

Global Perceptions 2023

Global Perceptions: UK Ireland Report

March 2024





Global Perceptions: UK Ireland briefing

British Council Ireland hosted a research briefing and focus group on British Council's **Global Perceptions 2023** in Buswell's Hotel, Dublin, on Wednesday, March 27th 2024.

What is Global Perceptions?

- **Global Perceptions 2023** is British Council's sixth survey of educated 18-34 year olds living in the G20 countries. Running since 2016, the survey provides a detailed picture on what values matter to young people, and their intentions to engage with education, arts and culture, and tourism across the surveyed states. In June and July 2023, British Council commissioned Ipsos UK to survey 19,601 educated 18-34-year-olds in 18 of the G20 member states and 5 additional countries, including Ireland. The Ireland sample included 500 participants, weighted to the national population by age and gender.

What did the Global Perceptions: UK Ireland briefing consist of?

- On the morning of March 27th, **British Council Ireland**, with partners **Cooperation Ireland**, hosted a **focus group** of 14 young Irish people aged 18-34 years. They were invited to discuss the findings of the **Global Perceptions 2023** survey and share their personal and professional reflections on the research. Journalist, broadcaster and author, **Dearbhail McDonald**, was our rapporteur for the focus group, capturing the discussions in the morning session, and sharing these with invited stakeholders at a research briefing in the afternoon.
- In the afternoon, we invited **key stakeholders** in government, UK-Ireland relations, media and cultural organisations to a **closed-room research briefing**. We shared highlights from the morning's focus group and the **Global Perceptions 2023** survey findings relating to Ireland. This was followed by a **facilitated Q&A session**.
- At both the morning and afternoon session, **British Council's Director of Research & Insight, Christine Wilson** and **Senior Soft Power Analyst, Anuja Desai**, presented the highlights and key findings from **Global Perceptions 2023** data, relating specifically to UK and Ireland.

What is this report?

- This soft-copy, high-level report is a collation of the morning and afternoon sessions and comprises qualitative and the quantitative data discussed at the morning and afternoon sessions on March 27th 2024.

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What took place?

Introduction:

- Welcome & introductions: British Council Ireland Director, Kerry McCall Magan
- Overview of Global Perceptions Survey: British Council Director Research & Insight, Christine Wilson and British Council Senior Soft Power Analyst, Anuja Desai

Morning Focus Group:

- Focus Group Discussion on Global Perceptions data with 14 participants facilitated by Cooperation Ireland Programme Director, Mags Lucey & Cooperation Ireland Development Officer, Morgan O'Toole

Facilitated Discussion:

- Silent Conversation – Reaction to Overall Findings
- Position Statements: Values and Issues
- Q&A discussion on demographics & final reflections by group
- Feedback & summary, Rapporteur Dearbhail McDonald

Afternoon Research Briefing:

- Welcome & introductions: British Council Ireland Director, Kerry McCall Magan
- Overview of Global Perceptions Survey: British Council Director Research & Insight, Christine Wilson and British Council Senior Soft Power Analyst, Anuja Desai

Discussion and Q&A:

- Rapporteur's report on Focus Group led by Dearbhail McDonald.
- Q&A on information presented and facilitate discussion between key stakeholders and focus group participants, led by Dearbhail McDonald





What is Global Perceptions?

Global Perceptions 2023: How 18-34 year olds see the UK and the world



The British Council's sixth survey of 19,601 educated* young people living in 18 of the G20 member states. Five non-G20 countries were surveyed including Ireland.

The Ireland sample included 500 participants, weighted to the national population by age and gender. Field work was conducted from June 17th-July 7th 2023.

- The Global Perceptions survey helps us understand how young people perceive the world's leading nations and the state of the world today.
- The metrics looked at include:
 - Overall attractiveness
 - Trust in governments, people, and institutions
 - Familiarity and favourability
 - Interactions and intentions to interact with Education, Arts and Culture, Business, Tourism, and Language learning
 - Important values, global issues and actions countries should undertake
 - Characteristic drivers of soft power that underpin attractiveness and trust e.g. being a global power or a force for good.

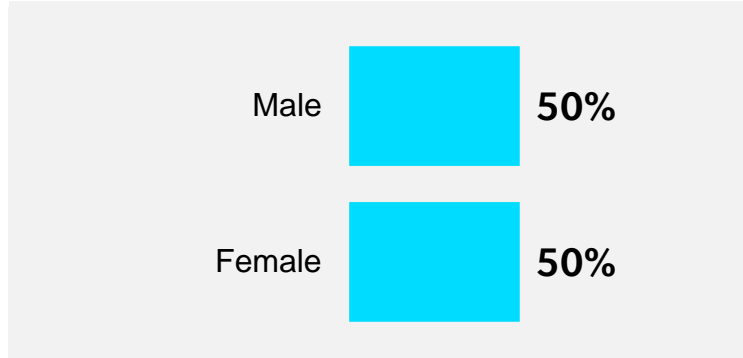
*Having completed at least second level education.

Who do we survey?

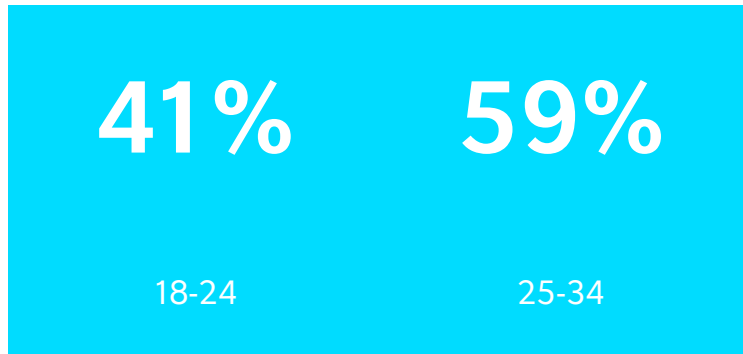
In each country, the data is weighted to be representative of the national population by age (18-24 vs 25-34) and gender

18-34 year olds who have completed secondary level education.

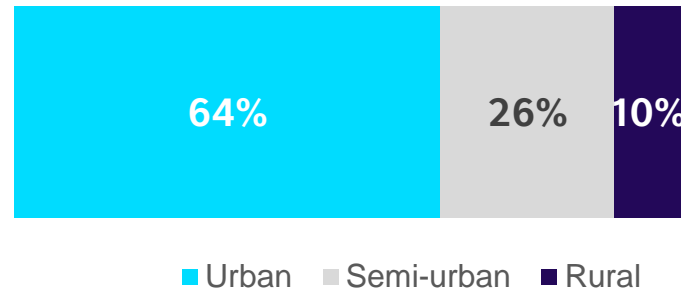
Gender*



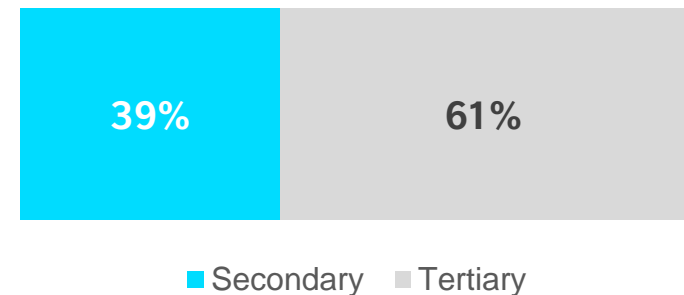
Age



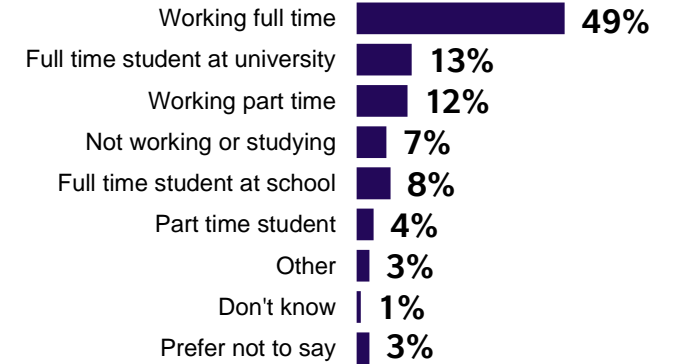
Urbanity



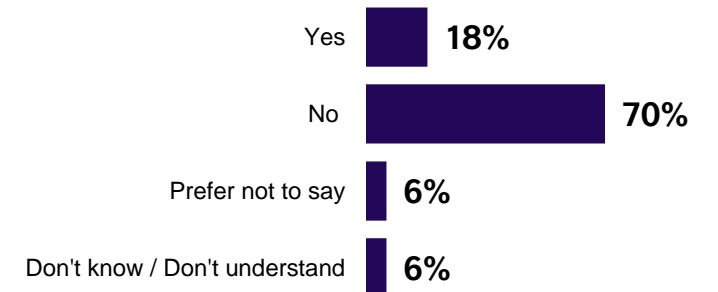
Education



Working status



Long-term illness or health conditions



Base: All participants in the G20 [19,601]

* In another way/ prefer not to say option is given in some countries but the numbers of those giving those responses is under 1%

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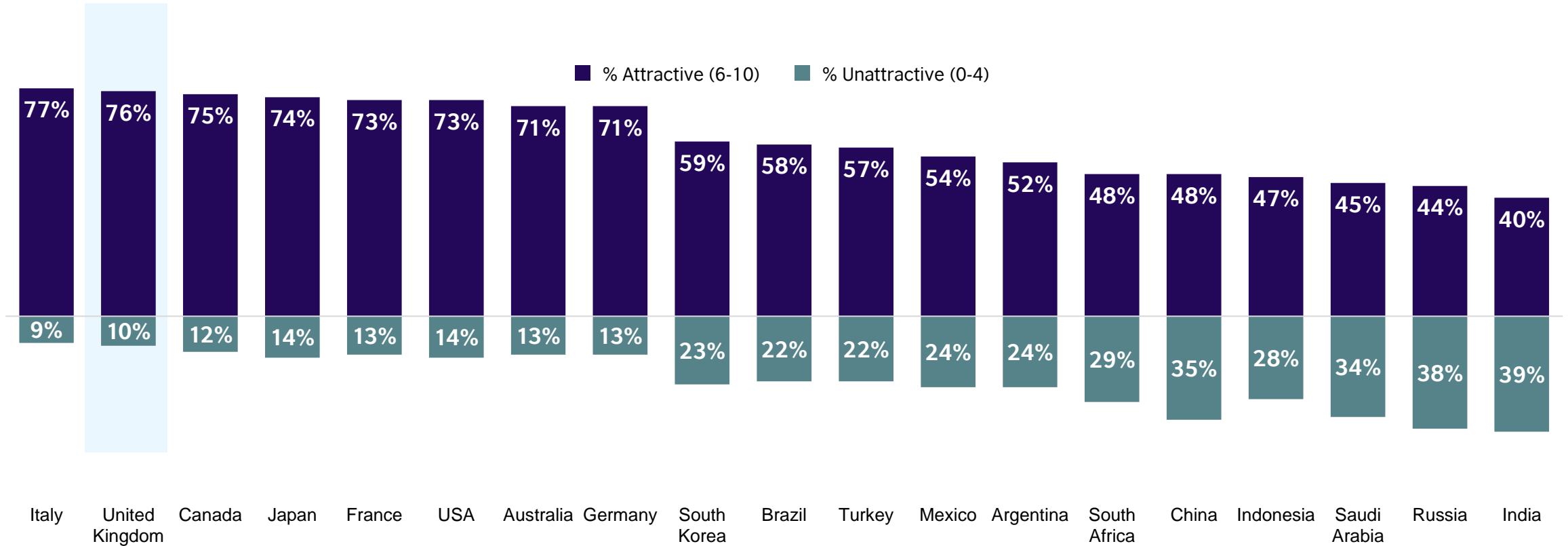


