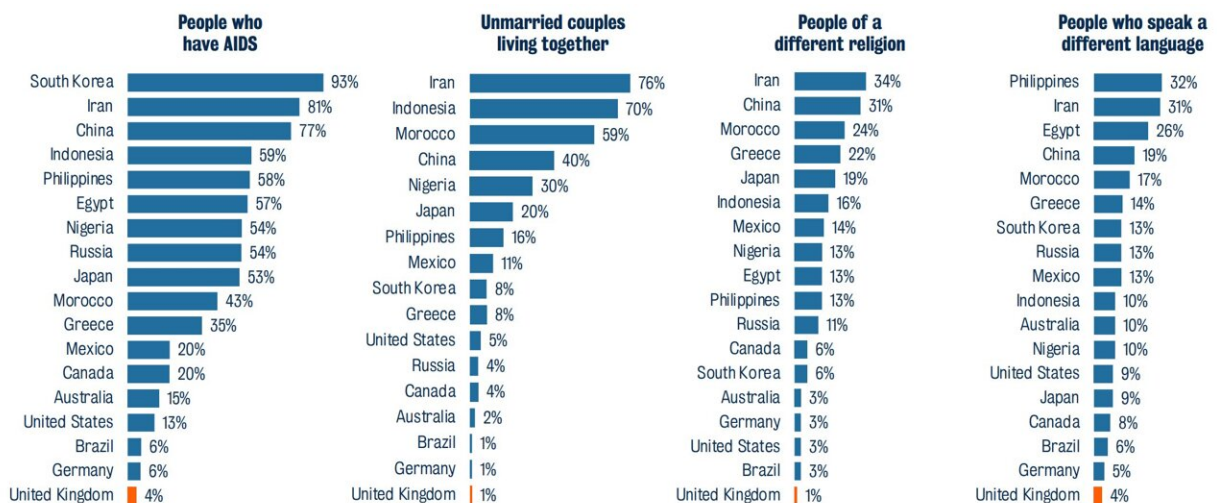


# UK public among most trusting of their neighbors internationally and increasingly comfortable living next to outsiders

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On this list are various groups of people. Please select any that you would not like to have as neighbors (% who mention group). Credit: *Love thy neighbour? Public trust and acceptance of the people who live alongside us* (2023)

The UK now has some of the highest levels of neighborhood trust internationally, while Britons have also become much more comfortable with having neighbors who belong to historically marginalized groups, such as gay people, those of a different race, immigrants, and people who have AIDS.

Research by the Policy Institute at King's College London finds the liberalization of social attitudes in Britain is reflected in changing views of who the public say they would not like to have as neighbors, with attitudes softening towards several groups.

Of around 20 countries included in the study, the UK now ranks as the most, or among the most, relaxed about living next to a range of people—including those of a different religion and those who speak a different language.

However, this increasing tolerance does not extend to all in society: compared with when trends began, the public have in fact become less open to people who are addicted to drugs being their neighbors, while a majority still take issue with heavy drinkers.

The analysis was carried out as part of the World Values Survey (WVS), one of the largest and most widely used academic social surveys in the world, in operation since 1981.

The groups asked about, as well as the terms used to describe them, therefore reflect the priorities and language of different eras, yet have not been altered given the value of tracking long-term trends in [public opinion](#).

The latest UK data was collected in 2022, with data for other nations collected at various points throughout the latest wave of the WVS, which spanned 2017 to 2022.

## **The UK has some of the highest levels of neighborhood trust internationally**

Out of 24 countries, the UK (84%) ranks behind only three—Egypt

(86%), Sweden (89%) and Norway (90%)—for levels of trust in the people in their neighborhood.

Other peer nations fare worse on this measure, such as the US, where 72% say they trust the people in their neighborhood.

And unlike the US, where trust fell from 80% in the mid-2000s to 72% in 2017, the British public's trust in their neighbors has risen, from 78% in 2005 to 84% in 2022.

Trust also varies geographically within the UK:

- Northern Ireland (90%) is the UK nation where people are most likely to trust those in their neighborhood, ahead of England (84%), Scotland (81%) and Wales (81%).
- In England, people in the South West (93%) are the most trusting of their neighbors.

## **Britons have become much more comfortable with some—but not all—historically marginalized groups being their neighbors**

In 1990, nearly a third (31%) of Britons said they would not like to have homosexuals as neighbors. By 2022, this had fallen to 4%.

