

UK attitudes to immigration: how the public became more positive

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THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM

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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 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 in 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](#)).

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. How to deal with immigration?

The UK is the least likely of 17 countries to support strict limits or an outright ban on immigration

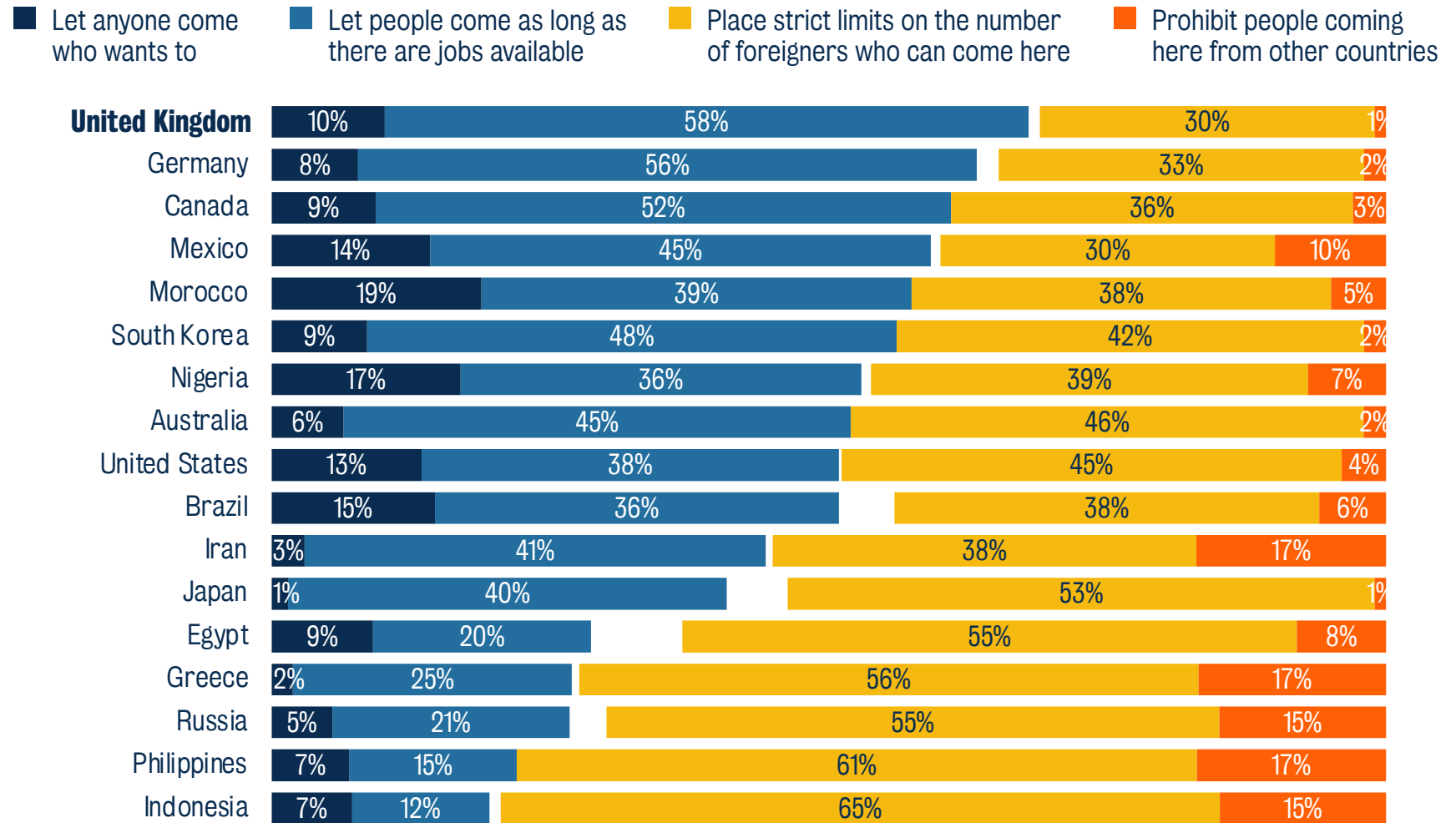


The UK public are least likely to say we should place strict limits on the number of foreigners or prohibit immigration altogether

Out of 17 countries, the UK is the most accepting of immigration. 31% think the government should place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come to the country or should prohibit people from coming altogether – the lowest of all the nations.

Correspondingly, 68% of the UK public think we should either let anyone come to the country who wants to or let them come as long as there are jobs available – the highest of the 17 nations, ahead of Germany (64%), Canada (61%) and Mexico (59%), the next most accepting countries by this measure.

How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?



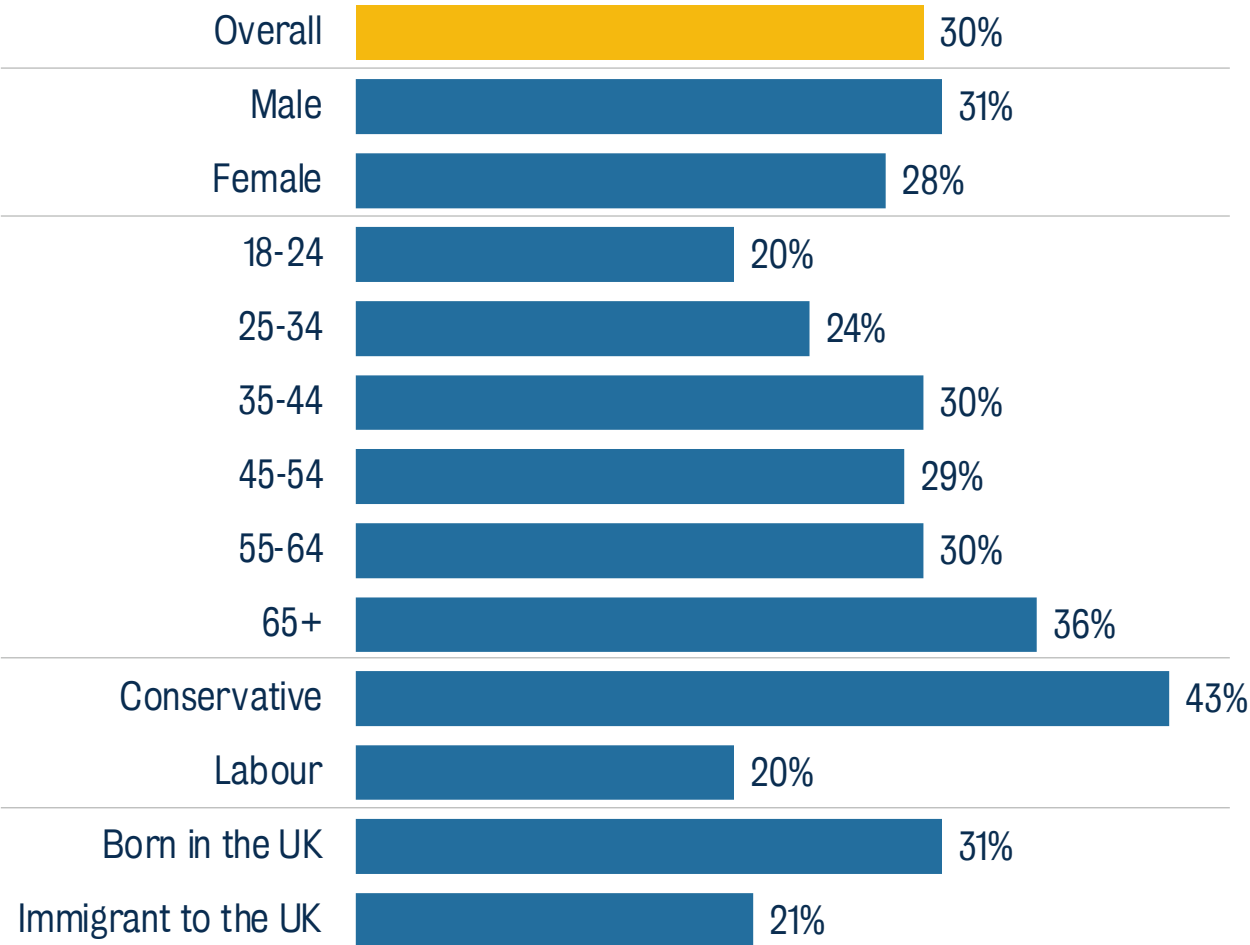
UK base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. Other countries all surveyed in wave 7 of WVS at various points between 2017 and 2022. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

Older people, Conservative voters and those born in the UK are most likely to say we need strict limits on immigration

Those who say they intend to vote Conservative are more than twice as likely as their Labour counterparts (43% vs 20%) to feel the government should place strict limits on the number of foreigners who come to the UK.

Meanwhile, people born in the UK (31%) are more supportive of strict limits on immigration than those who are immigrants to the UK themselves (21%), and there is some variation in views by age – for example, 36% of over-65s are in favour of strict limits, compared with 20% of 18- to 24-year-olds who feel the same.

How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do? % of UK public who say the government should place strict limits on the number of foreigners who come here



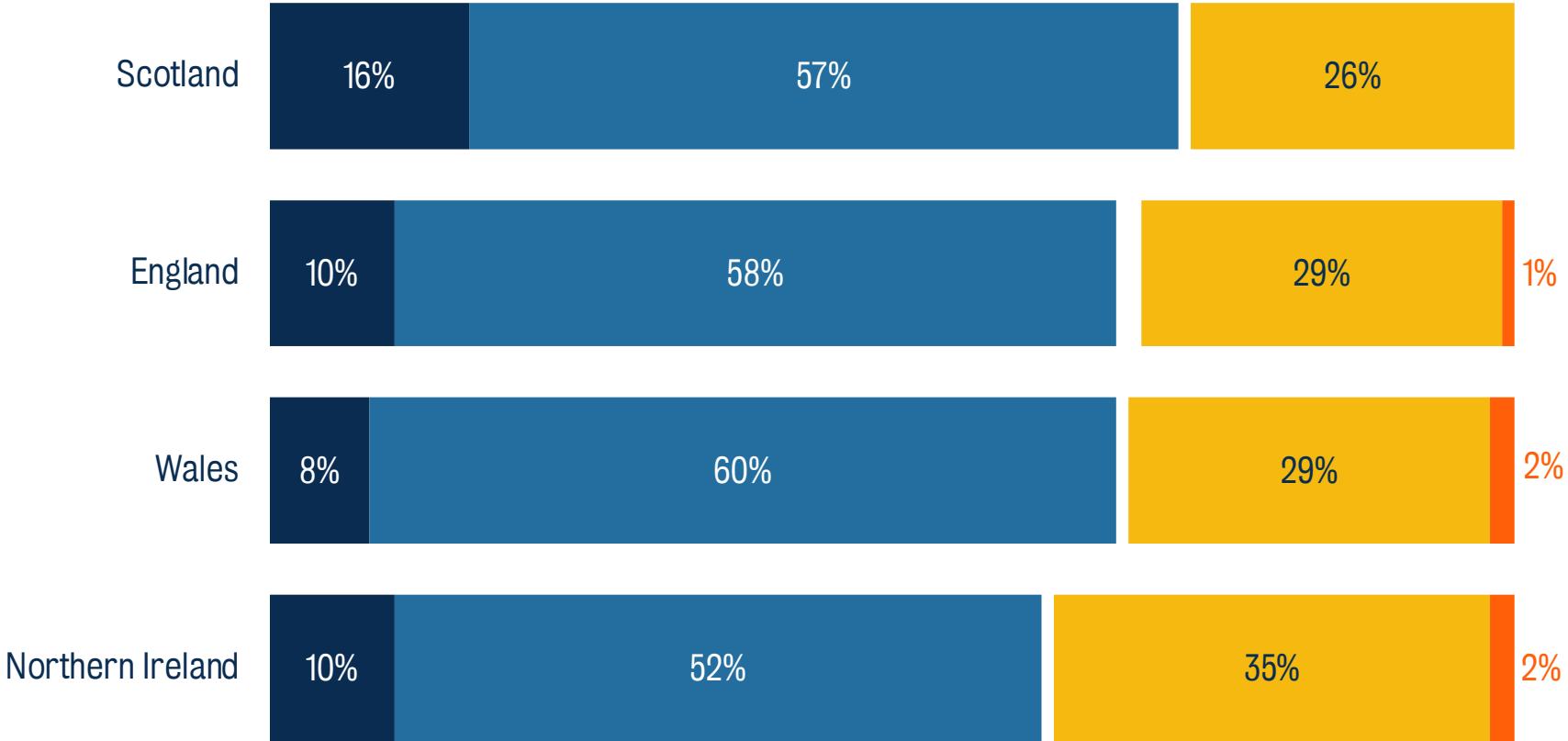
Scotland is the least likely of the four UK nations to say we should place strict limits on immigration or ban it altogether

26% of people in Scotland think the government should place strict limits on the number of foreigners arriving in the UK or prohibit people arriving altogether – slightly lower than in England (30%) and Wales (31%), but further below Northern Ireland (37%).