Key findings from across the G20

Overall attractiveness



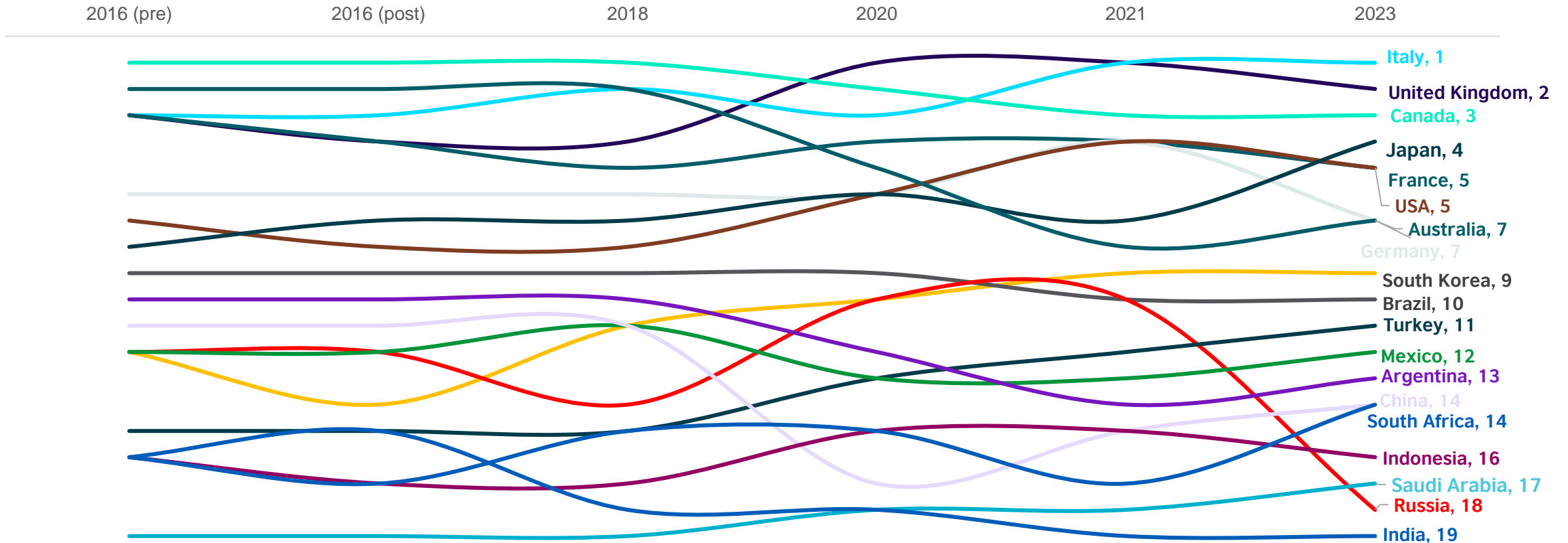
Attractiveness of G20 countries



Ranked attractiveness over time



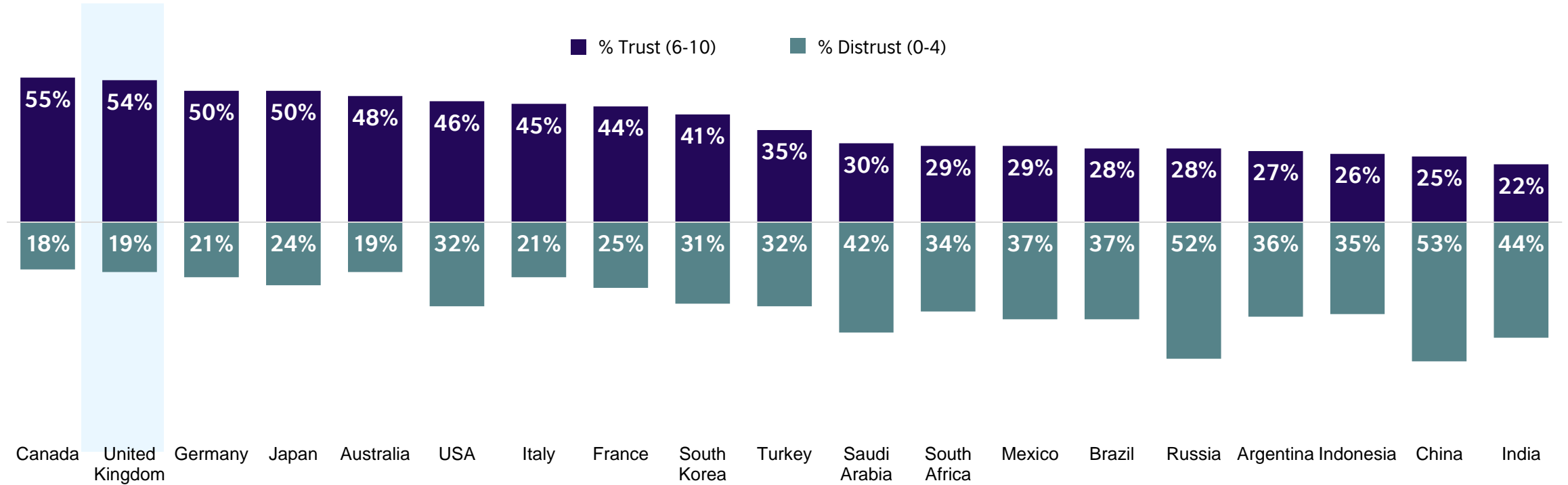
Ranked attractiveness over time (6-10)



Trust in government



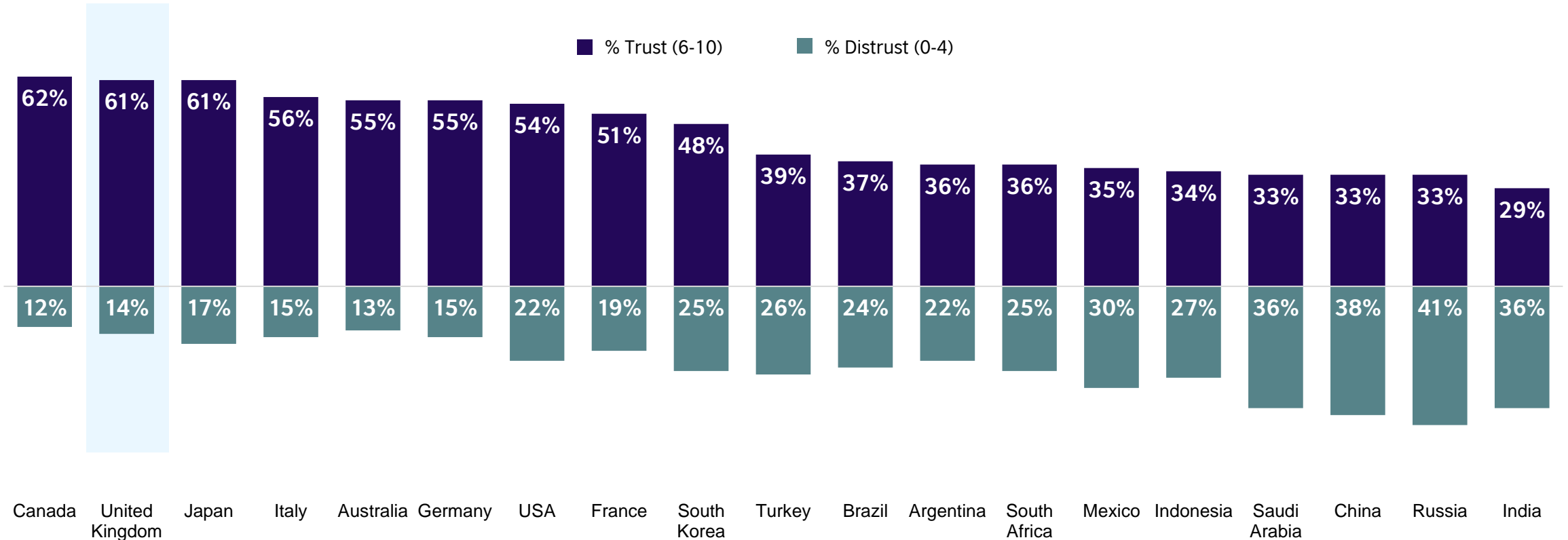
Trust in government



Trust in people



Trust in people

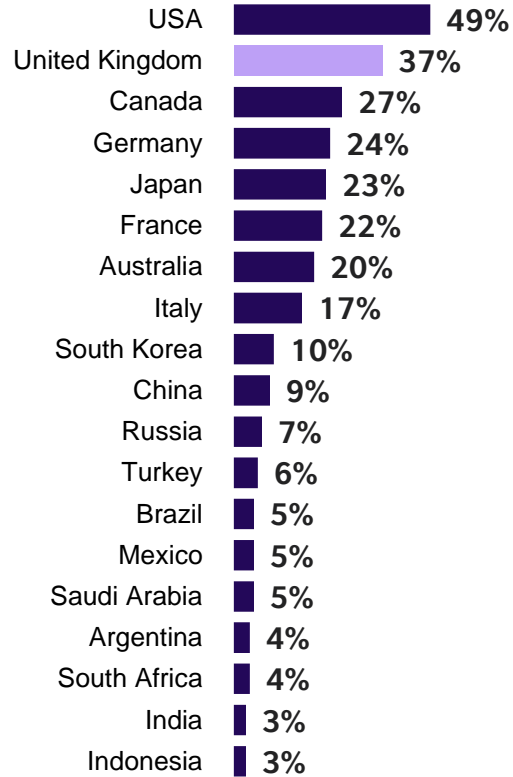


Domains of attractiveness

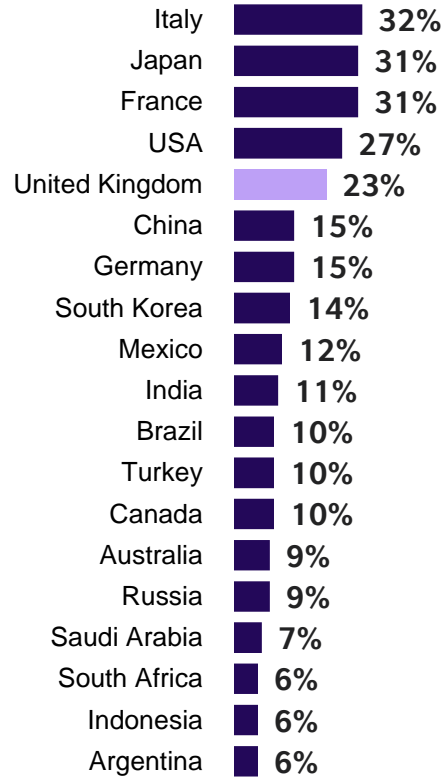


As a place to study

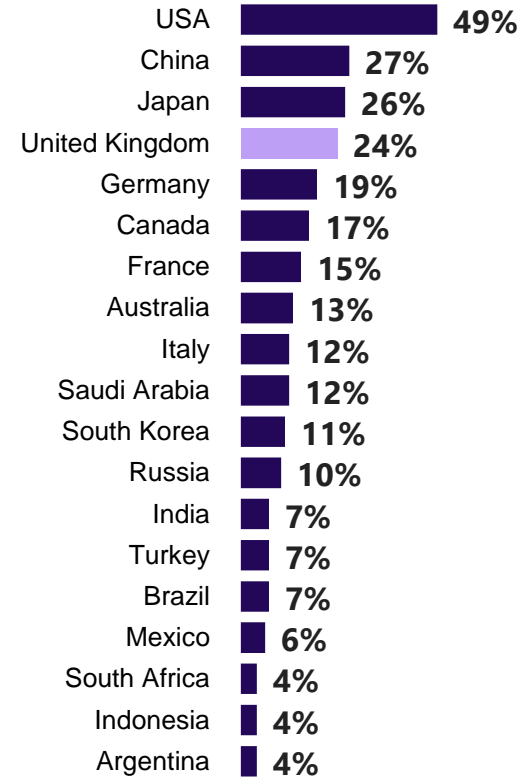
% Mentions



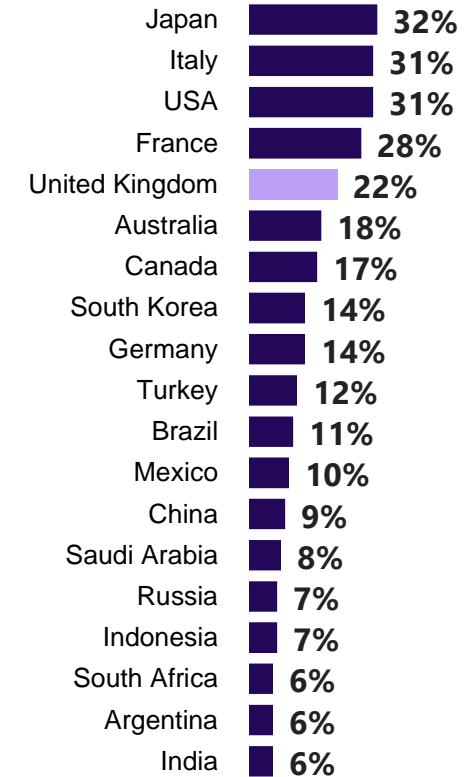
As a source of art and culture



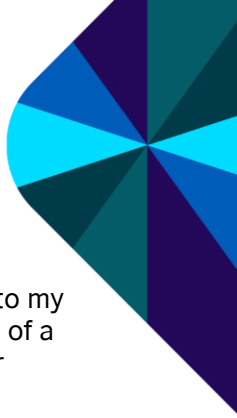
As a place to do business



As a place to visit



Democracy and international co-operation



This country is a force for good in the world

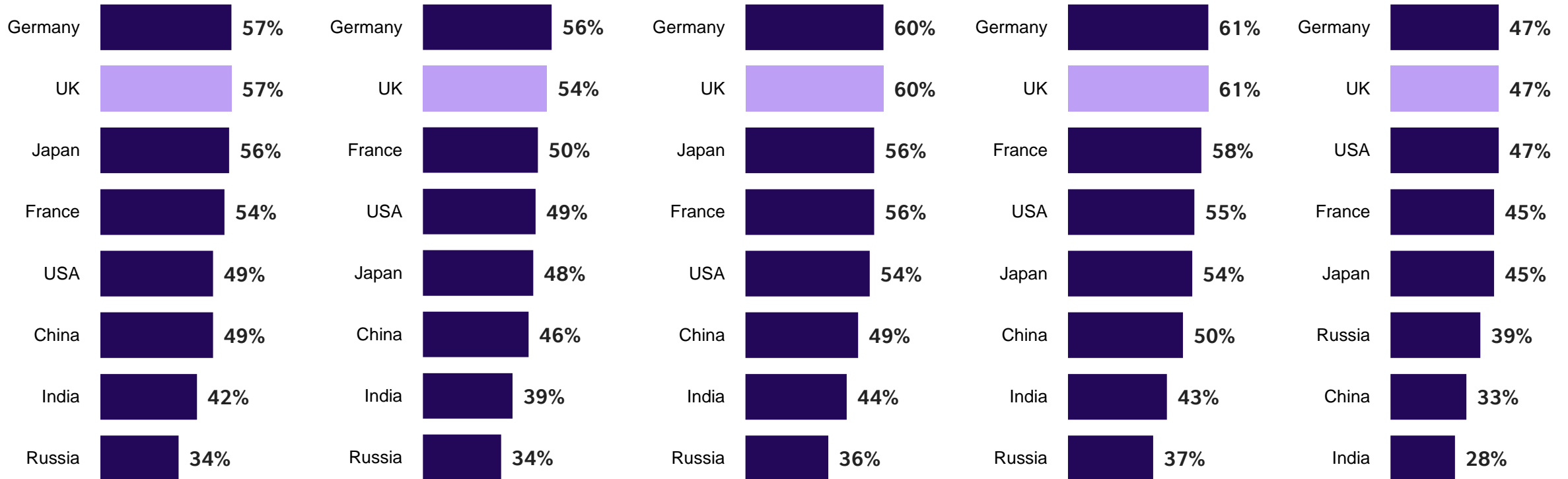
This country's government contributes its fair share to aiding development in poorer countries

