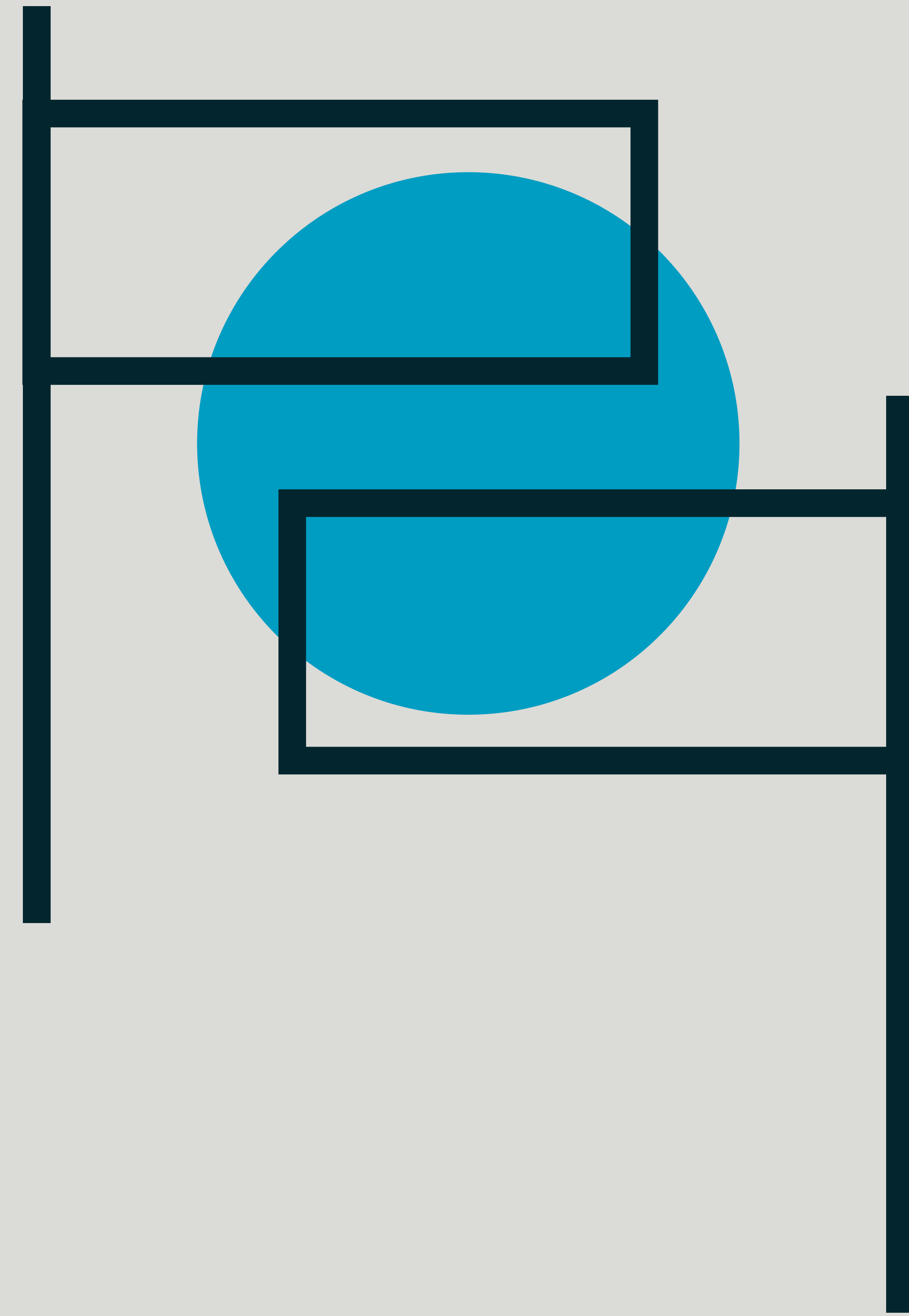


Values & Attitudes in Northern Ireland 25 Years after the Belfast-Good Friday Agreement



Executive Summary

Introduction

Social Change Initiative (SCI) works to improve the effectiveness of activism for social change, especially in the areas of peace building, migration, equality and human rights. Our work has included using attitude surveys to help civil society to explore perspectives on social issues, notably migration. In this 25th anniversary year of the Belfast-Good Friday Peace Agreement, SCI has come together with The Policy Institute at Kings College London and several co-funders to support the inclusion of NI in the World Values Survey (WVS) for the first time.

For SCI, having quality data from the WVS and comparative historical data from the European Values Survey about Northern Ireland provides an opportunity to broaden the public discourse beyond potentially binary constructs, towards something more focused on the values people hold and want to see reflected in political arrangements. We believe it might help to shift from a focus on positions and inform a richer conversation about the kind of future people want.



Economic and Social Research Council

This is SCI's first report using WVS data.

It asks:

- **How our values have changed?**
- **What attitudes and issues are concerning us now?**
- **What the implications of this are for the future?**

We are grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with The Policy Institute (lead partner for WVS in the UK) and for the support of the co-funders of the NI fieldwork (The Community Foundation Northern Ireland, Unbound Philanthropy, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Northern Ireland Office). Thanks also go to Professor Colin Knox for support with additional analysis specific to NI.



Key Trends - After 25 years of peace in NI, what can we say about our changing values?

- Our social attitudes have shifted – the NI public has become much more open on key social issues (such as abortion, divorce, homosexuality, euthanasia) and we rank among the most socially liberal nations internationally. In common with many other countries, young people in NI are more liberal than older people on many of these social issues.
- Overall, we have become more comfortable with many groups of people seen as ‘different’ or historically marginalised. For example, the levels of homophobia and xenophobia, assessed in terms of those we would be comfortable having as neighbours, have decreased. This does not extend to all groups though as we have become much more uncomfortable living next to people with social problems, namely heavy drinkers and drug users.
- This increasing social liberalisation may be linked to NI having become a more secular society. While religion is still an important facet of life (more so than in neighbouring places), it matters less to the NI public, and religiosity is limited to half the population.

- People now see politics as having equal importance in their lives as religion. However, neither politics nor religion matter nearly as much to people’s lives as family, friends, leisure and work.
- Despite our history of division, people in NI remain much more likely to think that other people can be trusted than those surveyed in many other countries, and we are particularly trusting of people in our own neighbourhoods.
- NI has also become more open to workers from abroad, even when jobs are scarce, and many people favour open immigration policies. However, relative to other UK nations, a larger share of the NI public are in favour of stricter limits on immigration.



What are our Current Concerns?

- Confidence and trust in all government institutions and the press are at worryingly low levels in NI. People have much higher levels of trust in civil society organisations such as universities, women's organisations, NGOs, trade unions and churches.
- On the whole, the NI public are strongly in favour of democracy. Support is generally low for any alternative systems of governance, though, a growing share of people approve of having experts, rather than government, making decisions. Younger people are somewhat less likely to favour a democratic political system and more likely to express support for alternatives.
- The vast majority of people in NI reject terrorism as a means of advancing political, ideological or religious ends.
- While the NI public support democracy as a political system, they are highly dissatisfied with the way politics is working in practice – much more so than in many western European countries including GB.

- Identity is complex in NI, often focusing on national identities and political parties supported. Looking at the less often considered 'left-right' political spectrum reveals that the majority in NI are centrist, with only around 1 in 5 identifying themselves as being on the far-left (more likely among young people and Catholics) or far-right (more likely among Protestants).

Despite our history of division, there is limited evidence from the survey of widespread political polarisation (i.e. strong negative feelings about the 'opposing' party or political group).

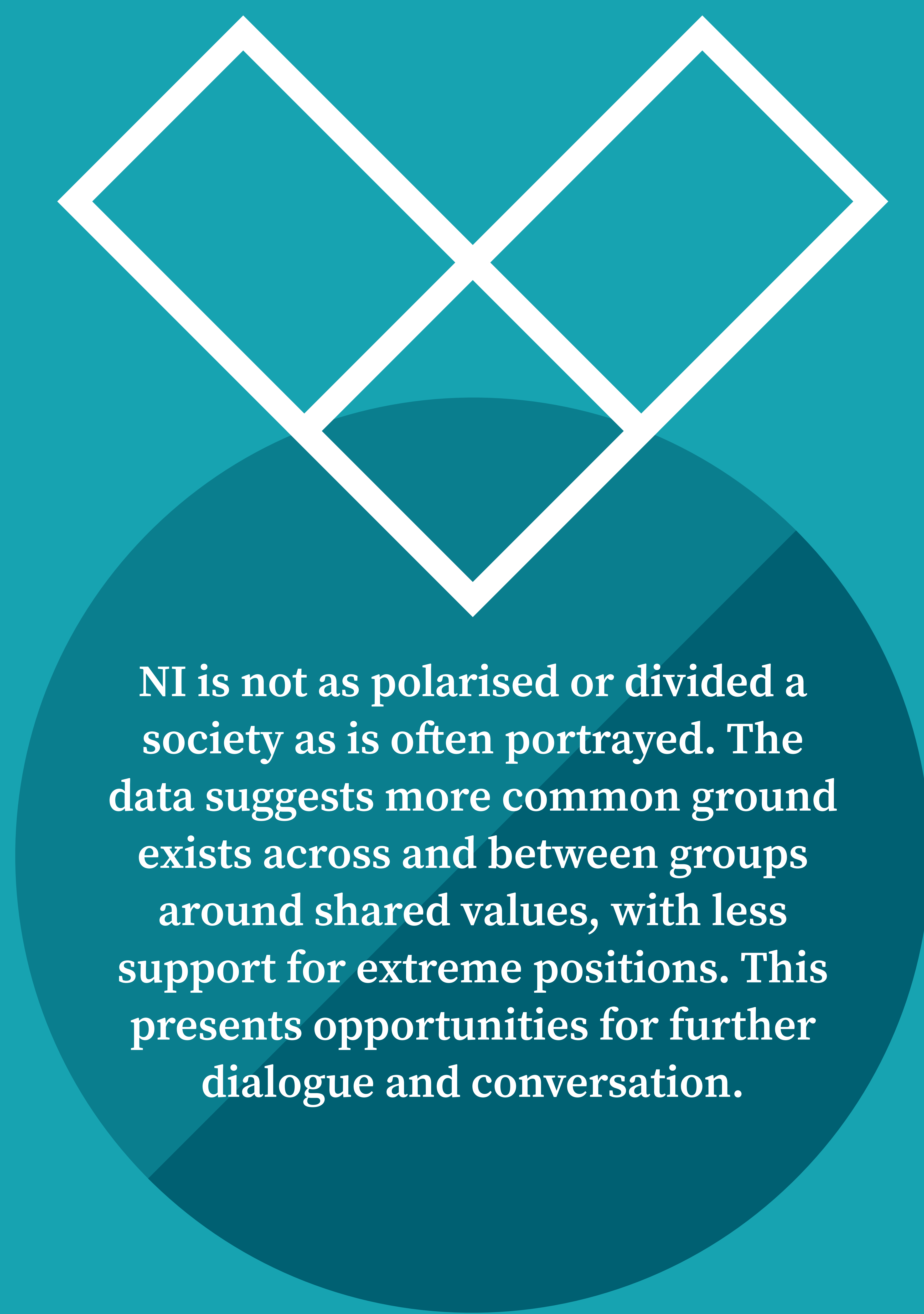
- Since the Brexit referendum, there is continued regret about the UK having left the EU and there are mixed views on the possibility of NI leaving the UK.

