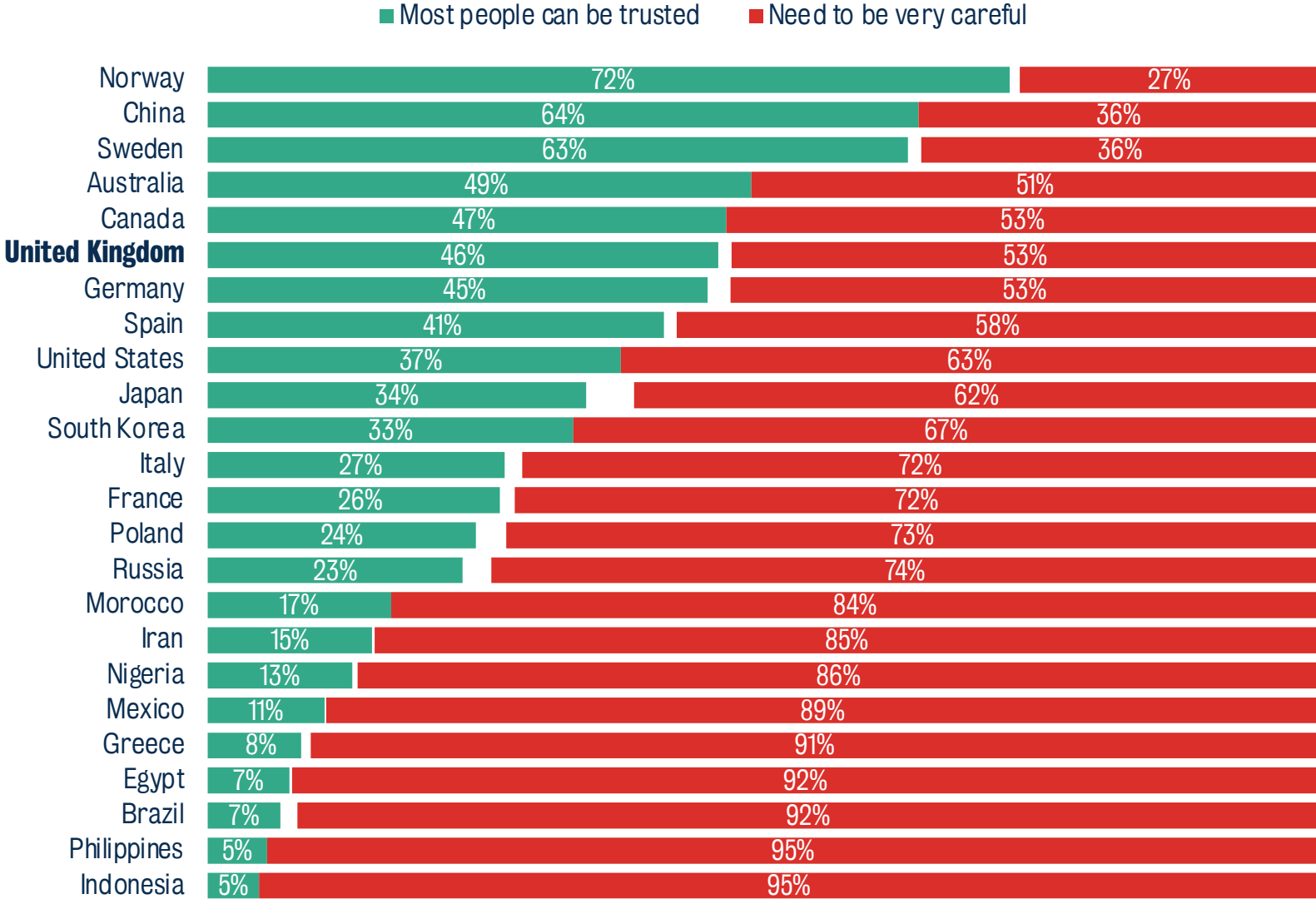
The UK ranks high internationally for social trust

Of 24 nations, only five are more likely than the UK to say most people can be trusted, with Norway (72%), China (64%) and Sweden (63%) the only countries where a majority feel this way.

And the UK ranks far above some peer nations, such as Italy (27%) and France (26%), as well as being ahead of the US (37%).

At the other end of the table, Indonesia (5%) and the Philippines (5%) have the lowest levels of social trust.

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?



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

2. Trust in people of another nationality

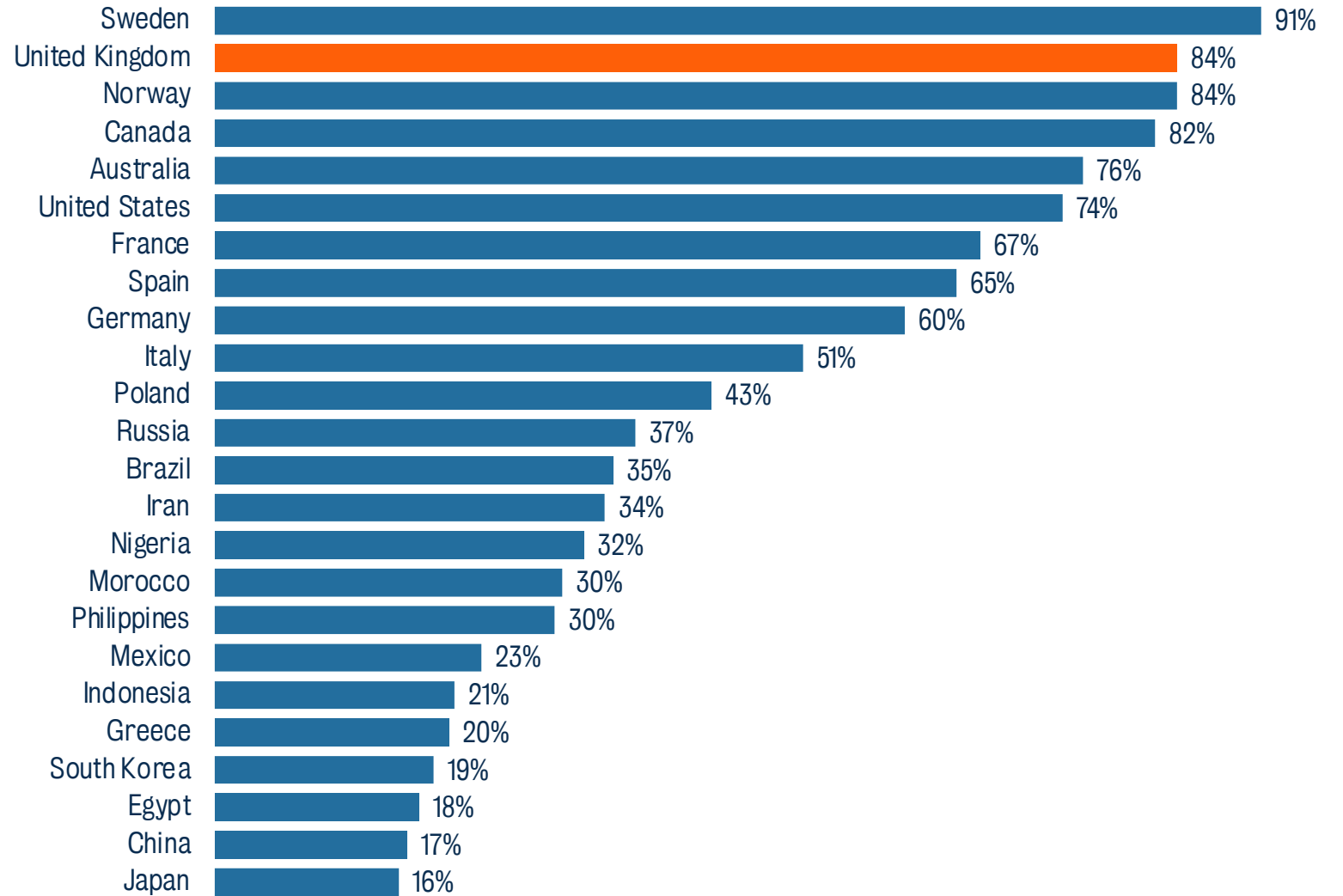
Of 24 countries, only people in Sweden are more likely than the UK public to say they trust foreigners, with Britons becoming increasingly trusting of people of different nationalities in recent decades



The UK is second only to Sweden for trust in people of different nationalities

84% of the UK public say they trust people of another nationality – behind only Sweden (91%), and on a par with Norway (84%).

