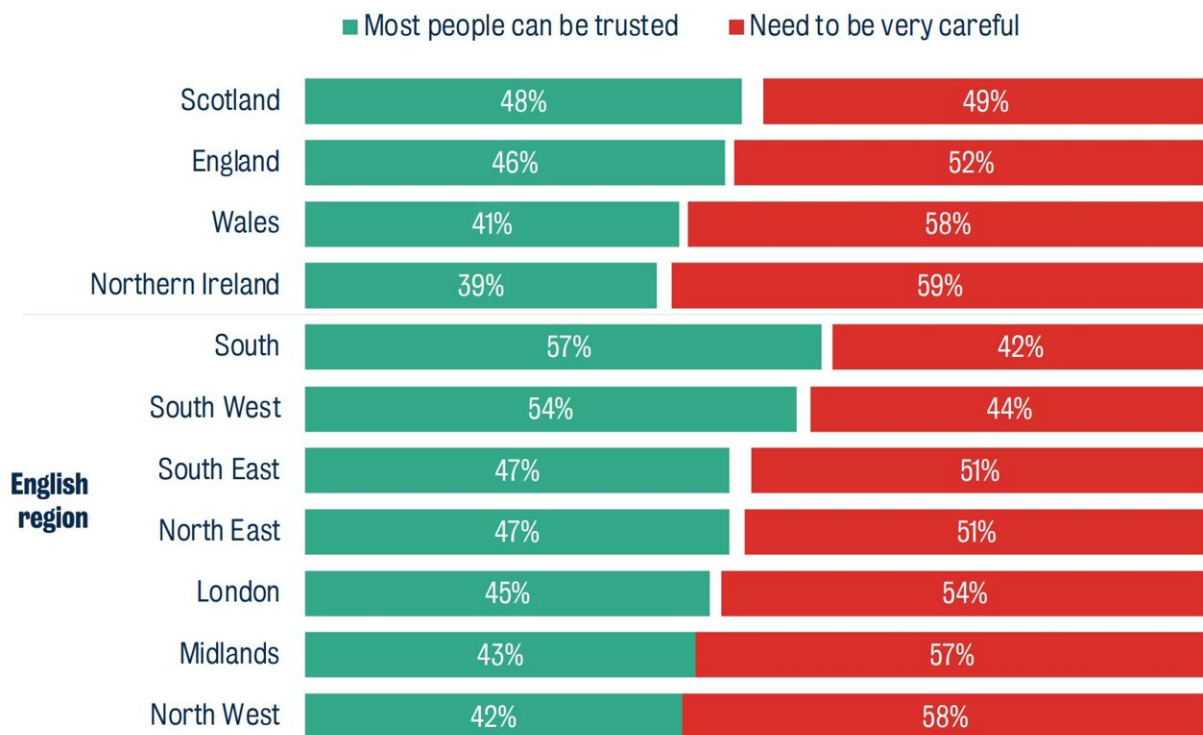


# UK public among most trusting in world: Report

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Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? Credit: *The state of social trust: how the UK compares internationally* (2023)

The UK public are among the most trusting globally, with internationally high levels of trust in people of different nationalities, people they meet for the first time, and people they know personally, according to a new

study of attitudes across 24 major countries.

Of the nations included, the UK ranks second for trust in foreigners, with such trust now at a record high following a rise over recent decades.

The UK public also rank third for trust in people they meet for the first time, and joint top for trust in people they know personally.

And more generally, the proportion of Britons who feel that "most people can be trusted" is now at a high, having rebounded since the late 1990s, with the UK also ranking among the highest internationally for this sense of trust.

The analysis was led by the Policy Institute at King's College London 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 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.

## **Trust in people of another nationality, people you meet for the first time, and those you know personally**

### **People of another nationality**

Eighty-four percent of the UK public say they trust people of another nationality—behind only Sweden (91%), and on a par with Norway (84%) among the 24 countries included in the research.

Between 2005 and 2022, the share of Britons who said they trusted

people of another nationality rose from 71% to 84%—the highest on record.

Today there is little difference in trust in foreigners among generations, with all age groups—including older cohorts—becoming more positive about those from other countries.

For example, the proportion of Baby Boomers who say they trust people of a different nationality rose from 69% in 2005 to 87% in 2022.

## **People you meet for the first time**

Fifty-two percent of the UK public say they trust people they meet for the first time, putting the country third on this measure, behind only Sweden (74%) and Norway (68%).

And this trust has grown: back in 2005, 46% of the British public said they trusted people they meet for the first time.

Compared with when trends began, all adult generations have become more likely to say they trust new people—but there is nonetheless still a clear divide by age.

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%).

Looking at trust geographically reveals that, among English regions, those in the South West (65%) and South (64%) are most trusting of people they meet for the first time—ahead of those in other areas, where around half or fewer say they trust new people.

## People you know personally

Ninety-eight percent of the UK population say they trust people they know personally—joint top out of 24 countries with Sweden and Norway.

As in other [western nations](#), the share of Britons who report trusting such individuals has remained consistently high since 2005.

## Can most people be trusted?

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.

Of 24 nations, only five are now 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.

This sense of trust has grown considerably among all generations in Britain—but particularly among older cohorts, and in a relatively short space of time.

For example, the share of the Pre-War generation who feel most people can be trusted 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 (54%) and those born pre-1945 (56%).

Bobby Duffy, professor of public policy and director of the Policy Institute at King's College London, said, "Despite the strong impression that Brexit and COVID have opened new, deep fissures, several key measures of social trust have improved in recent years, with the public's sense that most people can be trusted at its highest level since the World Values Survey began in 1981."

"That feels completely at odds with the image we're presented of a nation at war with itself, of woke versus anti-woke, immigrants versus citizens, elites versus the rest. Of course, this doesn't mean there are no societal tensions, just that the bigger risk is misdirection into a 'culture war' of conflicting tribes with no trust in each other."

David Halpern, CEO of the Behavioural Insights Team, said, "Social trust—having trust in your fellow citizens—is a social and economic 'wonder drug.' It boosts growth, health and well-being, educational attainment, and even the performance of government. So the rise in social [trust](#) in the UK to its highest level in more than 40 years is a big deal. Remarkably, it seems to have risen despite COVID—maybe even because of it—perhaps reflecting the experience of neighbors and friends helping each other out."

## **Technical details**

2022 UK data comes from a random probability sample of 3,056 adults aged 18+ interviewed by Ipsos through a mix on face-to-face and online survey methods. Data has been weighted by region, education and age interlocked with gender to be nationally representative.

For analysis of trends over time, data is nationally representative for

Great Britain due to a lack of available trend data from Northern Ireland, and is based on surveys of 1,000 or more people aged 18+.

Samples for other countries are all nationally representative and made up of at least 1,000 people. Information on the sampling methodology these nations is available via the [World Values Survey Association website](#).

Data produced for this research is used in wave 7 of the World Values Survey, which included around 90 countries and ran from 2017 to 2022. See the full report for the precise year each country was surveyed.

The report focuses on a cross-section of 24 countries selected based on the availability of reliable and weighted data and then narrowed down, focusing on global coverage (based on the [UN's standardized 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).

Not all questions are asked in each country in every wave of the study, and so the number of countries compared on each question can vary.

**More information:** Report: [www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute ... -of-social-trust.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute...-of-social-trust.pdf)

Provided by King's College London

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