This country's government works constructively with other governments around the world

This country works constructively with other countries to tackle development challenges

This country would come to my country's aid in the event of a humanitarian disaster

% Mentions

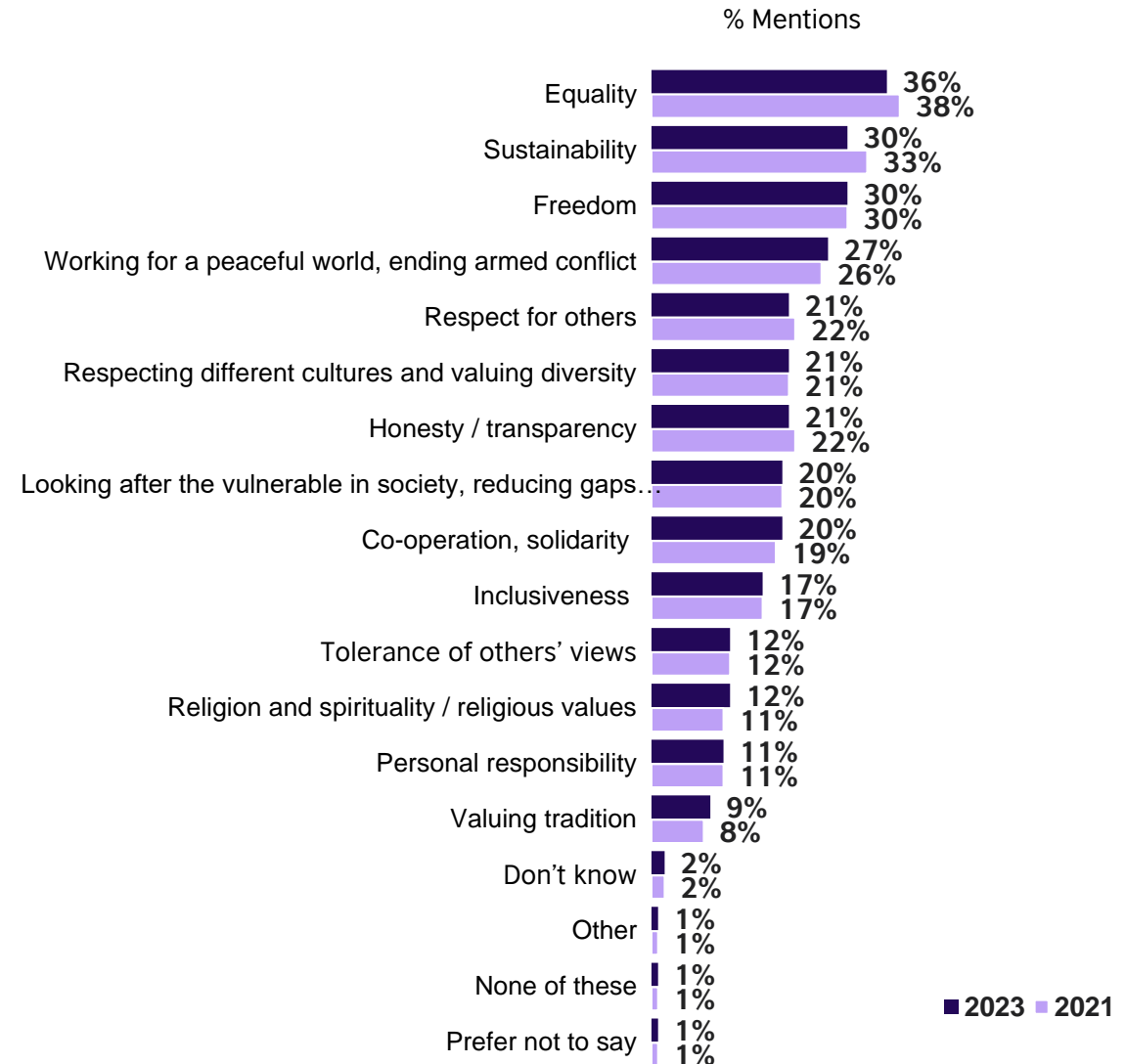


*Participants asked about other countries as well as their own

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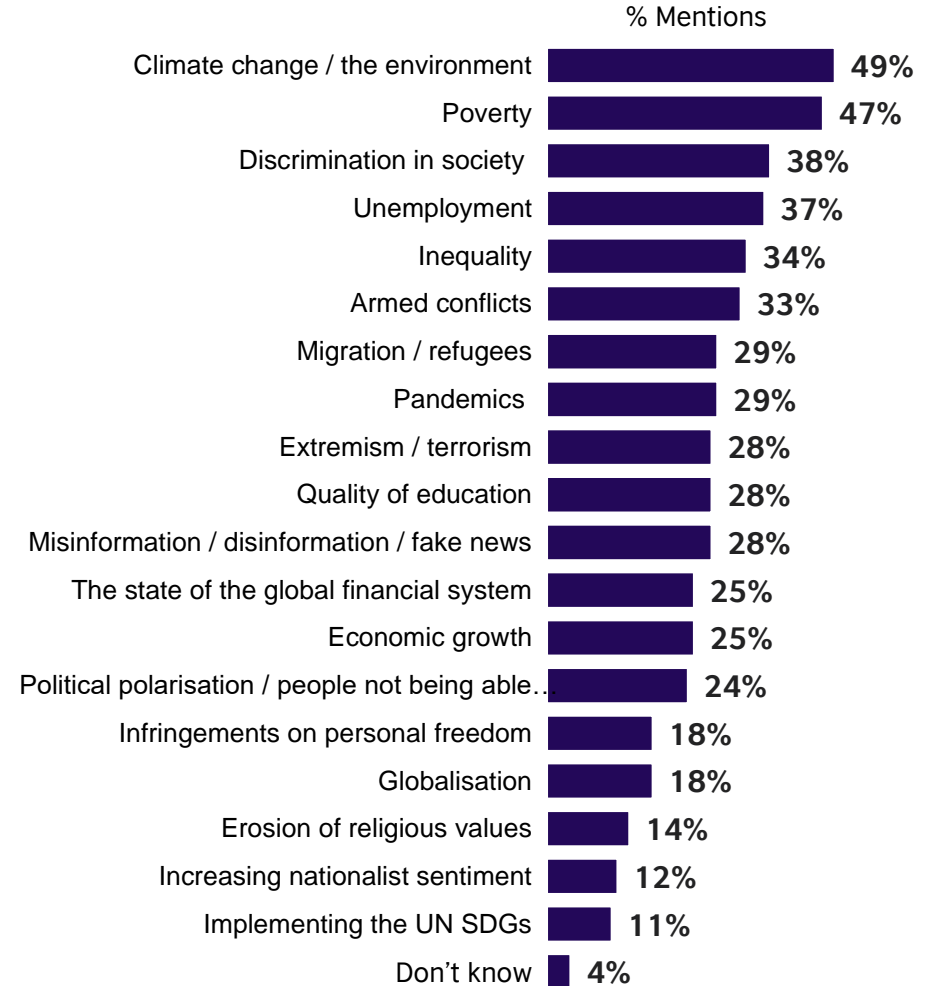
Values the world should support or encourage

- Equality ranked 1st in 12 of 18 countries.
- Working for a peaceful world/ending armed conflict is 1st in Indonesia and Japan.
- Religious values ranks 1st in Saudi Arabia.



Most important issues facing the world today

- Climate change ranked 1st in 11 of 18 countries.
- Extremism and terrorism has fallen out of the top three.
- Unemployment ranks higher in South Africa (1st), Saudi Arabia (2nd), and India (2nd).
- Migration/refugees is 1st in Turkey





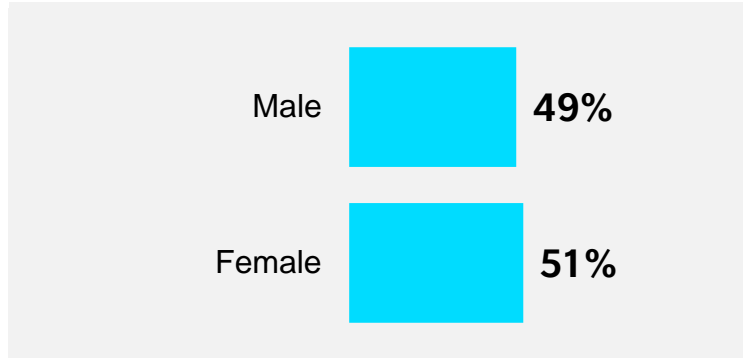
Global Perceptions 2023
link to webpage and report
[here](#)