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People of another nationality** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



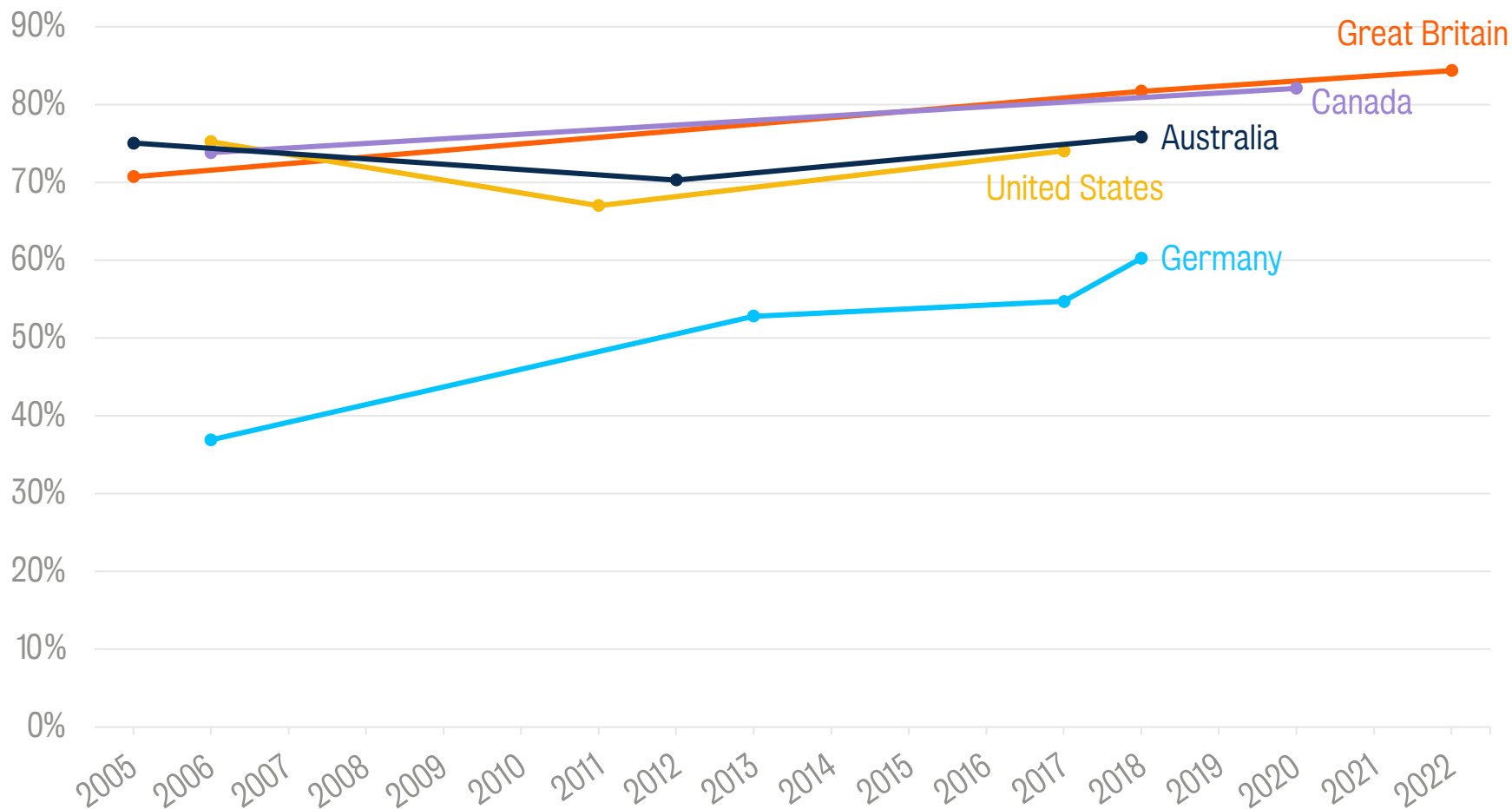
Britons' trust in people of different nationalities has risen considerably – and is now at a record high

Between 2005 and 2022, the proportion of the British public who said they trusted people of another nationality rose from 71% to 84% – a record high.

The share of the public who say the same in Germany has increased even more, from 37% in 2006 to 60% in 2018 – although this is still notably lower than in some other western nations.

At the same time, Canada has also seen a rise in this type of trust, while trends in Australia and the US have remained relatively stable.

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People of another nationality** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)