In line with this, the Scottish public (73%) are most likely to feel the government should let anyone come to the UK who wants to or let them come as long as there are jobs available – higher than the proportions who feel this way in the other constituent nations of the UK.

How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?

- Let anyone come who wants to
- Let people come as long as there are jobs available
- Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here
- Prohibit people coming here from other countries



2. Jobs: who gets priority?

The high acceptance of immigration in the UK reflects shifting views on whether UK-born workers should be prioritised over immigrants



The UK is now among the least likely to say that when jobs are scarce, we should prioritise the native-born population over immigrants – a marked shift from as recently as 2009

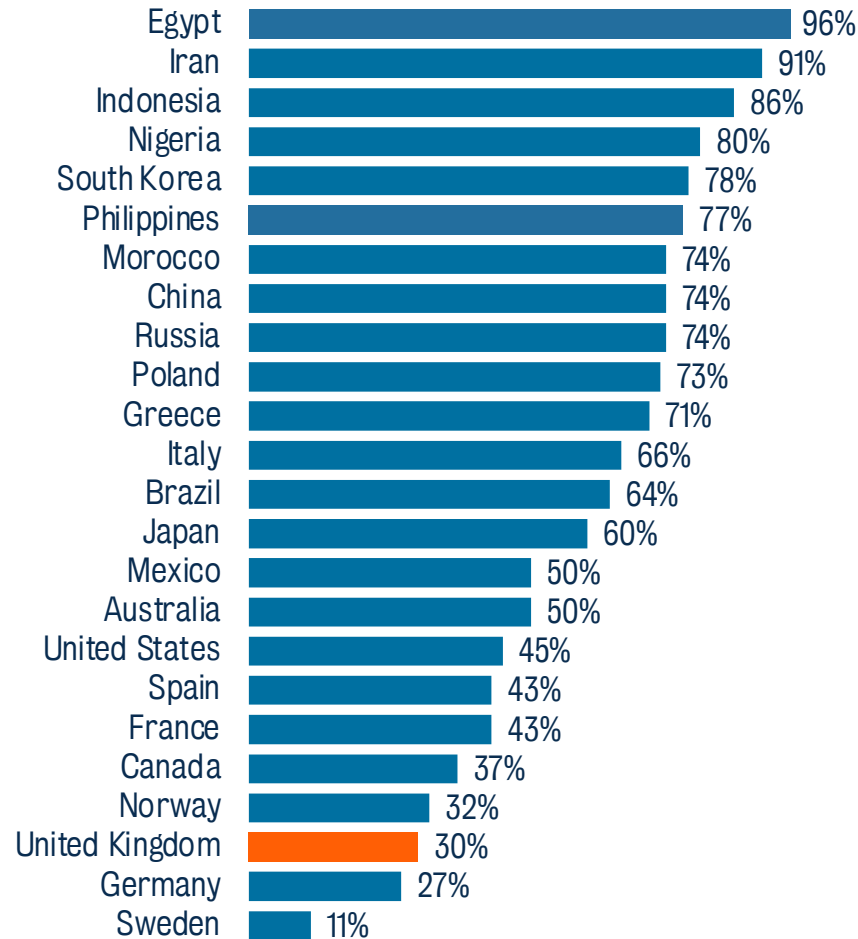
30% of the UK public think that when jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants. Only Germany (27%) and Sweden (11%) are less likely to agree with this view.

And the UK has far lower levels of agreement with this statement than many similar western nations, such as Italy (66%), Australia (50%), the US (45%), Spain (43%) and France (43%).

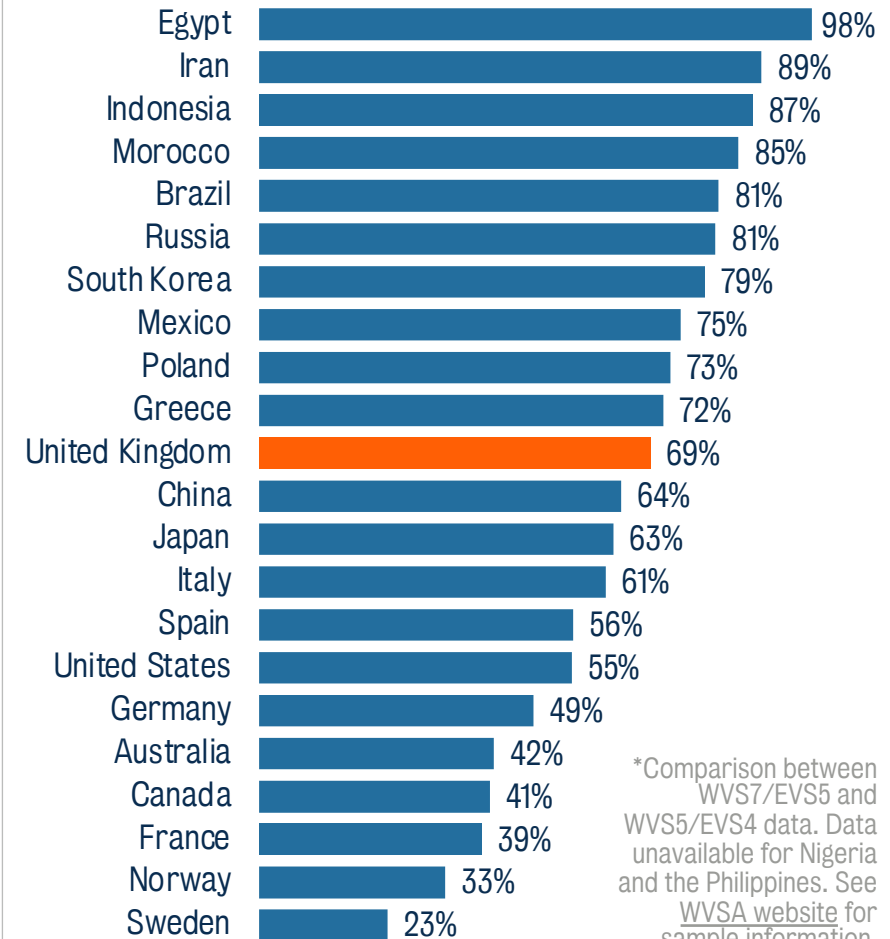
But as recently as 2009, agreement with this view in the UK was more than twice as high – back then, 69% felt employers should prioritise the native-born population over immigrants when jobs are scarce, putting the UK in the middle of the pack compared with other nations.

How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them? **When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants** (% who strongly agree/agree)

UK surveyed in 2022



UK surveyed in 2009*



*Comparison between WVS7/EVS5 and WVS5/EVS4 data. Data unavailable for Nigeria and the Philippines. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

The belief that we should prioritise native-born workers over immigrants has declined across several developed countries, though not Australia

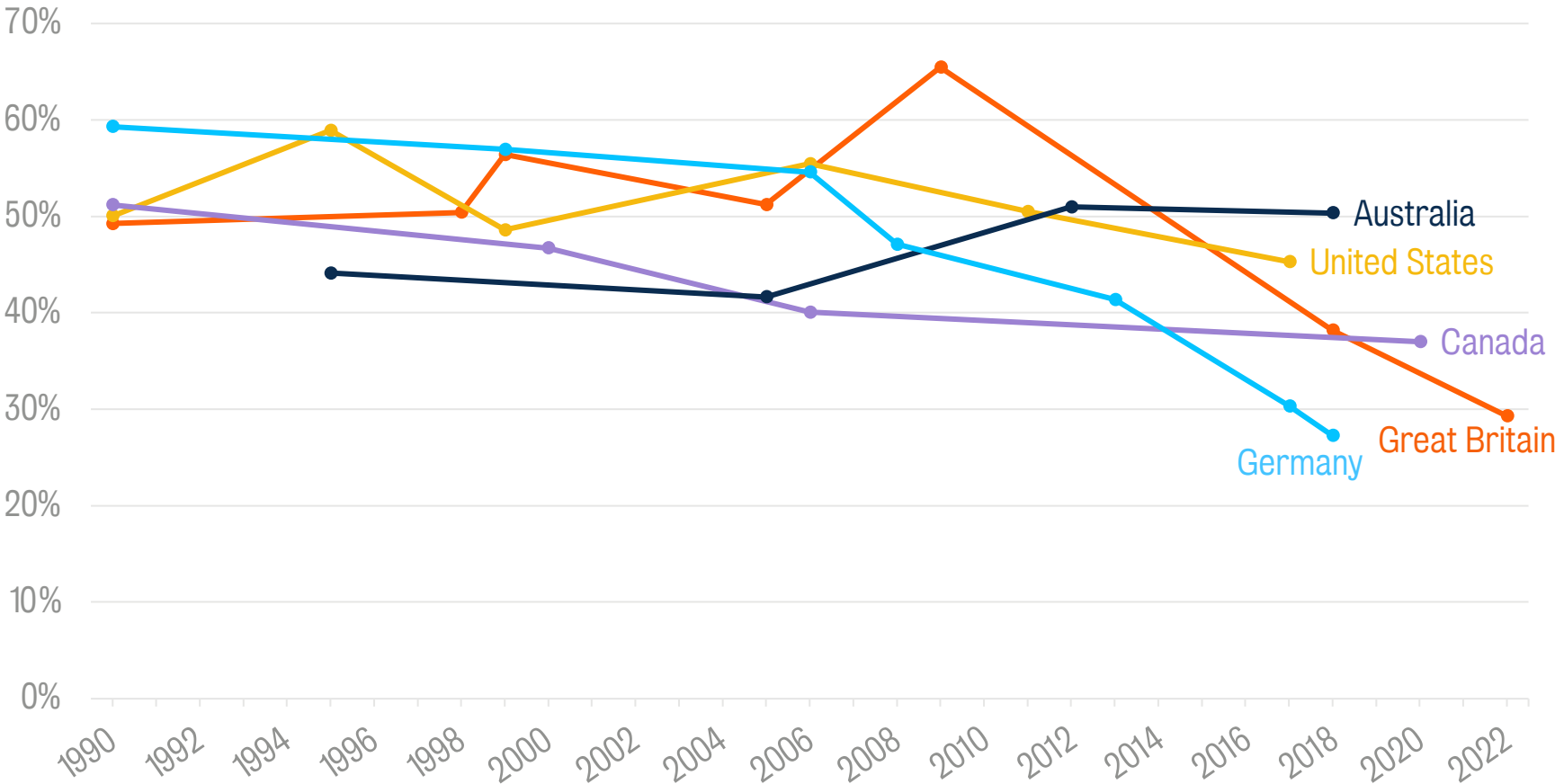
The share of the British public who think those born in the UK should be prioritised over immigrants when jobs are scarce has more than halved since 2009, falling from 65% to 29% in 2022.

There has been a similarly steep decline in Germany, albeit over a longer period: in 1990, 59% thought those born in the country should be prioritised over immigrants, compared with 27% in 2018.

In the US, the decline in this view has been less steep, while in Australia, the proportion who believe the native-born population should take priority has in fact risen, from 42% in 2005 to 50% in 2018.