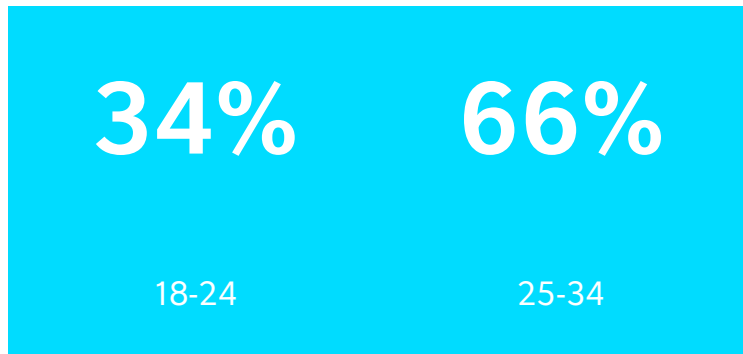
Findings from Ireland

Ireland Sample

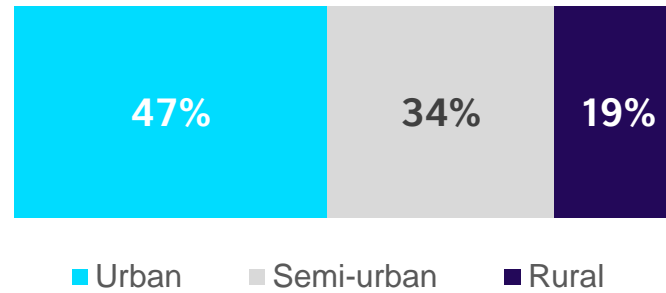
Gender



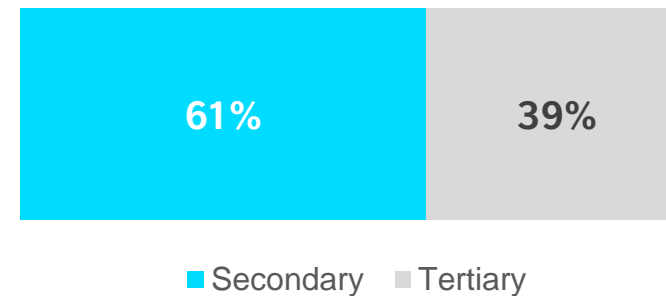
Age



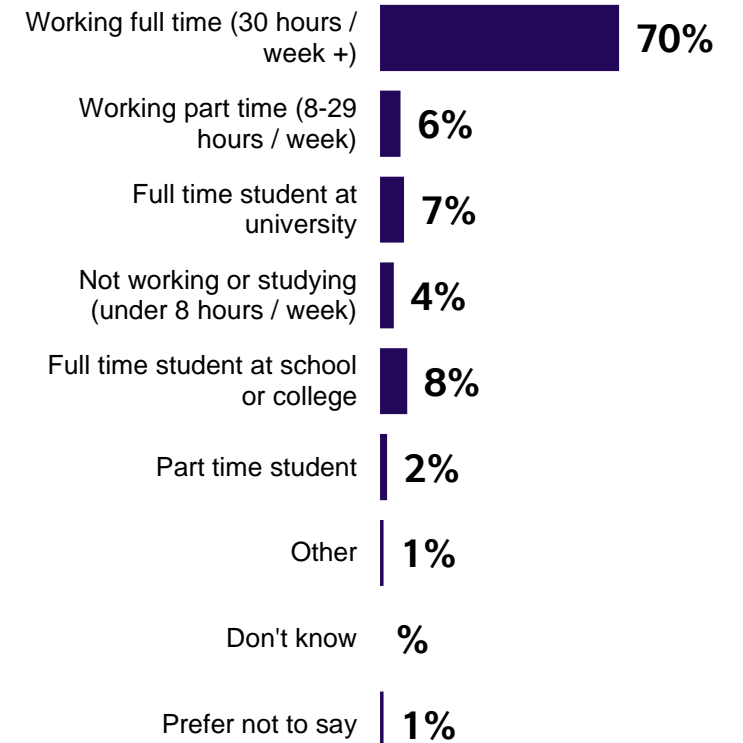
Urbanity



Education



Working status



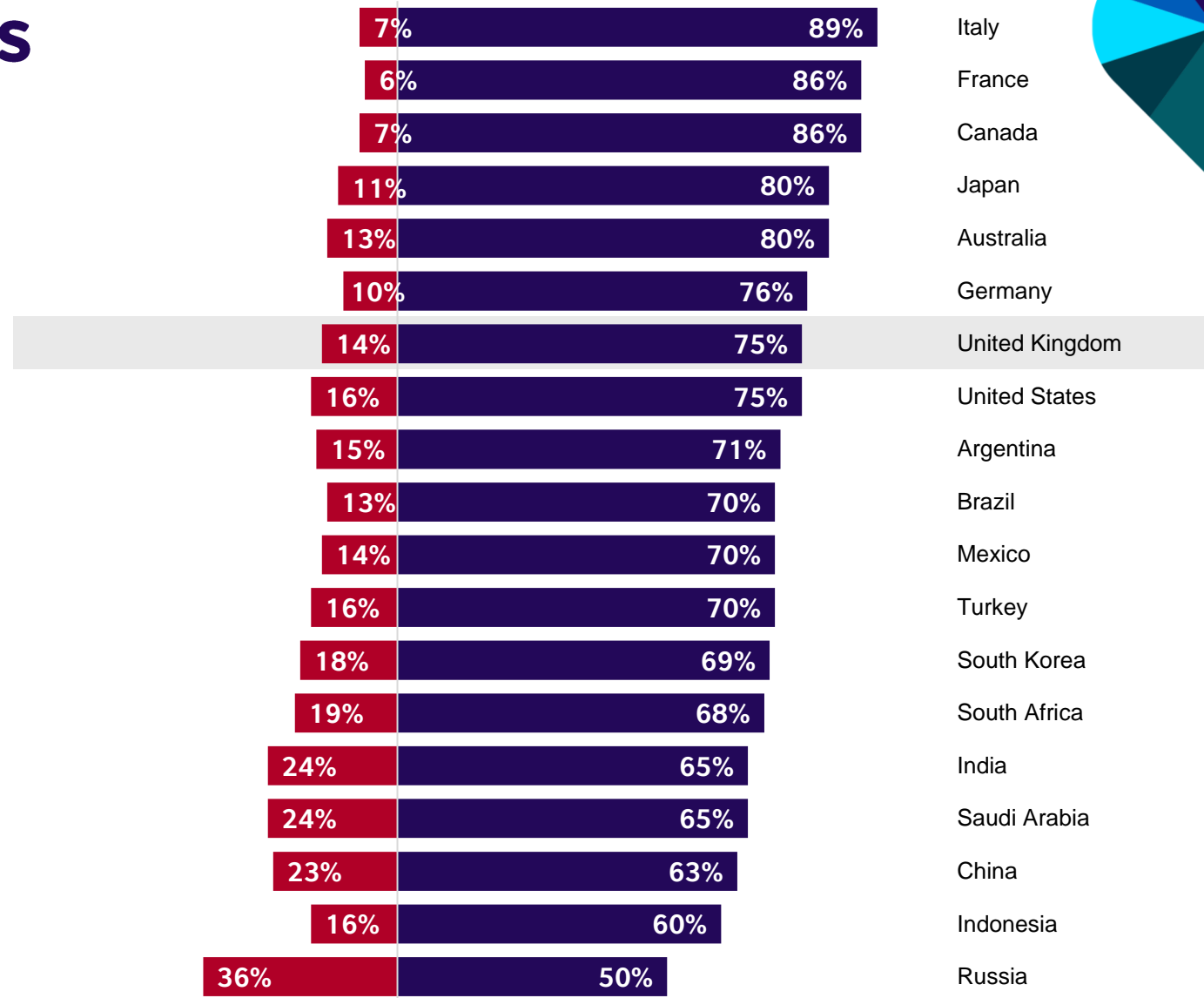
Base: All participants in Ireland [500]

Ireland: How 18-34 year olds in Ireland see the UK:

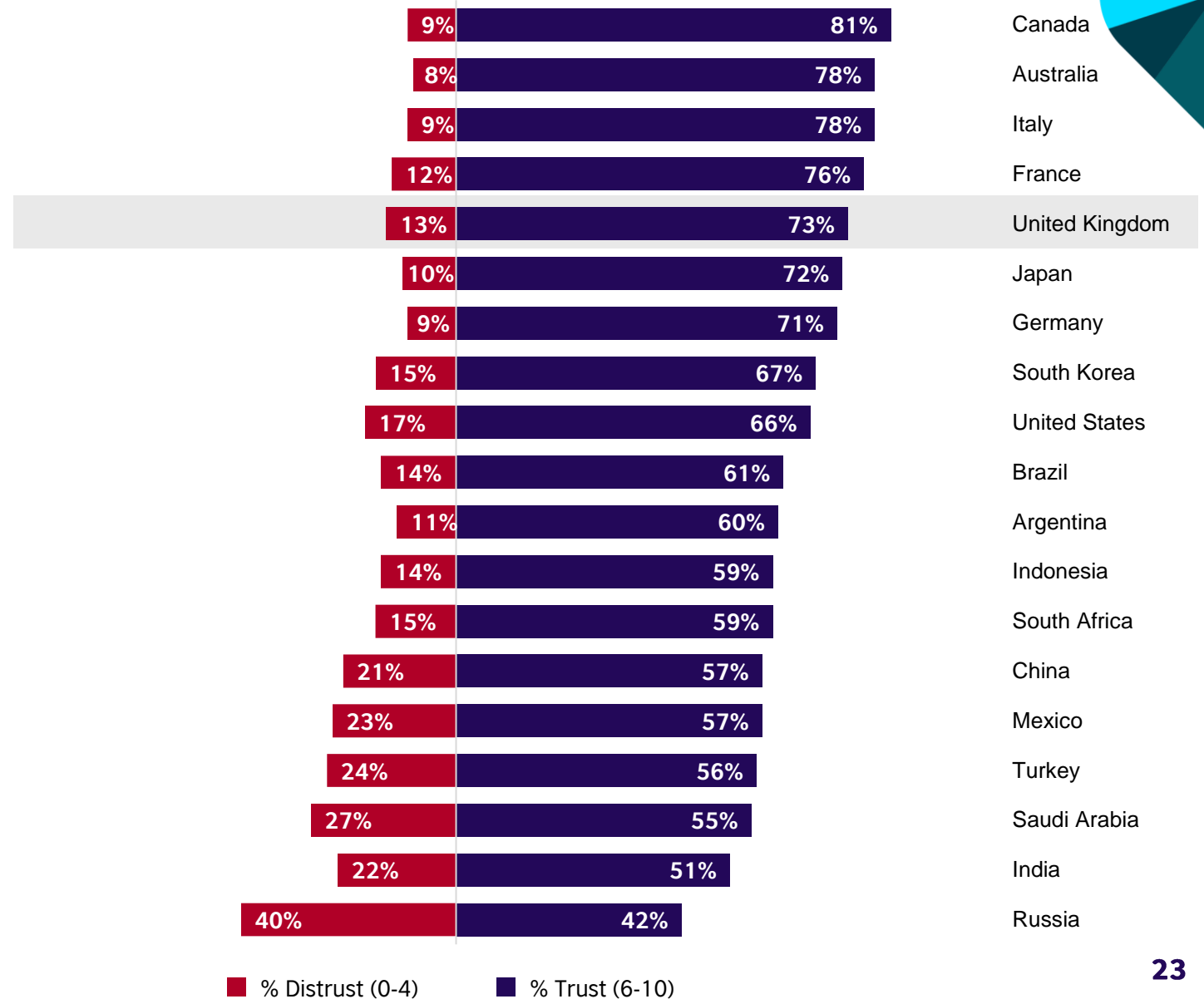
Competition for influence:

- **Italy is the most attractive country for respondents in Ireland**, followed by France and Canada. **The UK ranks joint 7th with the USA on this metric, up one place since 2020, when Ireland was last surveyed.**
- **Canada is first for trust in government among respondents in Ireland**, followed by Italy, Australia, and Germany. **The UK ranks 7th on this metric, consistent with 2020.**
- **The UK ranks 5th for trust in people and 4th for trust in institutions.** Canada ranks first for both these metrics among the Ireland sample.
- **76% of respondents in Ireland feel that the UK has a positive influence in the world**, placing it joint third with Australia and France on this metric behind Italy and Canada. 66% agreed that the UK government works constructively with other governments.