Implications for the Future

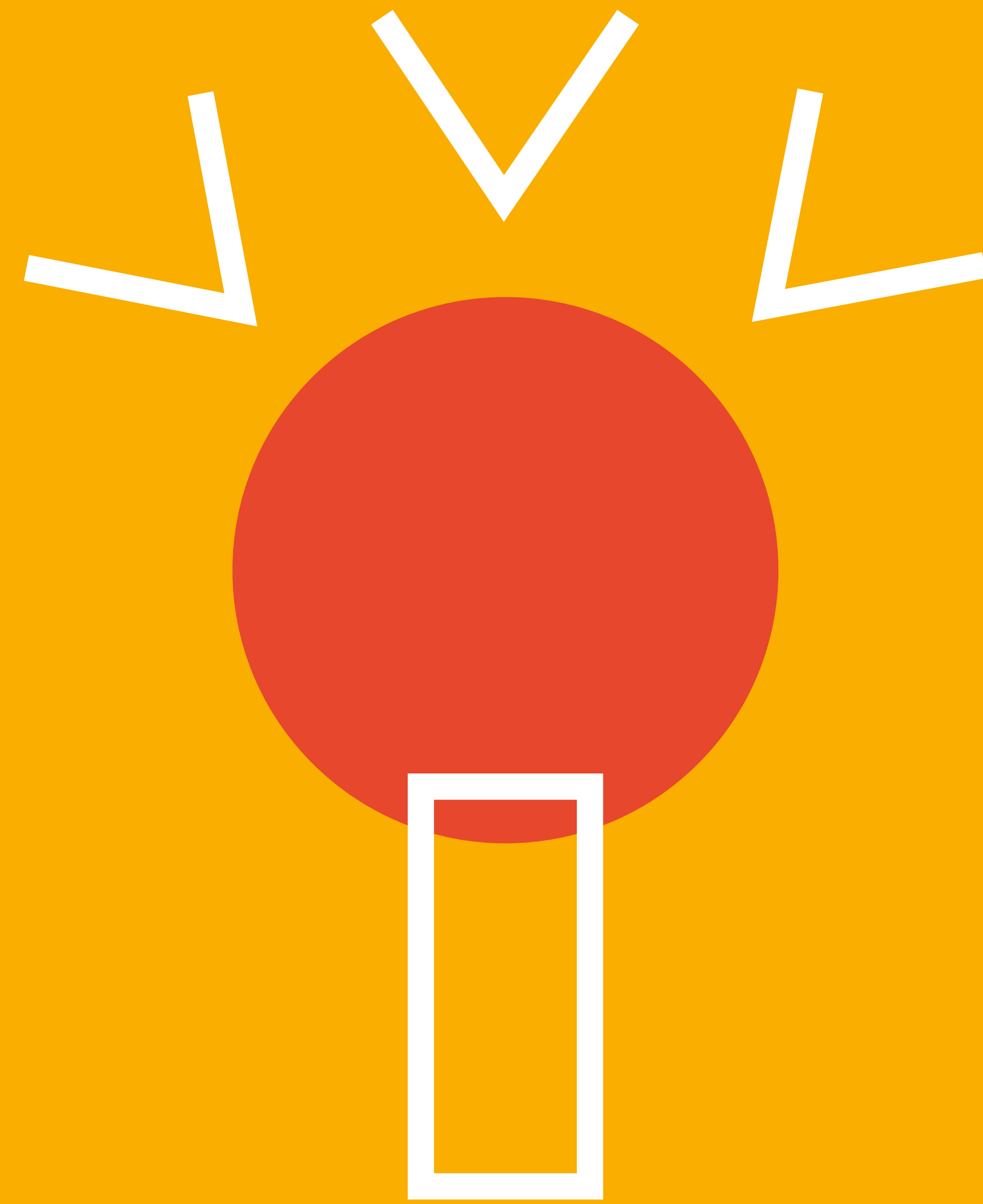
The WVS findings for NI indicate a shift in social attitudes and values among the population and challenge some of our long-held perceptions. They raise several concerns, but also suggest ways forward that build on our shared values:

- Social attitudes are changing right across the population and there is increasingly a high degree of inclusivity and acceptance of difference, but the pace of change is variable – younger people are more socially liberal and older people and the religious tend to hold more traditional views.
- We need to create spaces for value-based conversations, focusing less on religion and identity politics and more on the issues that are most important in people's lives (family, friends, leisure, work), acknowledging the plurality of views and experiences that exist.
- Those conversations also need to address social inequalities including the issue of substance misuse, which is a growing concern impacting on social cohesion.

- Confidence in democratic institutions and satisfaction with the current operation of the political system here are all strikingly low. There is also very low trust in the press. However, we have an interest in politics and believe the democratic process can realise change. Civil society institutions such as universities, women's groups and other NGOs enjoy much higher levels of confidence and could take a more leading role in building inclusive civic engagement and encouraging more participative democracy.
- The survey suggests young people are more disillusioned with the functioning of a democratic society, presenting a challenge for future stability if left unattended. Civil society must encourage and support the involvement of younger people in civic conversations.



NI is not as polarised or divided a society as is often portrayed. The data suggests more common ground exists across and between groups around shared values, with less support for extreme positions. This presents opportunities for further dialogue and conversation.



Introduction

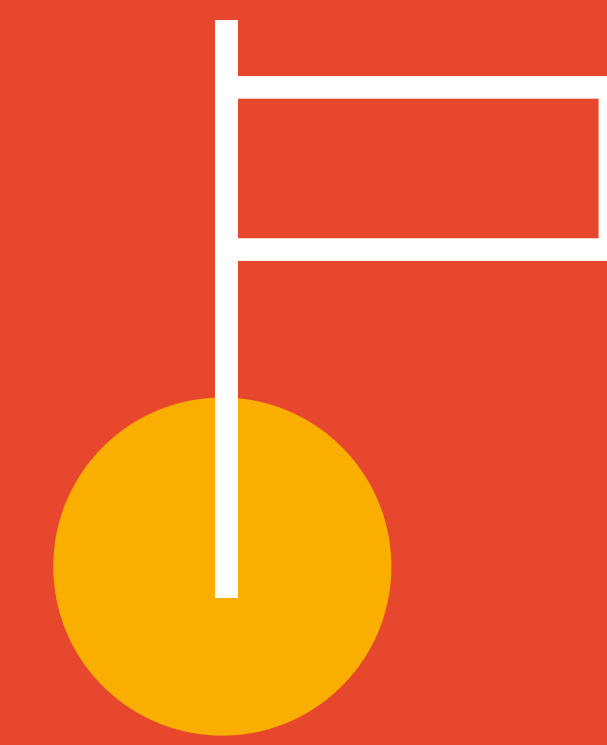
Background

Social Change Initiative (SCI) is an international NGO, based in Belfast. We work to improve the effectiveness of activism for social change, especially in the areas of peace building, migration, equality and human rights. Our work has included using attitude surveys to help civil society to explore perspectives on social issues, notably migration.

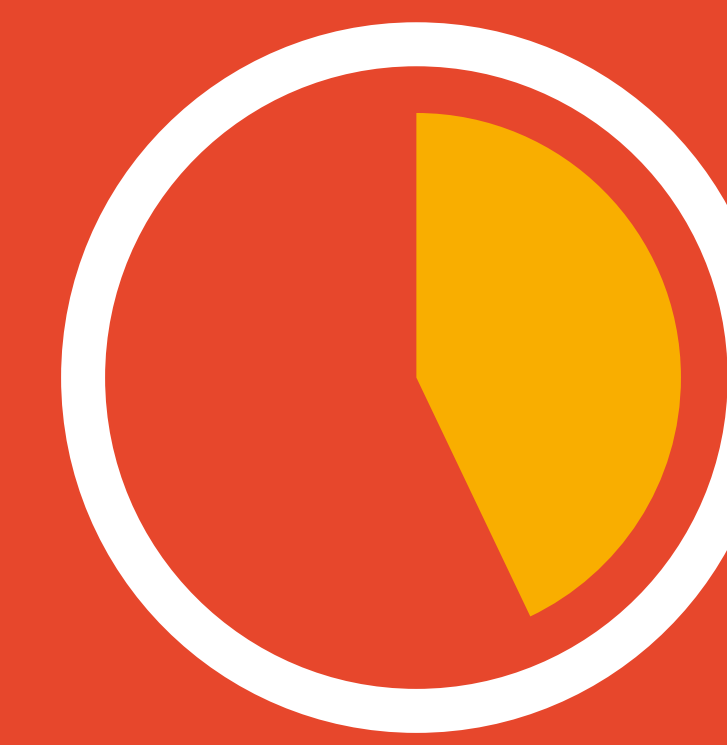
In this 25th anniversary year of the Belfast-Good Friday Peace Agreement, SCI has come together with The Policy Institute at Kings College London and several co-funders to support the inclusion of NI in the World Values Survey (WVS) for the first time.

The WVS is the world's largest and most widely used international social survey, devoted to the study of people's social, political, economic, religious and cultural values. NI results from this latest wave (Wave 7) can be combined with data from the European Values Survey (EVS), in which NI participated several times beginning in 1981, to provide rich insights into people's values and attitudes in NI over time.

Political, social and economic progress in NI has been mixed in the last 25 years:



There has been relative peace since 1998 and a sustained reduction in political violence, but community division and social segregation persists, and issues that threaten constitutional, cultural and political positions (notably Brexit) have created significant tension and political instability.



There has been a lack of political continuity – the NI Assembly has been collapsed for 40% of its existence - restricting opportunity for effective policymaking and public service reform.



There are persistent social and economic challenges – poverty, educational underachievement and economic inactivity - and a failure to close the gaps between the best and worst off in NI.



The '2 communities' perspective fails to reflect the growing diversity of the NI population - 6.5% of people in NI (or their parents) were born elsewhere (Census 2021) compared with 1.8% in 2011, and a growing number of people identify as neither Catholic / Nationalist / Republican nor Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist.

For SCI, having quality data from the World Values Survey about Northern Ireland provides an opportunity to broaden the public discourse beyond potentially binary constructs towards something more focused on the values people hold and want to see reflected in political arrangements. We believe it might help to shift from a focus on positions and inform a richer conversation about the kind of future people want.

This Report

This is SCI's first report using WVS data; it sets out key trends and insights over time and analysis of the 'here and now'. The report asks how have we changed, what attitudes and issues are concerning us now and what this tells us about the future.

We are grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with The Policy Institute (lead partner for WVS in the UK) and for the support of the co-funders of the NI fieldwork (The Community Foundation Northern Ireland, Unbound Philanthropy, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Northern Ireland Office). Thanks also go to Professor Colin Knox for support with additional analysis specific to NI.

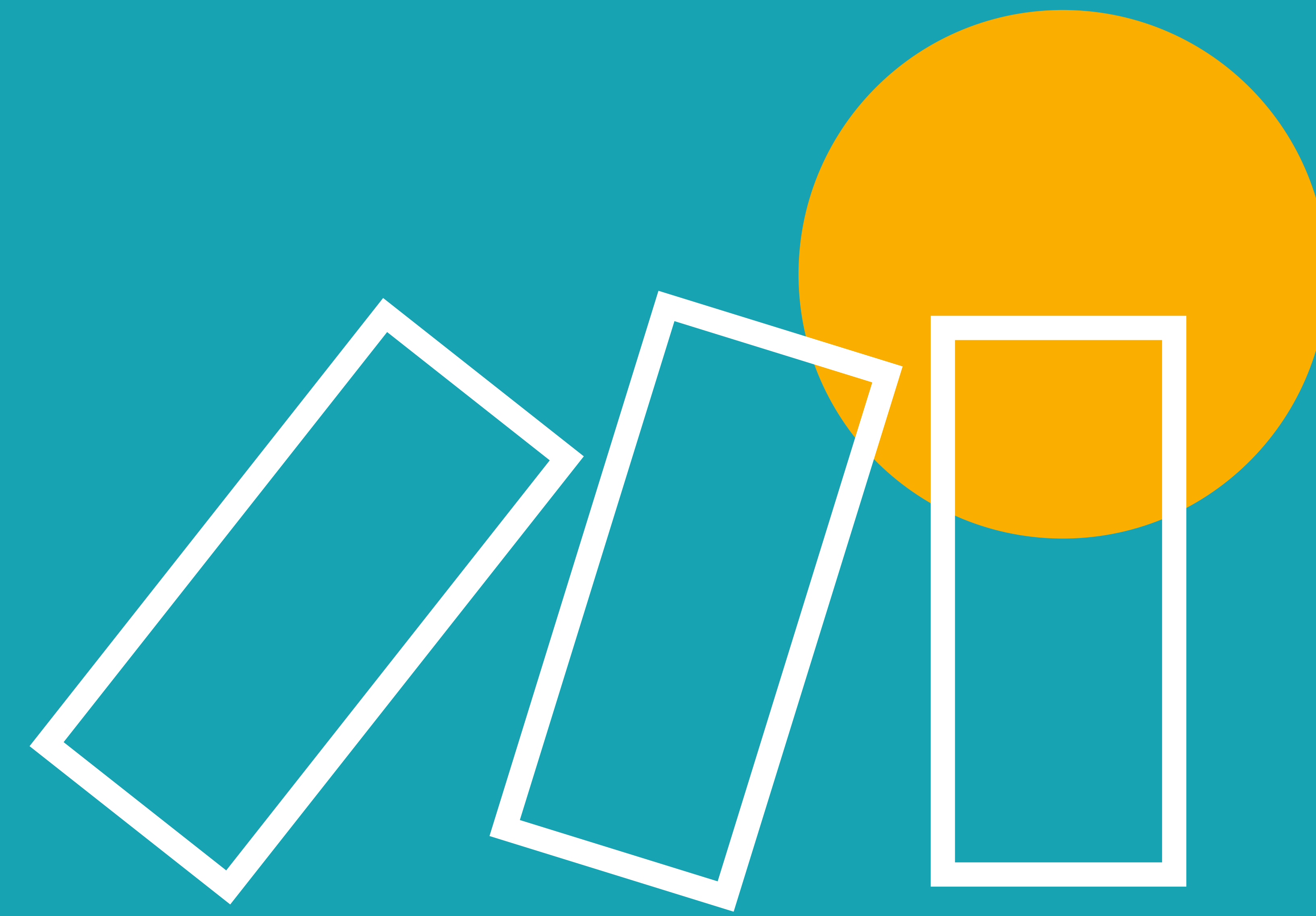


Although this is the first time WVS fieldwork has taken place in NI, the previous involvement in the EVS, which has a 50% overlap in questions with WVS, allows for comparisons over time. We also include comparisons with GB and other countries taking part in WVS Wave 7. Unfortunately, there is limited scope for comparison with Ireland as it has not participated in WVS to date and its most recent EVS data is from 2008. We have made some references to findings from the most recent European Social Survey in Ireland in 2022, though direct comparisons cannot be drawn. This is something which it would be great to remedy in the future.