How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them?
When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants

(% who strongly agree/agree)



Growing positivity about immigration isn't solely driven by more liberal attitudes among younger people – older generations have also seen large shifts

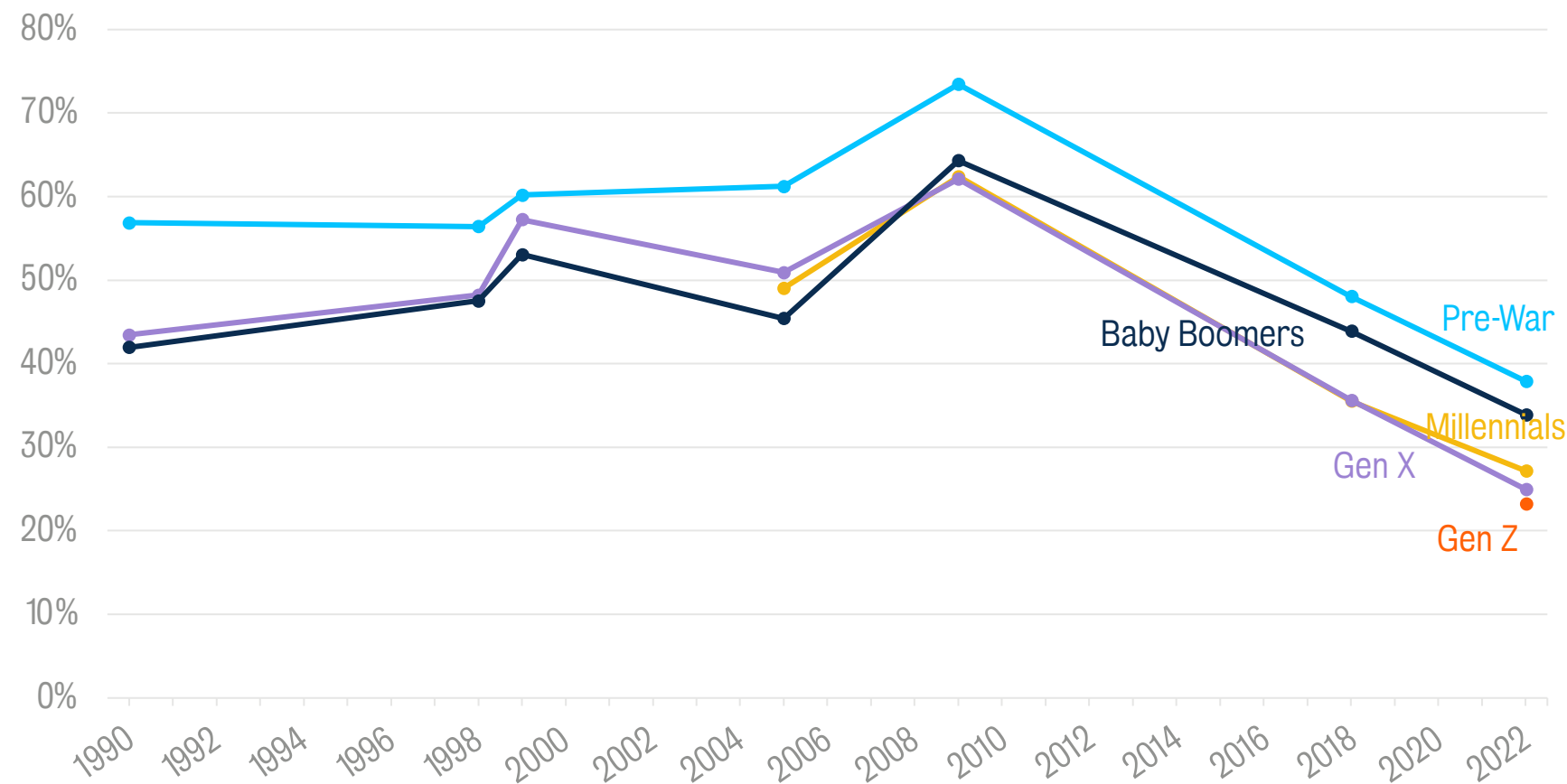
In Britain, all generations who were old enough to be surveyed in the late 2000s have seen huge declines in the belief that the UK-born population should take priority over immigrants when jobs are scarce.

For example, 73% of the Pre-War generation agreed with this view in 2009, but this had almost halved, to 38%, by 2022. Similarly, over the same period, the share of Millennials who held this opinion decreased from 62% to 27%.

But there is still somewhat of a generational divide on this issue, with the oldest generations – Pre-War (38%) and Baby Boomers (34%) – more likely than Gen Z (23%), Millennials (27%) and Gen X (25%) to think employers should prioritise people born in the country.

How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them?
When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants

(% who strongly agree/agree by generation in Britain)



3. The impacts of immigration: positive perceptions

There are relatively positive perceptions of immigration in the UK across different domains...

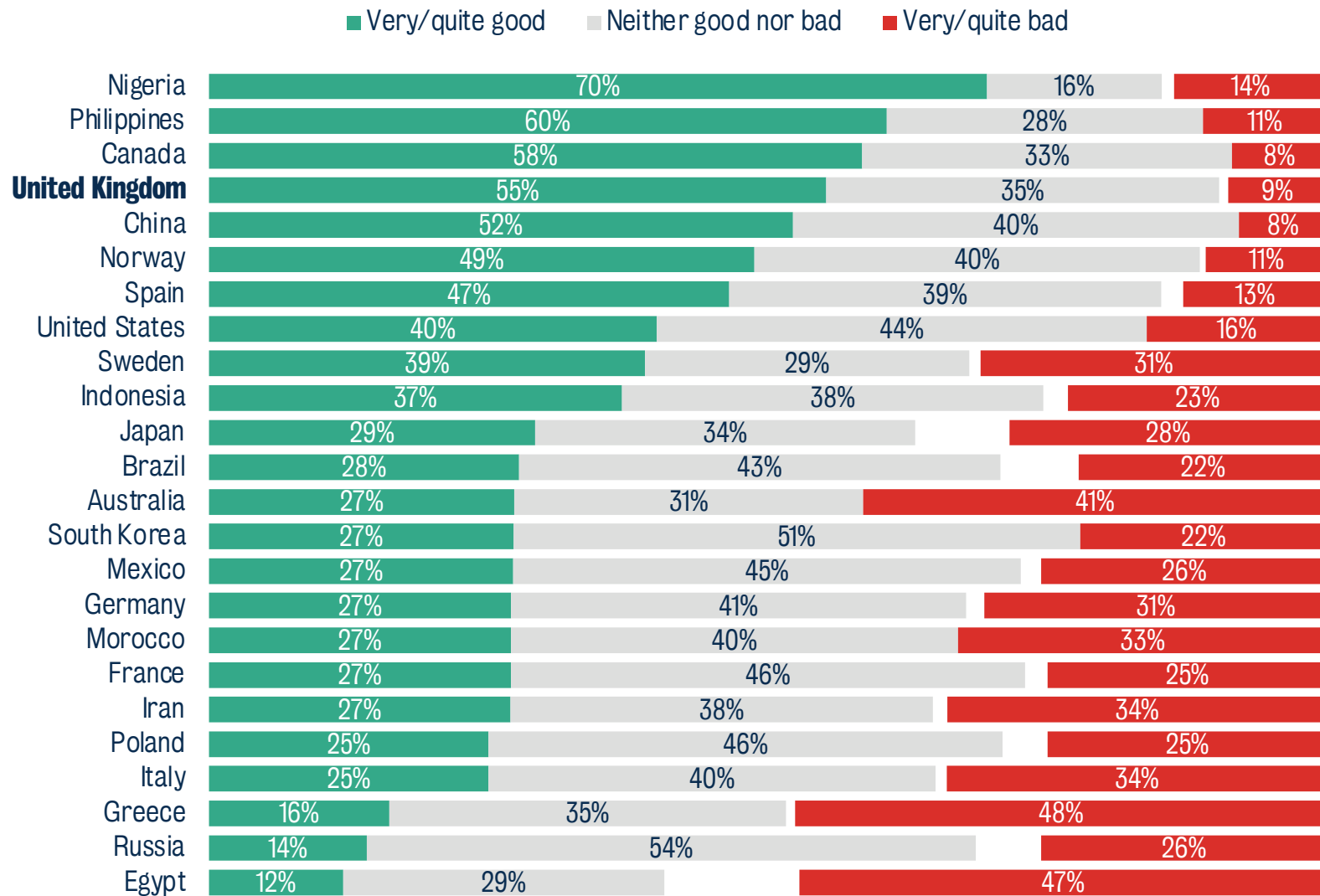


Compared with other countries, the UK has one of the most favourable views of the impacts of immigration

55% of the UK public say immigrants have had a very or quite good impact on the development of the country, with only people in Canada (58%), the Philippines (60%) and Nigeria (70%) having a more positive view of the impact of immigrants on their nations.

And the UK has a much more favourable view than do other western European countries, such as Germany (27%), France (27%) and Italy (25%), where around a quarter think immigration has been good for the development of their nation.

Now we would like to know your opinion about the people from other countries who come to live in [your country] – immigrants. How would you evaluate the impact of these people on the development of [your country]?



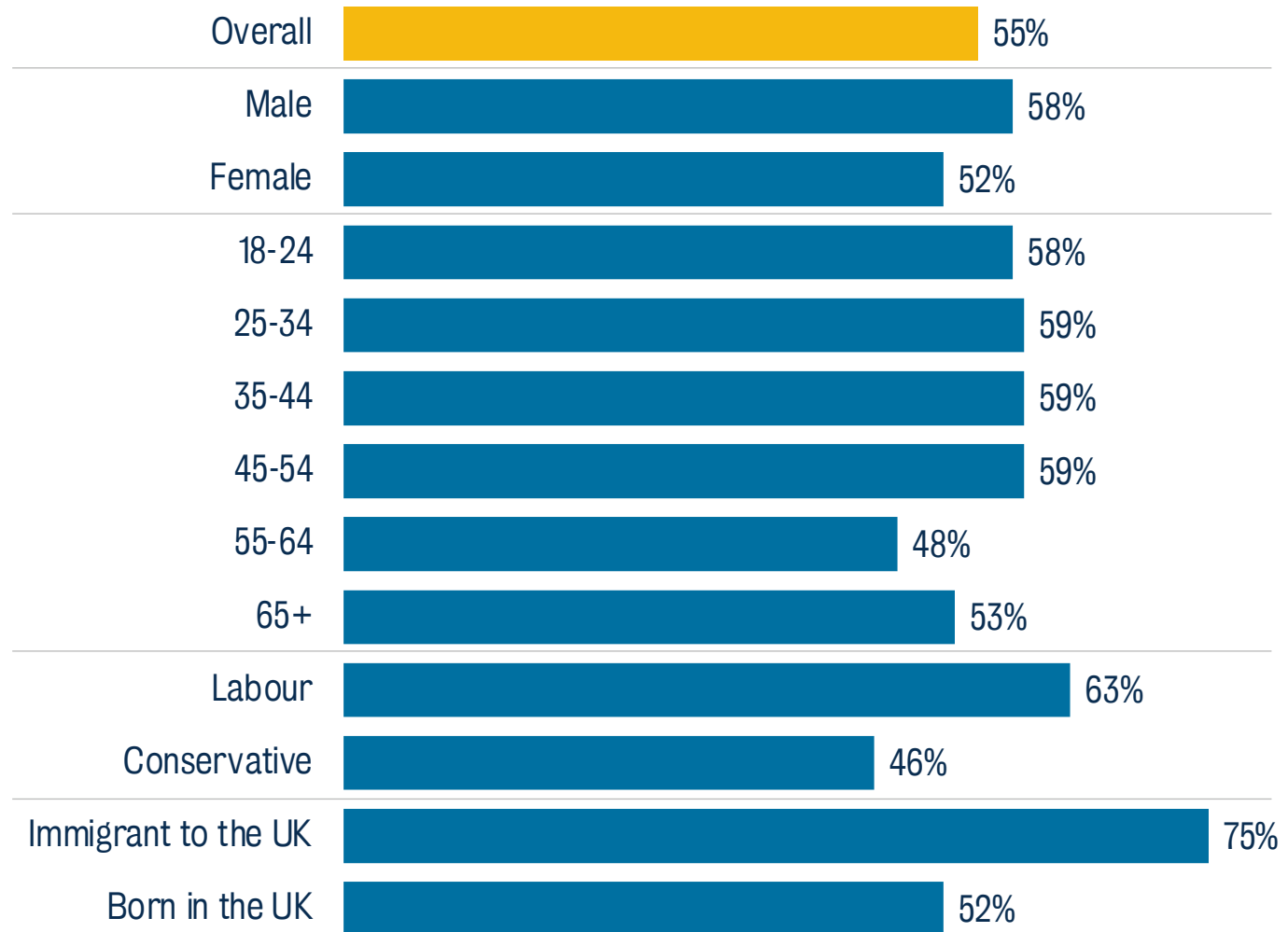
UK base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. Other countries all surveyed in wave 7 of WVS at various points between 2017 and 2022. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

This varies relatively little by age, but Labour voters and immigrants themselves are more positive

The oldest age groups surveyed are only slightly less likely than younger groups to feel that immigrants have a positive impact on the development of the UK. But there is a larger divide in views by voting intention, with 63% of likely Labour voters saying immigrants have a good impact on the country, compared with 46% of those who say they would vote Conservative.

And while three-quarters (75%) of immigrants to the UK themselves think immigration is good for the country, half (52%) of those born in the UK feel the same.