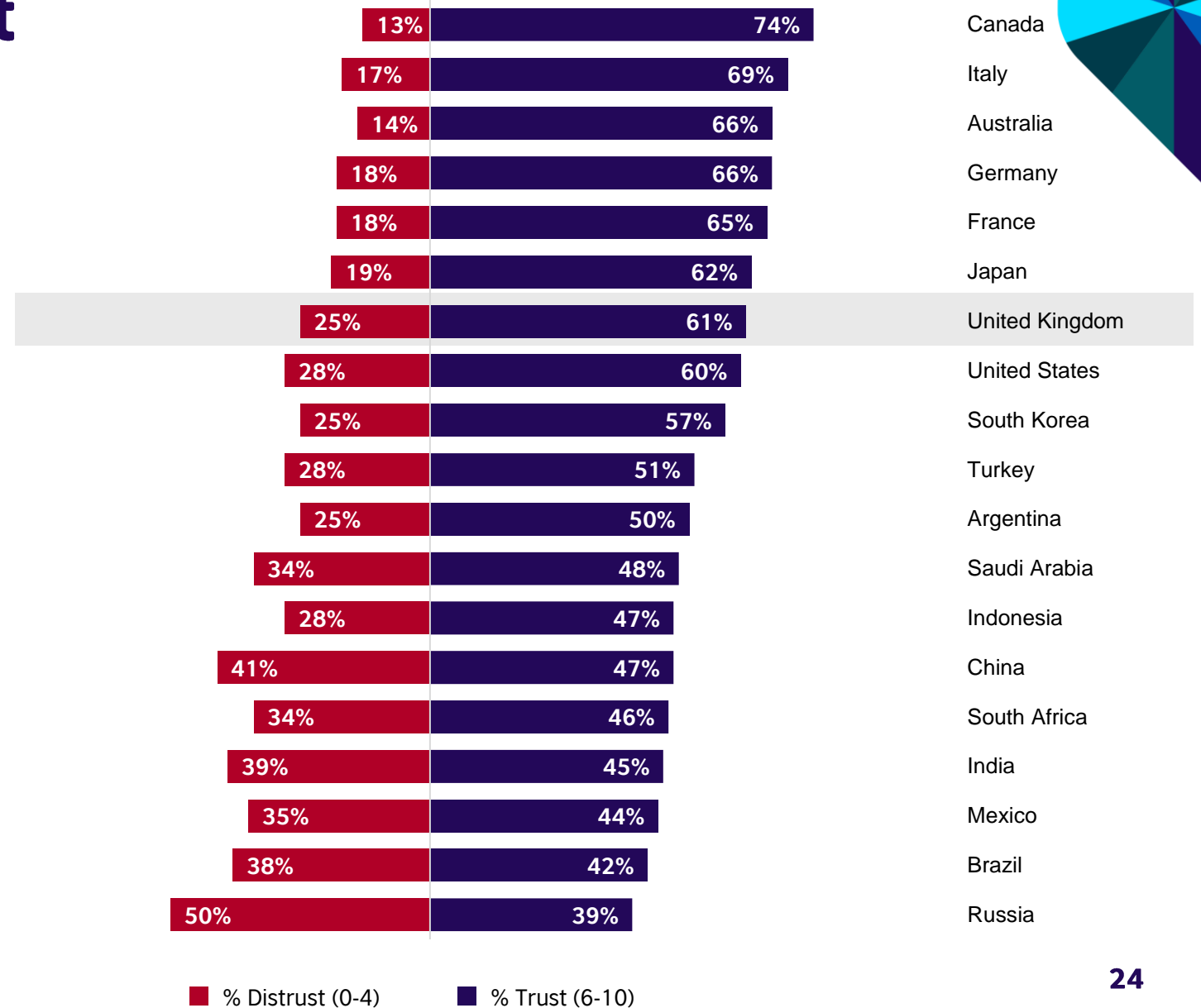
Most attractive countries overall



Trust in people of different countries



Trust in the government of different countries





Interacting with other countries

Ireland: How 18-34 year olds in Ireland see the UK

Cultural engagement, business, and tourism

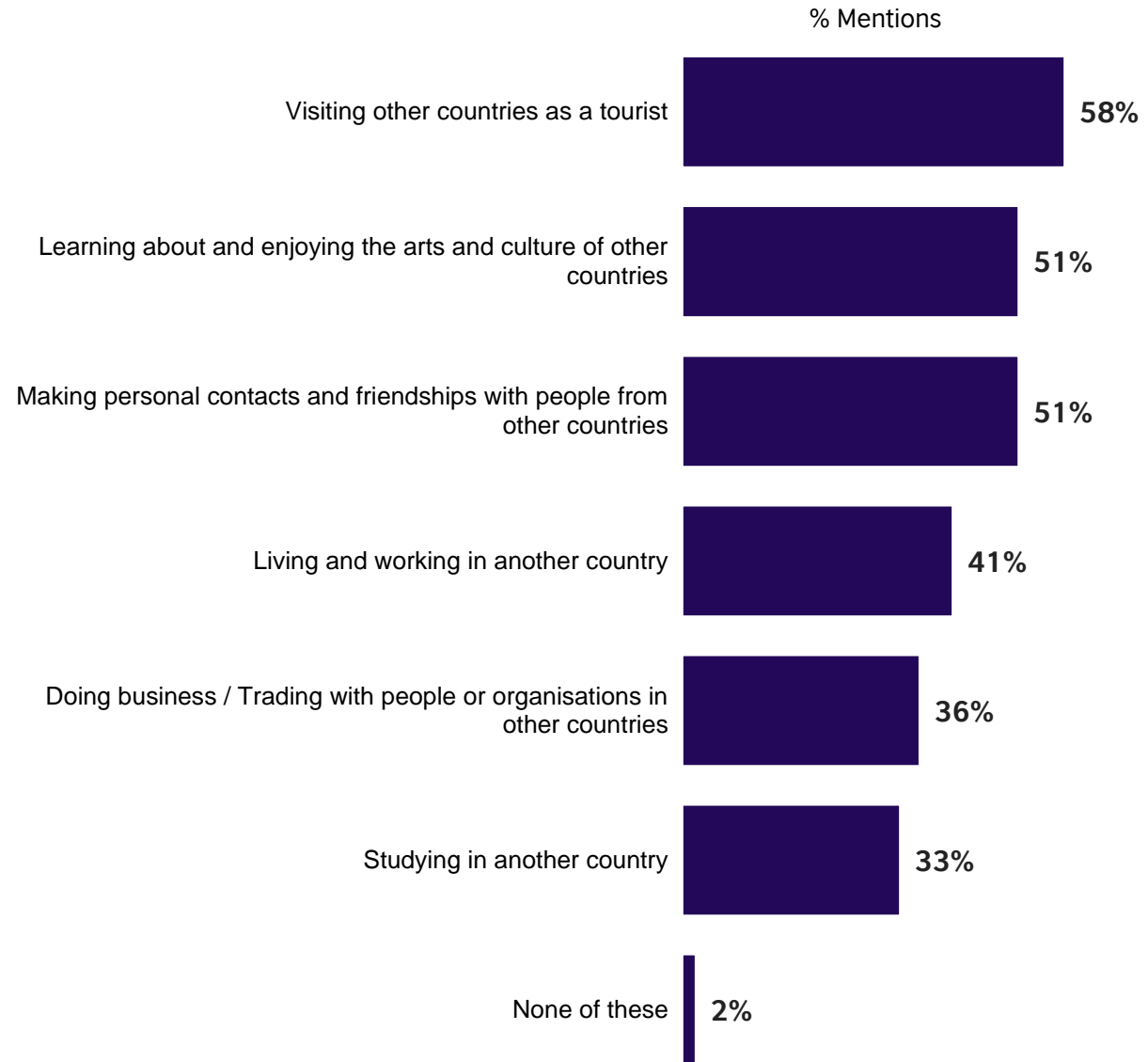
- **The most attractive study destinations for respondents in Ireland are the USA (41%) and UK (30%).** 77% of respondents agreed that the UK has world-leading universities. The UK ranks joint third (11%) for intentions to study overseas behind China and the USA and tied with Japan. Intentions to study in China and Japan have jumped from 2% to 13% and 6% to 11% respectively since 2020.
- **The most attractive countries as a source of arts and culture are Japan (34%), Italy (30%) and France (27%).** The UK ranks joint 7th (16%) with Brazil for this metric, down from 5th place in 2020. Intentions to experience arts and culture of the UK are at 17% placing the UK sixth after Japan (26%), Italy (24%), the USA (21%), France and China (both 19%).
- **The most attractive countries with which to conduct business or trade are the USA (44%), and the UK (31%), consistent with 2020.** The UK is 3rd (14%) for intentions to do business / trade behind the USA(19%) and China (15%). In 2020, the UK ranked 1st (18%) for intentions to do business/trade.

Ireland: How 18-34 year olds in Ireland see the UK

Cultural engagement, business, and tourism

- **The most attractive countries as a place to visit for respondents in Ireland are Japan (32%), the USA (32%), and Italy (28%).** The UK scored 13%, placing it 11th. This is a decrease in four places since 2020.
- The **most well-known organisations** for respondents in Ireland are the **BBC World Service (30%)** and the **British Council (27%)**, ahead of EducationUSA, the Japan Foundation, and the Chinese Cultural Centre in joint third (14%).
- **78% of respondents** have taken part in a **UK cultural relations** event or activity. For **49%** this event or activity **involved the British Council.**

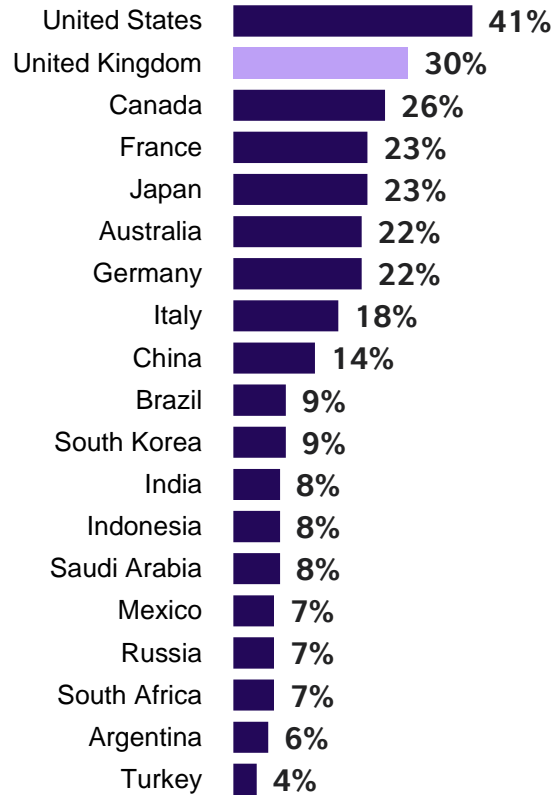
Interest in interacting with other countries



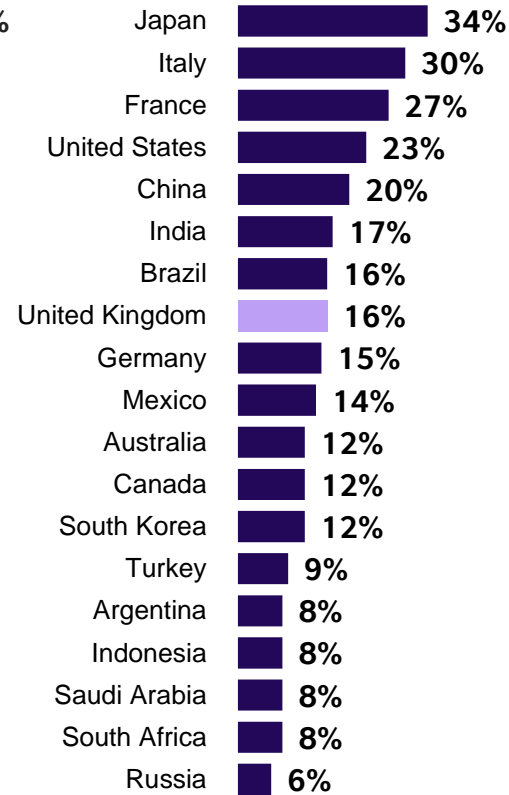
Domains of attractiveness



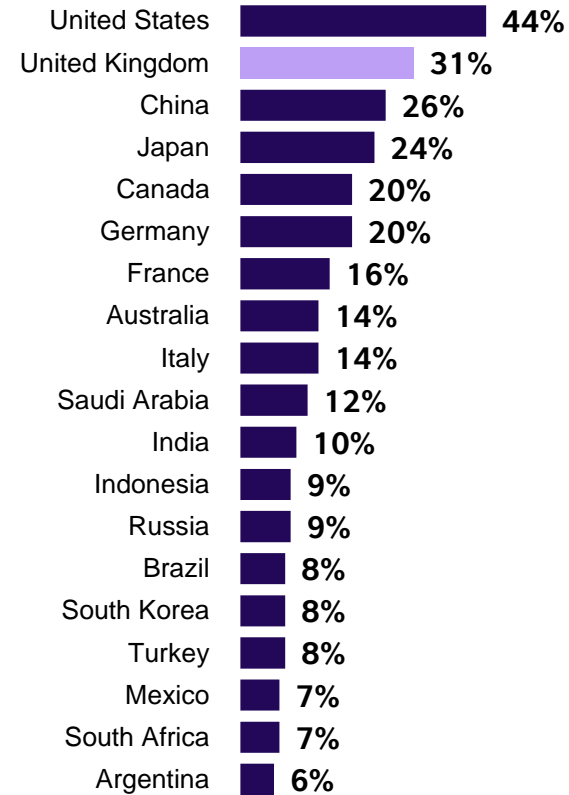
As a place to study



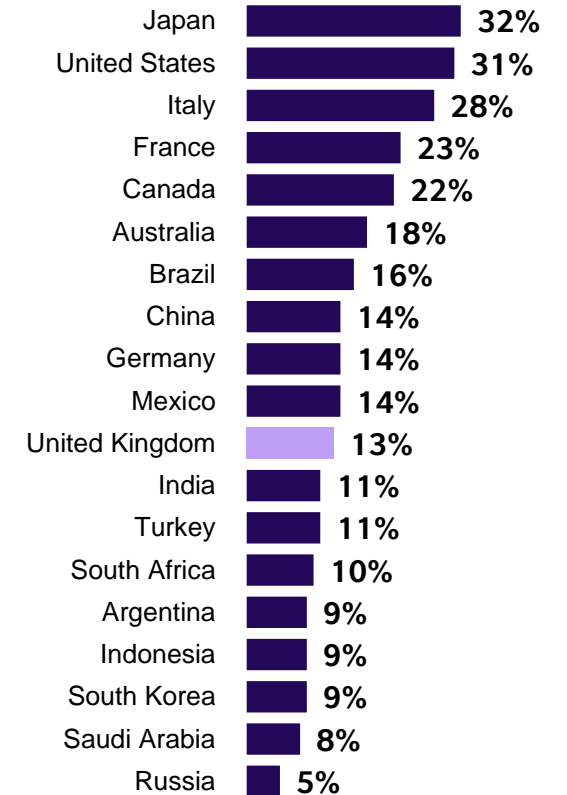
As a source of art and culture



As a place to do business



As a place to visit





Values and issues

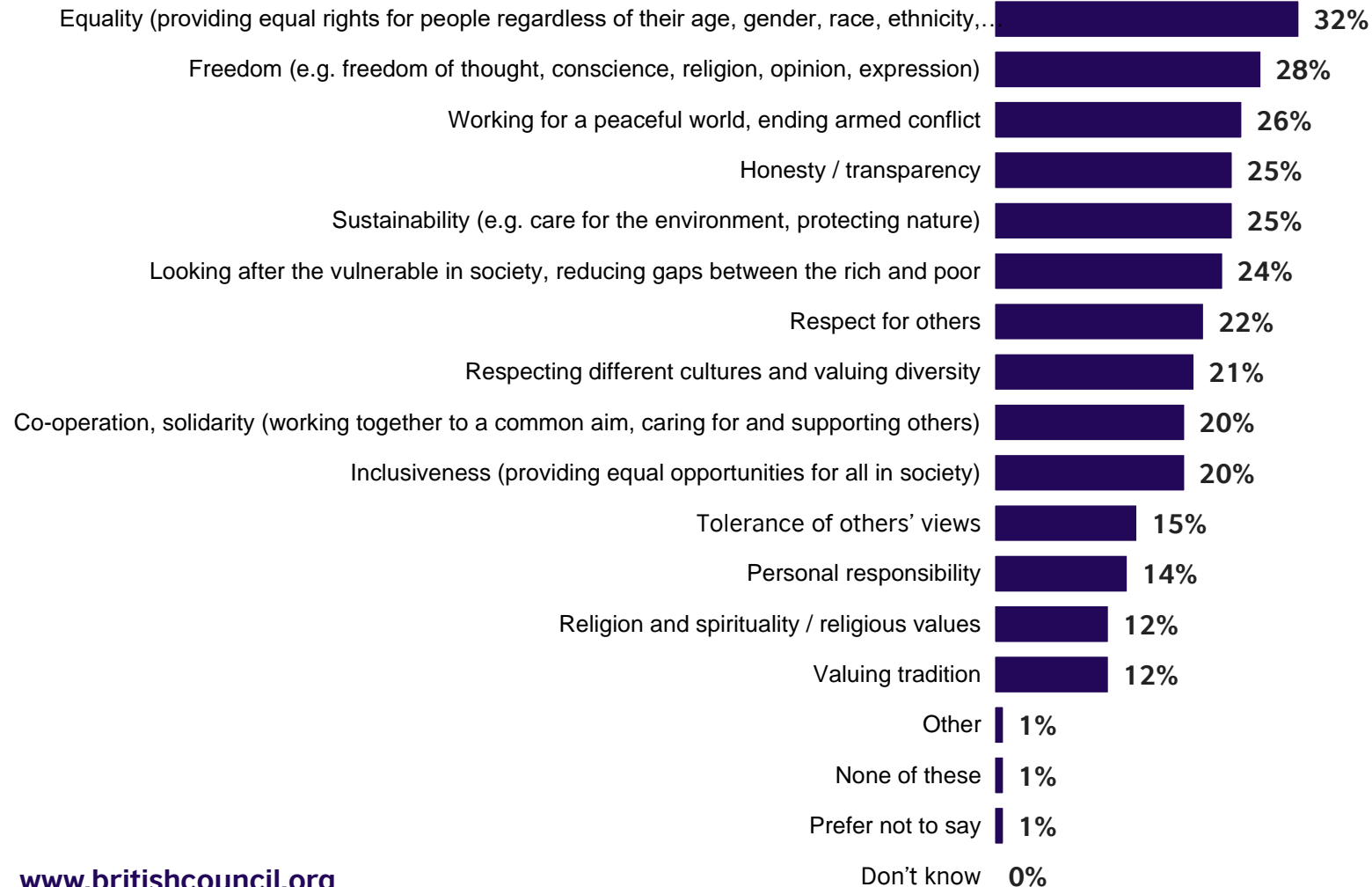
Ireland: How 18-34 year olds in Ireland see the UK