Full technical details can be found at the end of the report.

SCI will issue further data and insights, looking in more depth at what the results tell us about shared values and consensus among NI communities, as opposed to the usual analysis by community background or constitutional position.





How Values and Attitudes Have Shifted

Key Trends: After 25 years of peace in NI, what can we say about our changing values?

- Our social attitudes have shifted – the NI public has become much more open on key social issues (such as abortion, divorce, homosexuality, euthanasia) and we rank among the most socially liberal nations internationally. In common with many other countries, young people in NI are more liberal than older people on many of these social issues.
- Overall, we have become more comfortable with many groups of people seen as ‘different’ or historically marginalised. For example, the levels of homophobia and xenophobia, assessed in terms of those we would be comfortable having as neighbours, have decreased. This does not extend to all groups though as we have become much more uncomfortable living next to people with social problems, namely heavy drinkers and drug users.
- This increasing social liberalisation may be linked to NI having become a more secular society. While religion is still an important facet of life (more so than in neighbouring places), it matters less to the NI public, and religiosity is limited to half the population.

People now see politics as having equal importance in their lives as religion. However, neither politics nor religion matter nearly as much to people’s lives as family, friends, leisure and work.

- Despite our history of division, people in NI remain much more likely to think that other people can be trusted than those surveyed in many other countries, and we are particularly trusting of people in our own neighbourhoods.
- NI has also become more open to workers from abroad, even when jobs are scarce, and many people favour open immigration policies. However, relative to other UK nations, a larger share of the NI public are in favour of stricter limits on immigration.



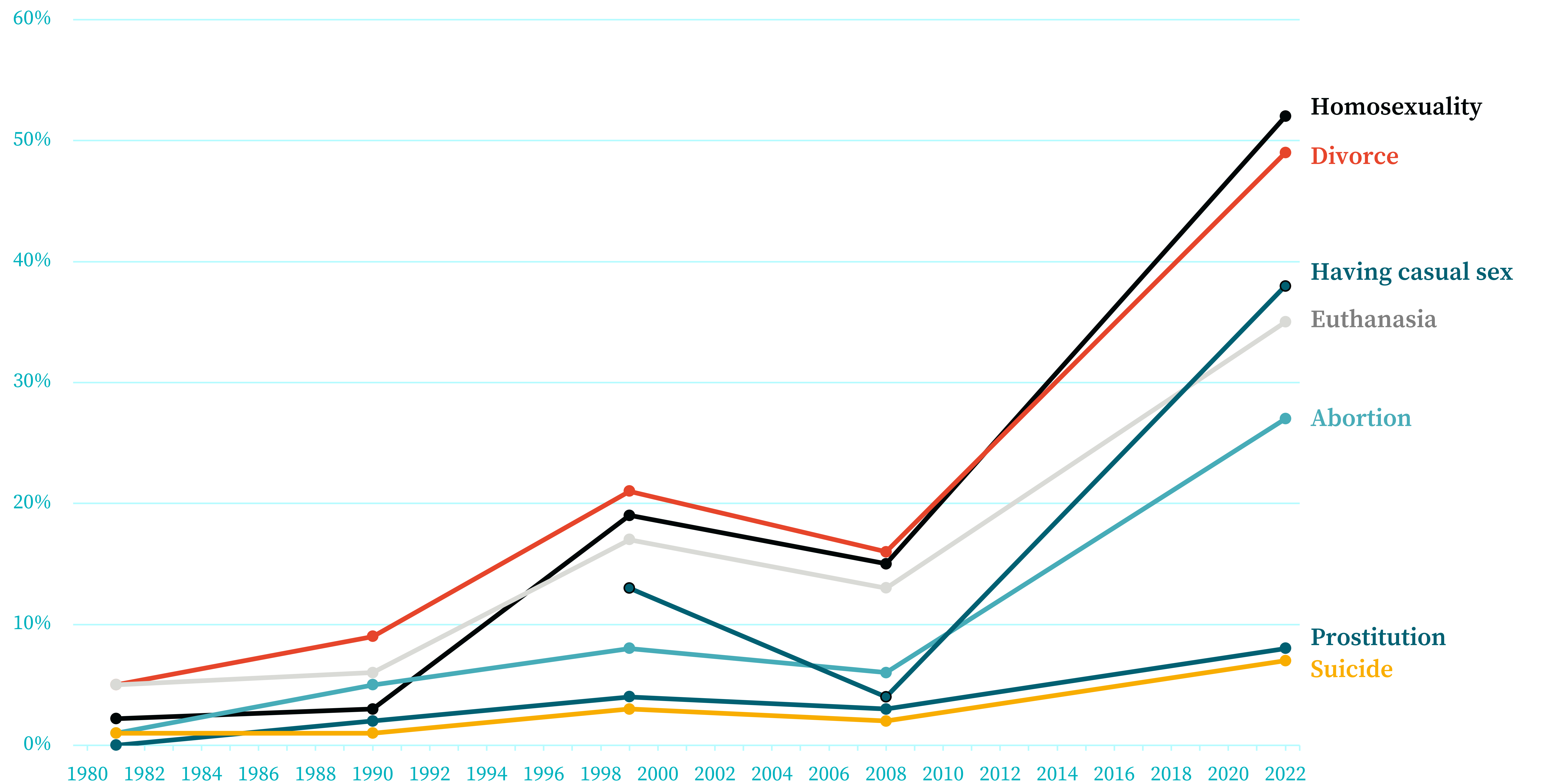
The public in Northern Ireland has become more socially liberal over the last four decades

NI has seen big changes in many social attitudes over the last four decades, with the general trend towards increasingly liberal views, and an acceleration of that change over the last 25 years.

Notable shifts include the share of the public in NI who think homosexuality is justifiable, which has more than doubled between 1999 and 2022 (from 19% to 52%) and the proportion thinking divorce is justifiable has doubled (from 21% to 49%).

Recently released data from the 2021 Northern Ireland Census illustrates the changing context within which this attitude shift has occurred. It reported there are more than 90,000 divorced adults in NI in 2021, compared with only 3,000 in 1971, and included figures on sexuality for the first time. Some 31,616 people aged 16 and over (2.1%) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other sexual orientation.

Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between (% of NI public who say justifiable)*



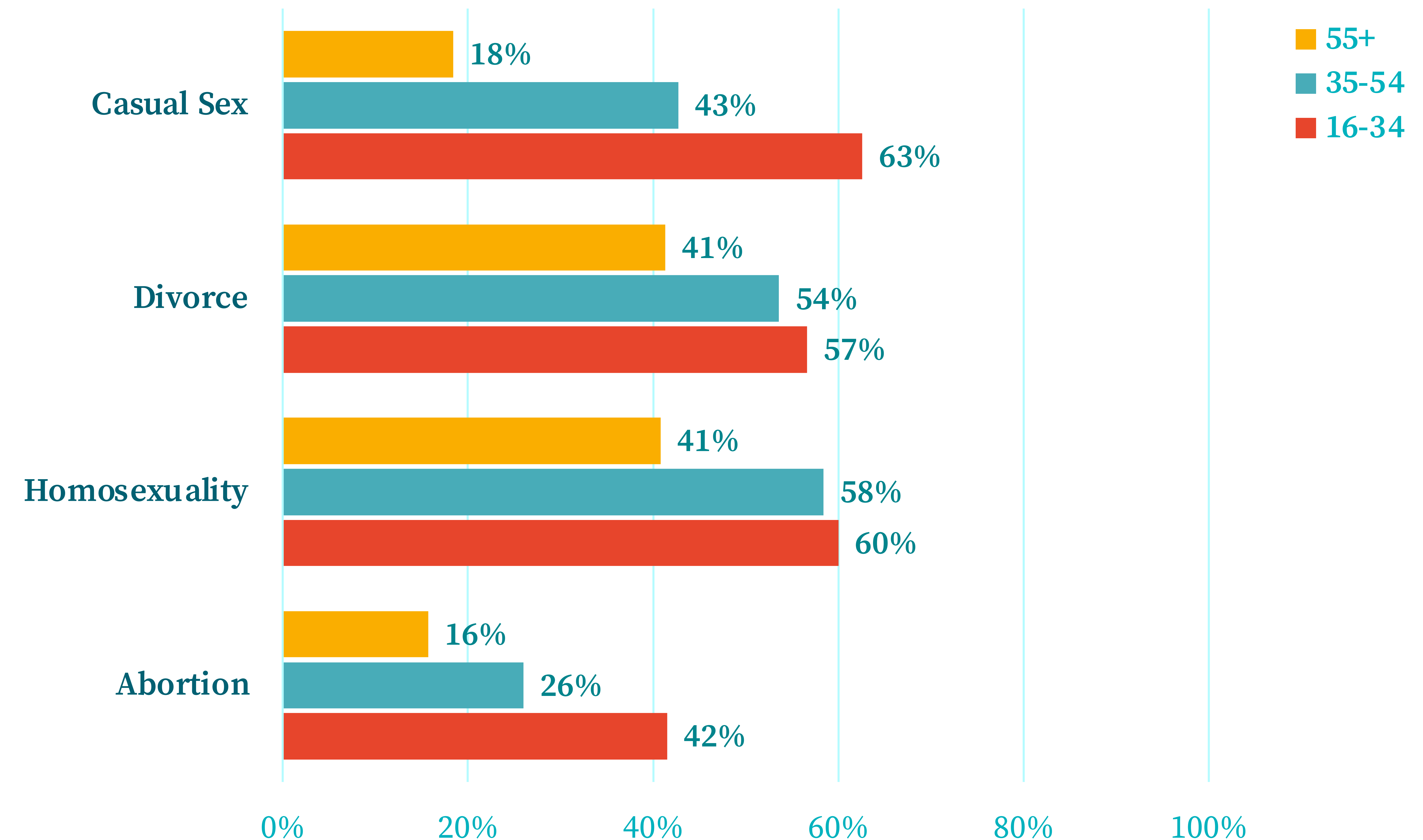
*Responses given on a scale where 1 = never justifiable and 10 = always justifiable. 8-10 counted as "justifiable" and 1-3 counted as "not justifiable" Base: minimum of 304 people aged 18+ surveyed in Northern Ireland per year. See Technical Details for sample information

Younger people are generally more accepting than older age groups - in NI and other places

Young people in NI are more socially liberal, with significantly higher levels of support than older age groups for abortion, homosexuality, divorce and casual sex.

This is the case internationally - analysis of 63 WVS participating countries finds that young people are generally more liberal on moral standards than the general population, wherever you are in the world.

Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between (% of NI Public who say justifiable)*



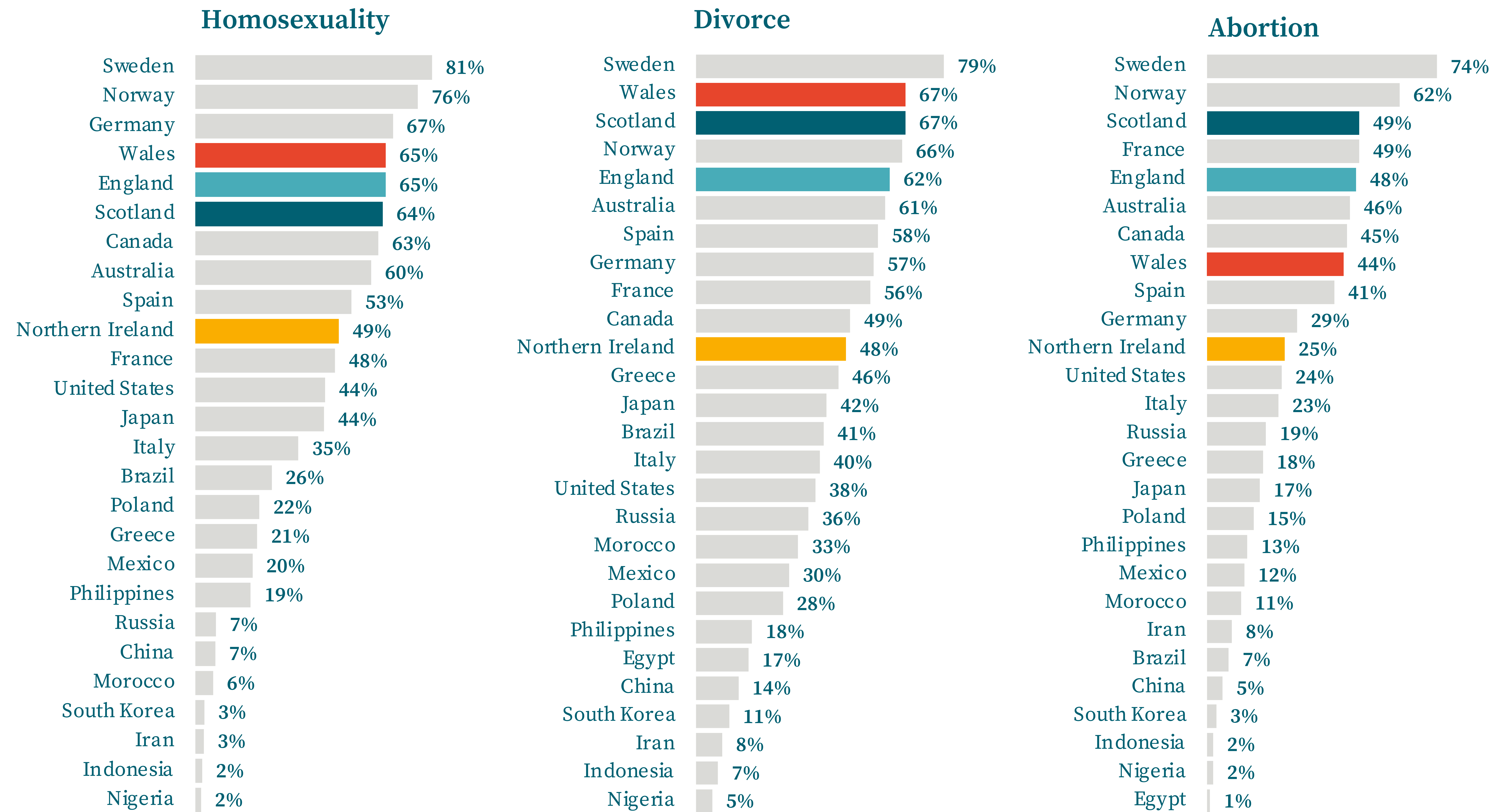
*Responses given on a scale where 1 = never justifiable and 10 = always justifiable. 8-10 counted as "justifiable" and 1-3 counted as "not justifiable" Base: 446 people in NI aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar-9 Sept 2022. See Technical Details for sample information.

The UK is now among the most socially liberal places, though NI is relatively less accepting than England, Scotland and Wales

Looking internationally, the UK now ranks among the most socially liberal places on a number of these issues.

However, within the UK, Northern Ireland stands out as less accepting compared with England, Scotland and Wales, illustrated in the relatively lower acceptance in NI of homosexuality, divorce and abortion. The higher degree of social conservatism in NI appears to be driven by the more traditional views held by people in older age groups who are also more likely to report being religious (see page 16).

Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between (% who say justifiable)*



*Responses given on a scale where 1 = never justifiable and 10 = always justifiable. 8-10 counted as "justifiable" and 1-3 counted as "not justifiable". 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 Technical Details for sample information.

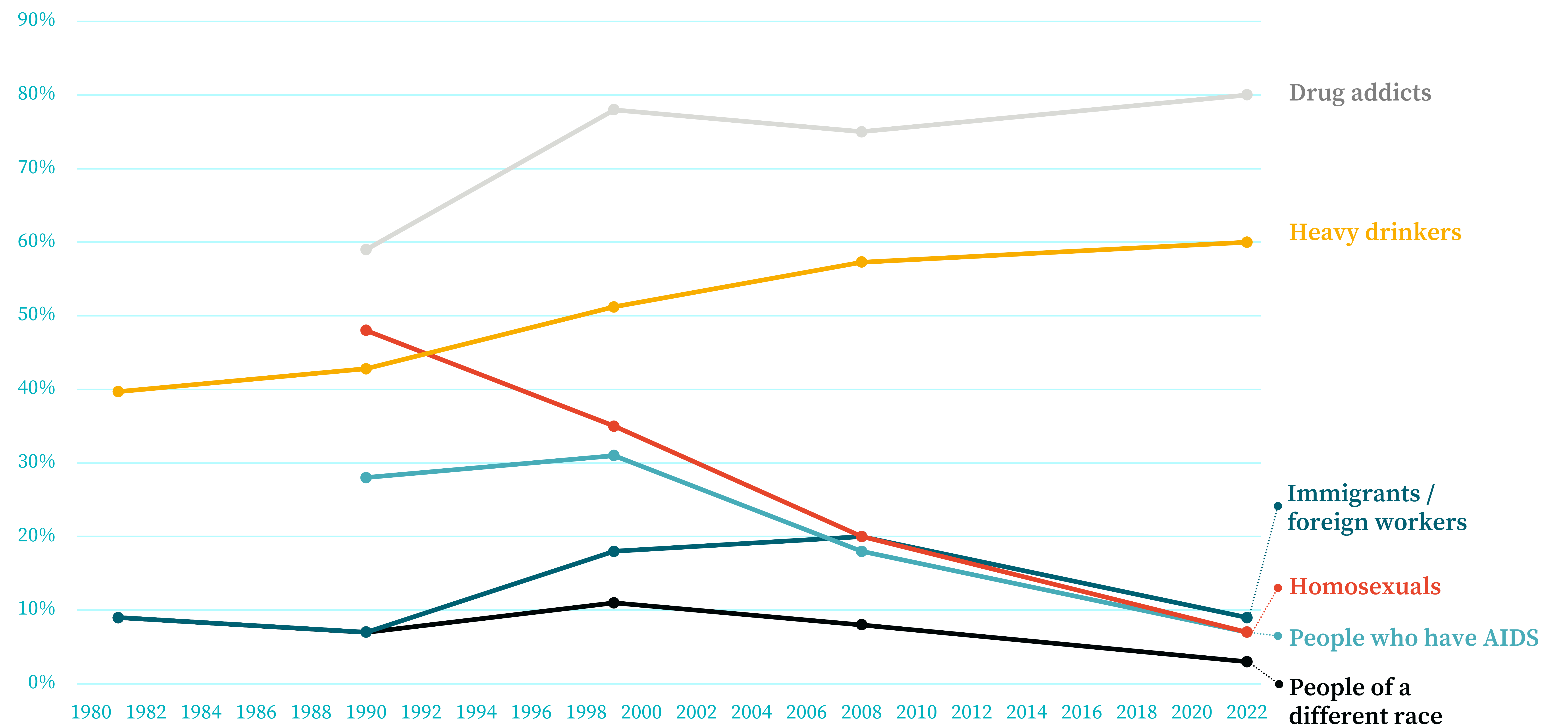
People have become more comfortable living next door to those who are different or stigmatised, but more uncomfortable living next door to those living with substance abuse

The increasing liberalisation of social attitudes in NI is reflected in changing views of who people would not like to have as neighbours. The public is now much more comfortable with some – but not all – historically marginalised groups.

For example, homophobia and xenophobia have decreased in NI - 35% did not want homosexuals as neighbours in 1999, dropping to 7% in 2022. For immigrants/ foreign workers, 18% did not want them as neighbours in 1999, dropping to 9% in 2022 and those saying they did not want people of a different race as neighbours dropped from 11% to 3% in the same period.

However, this increasing tolerance does not extend to those who drink alcohol or use drugs frequently, perhaps due to fear of how that may impact on their neighbourhoods. In 2022, 80% of the public said they would not like to have drug addicts as neighbours – far higher than the 59% who said the same when this question was introduced in 1990. And the proportion who say they'd rather not live next to heavy drinkers is also now higher than it was when trends began, rising from 40% in 1981 to 57% in 2008 and remaining at a similar level (60%) in 2022.

On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbors? (% of NI public who mention group)*



*Responses given on a scale where 1 = mentioned and 0 = not mentioned. Base: minimum of 304 people aged 18+ surveyed in Northern Ireland per year. See Technical Details for sample information.

NI has become a more secular society – politics is as important as religion but neither matter as much as family, friends, leisure and work

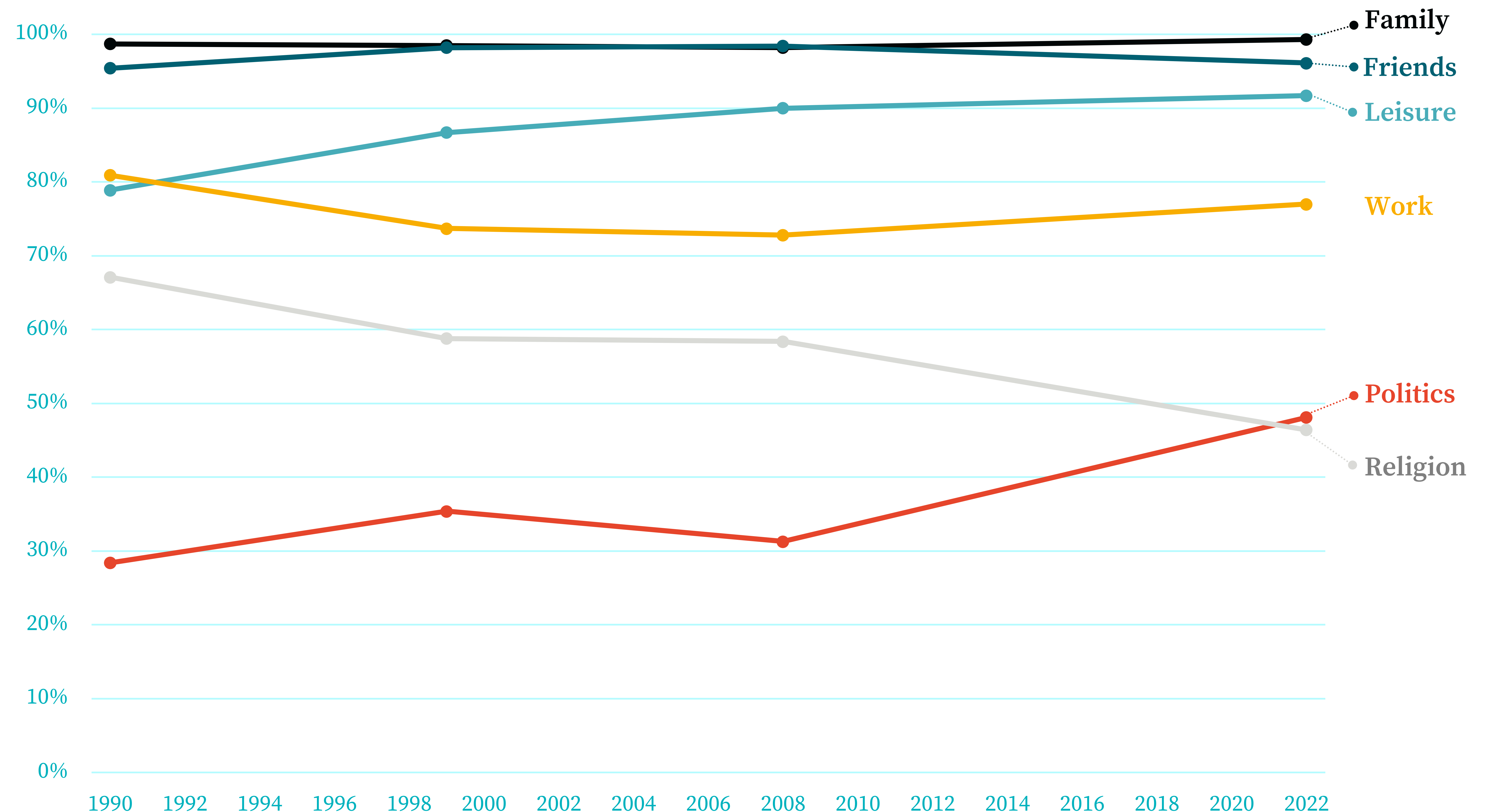
The degree to which religion is viewed as important in people’s lives has decreased in NI over the last 25 years, though it remains more important here than in other parts of the UK - 47% people in NI view religion as very or rather important in their lives vs 31% in Scotland, 30% in England and 27% in Wales.