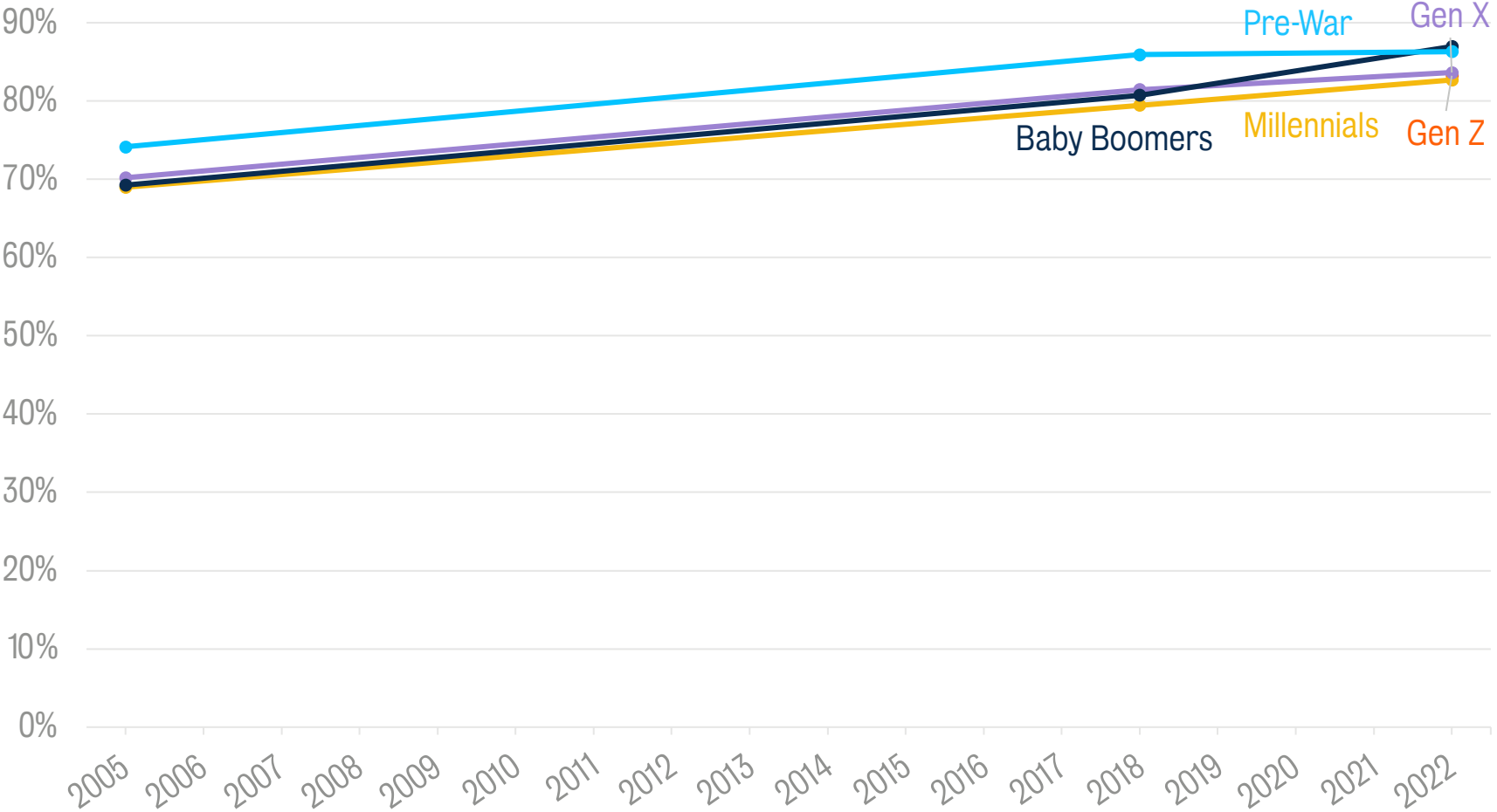


All generations in Britain have become more trusting of people who belong to different nationalities

All adult generations have become more likely to say they trust people of a different nationality. For example, the proportion of Gen X who report such trust rose from 70% in 2005 to 84% in 2022, with other cohorts experiencing a similar shift.

Today, there is very little difference between the generations on this question, with eight in 10 or more of all cohorts saying they trust people of another nationality.

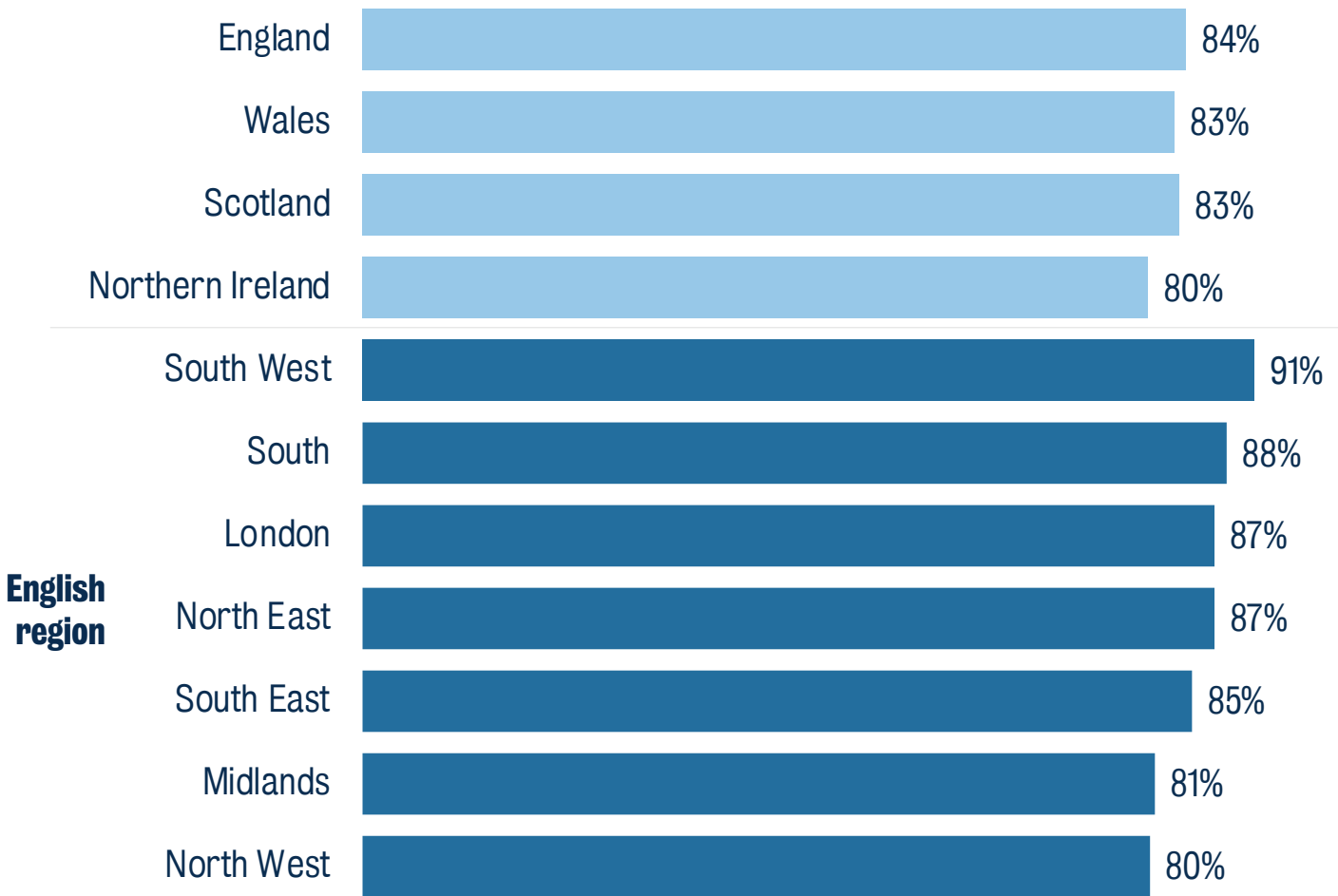
Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People of another nationality** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



Among English regions, people in the North West and Midlands are least likely to say they trust people of another nationality

In England, around eight in 10 people in the North West (80%) and the Midlands (81%) say they trust people of another nationality. This compares with nine in 10 in the South West (91%).