Now we would like to know your opinion about the people from other countries who come to live in the UK – immigrants. How would you evaluate the impact of these people on the development of the UK? (% who say very/quite good)

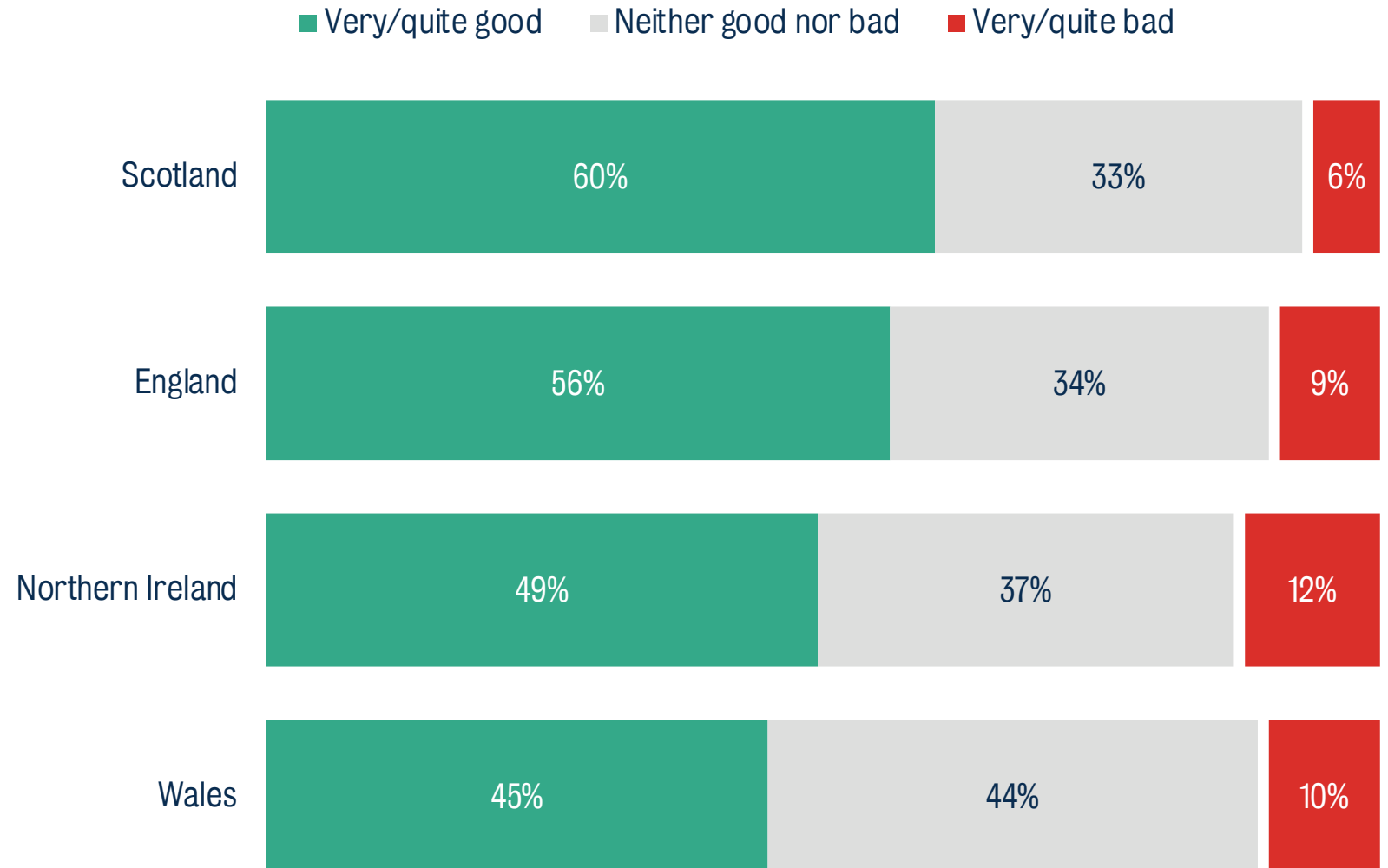


Scotland is most positive about the contribution of immigrants to the UK

60% of people in Scotland judge the impact of immigrants on the development of the UK to be very or quite good – the highest across the four nations that make up the UK, although only slightly more positive than England (56%).

At the other end of the spectrum, people in Wales have the least favourable view, with 45% saying immigrants have a positive impact.

Now we would like to know your opinion about the people from other countries who come to live in [your country] – immigrants. How would you evaluate the impact of these people on the development of [your country]?

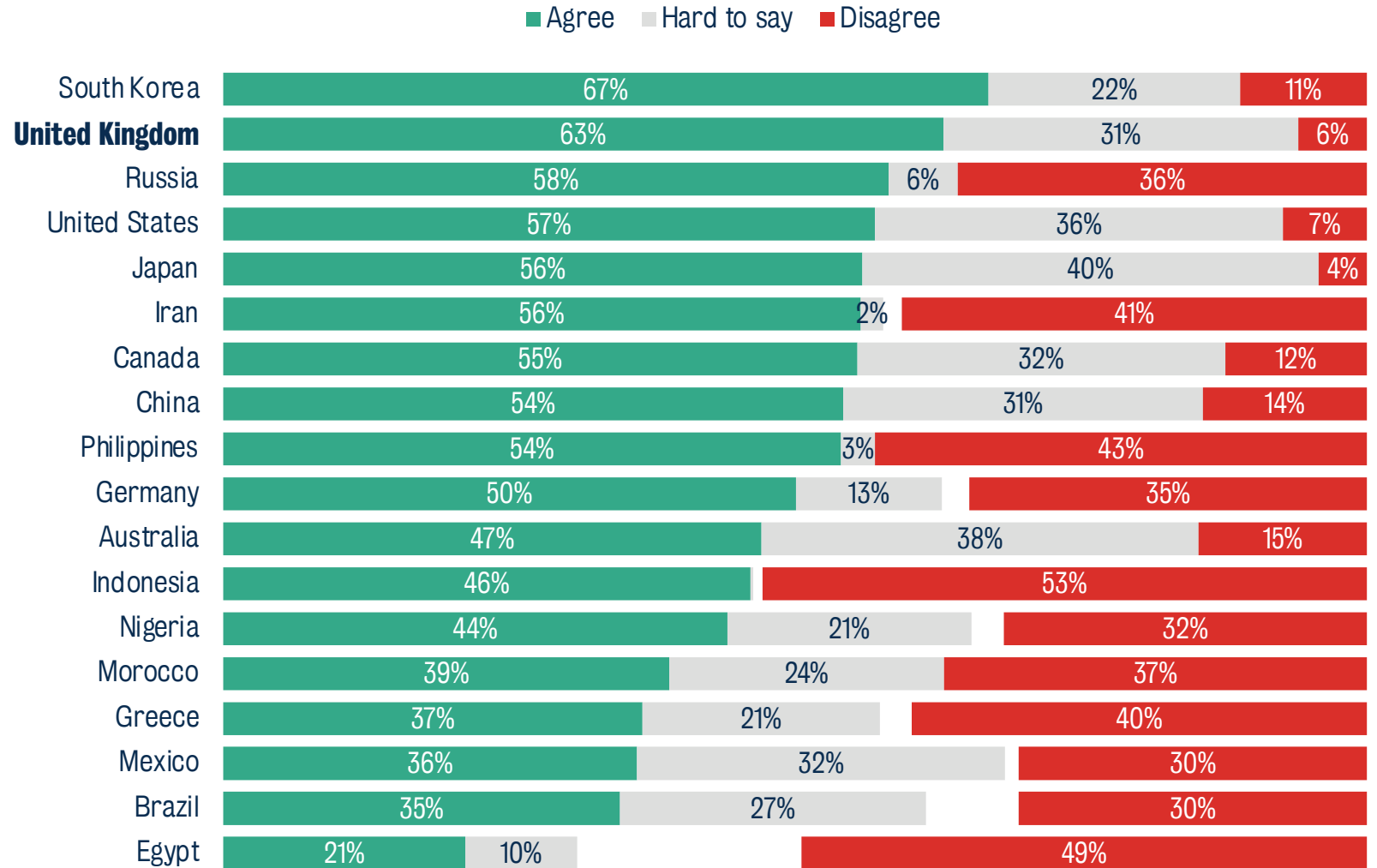


Only South Korea is more likely than the UK to agree that immigrants fill important job vacancies

63% of people in the UK agree that immigration helps fill important jobs vacancies. South Korea (67%) is the only country with a higher level of agreement with this view.

And the UK ranks above other western nations such as the US (57%), Germany (50%) and Australia (47%) when it comes to this belief that immigrants play such a role in the labour market.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Fills important jobs vacancies**

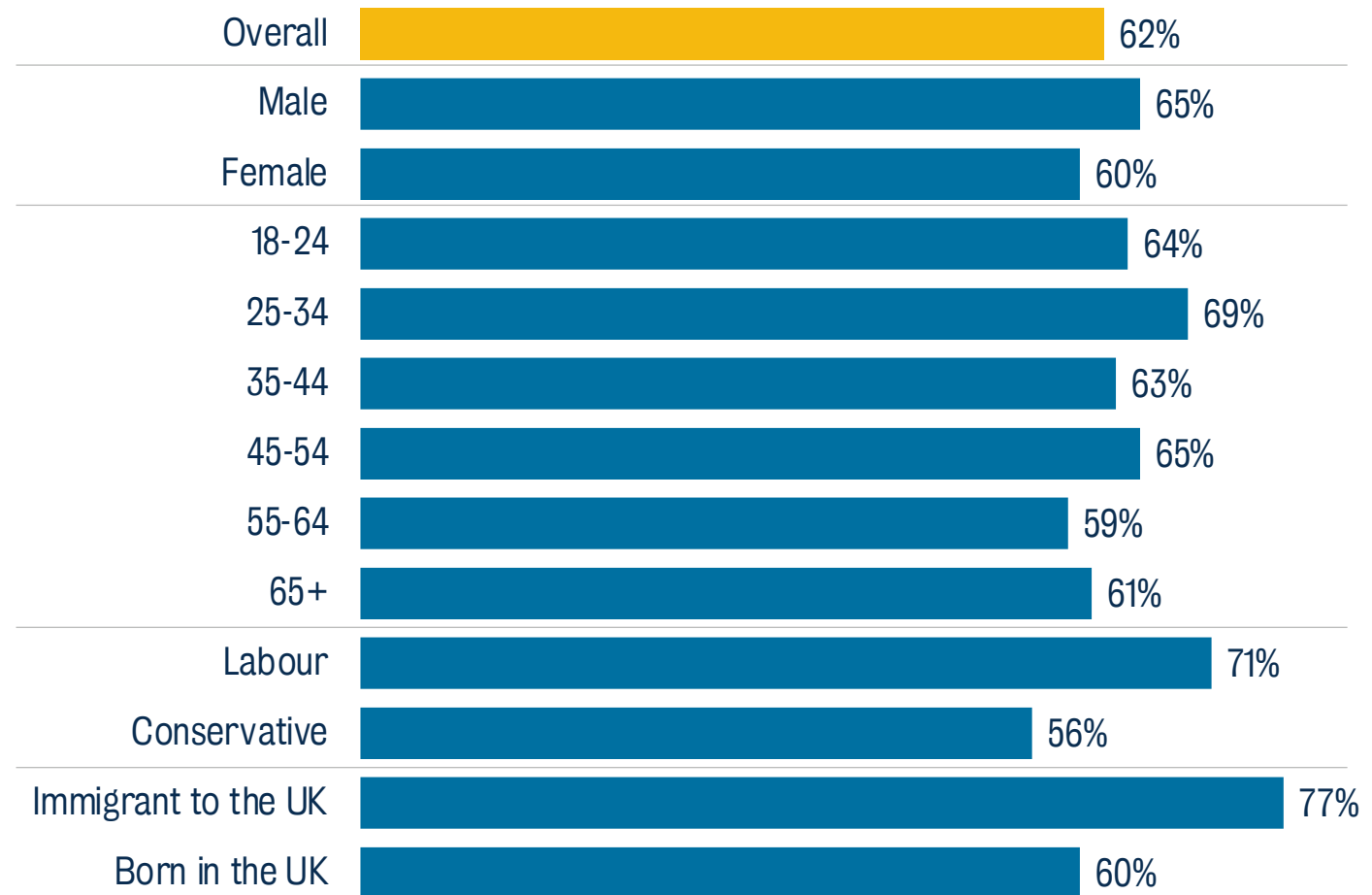


Again, there is little difference between demographic groups on this question, but Labour voters and immigrants themselves are more likely to agree

Views on whether immigration helps fill important jobs vacancies vary little according to gender or age, but there is a political divide in opinion, with Labour voters (71%) more likely than Conservative voters (56%) to agree.