Almost a third (32%) see God as having ‘no’ or ‘limited importance’ in their lives and there has been a significant drop in the share self-classifying as ‘a religious person’ - 51% in 2022. Younger people are much less likely to report being ‘a religious person’ than those in older generations - 33% of 16-34s say they are religious vs 48% 35-54s and 62% of 55+). Declining religiosity may be related to the increasing social liberalisation described above.

A similar trend is evident in Ireland – the 2022 European Social Survey finds the share who report belonging to any religion or denomination stands at 65%, down from 81% in 2002. Despite this decline, Ireland remains a more religious country than most Western European participants in ESS.

Meanwhile, in NI the importance of politics to people’s lives has steadily increased since 1990, and politics is now deemed as important as religion. However, despite the focus on politics and religion here, neither matter nearly as much to people’s lives as family, friends, leisure and work.

For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life.
(% of NI public who indicate very important or rather important)*



*Base: minimum of 304 people aged 18+ surveyed in Northern Ireland per year. See Technical Details for sample information.

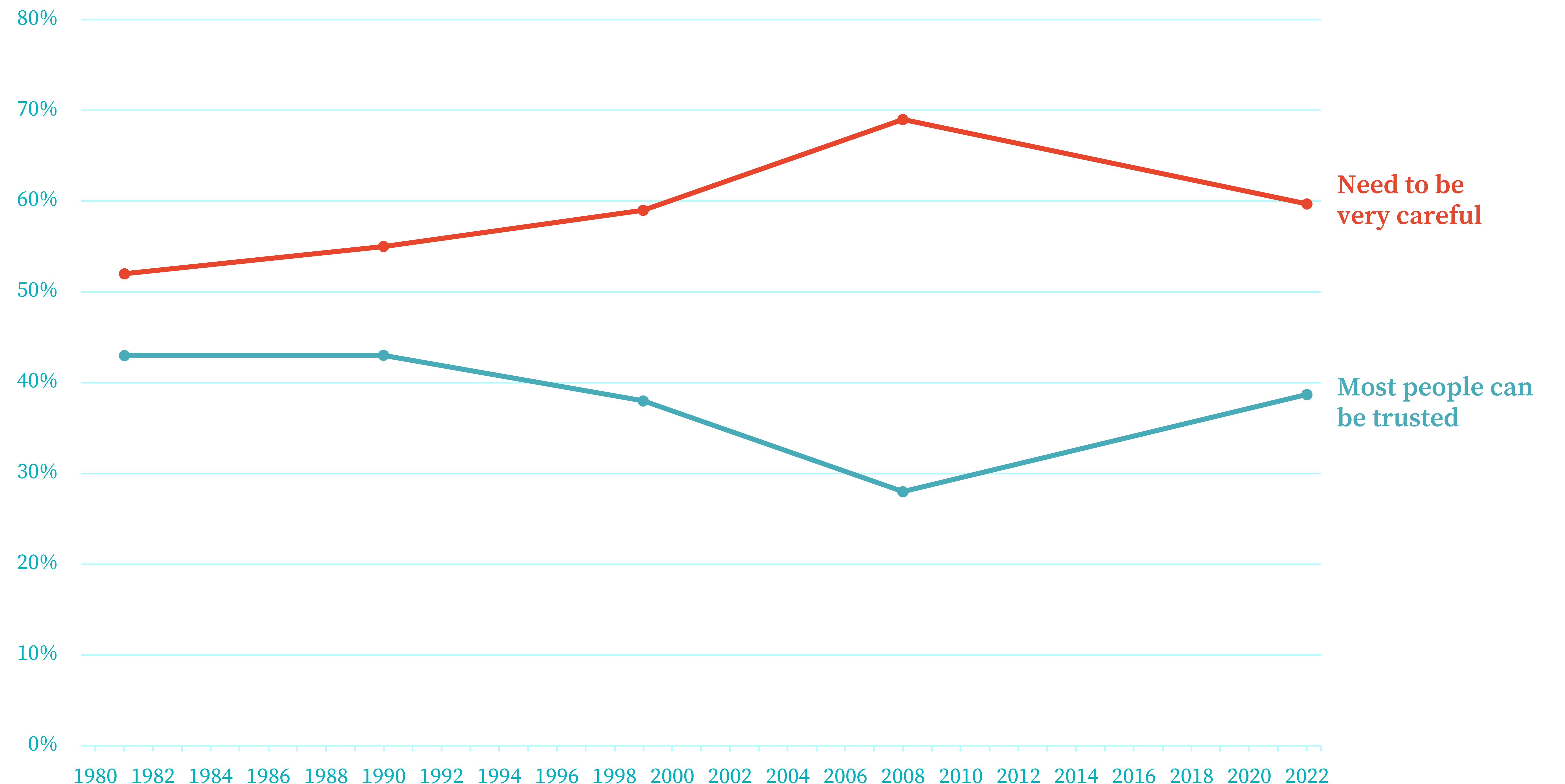
Levels of social trust are higher in NI than in many other countries – we are particularly likely to trust people in our own neighbourhoods

Respondents were asked if, in general, ‘most people can be trusted’ - some 39% in NI agreed and 60% feel they ‘need to be very careful’. This measure of trust had dipped in 2008 (around the time of the Great Recession) but has now recovered to previous levels.

People in NI are slightly less likely than people in Wales, England and Scotland to say that most people can be trusted but, despite our history of division, this difference is very small – the UK average is 46%. Looking internationally at WVS participating countries, the NI levels of social trust are high, with only Norway, China and Sweden ranking far higher against this measure.

When considering ‘people that you know’ and ‘people in one’s own neighbourhood’, trust levels are even higher (98% and 90% respectively). The UK has some of the highest levels of neighbourhood trust internationally and people in NI are more likely than those in England (84%), Scotland (81%) or Wales (81%) to trust those in their neighbourhood. The highly segregated nature of housing in NI may be a contributing factor, with the dominance of neighbourhoods populated by people with a similar background.

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

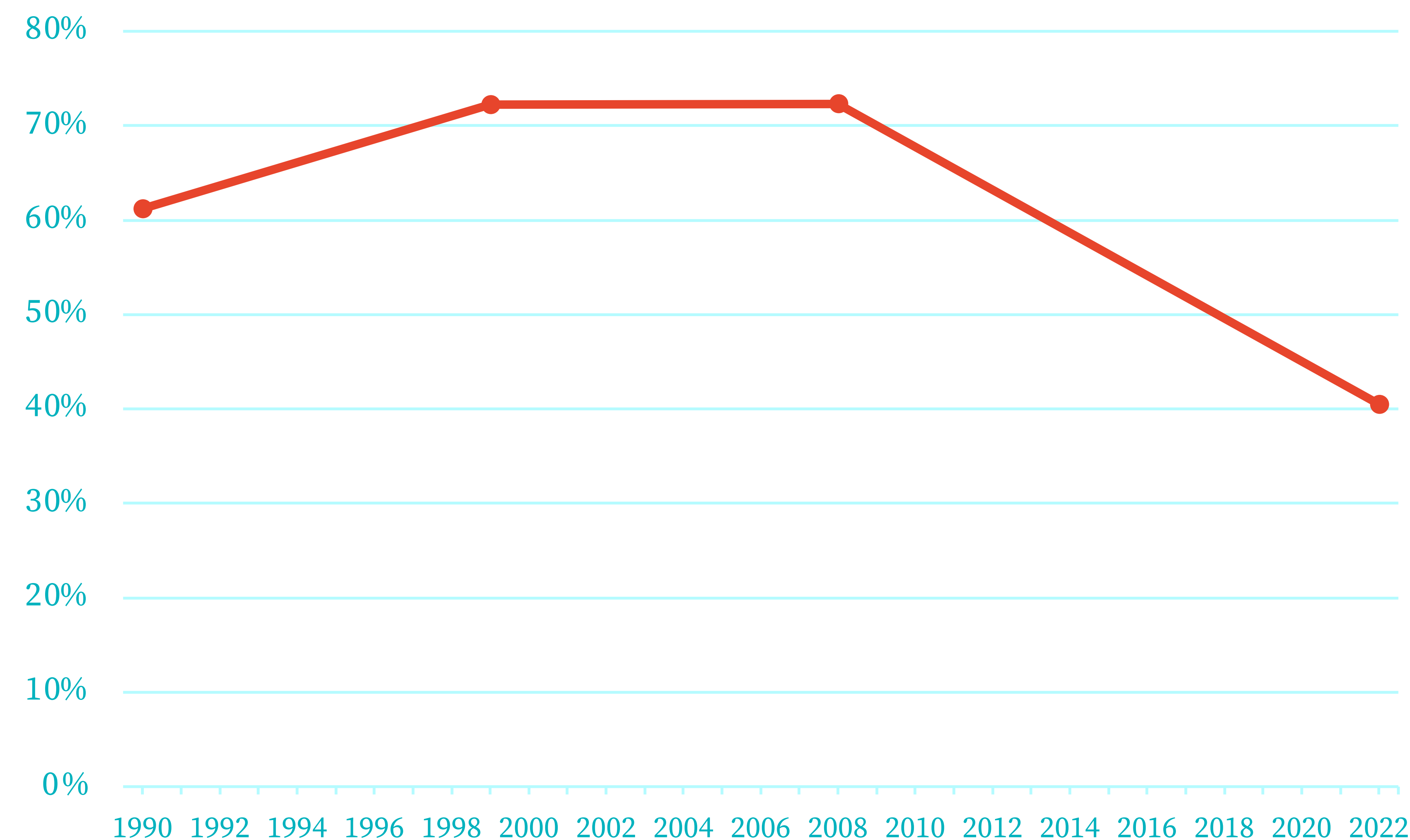


*Base: minimum of 304 people aged 18+ surveyed in Northern Ireland per year. See Technical Details for sample information.

Northern Ireland has become increasingly more open to workers from abroad, even when jobs are scarce

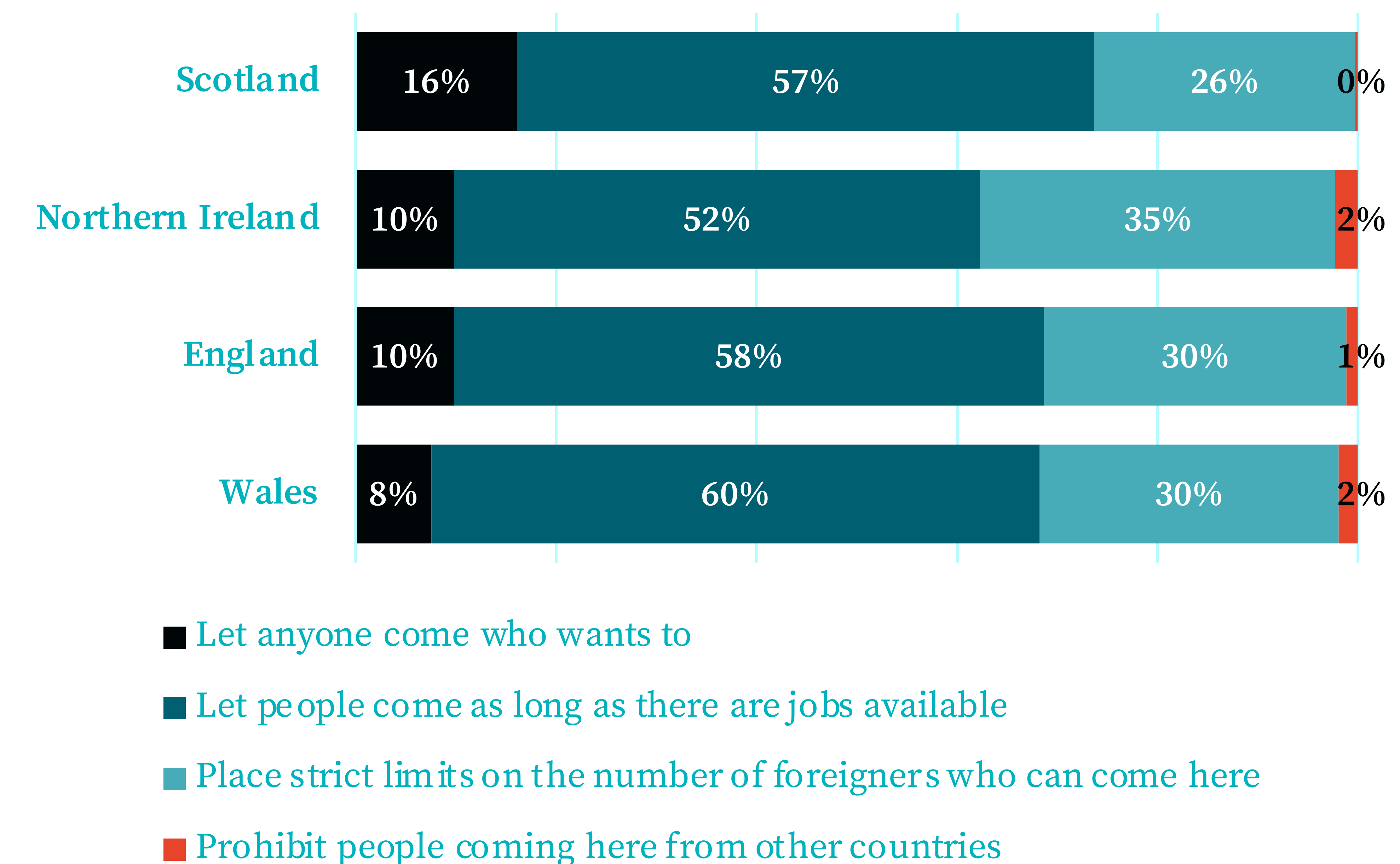
The share of NI respondents who think that when jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants has dropped dramatically since 1999, from 72% to 41% 2022. Just under two-thirds (62%) favour more open immigration policies, while just over a third (37%) prefer stricter limits on migration. The latter view is held by a greater share of people in NI than in other UK 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 (% of NI public who strongly agree/agree)*