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People of another nationality** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



3. Trust in people you meet for the first time

The UK public ranks third for trust in people they meet for the first time, with such trust rising since the mid-2000s

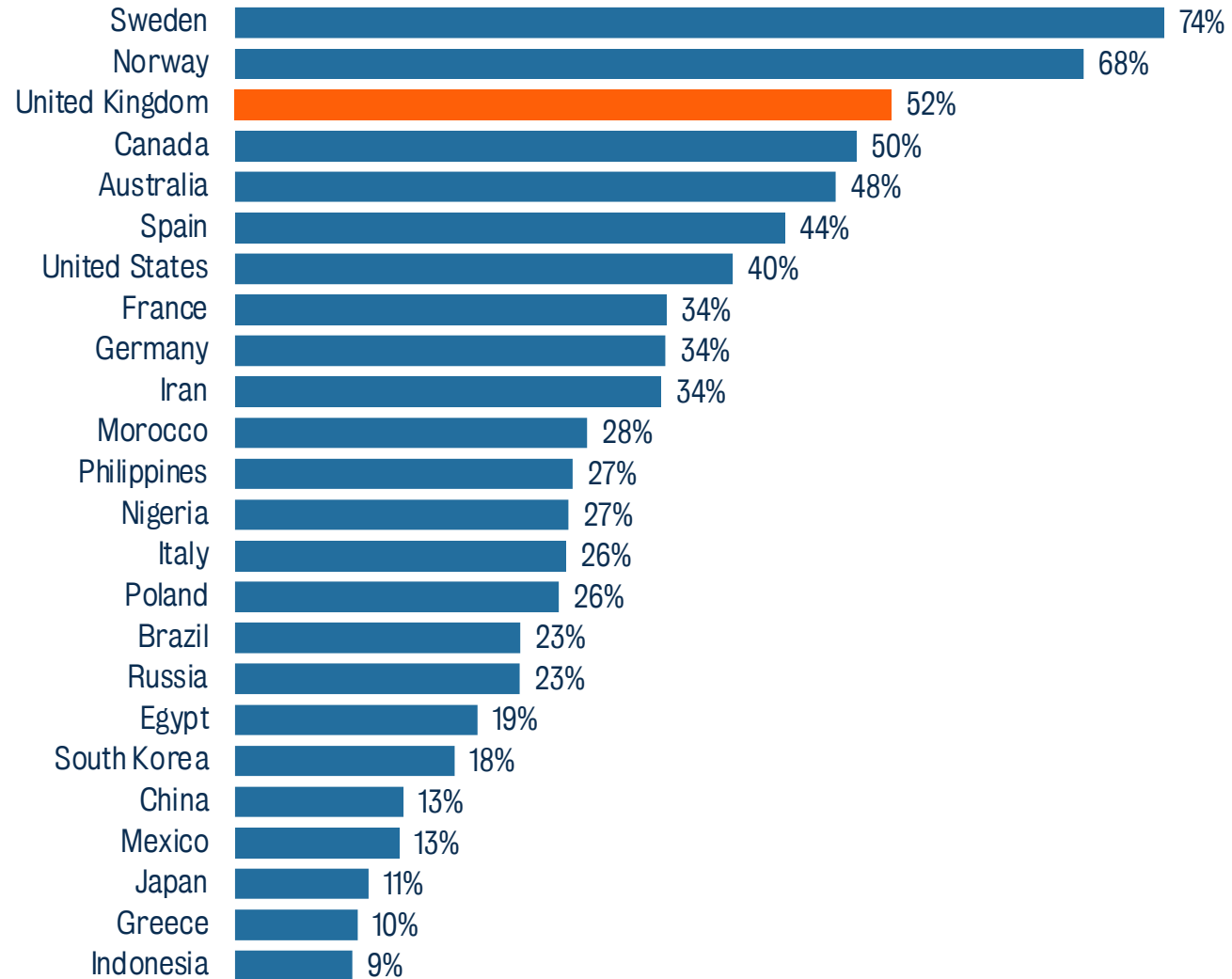


Only Sweden and Norway have higher trust in people they meet for the first time than the UK

52% of the UK public say they trust people they meet for the first time. This places the UK third out of 24 countries on this measure, behind only Sweden (74%) and Norway (68%).

And the UK fares far better for this kind of trust than some other high-income western nations, such as France (34%), Germany (34%) and Italy (26%).

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People you meet for the first time** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)

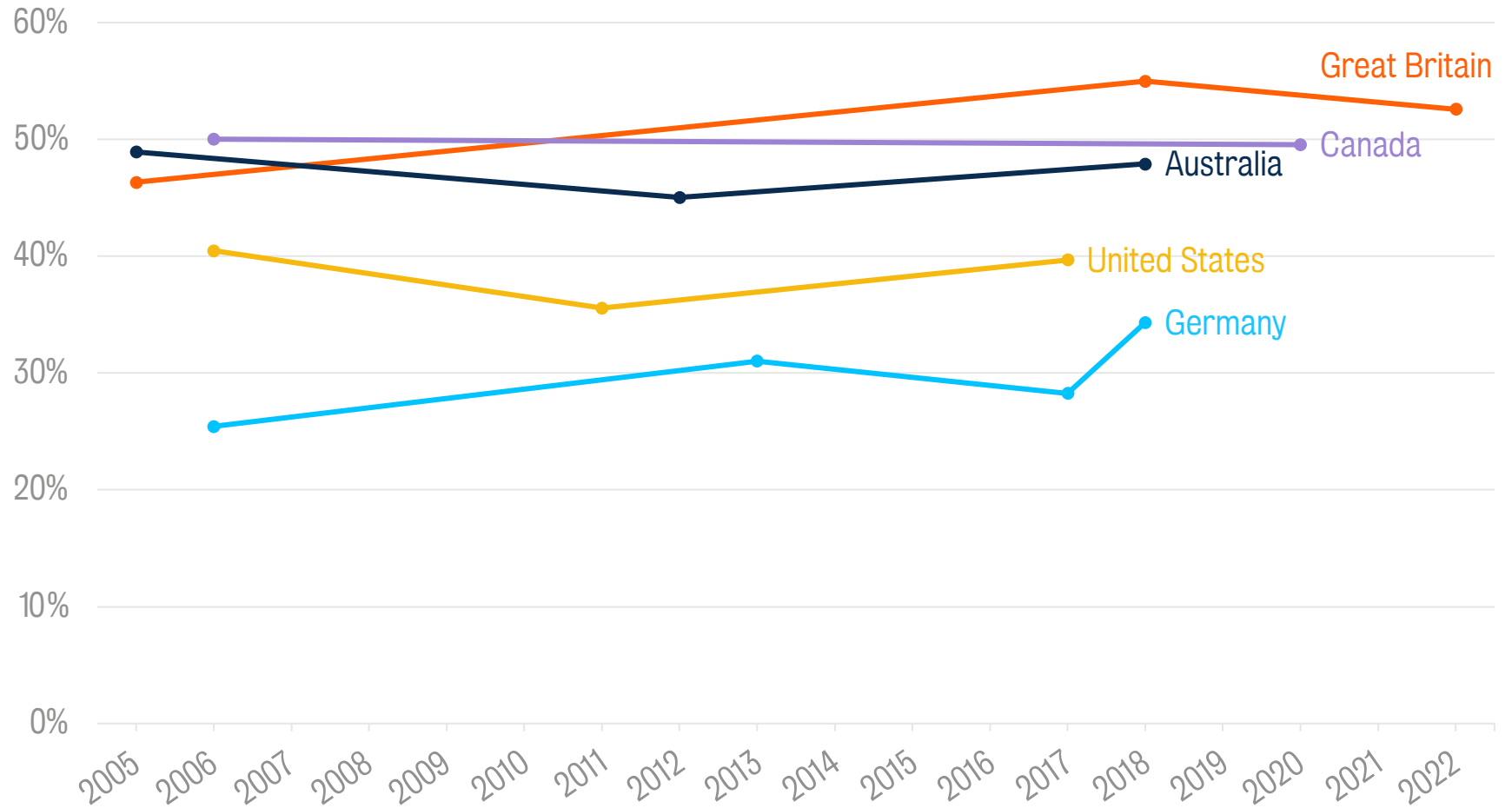


Britons have become more trusting of people they meet for the first time

In 2005, 46% of the British public said they trusted people they meet for the first time. By 2022, this had risen to 53%.