And immigrants themselves (77%) are more likely than those born in the UK (60%) to have such a favourable view of the impact of immigration.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of the UK? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it.
Fills important jobs vacancies (% who agree in the UK)

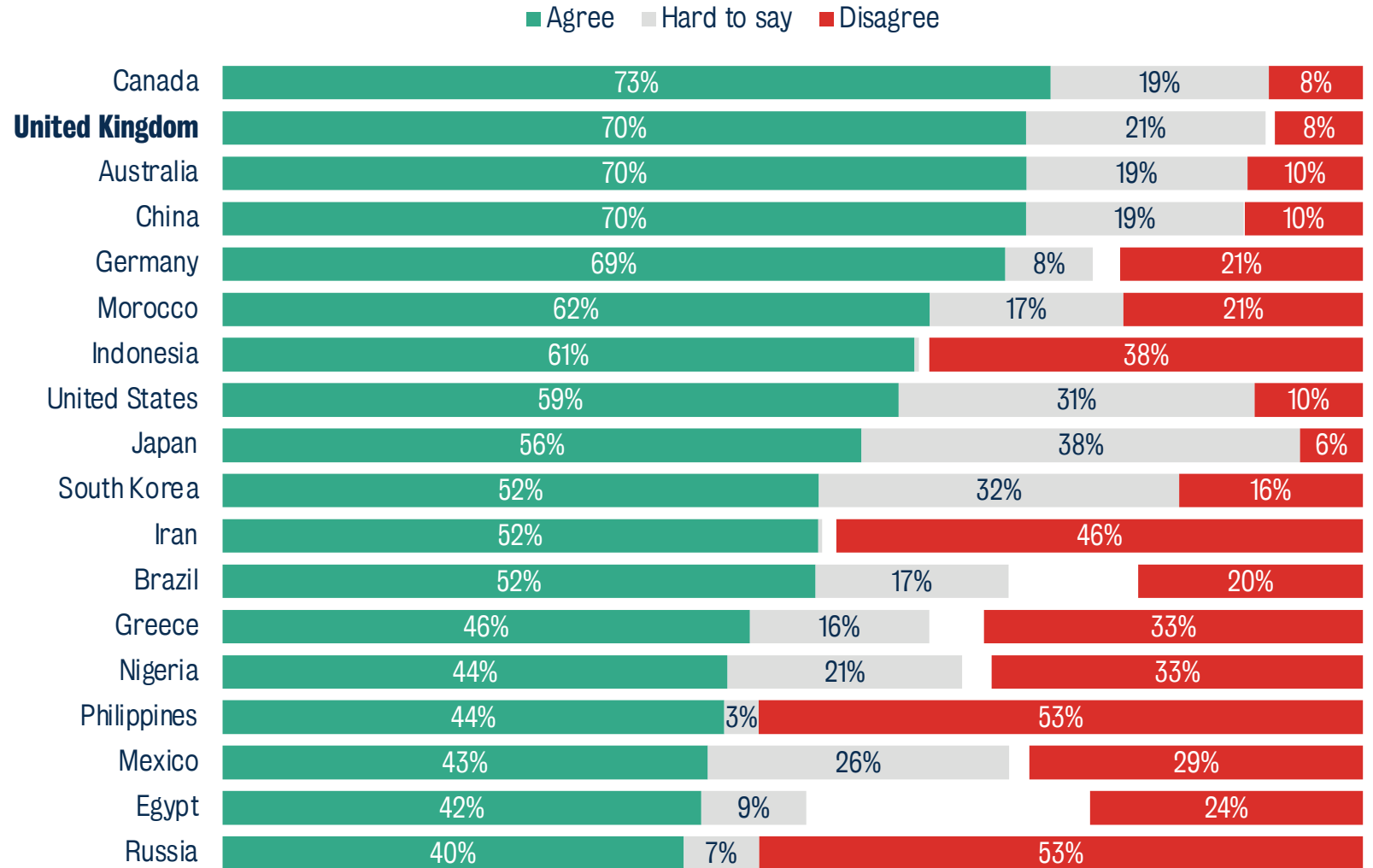


The UK is also among the most likely to think immigrants strengthen cultural diversity...

70% of the UK public feel that immigration strengthens cultural diversity, with Canada (73%) the only country where a greater proportion agree with this view.

Australia (70%), China (70%) and Germany (69%) have the same or virtually the same levels of agreement with this view as the UK, although in Germany a larger share disagree with it.

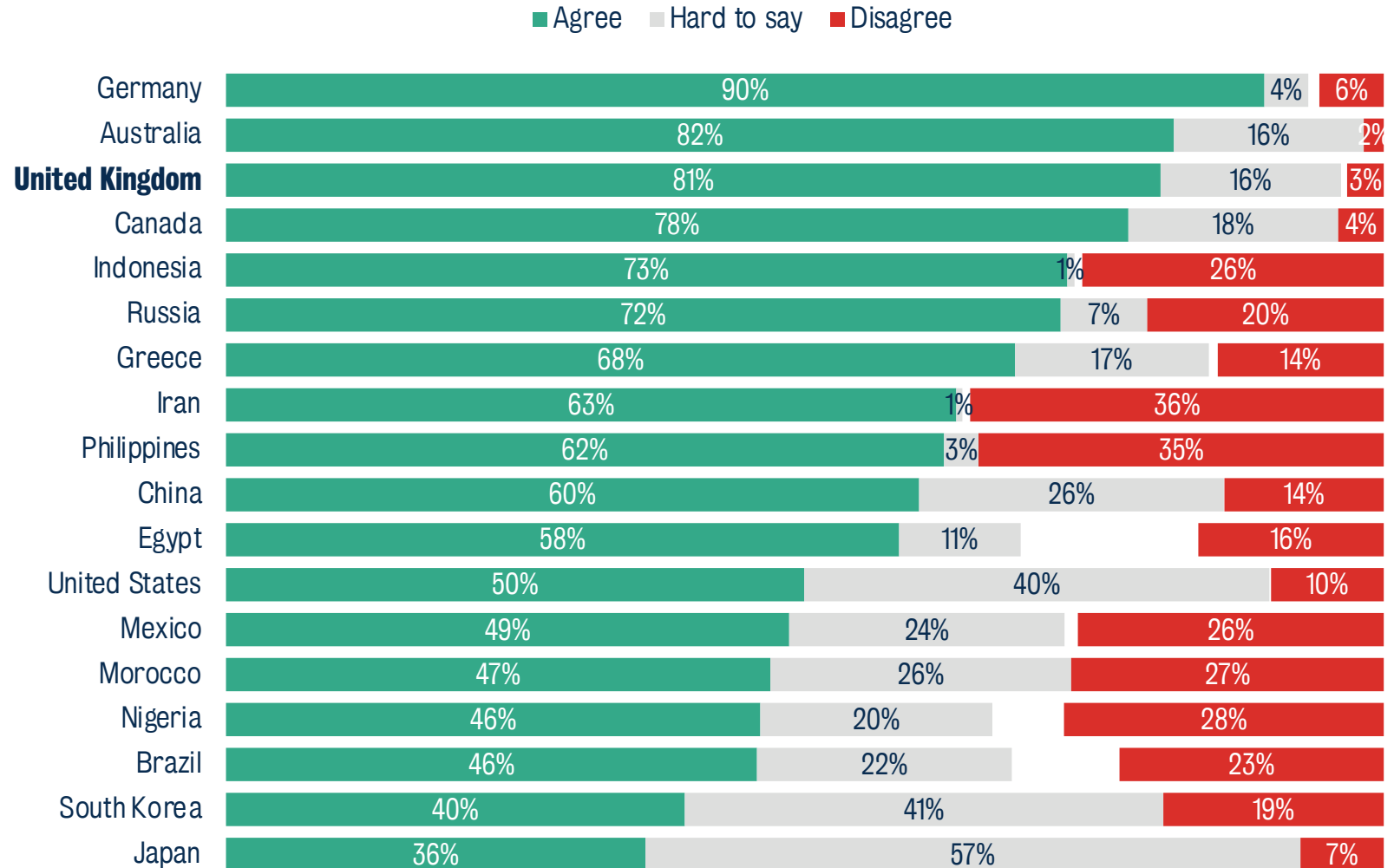
From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Strengthens cultural diversity**



...and that immigration offers people from poor countries a better living...

The UK has the third-highest level of agreement that immigration offers people from poor countries a better living, with 81% holding this view – just behind Australia (82%) and below Germany (90%).

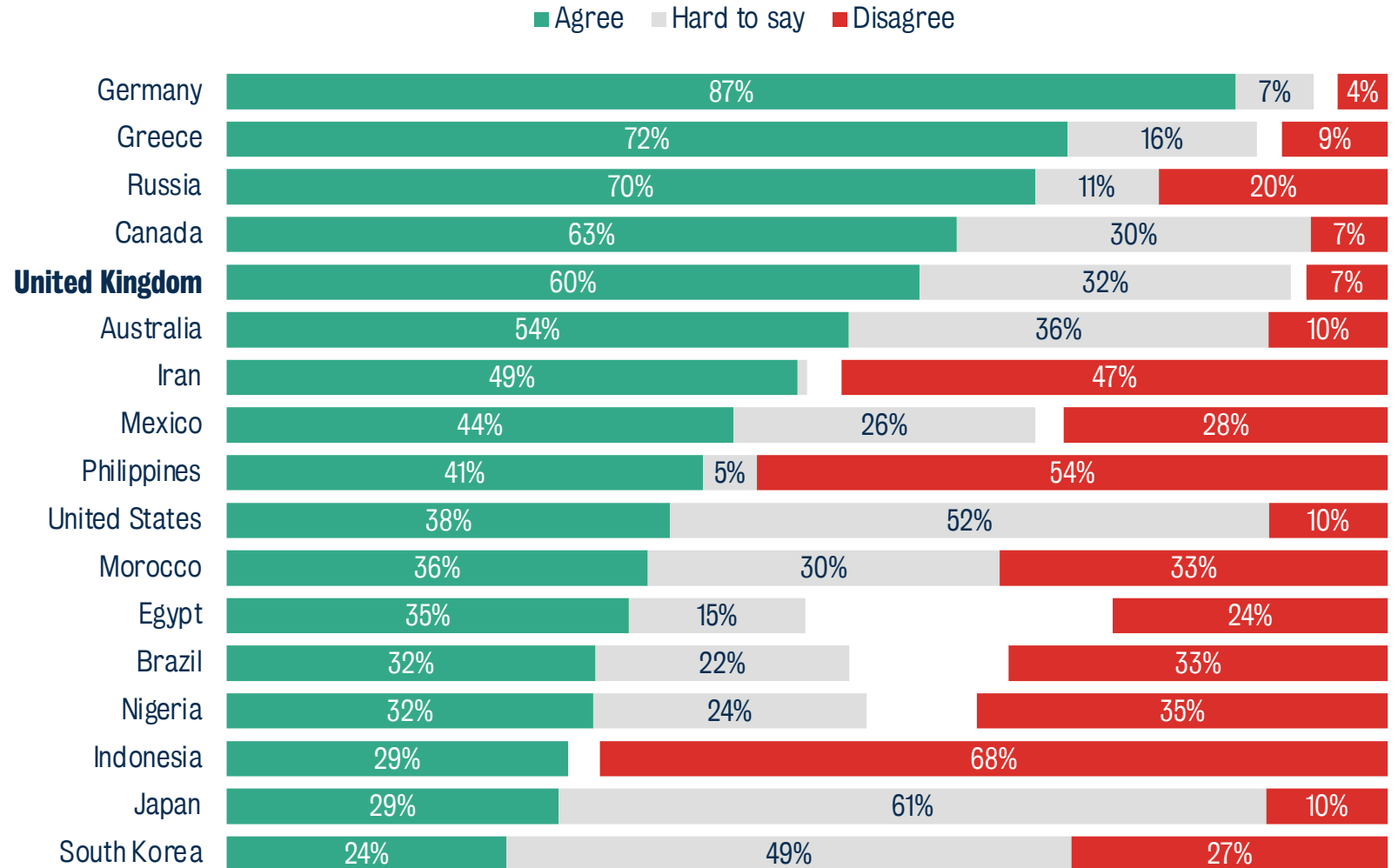
From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Offers people from poor countries a better living**



...as well as giving asylum to refugees who are persecuted elsewhere

60% of people in the UK agree immigration helps give asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere, placing it in the top third of countries who agree with this view – higher than Australia (54%) and the US (38%), but lower than Germany (87%), Greece (72%), Russia (70%) and Canada (63%).