Values and Issues

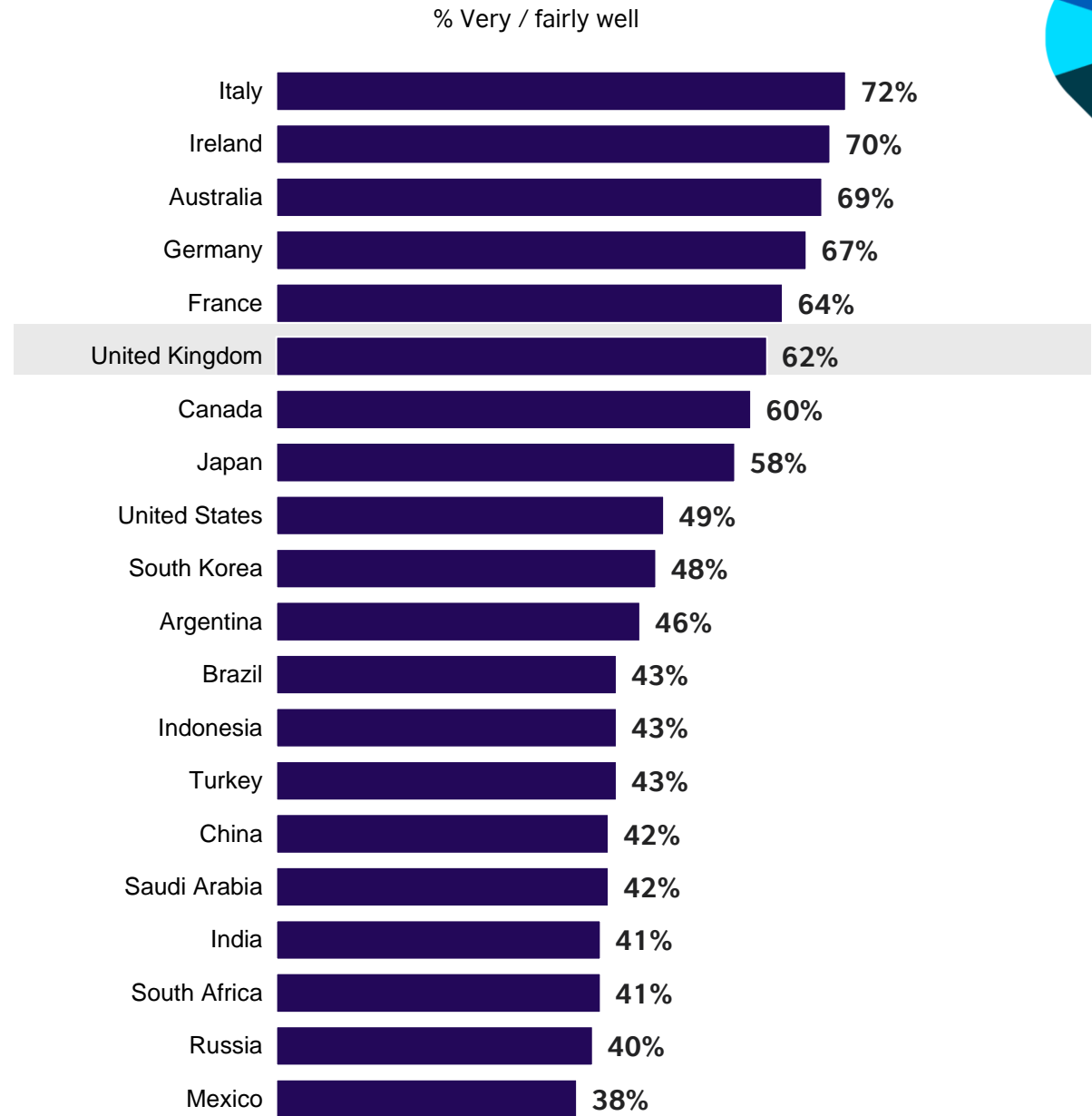
- The Ireland sample **ranked equality (32%), freedom (28%), and working for a peaceful world/ending armed conflict (26%)** as the **most important values** for countries to encourage in the 21st century.
- The Ireland sample **selected climate change (36%), poverty (35%), discrimination in society (35%), and migration/refugees (29%)** as the **most important issues** facing the world today.
- **21% of respondents** in Ireland agree that **Ireland should pursue its national interest** above anything else. 21% of respondents feel Ireland should prioritise what is needed to advance international cooperation and address global challenges. 39% advocate for an equal balance of these two approaches.

Values the world should support or encourage

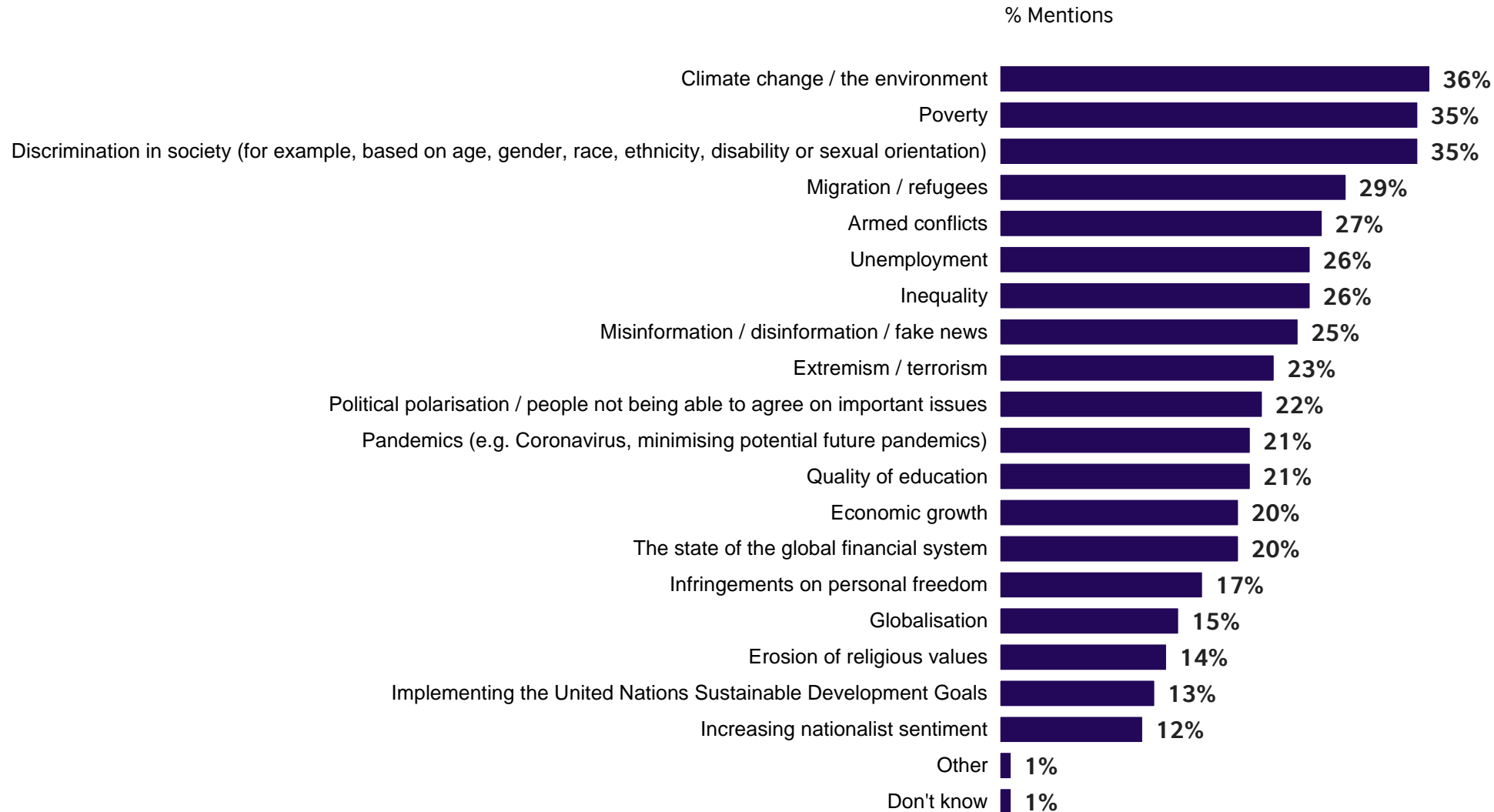
% Mentions



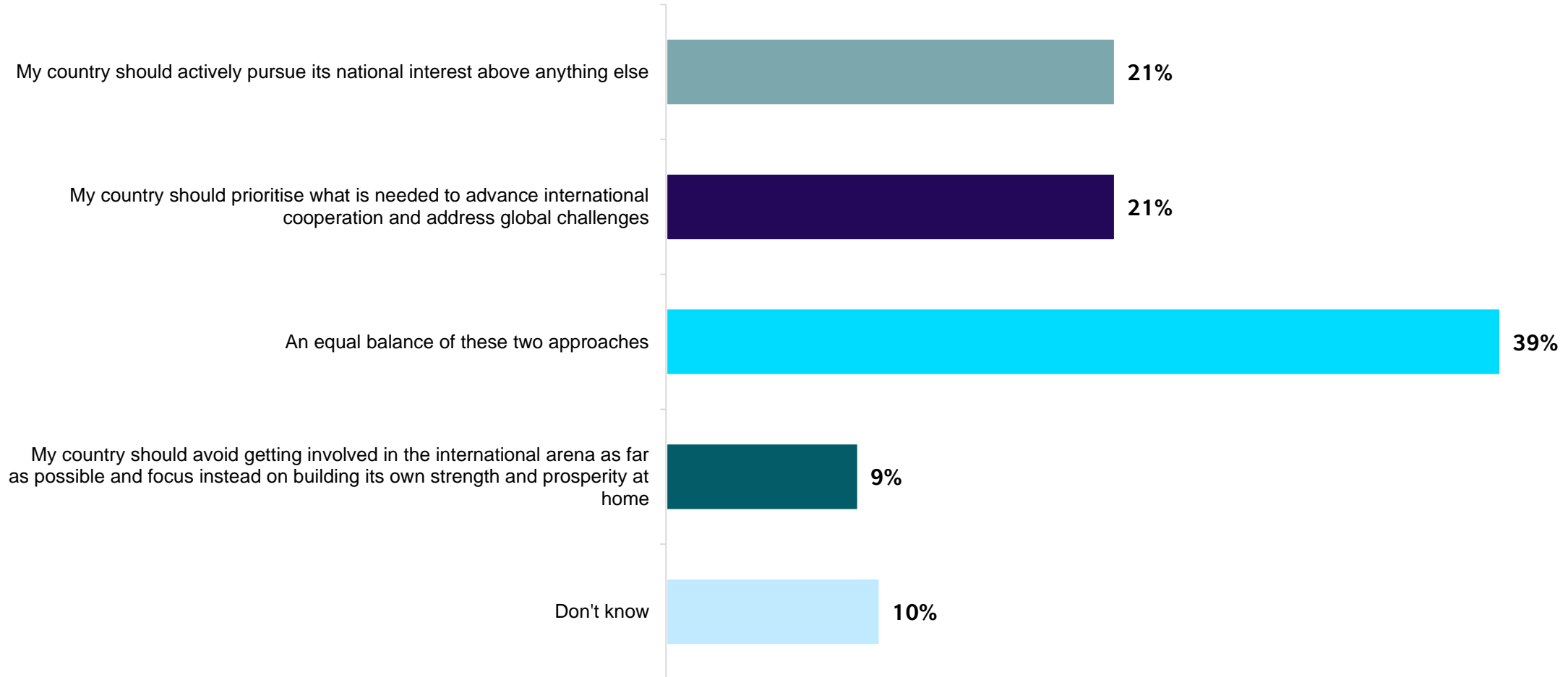
How well does each country support 21st century values?



Most important issues facing the world



How should Ireland act in the international arena?