Trends in some other western nations have been more stable, with very little change since the mid-2000s – although Germany has seen a bigger shift.

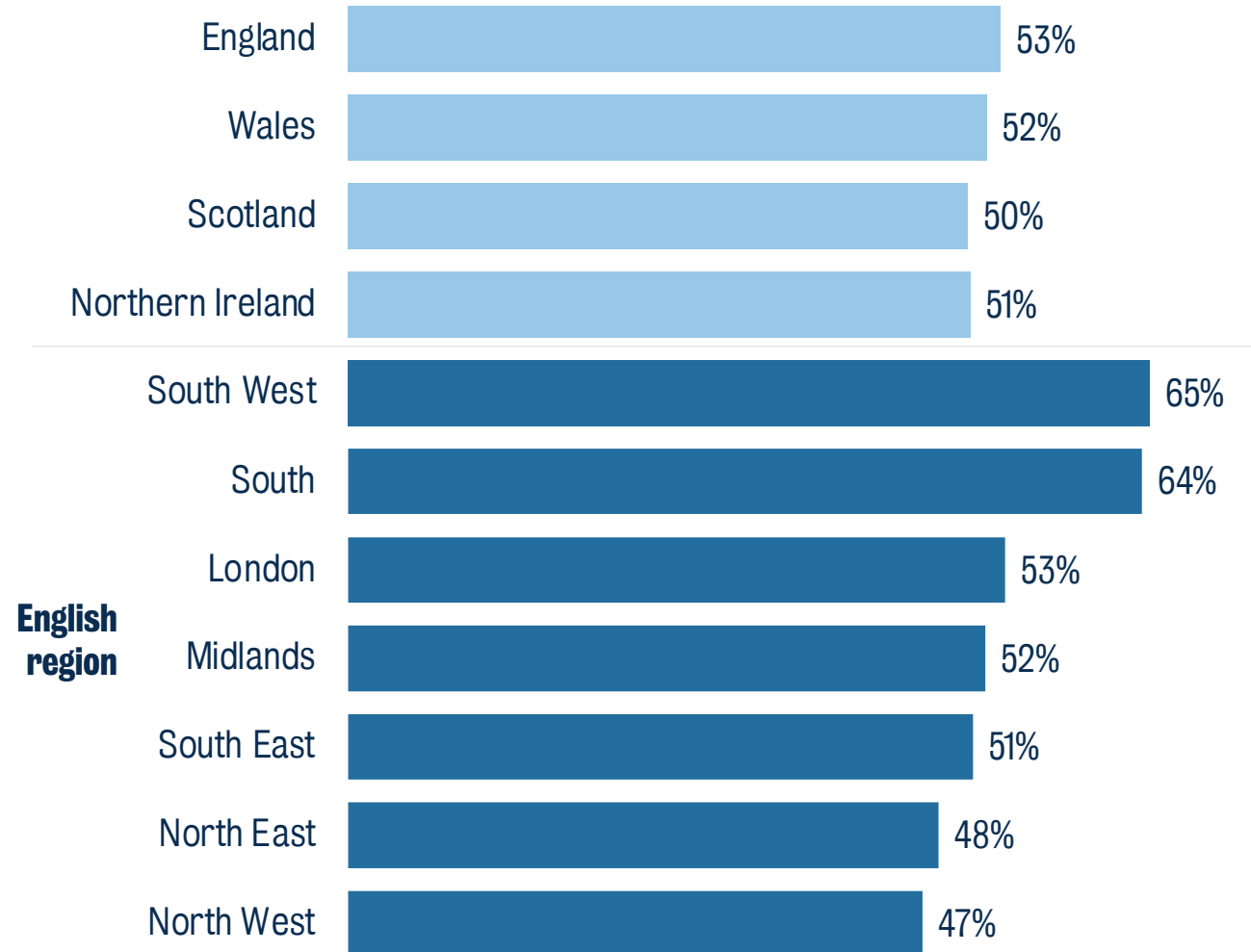
Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People you meet for the first time** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



People in the South West and South of England are most trusting of people they meet for the first time

Two-thirds of people who live in the South West (65%) and South (64%) of England say they trust people they meet for the first time – notably higher than in other regions, where closer to half say the same.

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People you meet for the first time** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)

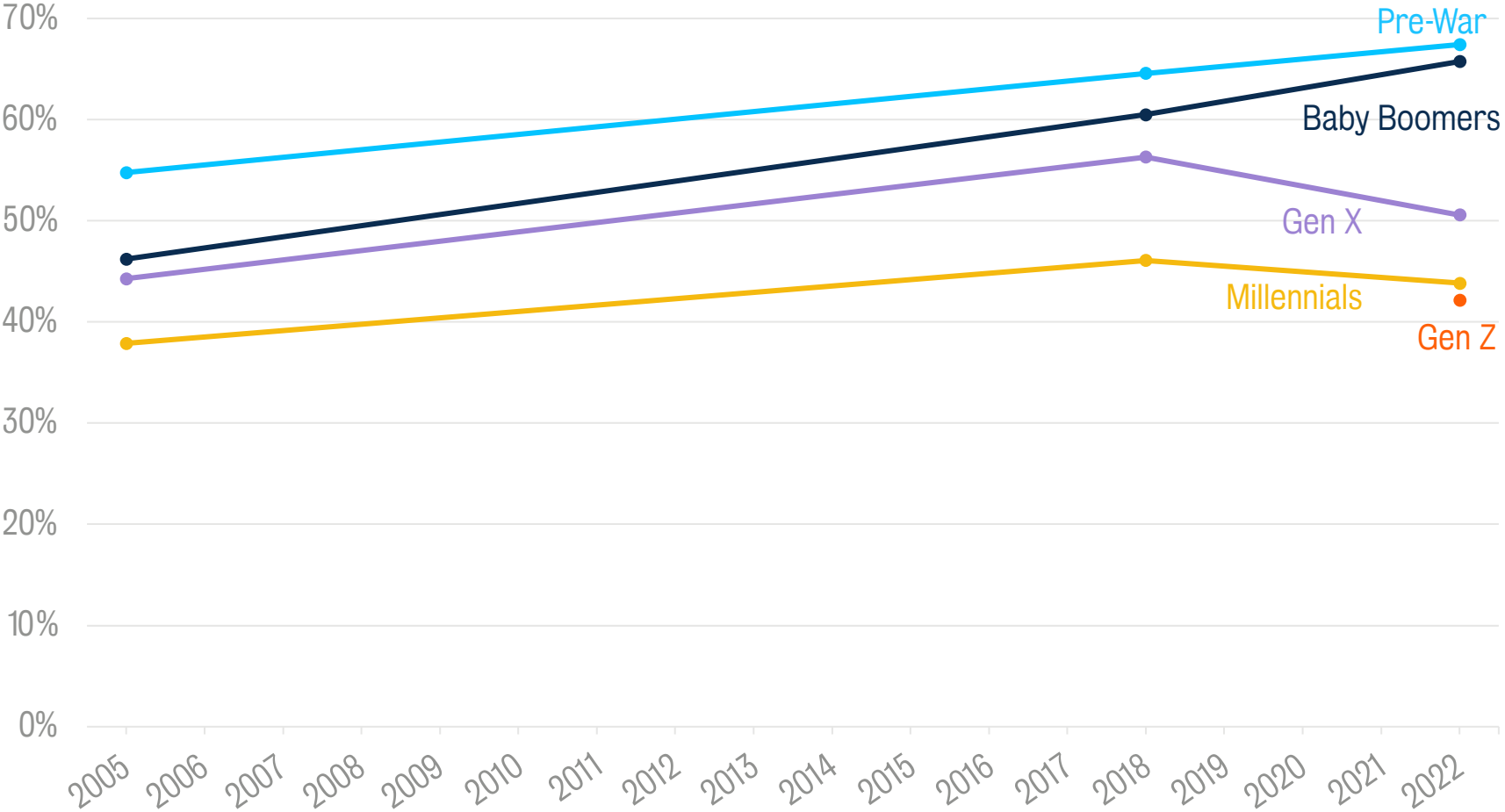


Older generations are much more trusting than younger generations of people they meet for the first time