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Gives asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere**



4. The impacts of immigration: negative perceptions

...and relatively few people in the UK see immigration as having various negative impacts

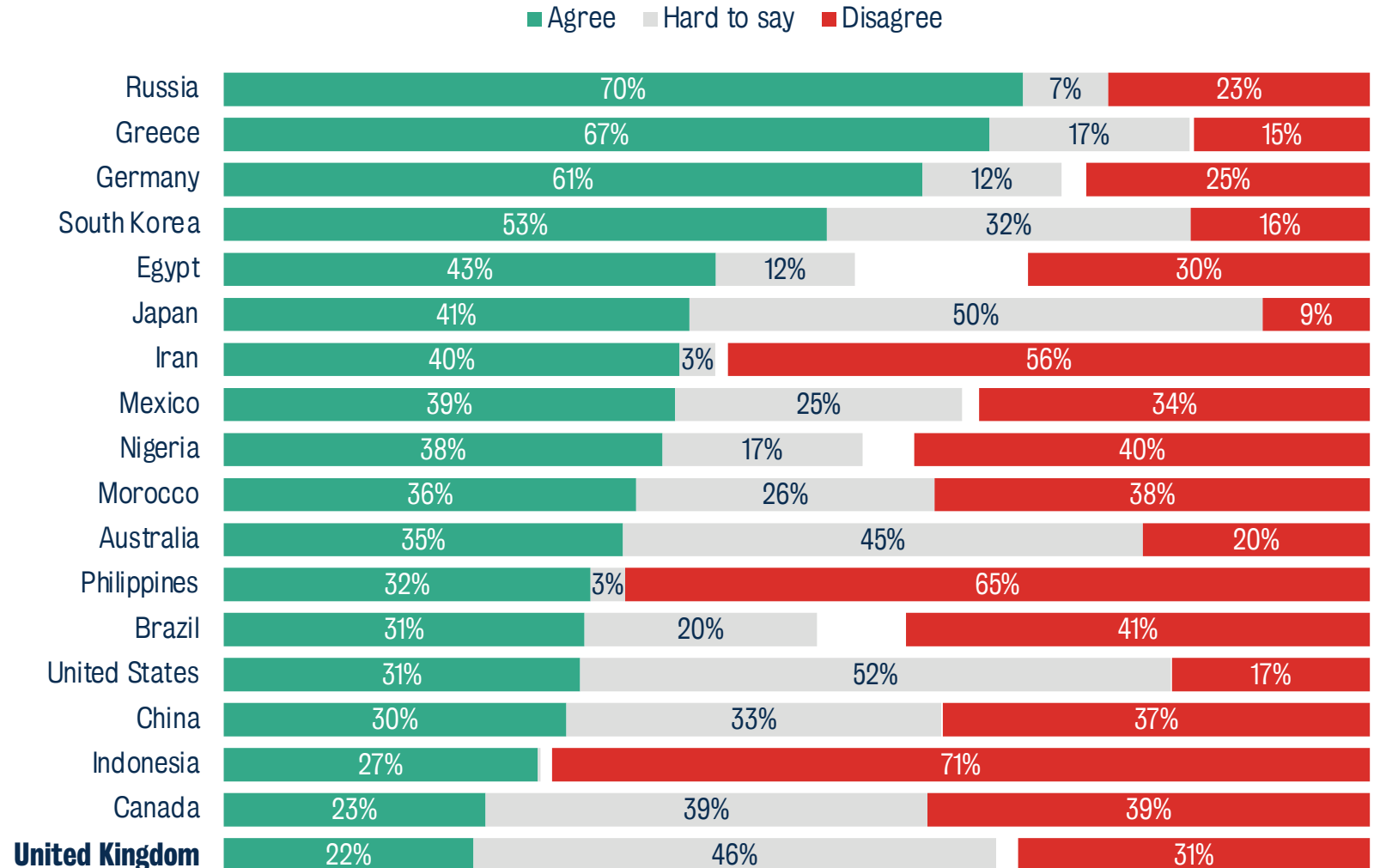


People in the UK are least likely to believe immigration increases the crime rate

22% of the UK public think immigration increases the crime rate – the lowest of 18 countries, although virtually the same as in Canada (23%).

By contrast, compared with the UK, people in Germany (61%) are almost three times as likely to think that immigration leads to more crime, while those in Australia (35%) and the US (31%) are also more likely to hold this view.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Increases the crime rate**

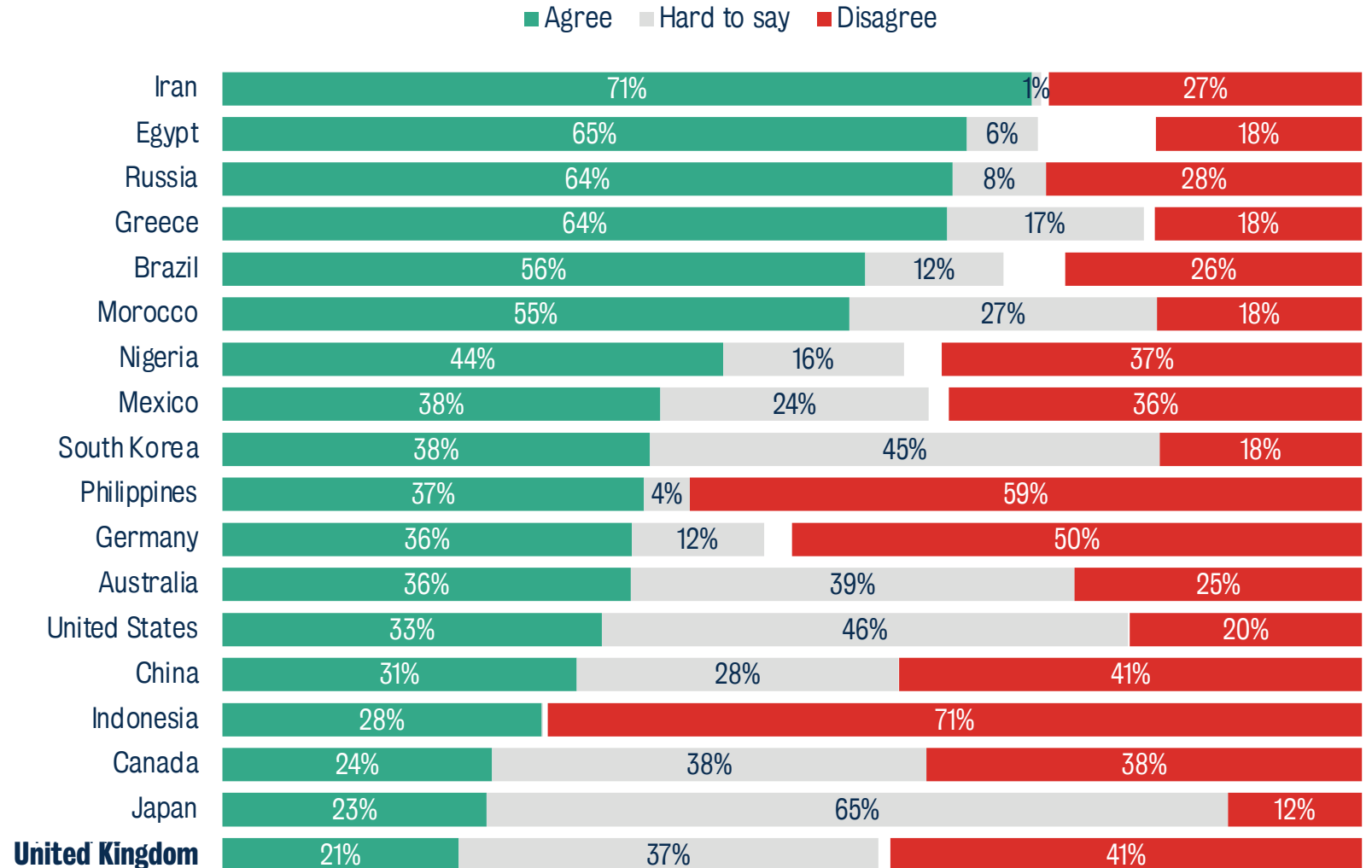


The UK is also least likely to say that immigration increases unemployment

21% of people in the UK believe immigration increases unemployment, with almost double this proportion (41%) disagreeing with this view. This makes the UK least likely of 18 countries to believe in such a link.

At the same end of the spectrum, Japan (23%) and Canada (24%) have similarly low levels of agreement with this view, while at the other end, Iran (71%), Egypt (65%), Russia (64%) and Greece (64%) are the most likely to think unemployment rises with immigration.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Increases unemployment**



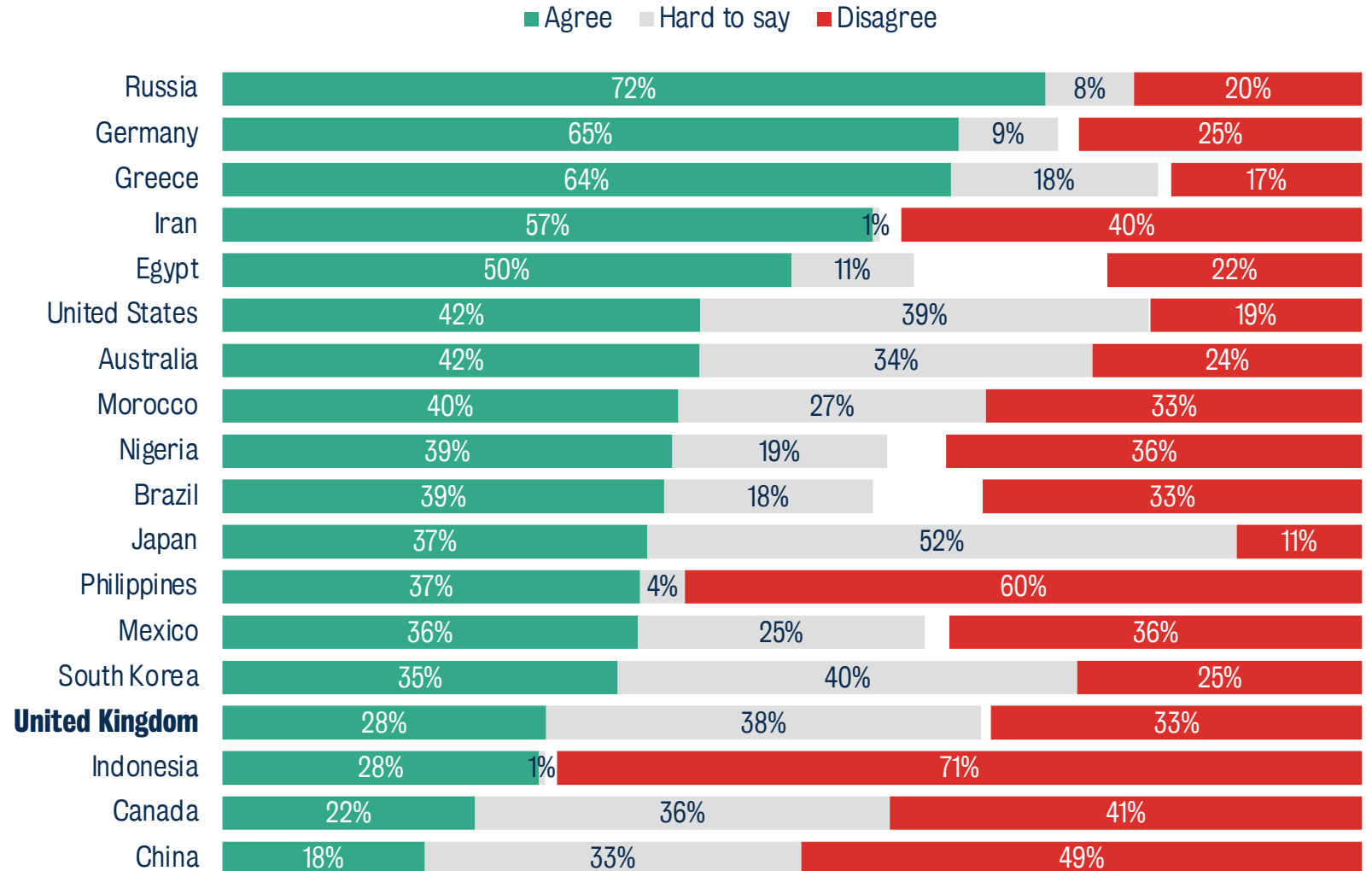
UK base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. Other countries all surveyed in wave 7 of WVS at various points between 2017 and 2022. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

The UK is among the least likely to say immigration increases the risks of terrorism

The UK is much less likely than some other western nations to say that immigration increases the risks of terrorism, with 28% holding this view, compared with 65% in Germany and 42% in both the US and Australia.