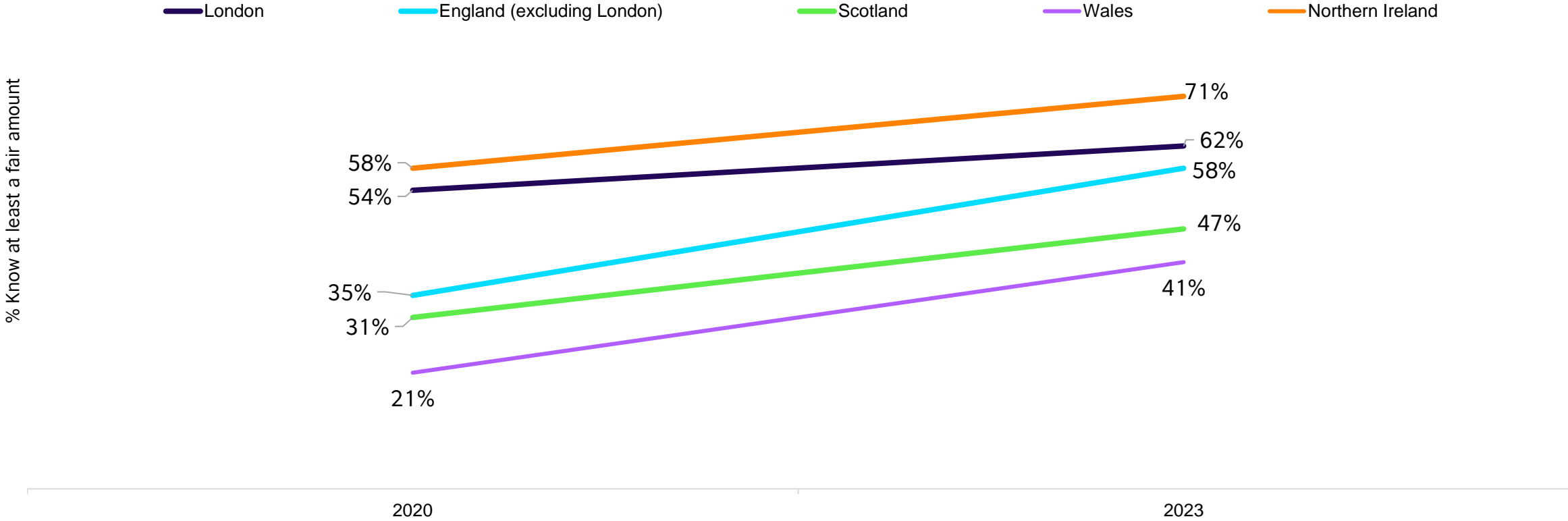


Knowledge of the UK

Knowledge of nations and regions of UK over time



Percentage of respondents who know at least a fair amount about England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and London

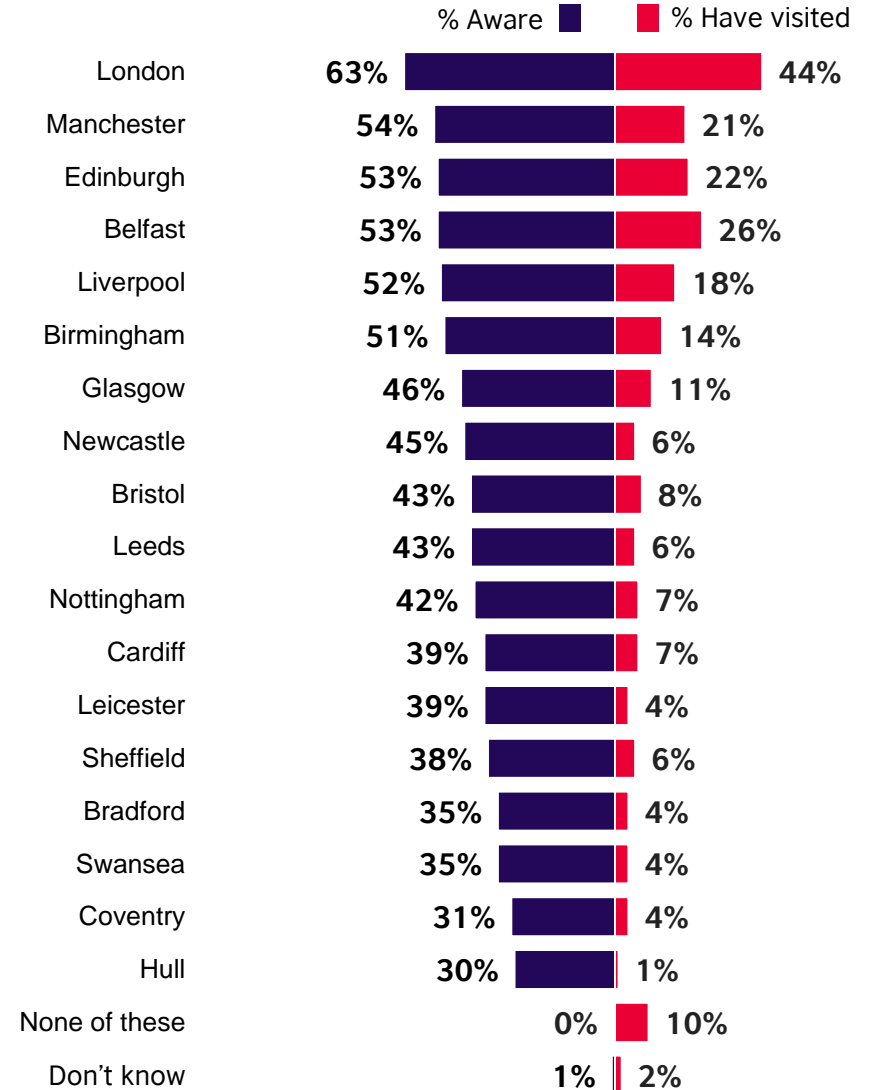


Awareness of UK cities

Which, if any, of the following cities in the UK have you heard of?

% aware shown

- Belfast
- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Bristol
- Cardiff
- Coventry
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Hull
- Leeds
- Leicester
- Liverpool
- London
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Nottingham
- Sheffield
- Swansea





Perceptions of Ireland among respondents in the UK

Overall attractiveness of Ireland

| | Percentage of respondents who find Ireland attractive overall | Rank |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| England | 63% | 9th |
| Northern Ireland | 79% | 5th |
| Scotland | 66% | 7th |
| Wales | 62% | 6th |

Trust in the government of Ireland

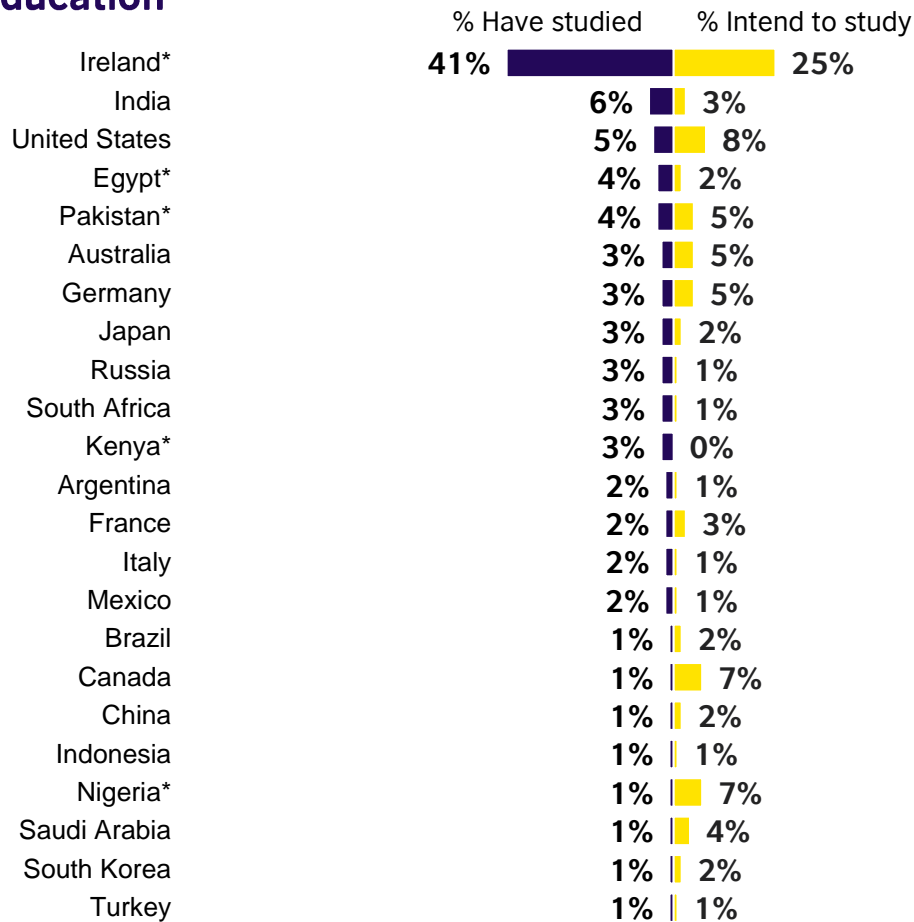
| | Percentage of respondents who trust the government of Ireland | Rank |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| England | 49% | 4th |
| Northern Ireland | 70% | 1st |
| Scotland | 50% | 3rd |
| Wales | 48% | 4th |

Trust in the people of Ireland

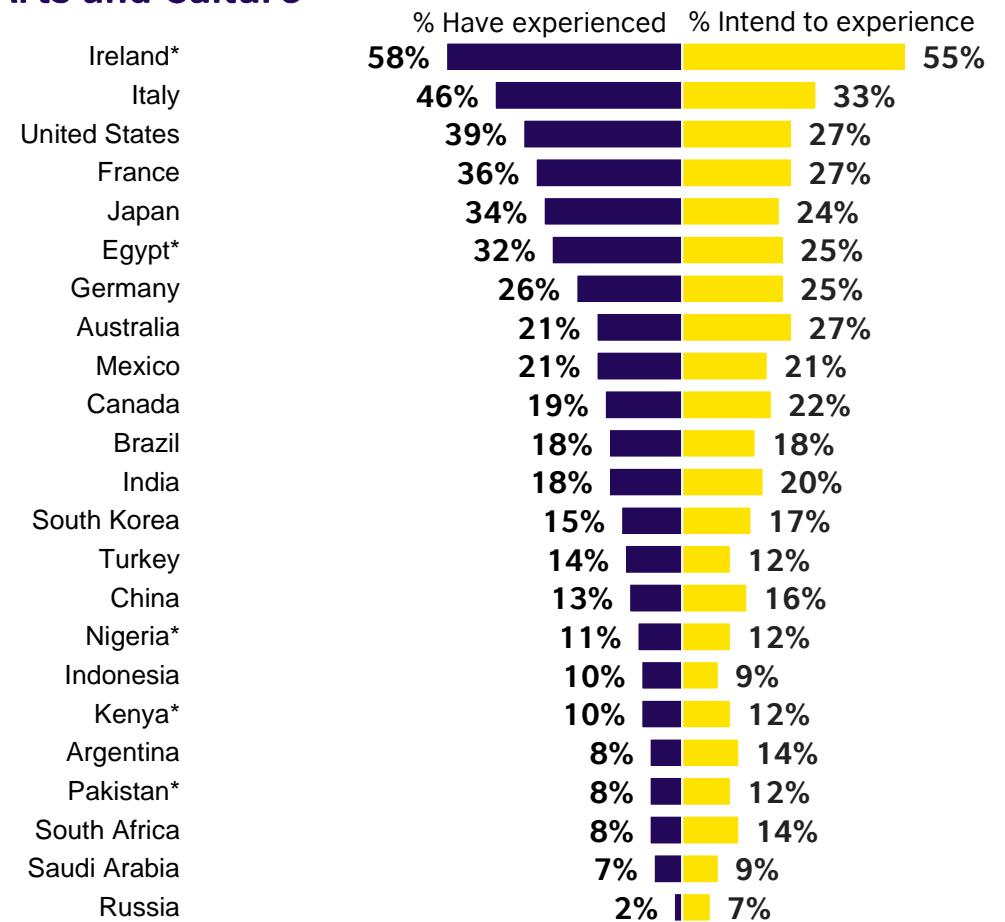
| | Percentage of respondents who trust the people of Ireland | Rank |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|
| England | 60% | 3rd |
| Northern Ireland | 82% | 1st |
| Scotland | 68% | 2nd |
| Wales | 65% | 2nd |