Two-thirds of the Pre-War generation (67%) and Baby Boomers (66%) say they trust people they meet for the first time. This compares with half of Gen X (51%) and less than half of the youngest generations, Millennials (44%) and Gen Z (42%).

Nevertheless, all adult generations have become more trusting of new people. For example, among Baby Boomers, there was 20 percentage point rise in such trust between 2005 and 2022.

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People you meet for the first time** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



4. Trust in people you know personally

The UK public rank joint top for trust in people they know personally

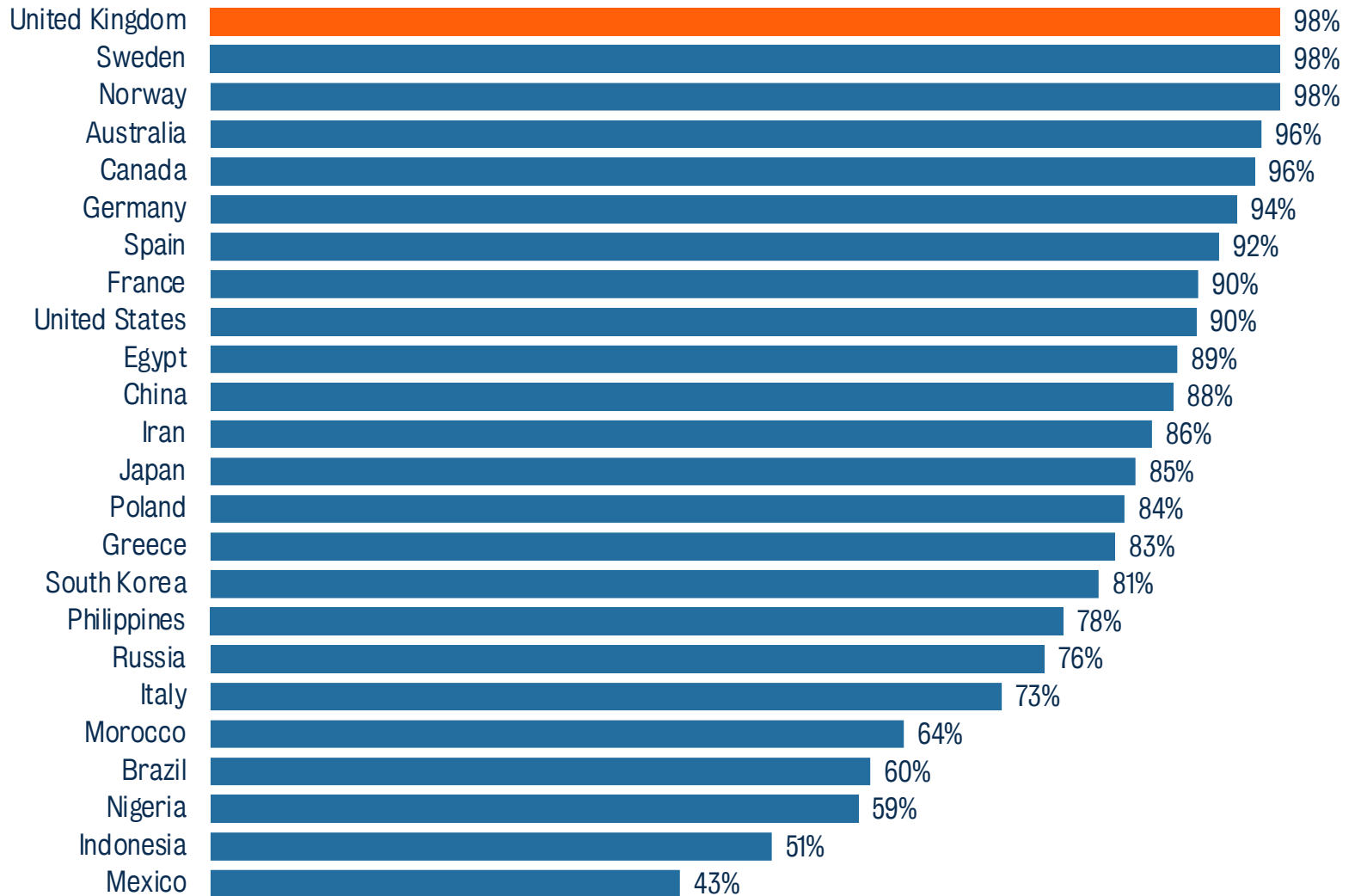


The UK public rank joint top for trust in people they know personally

98% of the UK population say they trust people they know personally – joint top out of 24 countries with Sweden and Norway.

While most nations are very trusting of such individuals, some are notably less so. In Europe, Italy (73%), Greece (83%) and Poland (83%) rank lowest, while Mexico (43%) comes bottom overall, and is the only country where less than half say they trust people they know personally.