Indonesia (28%) is just as likely as the UK to believe that the risk of terror attacks rises with immigration, while Canada (22%) and China (18%) are the only countries where a smaller share of the population think this.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Increases the risks of terrorism**



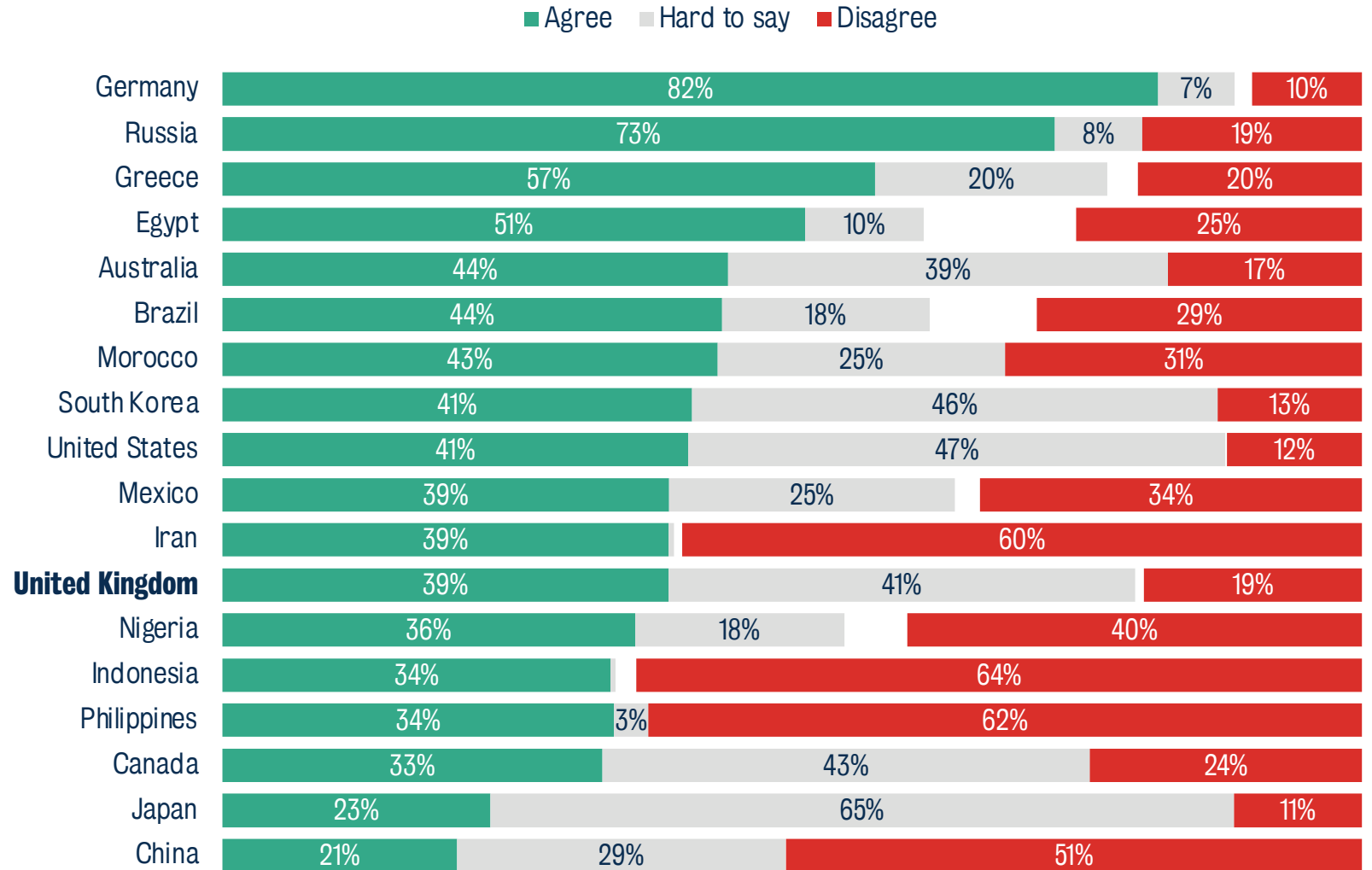
UK base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. Other countries all surveyed in wave 7 of WVS at various points between 2017 and 2022. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

But the UK ranks more mid-table for the belief that immigration leads to social conflict

Two in five (39%) people in the UK think immigration leads to social conflict, compared with one in five (19%) who think it doesn't. This is similar to the balance of opinion in the US, where 41% agree with this view and 12% disagree with it, and places the UK closer to the middle of the pack for belief that immigration has such an effect.

At the top of the ranking, Germany stands out as by far the most likely to think that immigration causes social conflict, with 82% holding this view.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [your country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it. **Leads to social conflict**



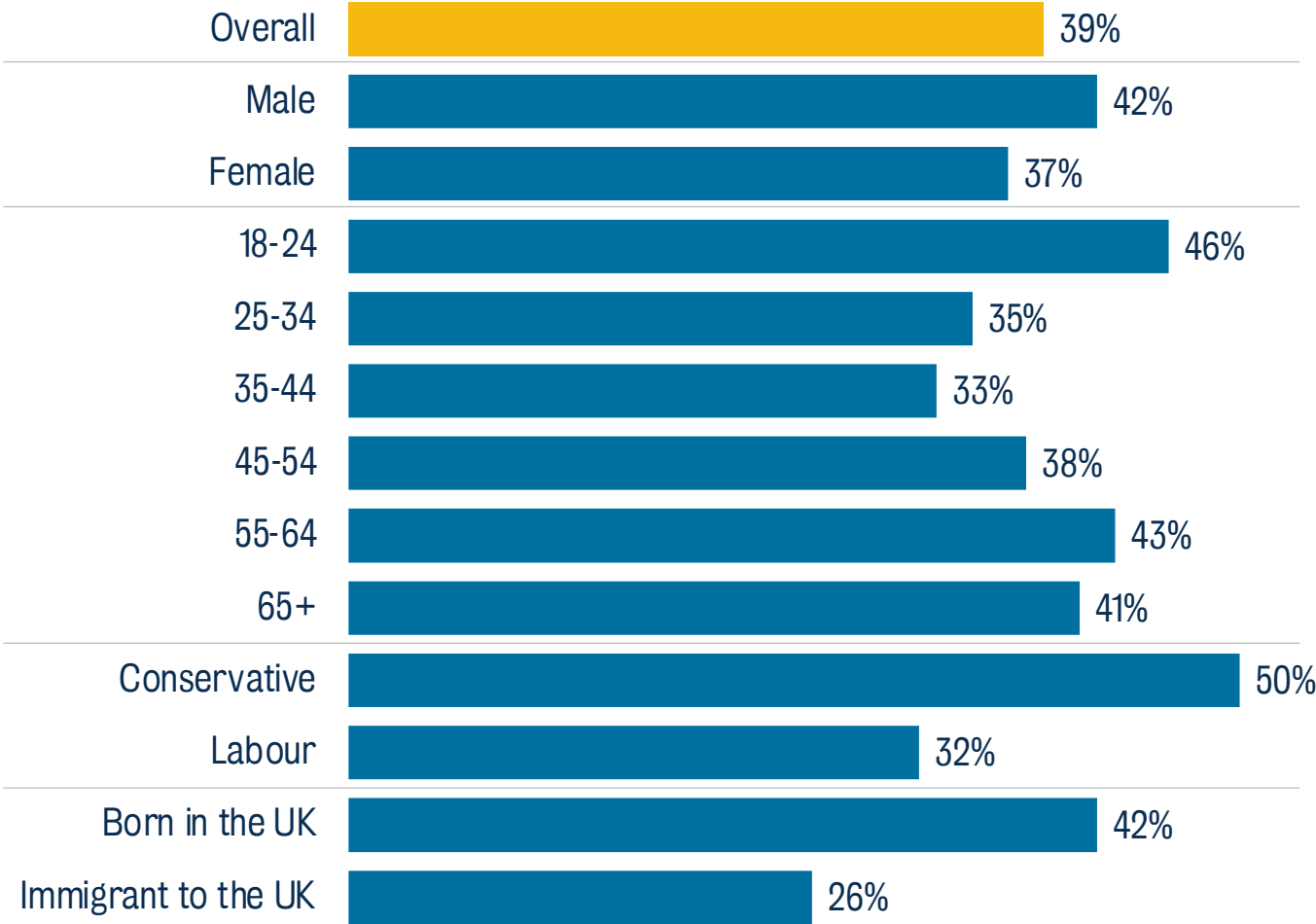
UK base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. Other countries all surveyed in wave 7 of WVS at various points between 2017 and 2022. See [WVSA website](#) for sample information

The youngest and oldest age groups are most likely to think immigration leads to social conflict, along with Conservative voters and native-born populations

46% of 18- to 24- year olds believe immigration leads to social conflict – similar to older age groups such as those aged 55 to 64 (43%). Those closer to the middle of the age distribution, such as 35- to 44-year-olds (33%), are least likely to agree with this view.

And as with other questions on immigration, there is political divide in views, as well as a split between those born in the UK and those who have migrated to the country.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of the UK?
Leads to social conflict (% who agree in the UK)

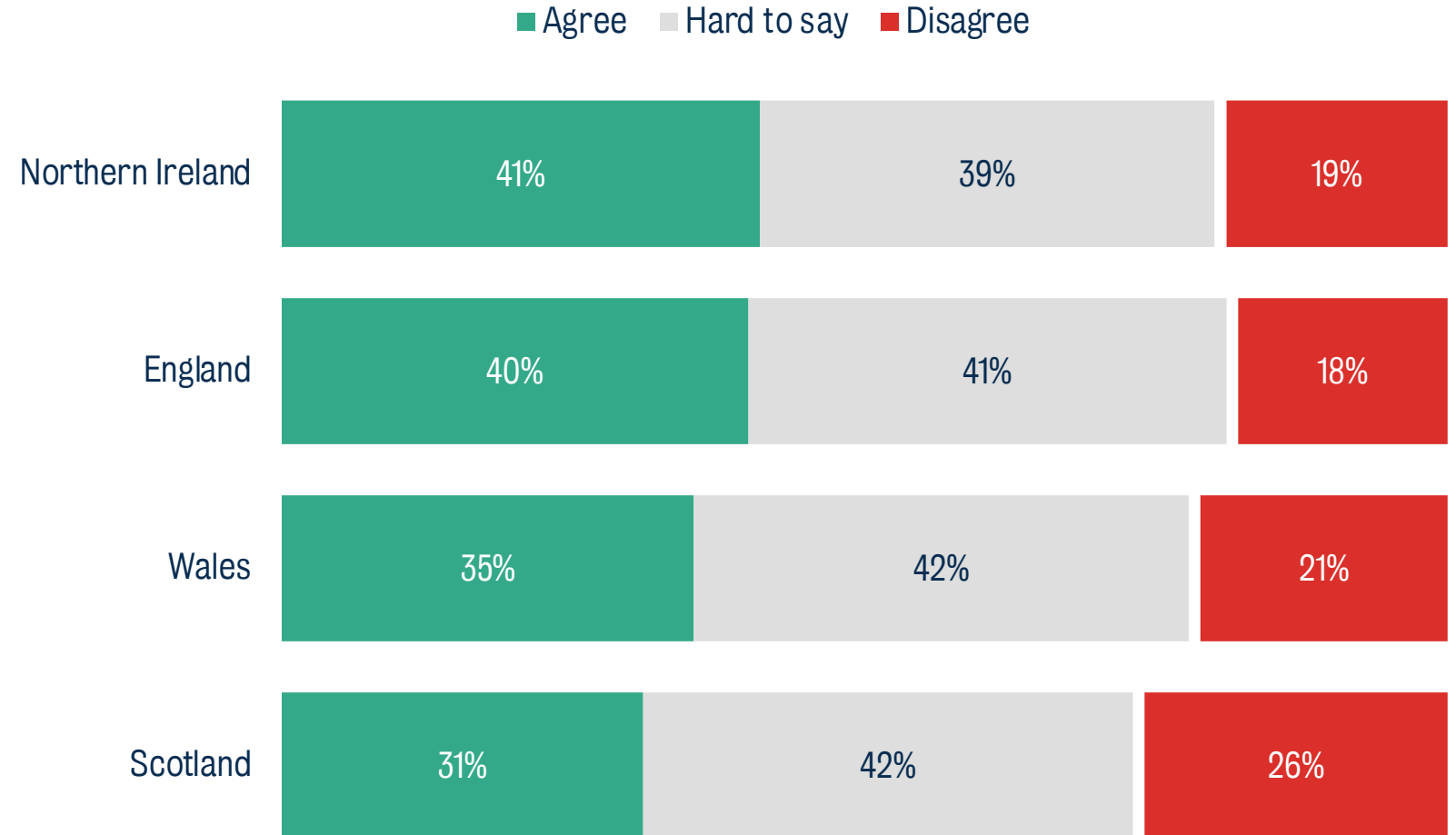


Among UK nations, Scotland is least likely to think immigration leads to social conflict – even though more agree than disagree that it has this effect

31% of people in Scotland think immigration leads to social conflict – the lowest share of any of the four nations that make up the UK, though similar to Wales (35%). Yet despite this, the Scottish public are still more likely to agree than disagree (31% vs 26%) that immigration has such an effect.

But this split is far greater in England and Northern Ireland, where the public are twice as likely to agree than disagree that immigration produces social conflict.