Intentions to engage with Ireland among respondents in Northern Ireland

Education

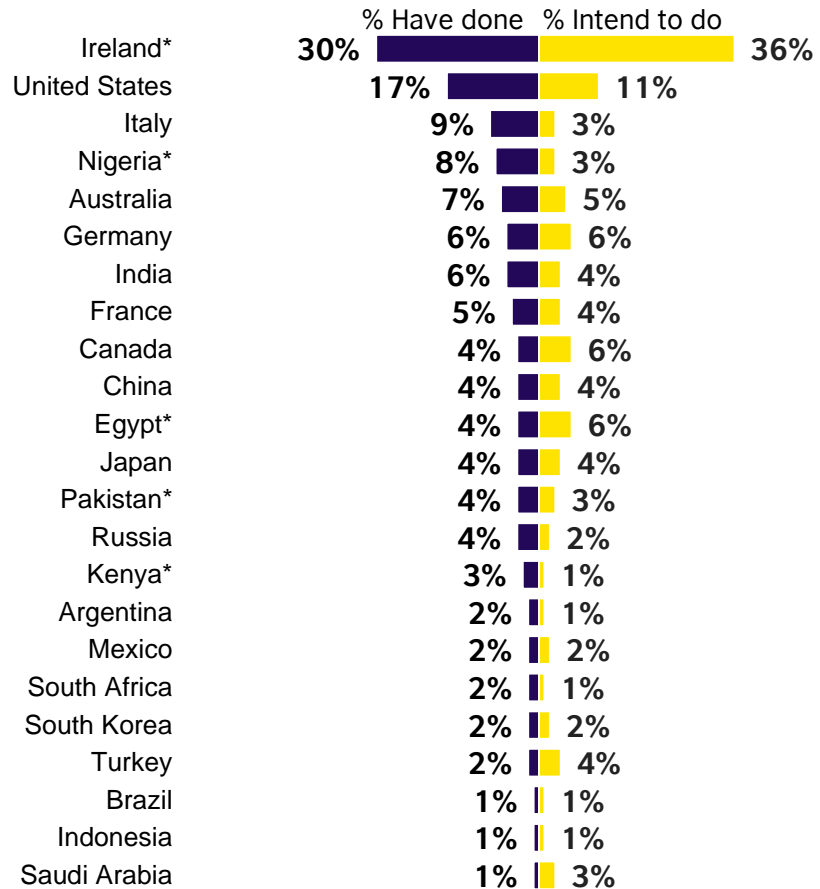


Arts and Culture

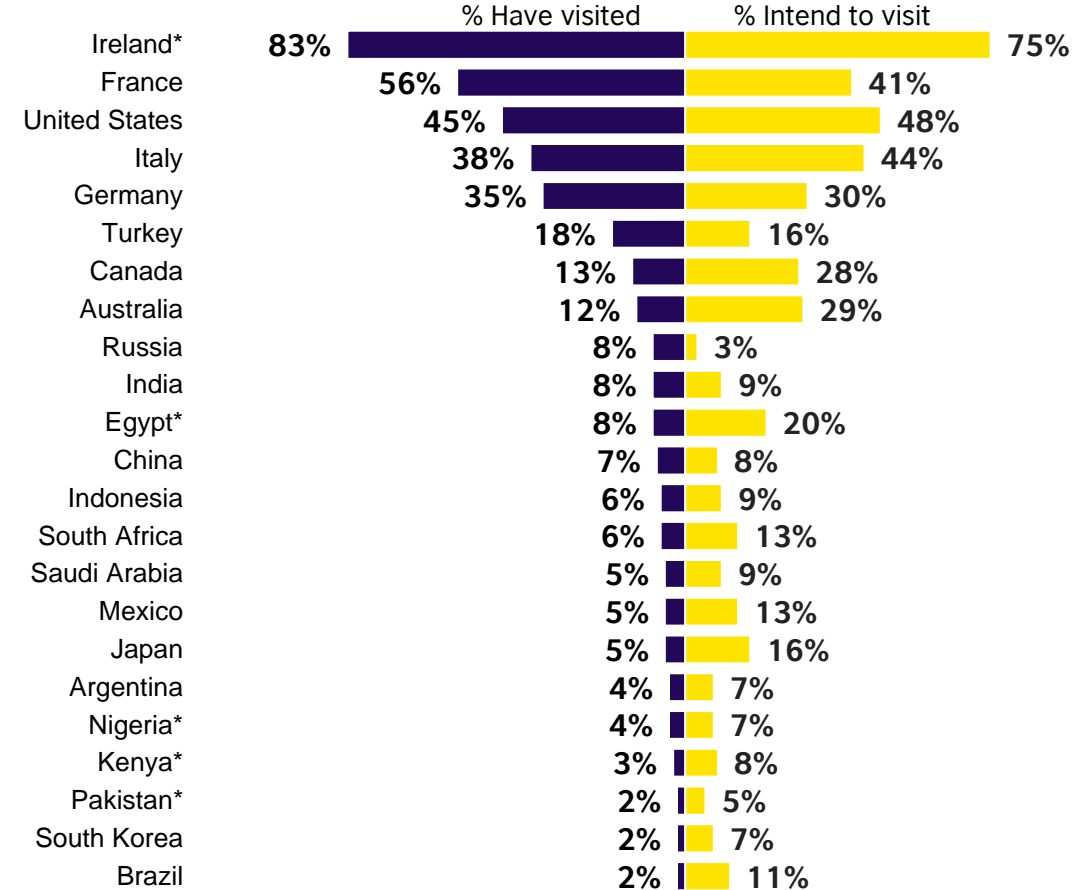


Intentions to engage with Ireland among respondents in Northern Ireland

Business/Trade



Tourism



Qualitative findings

Rapporteur Report: Summary



- The participants and facilitators together provided a rich, diverse, thoughtful and thought-provoking morning that formed the basis for the substantive conversation with key stakeholders in the afternoon.
- The rapporteur provided an overview of the key components of the facilitated workshop including:
 - **Silent Conversation:** Reaction to Overall Findings
 - Individual and group responses to the summary research findings from Ireland.
 - **Facilitated Discussion:** How the UK and Ireland see each other
 - Reminder of key findings and reflections on these findings by group.
 - **Small Group Discussion & Feedback:** Interactions between UK and Ireland
 - Reminder of key findings and reflections on these findings by group.
 - **Position Statements:** Values and Issues
 - Reminder of key findings and reflections on these findings by group.
- The group moved with considerable sophistication and ease from high level principle to very practical ongoing consequences of major factors including, but not limited to, the UK's exit from the EU, high level of armed conflict, global inequality.
- The group also interrogated issues which go to the heart of not just relations on these islands, such as the traditional north/south/east/west axis, but also within Ireland, and how more could be done to encourage a shared understanding of our history in Ireland and a strong sense that too little is known, taught or shared relating to the UK generally, and Northern Ireland specifically.

Main Takeaways

Context is key.

Institutional stability matters, especially as a bulwark/backstop against political instability.

Definitions are critical.

To the extent that there may be negative reactions towards the UK, that negativity was framed as part of broader global criticisms of G20, i.e. wealthy, liberal countries whose words don't match their actions, of which the UK is a member.

History and geography are key.

The exercise demonstrated the advantages as well as the inherent limits of quantitative research alone – everything can change, as indeed it did, once the qualitative conversations and reflections begin.

Lens, in terms of socio-demographic and geographic factors cannot be overlooked.

Considerations such as the experience of education, class, the Global North versus the Global South, need to be taken into account.

Silent conversation: *education & institutions*

It is not a huge surprise that the UK was ranked as most attractive study destination by 30% of Irish respondents.

Factors such as cultural familiarity and a shared language create a smoother transition for Irish students choosing to study abroad in the UK.

Irish students have less confidence in other EU languages due to negative experiences of language teaching in secondary school.

The UK UCAS application process is more inclusive of students' overall experience and not limited to their qualifications as in the CAO process.

Being geographically, historically and culturally close, Irish young people have a familiar and sometimes, critical view of the UK government.

This group of young people are highly engaged with UK politics generally and were highly cognisant of the instability of the UK government in recent years, not just in relation to the UK's exit of the EU and /or island of Ireland related matters.

The UK is perceived as broadly liberal and trustworthy; though news of new harsh immigration policies and awareness of the frustration of people in the UK in relation to government has been highly influential.

UK institutions are perceived as highly trustworthy. The group valued the role of institutions, such as the BBC and the NHS, whose status informed a significant part of the debate in terms of values, trusts and the cultural impact. The BBC has a large and successful marketing reach across different forms of media, making it rightly the most well-known UK institution.

Silent conversation: *place to visit & national interest*

Italy was the most attractive country to Irish young people, while the UK placed 7th in this category. Despite Italy's attractive weather, culture and tourist opportunities, its government and other factors were deemed less positive.

On a people-to-people basis, Italian individuals are perceived as friendly, and areas in Ireland, such as Cork, have high populations of Italians.

The findings surprised some, but this debate spoke to the importance of pre-existing relations, the attraction of programmes such as Erasmus, confidence about application processes, including fees to universities/working overseas versus perception of diffs with UK, despite the Common Travel Area.

Despite questions over the future of Irish neutrality and whether it would join NATO and follow in the footsteps of Sweden, recent debates indicate Ireland's wish to remain neutral.

Ireland must balance its own national interest with prioritising international cooperation and addressing global challenges. Other nations, such as the UK and US, interact with other nations under a peaceful intention, but the result is not often peaceful.

21% of Irish young people surveyed recommended that Ireland pursue its national interest first were likely voting from a place of fear rather than nationalism.

Agreed that if the survey was conducted in 2024, perhaps recent rhetoric on refugees in Ireland as a deflection for lack of action on issues such as housing would feature more strongly.

Walking debate on statements:



UK Government works constructively with other governments:

The majority in the group felt the UK leaving the EU, and also the means by which it left, had impacted the UK's reputation as a trusted nation.

This worried the group in terms of the UK's hitherto established leadership in global affairs, including its positive role vis-à-vis major armed conflicts.

The group lamented the UK's drop in status from a rule-breaker instead of rule-maker.

The UK was credited for many of its actions, but here again, context is key and speaks to the standards by which the group expects G20 countries to set and abide by rules and, critically, why their actions must match their words.

Equality is the most important value for a country to encourage:

Only two participants were the strongest in agreement on this statement, which may seem surprising. There was much discussion on what we mean by equality – is it income inequality or gender/sex/etc.

Discussion centred on equality as a broad concept which means very different things to different countries and is shaped by their current privilege/power or lack thereof. There was no agreement on the definition of equality as there are too many variables. This was interesting as equality is the leading concern of the G20 respondents. To promote equality, the focus needs to be on where and how this can be achieved, and a review of existing initiatives and whether they are working in light of recent developments both positive (e.g. access programmes) and negative (e.g. gender pay gap and UK transgender healthcare bill).

Walking debate on statements:

The UK has a positive influence on the world:

This statement itself was extensively discussed : was it '*had power*' or '*has power*'? Would their answers be different if the term was '*strong influence*' instead of '*positive influence*'?

Accountability was the dominant theme in relation to this debate, traversing the UK's vast history and influence, negative and positive, not just in respect of these islands, but across the world.

This discussion was informed by the group's understanding of historical events, with the group debating whether colonialism was an historic or current event. A gap was identified between the UK's undoubted influence on global affairs, including its role in conflicts, and a strong feeling that words on issues such as migration and Ukraine were not matched by actions.

There was, it was felt, a contemporary resonance with current issues such as the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

Climate issue is the most important issue facing the world:

This statement provoked a very nuanced conversation with the group expressing that climate change is, in many respects, a privilege to be promoted by the Global North and wealthy G20 countries. Everyone agreed that the climate crisis is a key existential challenge but felt that the climate change agenda is for those with economic power with the most dispossessed communities (in the Global South) suffering impacts the most.

Despite having expressed earlier doubts about equality as the most important value for a country to encourage, the intersectionality between inequality and climate really came to the fore in this discussion - namely inequality being at the heart of climate change and a 'just transition'. It was agreed that climate change is an incredibly important issue facing the world, but not 'the most' important, as caring for the planet is void, if the people living on it cannot be protected.

Summary of what was shared:



Perceptions of the UK by Irish young people are based on personal experience and context.

Positive perceptions are based on positive people-to-people experiences rather than with the government.

More could be done to share knowledge and understanding in education systems of UK and Ireland.

Many peers in the UK are unaware of the Common Travel Area (CTA), and more information could be given on the nuances of the Common Travel Area.

Questions remain over Italy representing 21st century values. Positive perceptions are influenced by experiences, tourism, weather and culture; however, the reality of living in Italy is different.

Irish young people viewed negatively the Arts Council of England's recent guidance for funding applications which discouraged overly political or activist work. They expressed the view that work fostering criticality and creative expression were important to encourage.

Large, complex concepts such as 'climate' 'equality', 'trust', cannot be overly simplified or turned into 'buzz words'.

The human element of any issue, and the real-life consequences of perceptions, as well as the context in which they are situated, are crucial to consider.

The UK is very important in the context of the United Nations, and Ireland works closely and collaboratively with the UK in the UN on shared issues, including conflicts abroad.

As its closest neighbour, Ireland receives news from the UK and is its harshest critic at times.

History is taught differently in Northern Ireland and Ireland. In Ireland, particularly in Catholic Schools, students are told about Northern Ireland rather than encouraged to debate and think critically.

Interactions between the UK and Ireland

This debate was shaped by a number of factors including proximity, familiarity, similarity of culture.

The group spoke of the enduring impacts of the UK leaving the EU, although many of our stereotypes of each other did not survive detailed discussion.

Most of the group had visited and several had worked, lived or studied in the UK and had experienced the strong, established relations influenced by sports, entertainment, and family connections.

The group lamented the ongoing political instability and values the UK's institutional leadership – courts, rule of law etc...They commented that institutions in the UK are solid and respected and are seen to uphold laws and values.

Many referenced strains in the UK Ireland relationship, which peaked during the visit to Ireland of the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2011. The group spoke of poorer East/West relations aggravated by the tension and confusion and the long tail of the UK leaving the EU.

The group also acknowledged that the preference of other countries may be related to broader migration trends for young Irish people, including work and travel opportunities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Mainland Europe etc.

The group debated extensively about the role of education, particularly the lack of knowledge in the school curricula the Republic of Ireland on learning about the history of the conflict in Northern Ireland and a limited knowledge in the UK on Ireland.

The group were hopeful at the possibilities for closer integration and alignment especially because of Horizon, Erasmus and student mobility.

Final thoughts...

Perceptions are never reality, but rather influenced by personal experience, education and other external factors.
Perceptions have real world consequences.
They have done so for this group, informing their thoughts, behaviours and key decisions in these formative years.

The group positively value the personal interactions and the Common Travel Area. The group formed the view that the UK remains hugely attractive for Irish people in terms of their personal relationships, education, travel, culture etc..

Personal connections remain key.
People-to-people experiences are crucial in providing a positive antidote to distrust and disregard to building relationships with each other.





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