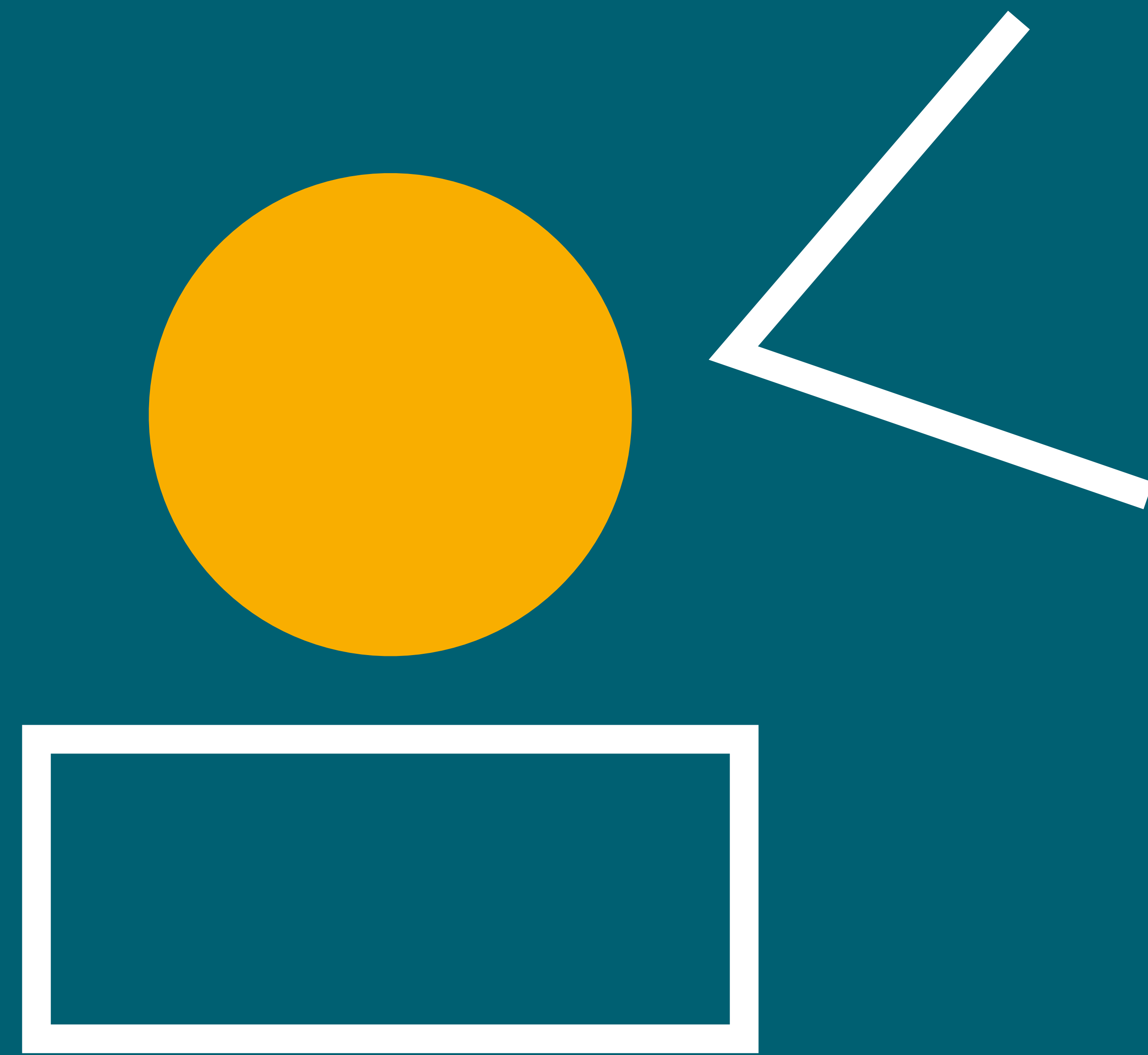


*Base: minimum of 304 people aged 18+ surveyed in Northern Ireland per year. See WVSA website for sample information.

How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do? (% public selecting each option)*



*Base: 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. See Technical Details for sample information.



Our Current Attitudes and Concerns

What are our Current Concerns?

- Confidence and trust in all government institutions and the press are at worryingly low levels in NI. People have much higher levels of trust in civil society organisations such as universities, women's organisations, NGOs, trade unions and churches.
- **On the whole, the NI public are strongly in favour of democracy. Support is generally low for any alternative systems of governance, though, a growing share of people approve of having experts, rather than government, making decisions. Younger people are somewhat less likely to favour a democratic political system and more likely to express support for alternatives.**
- The vast majority of people in NI reject terrorism as a means of advancing political, ideological or religious ends.
- While the NI public support democracy as a political system, they are highly dissatisfied with the way politics is working in practice – much more so than in many western European countries including GB.

- Identity is complex in NI, often focusing on national identities and political parties supported. Looking at the less often considered 'left-right' political spectrum reveals that the majority in NI are centrist, with only around 1 in 5 identifying themselves as being on the far-left (more likely among young people and Catholics) or far-right (more likely among Protestants).
- Despite our history of division, there is limited evidence from the survey of widespread political polarisation (i.e. strong negative feelings about the 'opposing' party or political group).
- Since the Brexit referendum, there is continued regret about the UK having left the EU and there are mixed views on the possibility of NI leaving the UK.

Confidence is low in all forms of government institutions and the press, but higher in universities and NGOs

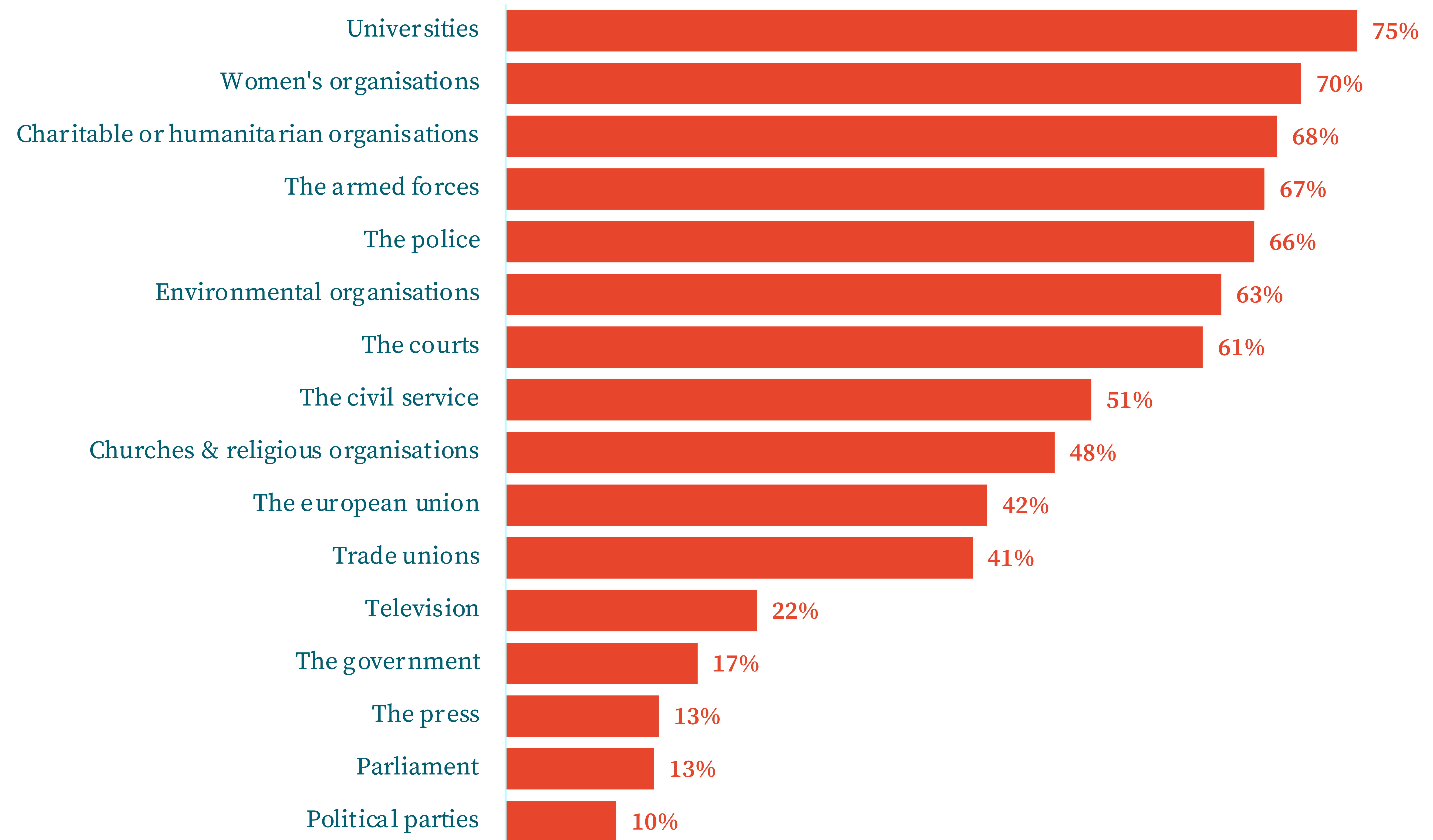
Levels of trust in all government institutions are low in NI. By international standards, the UK public have little confidence in their political institutions and NI stands out as having the lowest confidence in the government, political parties and parliament.

This finding is echoed in the recent [NILife and Times Survey](#), which found low levels of trust in the NI Executive (17%), the UK Government (21%) and the Irish Government (28%), but higher trust in the NI Civil Service (41%) and the EU (37%). The 2022 wave of the European Social Survey reveals similar low levels of trust in political institutions in Ireland, with the share having a high level of trust or complete trust in the parliament being 26%, in politicians 15% and in political parties 13%.

The WVS also reveals limited confidence in the press in NI and the UK as a whole, putting it among the very lowest ranking internationally. Confidence in the press is more than twice as high in Germany (36%), Spain (33%), France and the US (both 30%).

The degree of confidence in non-government institutions such as universities, women's organisations and charitable / humanitarian organisations is much higher in NI than it is in government institutions.