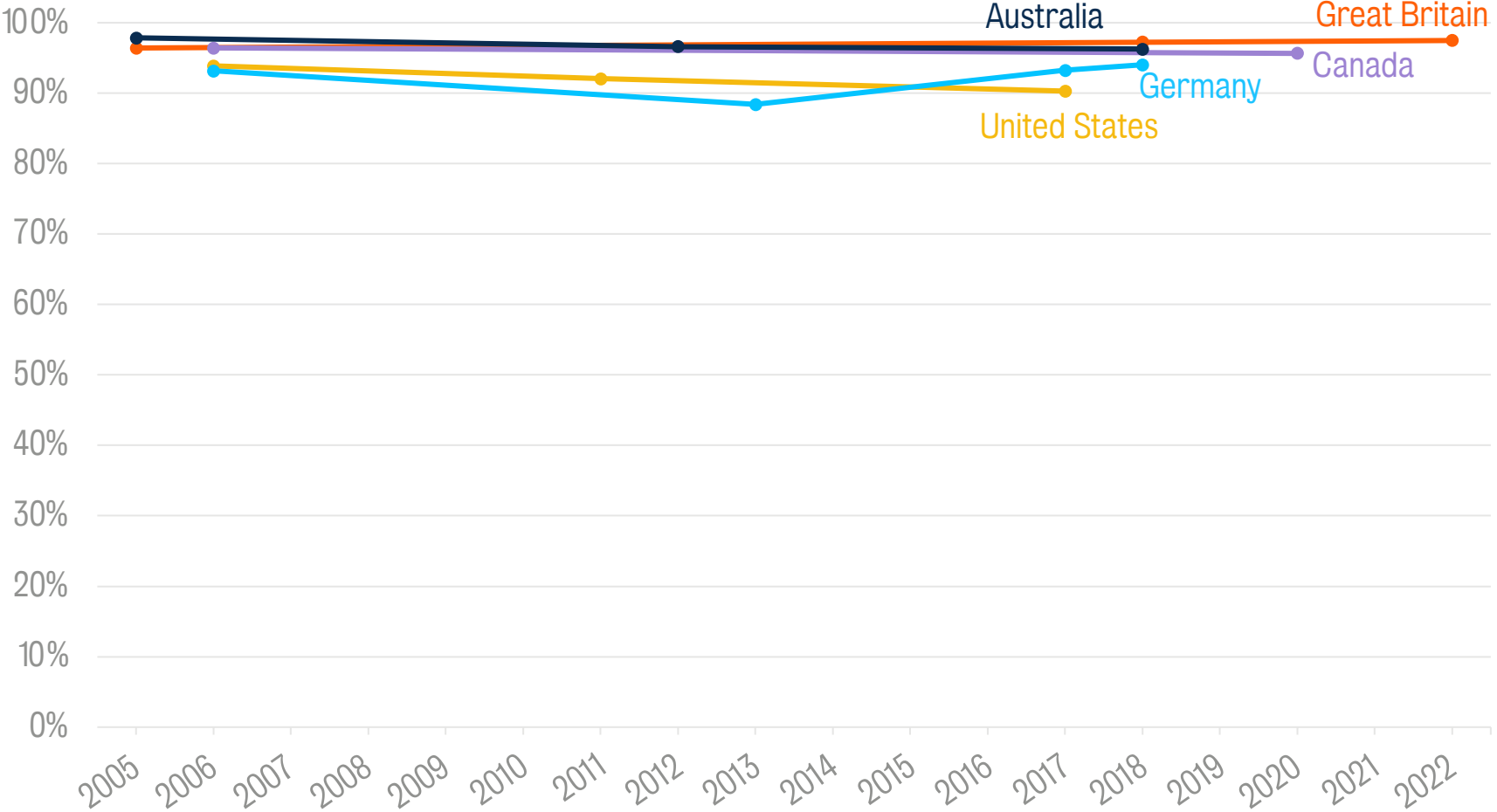
Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People you know personally** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



In Britain and other western nations, people's trust in those they know personally has stayed consistently high

Trust in people who are known personally has remained largely unchanged across several western nations since at least 2005.

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? **People you know personally** (% who trust completely/trust somewhat)



5. Brexit attitudes and trust in others

Those who are disappointed about Brexit tend to be more trusting of others than those who are happy about it



Those who are disappointed about Brexit are more likely than those who are happy about it to say they trust different groups in society, as well as more likely to feel that most people can be trusted in general

Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all...?
(% of UK public who trust completely/trust somewhat, by feelings about Brexit)

People of another nationality



People of another religion



People you meet for the first time



% of UK public who say most people can be trusted, by feelings about Brexit



6. “Bridging” and “bonding” trust

Using a technique called exploratory factor analysis, it is possible to categorise people’s responses to sets of related questions on trust to assess two key social science concepts:

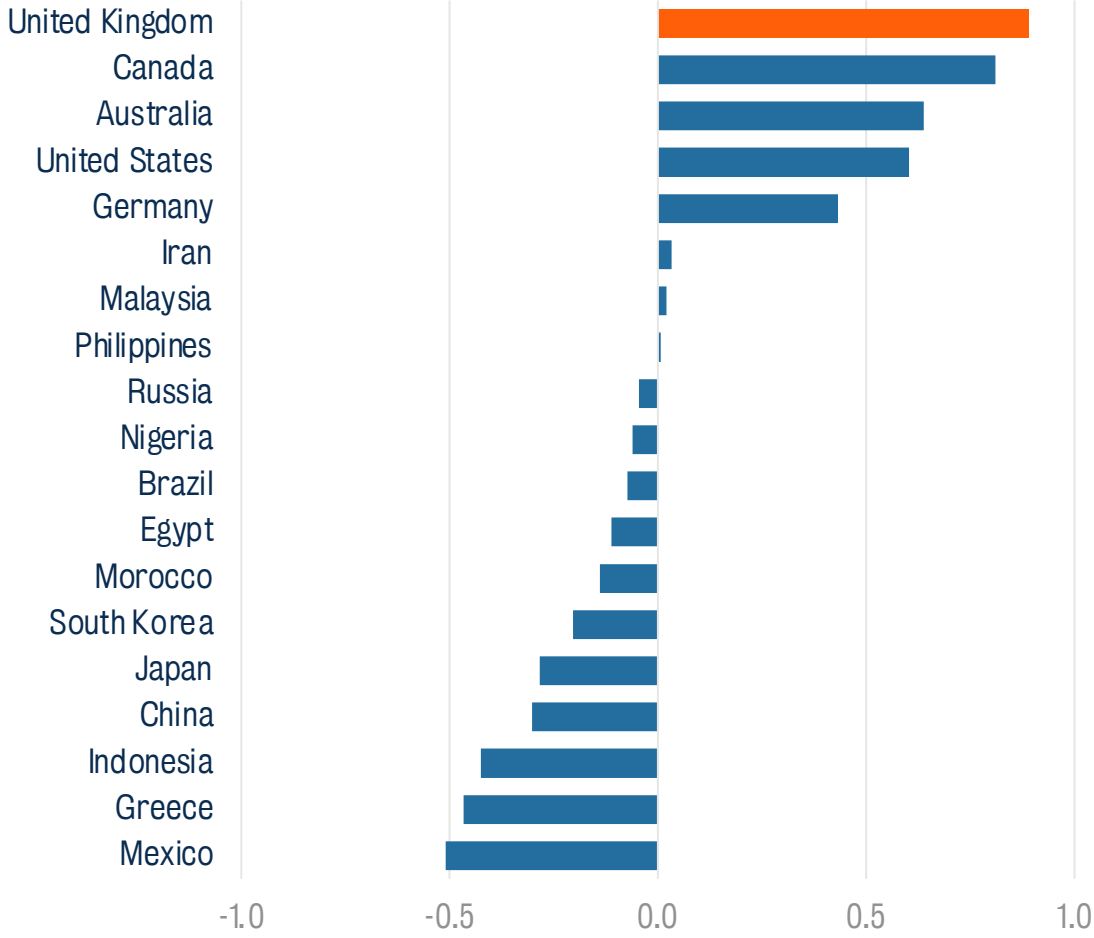
Bridging trust is about trust *between* different social groups (eg people of a different religion, nationality or those you meet for the first time)

Bonding trust is about trust *within* social groups (eg your family and people in your neighbourhood)