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of the UK? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it.
Leads to social conflict



5. Attitudes to immigration on a more personal level

There is only a very small, decreasing minority in the UK who say they wouldn't want to have immigrants as neighbours



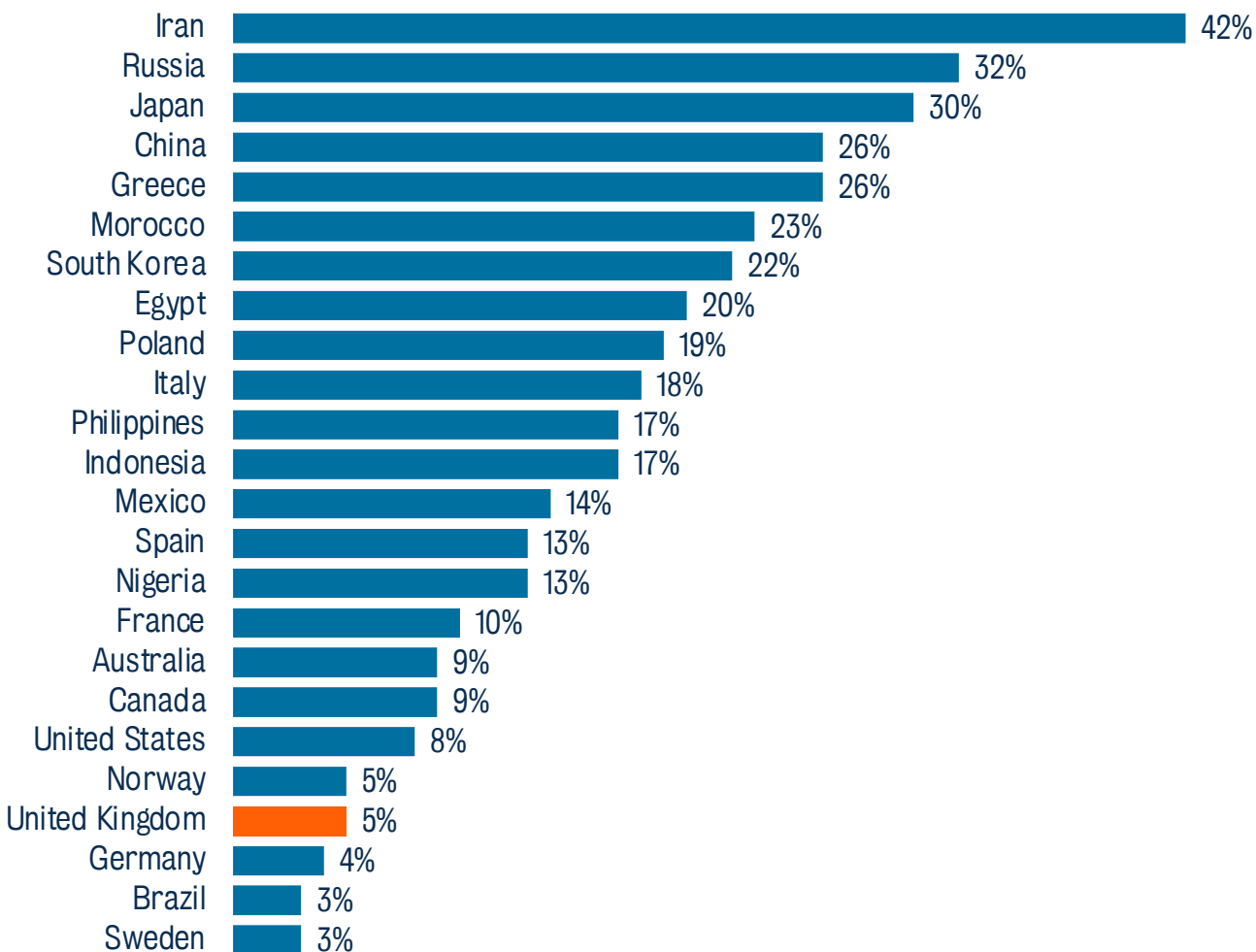
One in 20 people in the UK say they wouldn't want immigrants as neighbours – among the lowest across a range of countries...

Just 5% of the UK public say they wouldn't like to have immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours – only marginally higher than Sweden (3%), Brazil (3%) and Germany (4%), which rank just below the UK on this measure.

Among developed nations, Japan is the least accepting, with 30% of the public saying they wouldn't like immigrants as neighbours. Meanwhile, of European countries surveyed, Greece (26%), Poland (19%) and Italy (18%) are most resistant to this idea.

On this list are various groups of people. Please select any that you would not like to have as neighbours.

Immigrants/foreign workers (% who mentioned group)



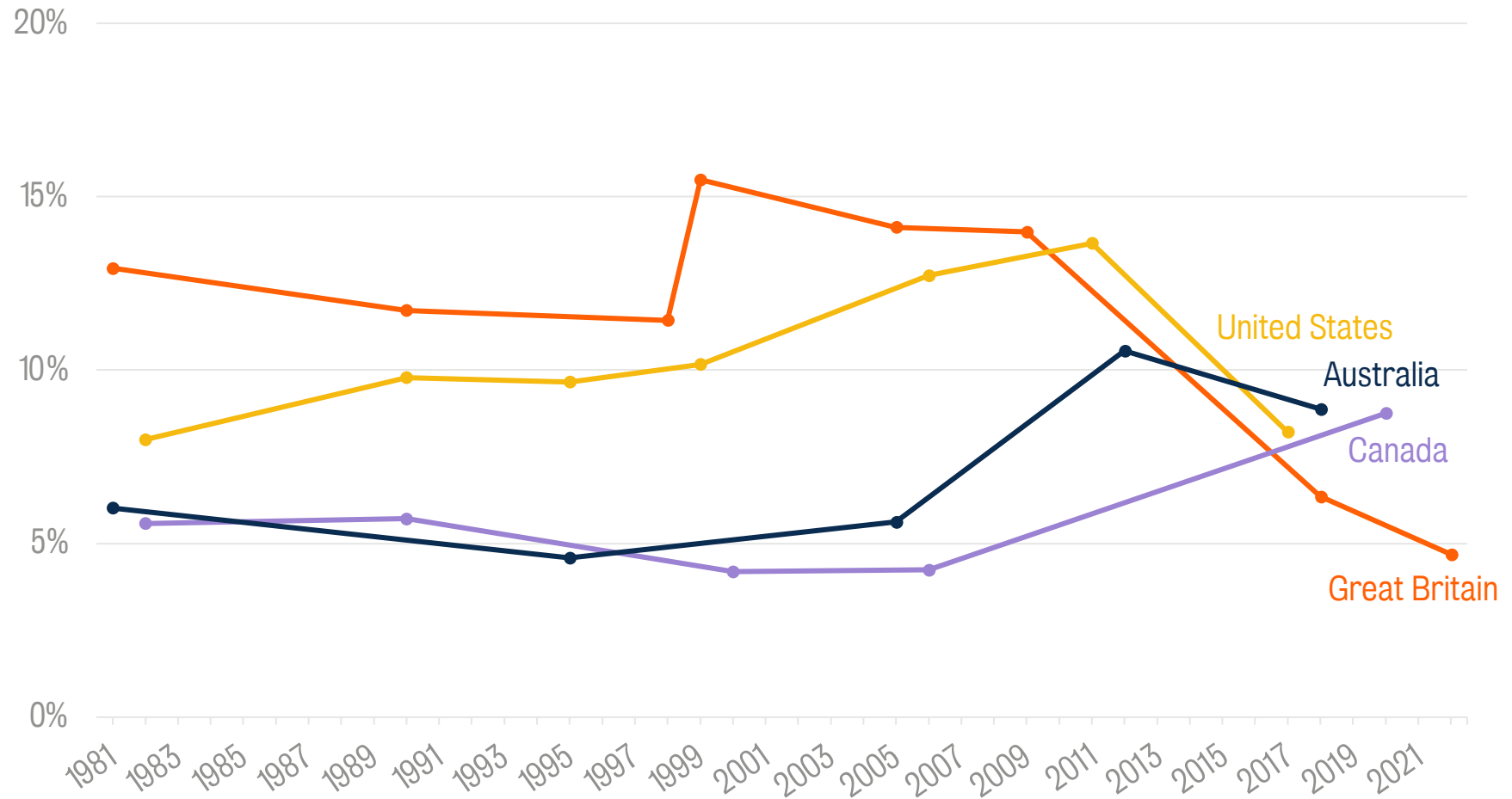
...and this has decreased considerably in Britain since the 2000s

While one in 20 (5%) people in Britain said they wouldn't like immigrants as neighbours in 2022, this was as high as one in seven (14%) as recently as 2009.

There has been a similar decline in the US, where 8% said they wouldn't want to have immigrants as neighbours in 2017 – down from 14% in 2011.

By contrast, over the last decade or so, both Australia and Canada have become slightly less accepting on this measure. For example, in Canada, 4% said they wouldn't like immigrants as neighbours in 2006, which had risen to 9% by 2020.

On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbours? **Immigrants/foreign workers** (% who mention group)



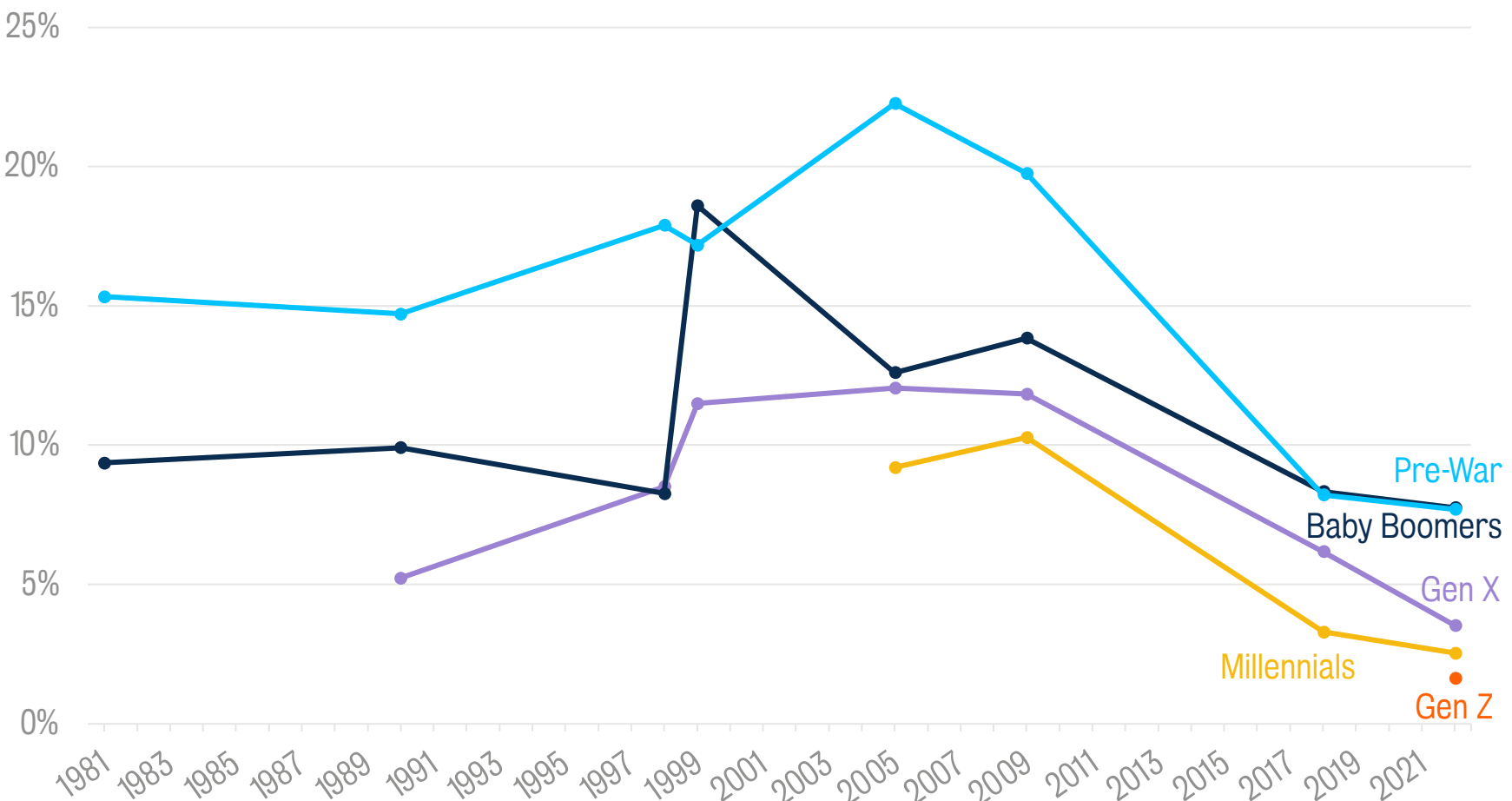
Older generations in Britain are slightly more likely to say they wouldn't want immigrants as neighbours – but their views have nonetheless softened a great deal

In 2022, the youngest generation, Gen Z (2%), were least likely to say they wouldn't like to have immigrants as neighbours, while the Pre-War generation (8%) and Baby Boomers (8%) were the most likely.

But despite this, older generations have undergone considerable shifts in attitudes – for example, in 2009, the share of the Pre-War generation who expressed this preference was more than twice as high (20%).

Similarly, the proportion of Baby Boomers who say they wouldn't like immigrants as neighbours has almost halved since 2009, falling from 14% to 8% in 2022.

On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbours? **Immigrants/foreign workers** (% who mention group by generation in Britain)



6. 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	
Age	
18-24	199
25-34	438
35-44	467
45-54	452
55-64	494
65+	835
Gender	
Female	1,695
Male	1,328
Voting intention	
Conservative	564
Labour	711
Place of birth	
Born in the UK	2,624
Immigrant to the UK	394

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

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