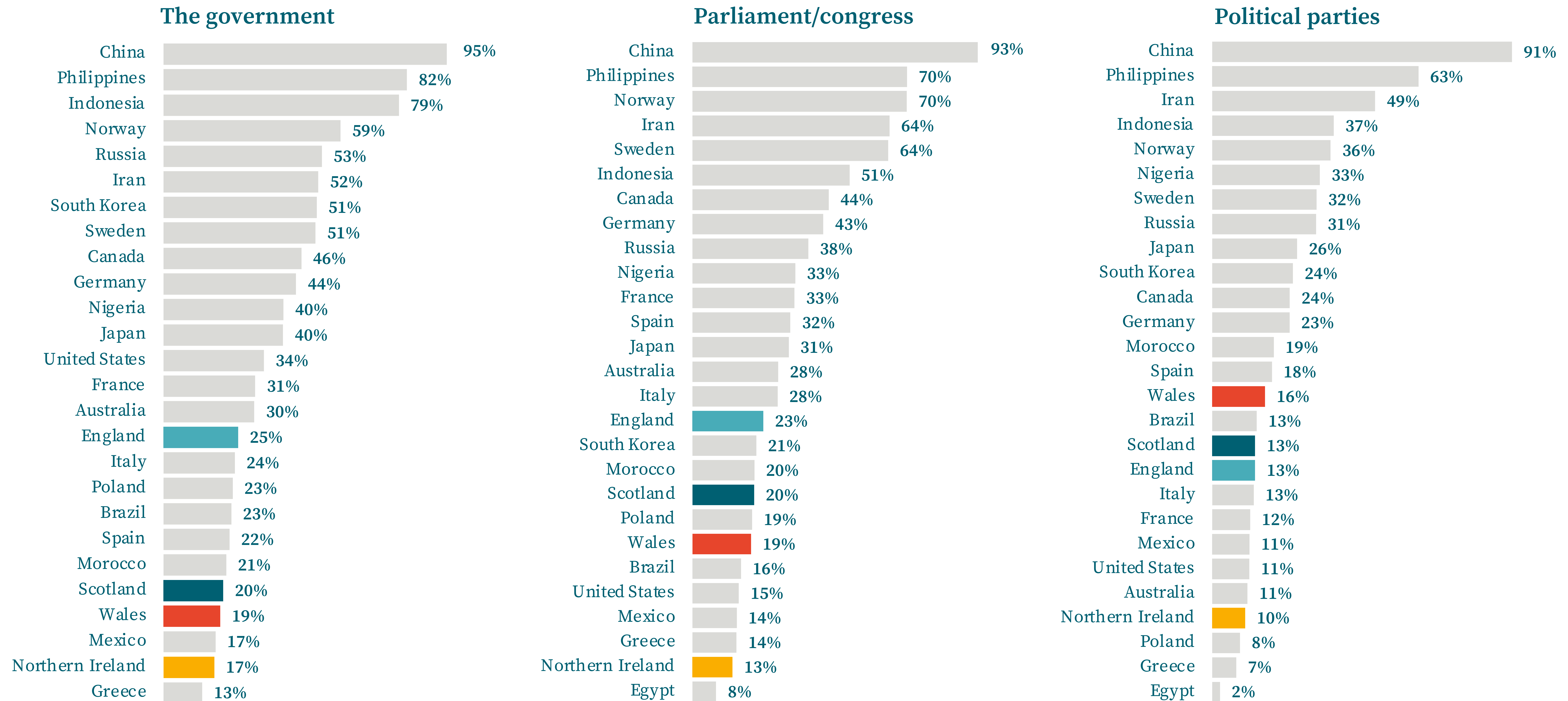
I am going to name a number of organisations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?
(% who say a great deal/quite a lot of confidence in Northern Ireland)*



*Base: 446 people in NI aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar-9 Sept 2022.
See Technical Details for sample information.

Northern Ireland stands out internationally as having less confidence in its political institutions

Below is a list of organisations. For each one, please indicate how much confidence you have in them (% who say a great deal/quite a lot)*



*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 WWSA website for sample information.

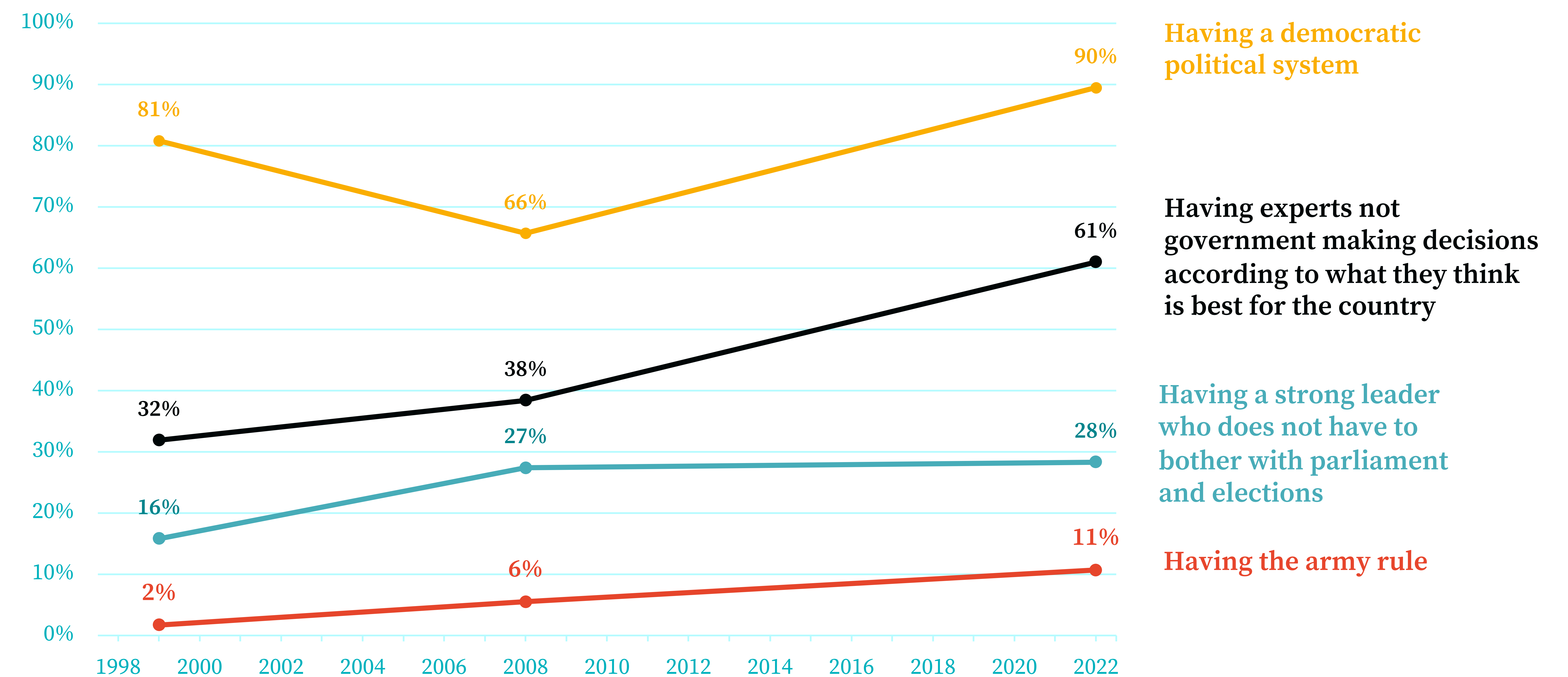
People in Northern Ireland think democracy is a good way of governing and the vast majority reject terrorism as a means of advancing political, ideological or religious ends

Most people in NI (90%) think democracy is a fairly or very good way of governing. The share who think democracy is a very good way of governing has grown (up to 65%) and the share who are unsure has dropped (only 4% responded Don't Know in 2022 compared with 20% in 2008). There is also considerable support for having experts, rather than government, making decisions (61% think this is a fairly or very good way to govern), perhaps connected to issues of confidence in the current political system. Support for other systems of governing is much lower – less than a third (28%) of people approve of having a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with parliament and elections and around a fifth (11%) in NI support army rule.

Younger people seem more disillusioned with a democratic political system - 78% of those aged 18-34 think democracy is a good way to govern and higher proportions support having a strong leader making decisions (36%) and army rule (17%).

The majority of respondents see terrorism for political, ideological or religious ends as never justifiable. Respondents aged 35 and over, who have lived experience of the conflict, are more likely to hold this view (96%) than younger respondents (87%). None of this suggests that younger people in Northern Ireland condone terrorism but rather that those who have lived through the conflict find it untenable as a means to further political, ideological or religious ends.

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country? (% who say very/fairly good in NI)*



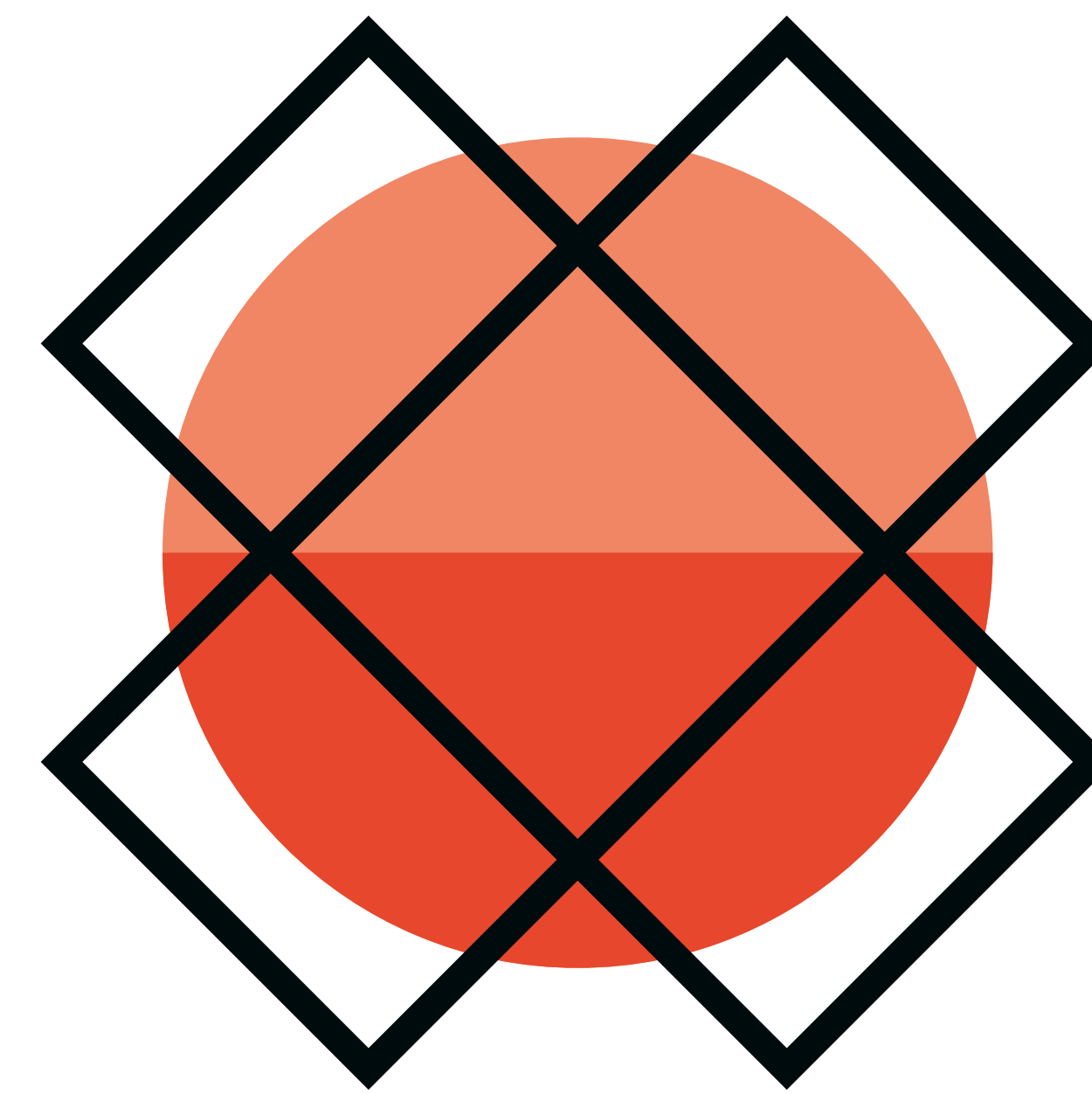
*Base: minimum of 304 people aged 18+ surveyed in Northern Ireland per year. See WVSA website for sample information.

People in NI are particularly dissatisfied with how the current political system is working

When it came to satisfaction in the political system in Northern Ireland, 56% said they were unsatisfied, 36% were neither fully satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 8% were satisfied. Looking internationally, NI has a much higher rate of dissatisfaction with the functioning of its political system than, for example, Germany (13%), Italy (33%), France (32%) and Greece (42%). NI is also by far the most dissatisfied when compared with England (30%) Scotland (37%) and Wales (28%).