Similarly, in 1990, a quarter (23%) of the public said the same about people who have AIDS—a figure that has also now declined to 4%.

Looking further back, between 1981 and 2022, the share of the public who cited immigrants/foreign workers decreased from one in eight (13%) to 5%.

And over the same period, the proportion who said they would not like to live next to people of a different race dropped from one in 10 (10%) to just 1%.

However, attitudes towards two groups have hardened or at least remained very negative:

- In 2022, 83% of Britons said they would not like to have [drug addicts](#) as neighbors—far higher than the 63% who said the same in 1990.
- The proportion who say they'd rather not live next to heavy drinkers has risen from 48% in 1981 to 57% in 2022—although this is less of a clear upward trend.

In both cases, there has been a notable increase in people feeling this way since 2018.

## **The UK public rank as the most, or among the most, accepting of a range of different groups**

Of nearly 20 countries, the UK emerges as the most comfortable with the idea of having various groups as neighbors:

- 4% of the UK public say they would not like to live next to people who have AIDS, with only Germany (6%) and Brazil (6%) coming close to such levels of acceptance.
- Similarly, the UK (4%) ranks as the least likely to take issue with someone who speaks a different language being their [neighbor](#). Other higher-income democracies such as Greece (14%) and Australia (10%) fare worse on this measure.
- Only 1% of the UK have a problem with unmarried couples or people of a different religion being their neighbors—the lowest

among nations analyzed.

Of a larger sample of more than 20 countries, the UK is also among the most comfortable with the prospect of neighbors who belong to other groups:

- The UK (4%) ranks alongside Sweden (3%) and Norway (2%) as the most relaxed about the idea of having neighbors who are gay.
- People in the UK (2%) are among the least likely to say they'd prefer not to have neighbors of a different race, on a par with those in Brazil (1%), Sweden (1%) and several other western nations.
- Other high-income democracies, such as Italy (18%), Spain (13%), France (10%) and Australia (9%), are all more likely than the UK (5%) to have a problem with their neighbors being immigrants.

But by international standards, the UK ranks as somewhat less tolerant of frequent drug users or drinkers:

- 83% of the UK public say they wouldn't like to live next to drug addicts, with the country less accepting of this group than the likes of Spain (61%), France (57%), Norway (57%), but more accepting than Australia (94%), the US (92%) and others.
- A majority of 57% in the UK say they would not like to have heavy drinkers as neighbors—lower than in some peer nations, such as Canada (80%), but much higher than others, such as Norway (29%) and France (41%).

## **Perceptions of neighborhood safety and quality of life**

The research also explores the quality of neighborhood life and finds the UK fares worse than some comparable nations on perceptions of how

often illegal or anti-social behavior takes place.

For example, people in the UK (28%) are four times as likely as those in Germany (7%) to say that drug sales happen very or quite frequently in their neighborhoods.

And the UK is on a par with the US for perceptions of how often robberies (UK 21%; US 21%) and street violence and fights (UK 14%; US 16%) take place.

But the UK does fare better on perceptions of sexual harassment, police or military interference with people's private lives, and racist behavior. On the latter, 13% in the UK say this is a frequent occurrence in their neighborhood, compared with 24% in the US.

Professor Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Institute at King's College London, said, "The UK public are highly trusting of the people in their neighborhood and very comfortable being neighbors with a wide range of groups, compared with many other nations and our own past views."

"It seems absurd that as recently as 1990 nearly a third of people in the UK said they'd be uncomfortable with gay neighbors, but this is now down to just 4%, and reflects a wider rapid change of attitudes, shown in increased acceptance of people from different races and immigrants. These shifts have been seen in other countries too, but the UK has often shifted more than many others, putting us now among the most open countries in the study."

"This does not apply to neighbors engaged in illegal or anti-social behavior, however, with drug users in particular the least welcome, and the UK more hardline on this than many other countries."

"Our high levels of neighborhood trust and tolerance are somewhat at

odds with relatively widespread experience of local illegal or anti-social behavior—for example, 28% of us say we've seen drug dealing in our neighborhood, which is on a par with the US and compares with 7% in Germany."

**More information:** Report: [www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute ... ve-thy-neighbour.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute...ve-thy-neighbour.pdf)

Provided by King's College London

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