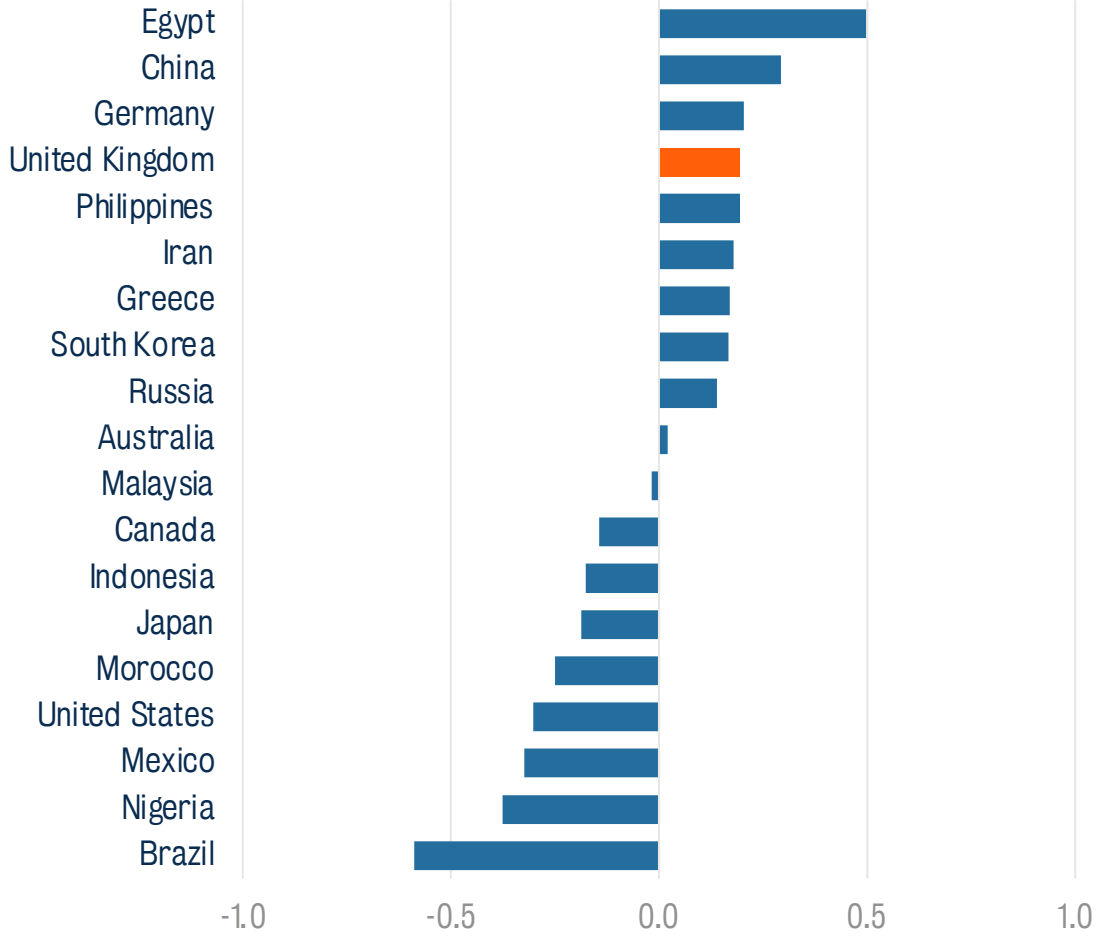


Among countries in the sample for which data is available, the UK comes top for bridging trust and ranks high on bonding trust

Country scores for **bridging trust**



Country scores for **bonding trust**

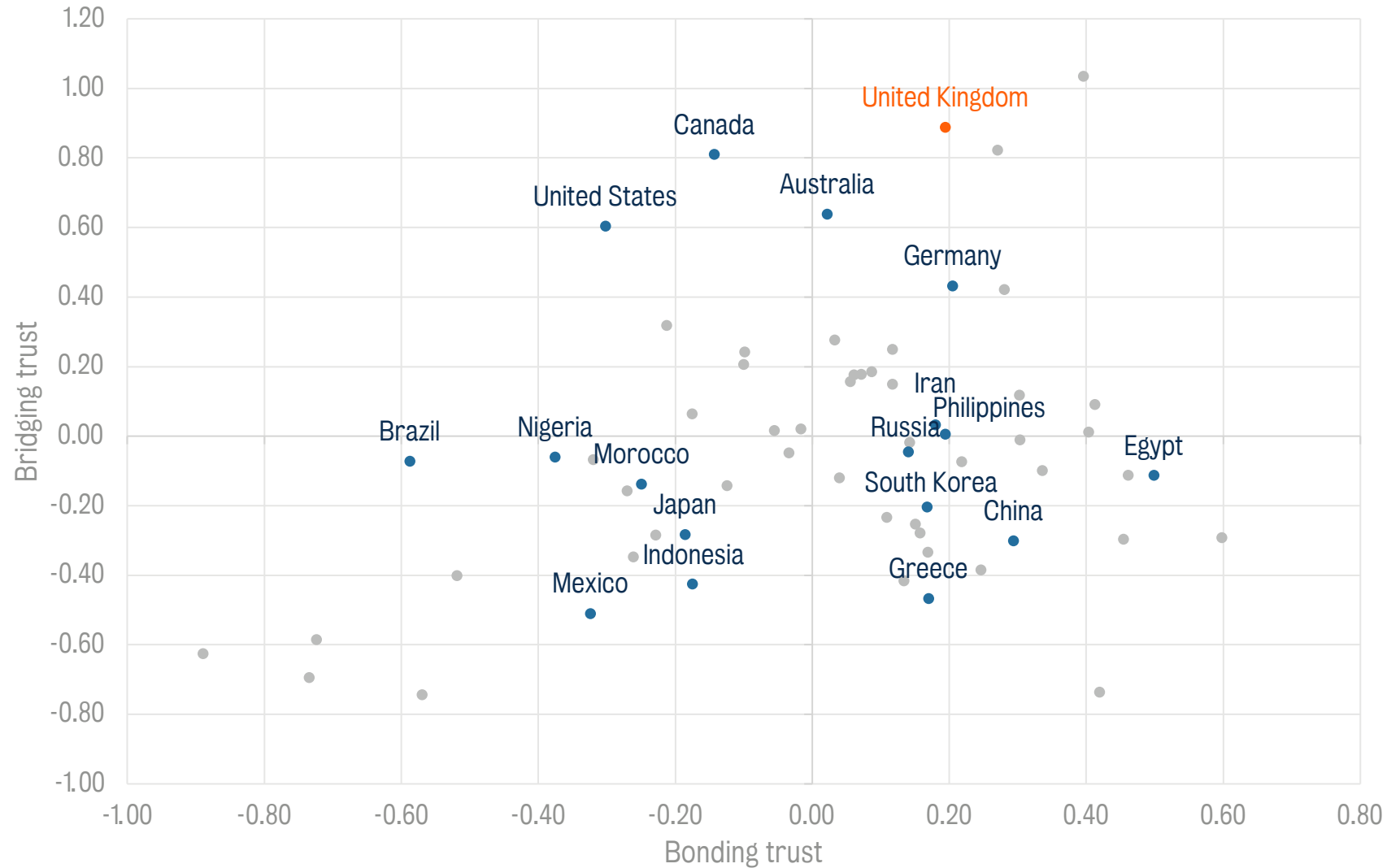


Australia, Canada and Germany are most similar to the UK in terms of bridging and bonding trust

Australia, Canada and Germany are most similar to the UK, with high scores on both bridging and bonding trust.

The US has a similar score for bridging trust, but slightly lower for bonding trust, suggesting lower levels of trust in those known personally.

Meanwhile, China, South Korea, Egypt and Iran have high levels of bonding trust, but bridging trust remains low. And several Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, have low scores for both measures of trust.



7. Technical details



Technical details

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](#).

Unweighted sample sizes for UK nations

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

Unweighted subgroup sample sizes

English region	
Greater London	216
Midlands	326
North East	196
North West	305
South	163
South East	304
South West	135

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

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