51% WITHOUT A DEGREE NOT SATISFIED



65% WITH A DEGREE NOT SATISFIED

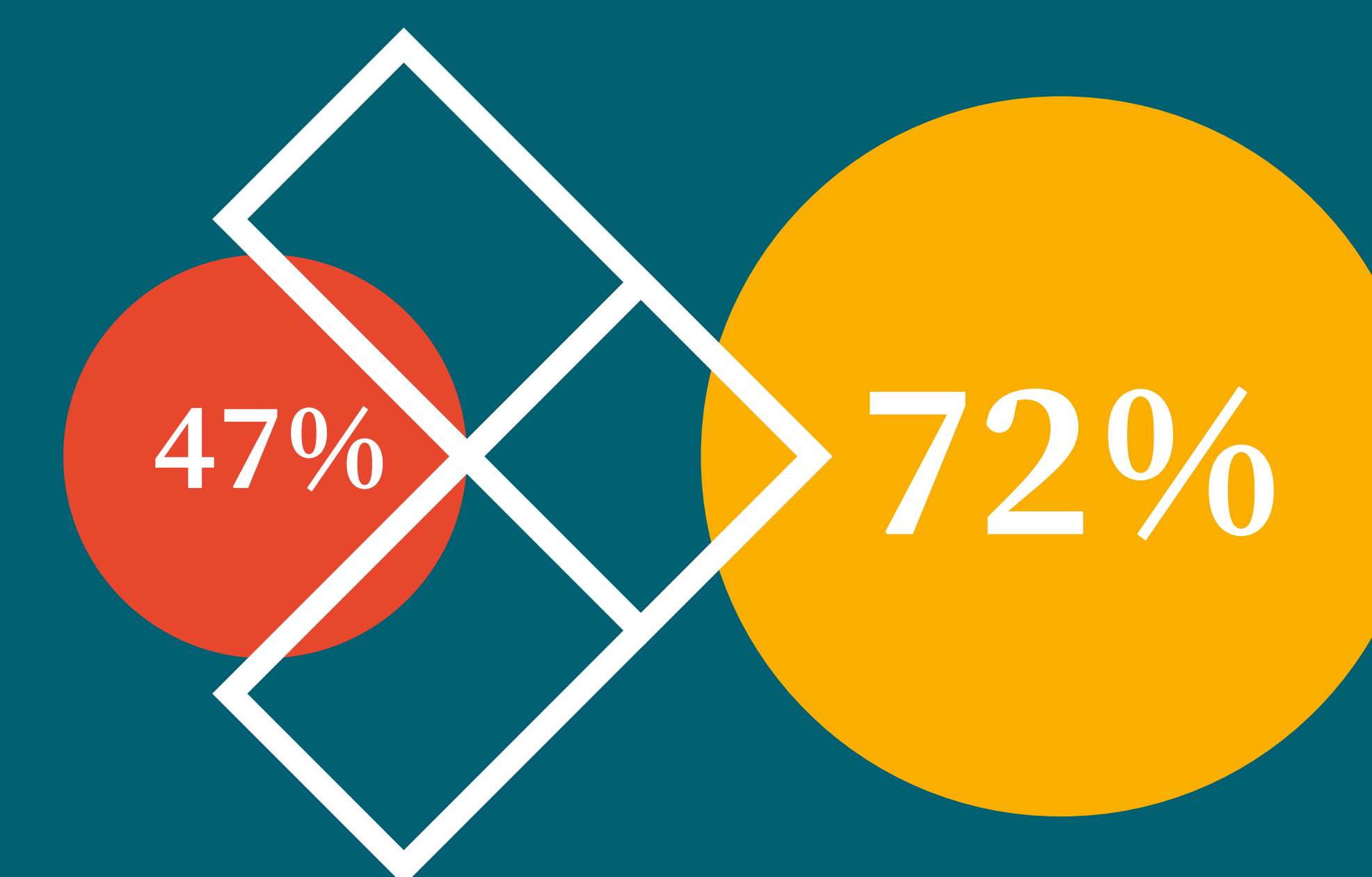
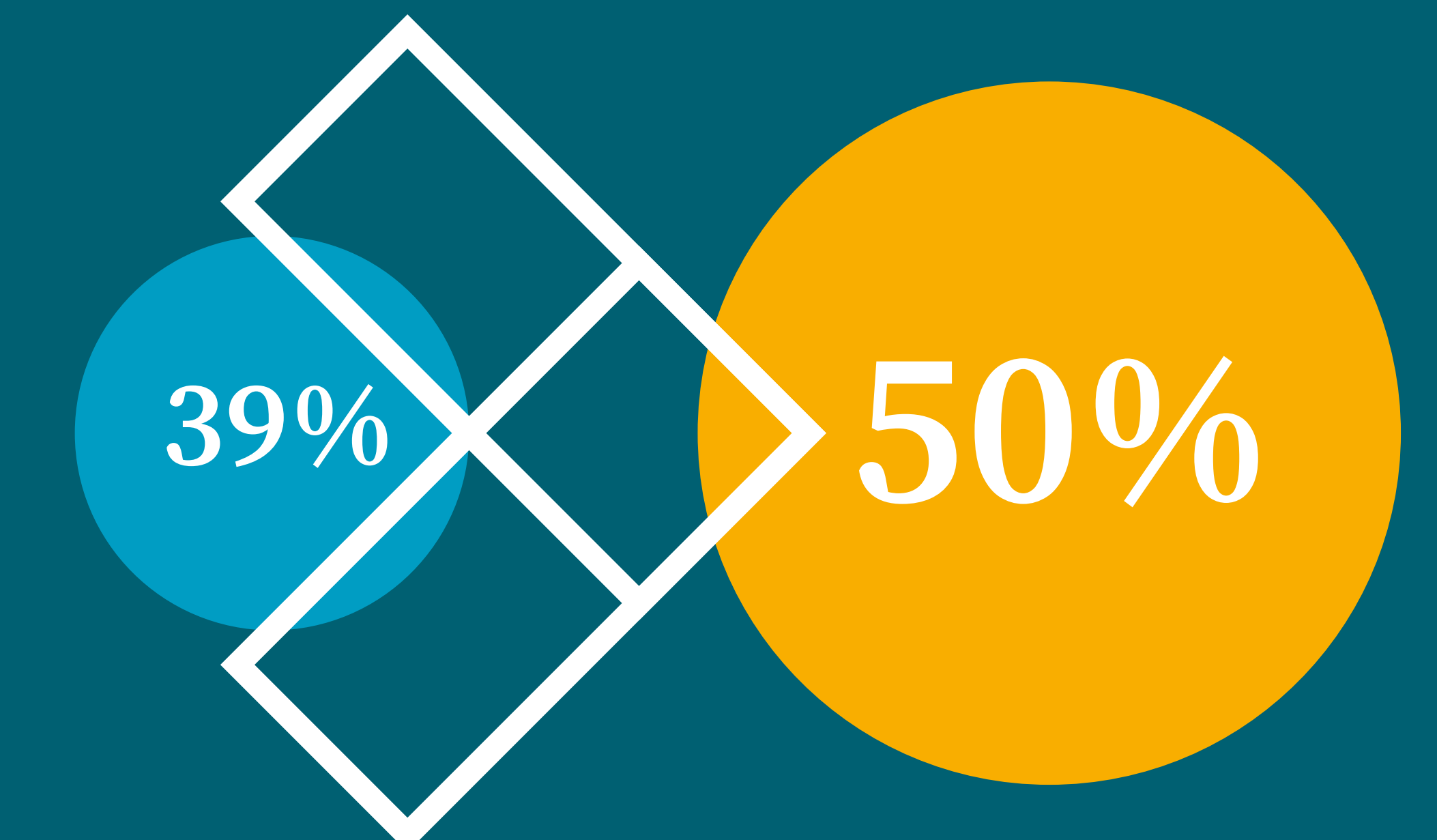
There is a relationship between satisfaction and religious denomination, with 64% with no denomination not satisfied compared to 58% of Catholics and 55% of Protestants. Education level was also important, with 51% without a university education dissatisfied compared to 65% with a degree or higher. There was no noticeable trend between age and political satisfaction.

There is however optimism in that the people of Northern Ireland believe in the democratic process as a way of political change:



There is evidence of support for, and participation in, the democratic process. Around 4 out of 5 people say they are electorally active, claiming that they 'always' or 'usually' voted in local (85%) and national (80%) elections.

Results show a significant increase in those interested in politics over time from 39% of those in 1999 who were 'very' or 'somewhat interested' rising to over 50% in 2022. Although the two surveys are not directly comparable, the 2022 European Social Survey in Ireland finds 41% report being 'very interested' or 'quite interested' in politics.



Concurrently, respondents have, over time, become more politically mobilised with an increase in those who 'participated in a peaceful demonstration' or 'might do so' increasing from 47% to 72% (1999 and 2022, respectively).

Most people in NI are ‘centrists’ on the political spectrum, with few on the far-left or far-right

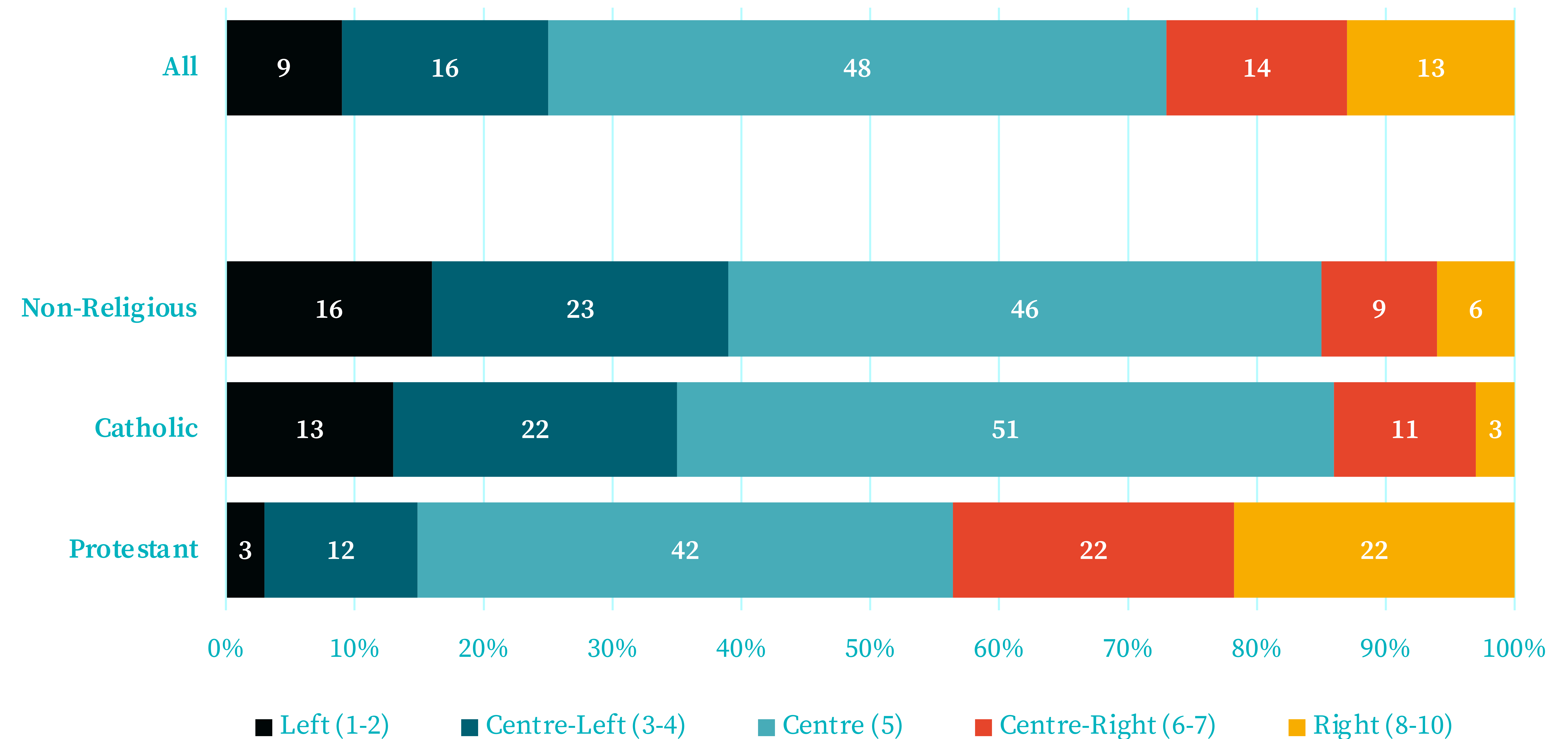
How people in Northern Ireland self-classify their identity is complex. The focus is often on national identities and political parties supported, while in reality the picture is becoming more plural with multiple minorities.

Traditional measures of ‘left-right’ political leanings are less discussed in NI. When it comes to these measures, the majority fall into the centre of the political spectrum: 48% put themselves in the centre, with another 30% either on the centre-left or centre-right.

There were significant differences by religious denomination. Non-religious respondents and Catholics were more likely to identify as left-wing compared to Protestants, while Protestants were more likely to identify as right-wing than were Catholics and Non-religious respondents.

There was also an association between position on the left-right political spectrum and age, with younger people most likely to identify as left-wing and older people most likely to identify as right wing.

In political matters, people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right’. How would you place your views on this scale generally speaking? (% All NI respondents / NI respondents by religion)*



*Responses given on numerical scale where 1 = Left and 10 = Right. Don't knows not shown. Other religions not reported due to low numbers. Base: 446 people in NI aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. See Technical Details for sample information.

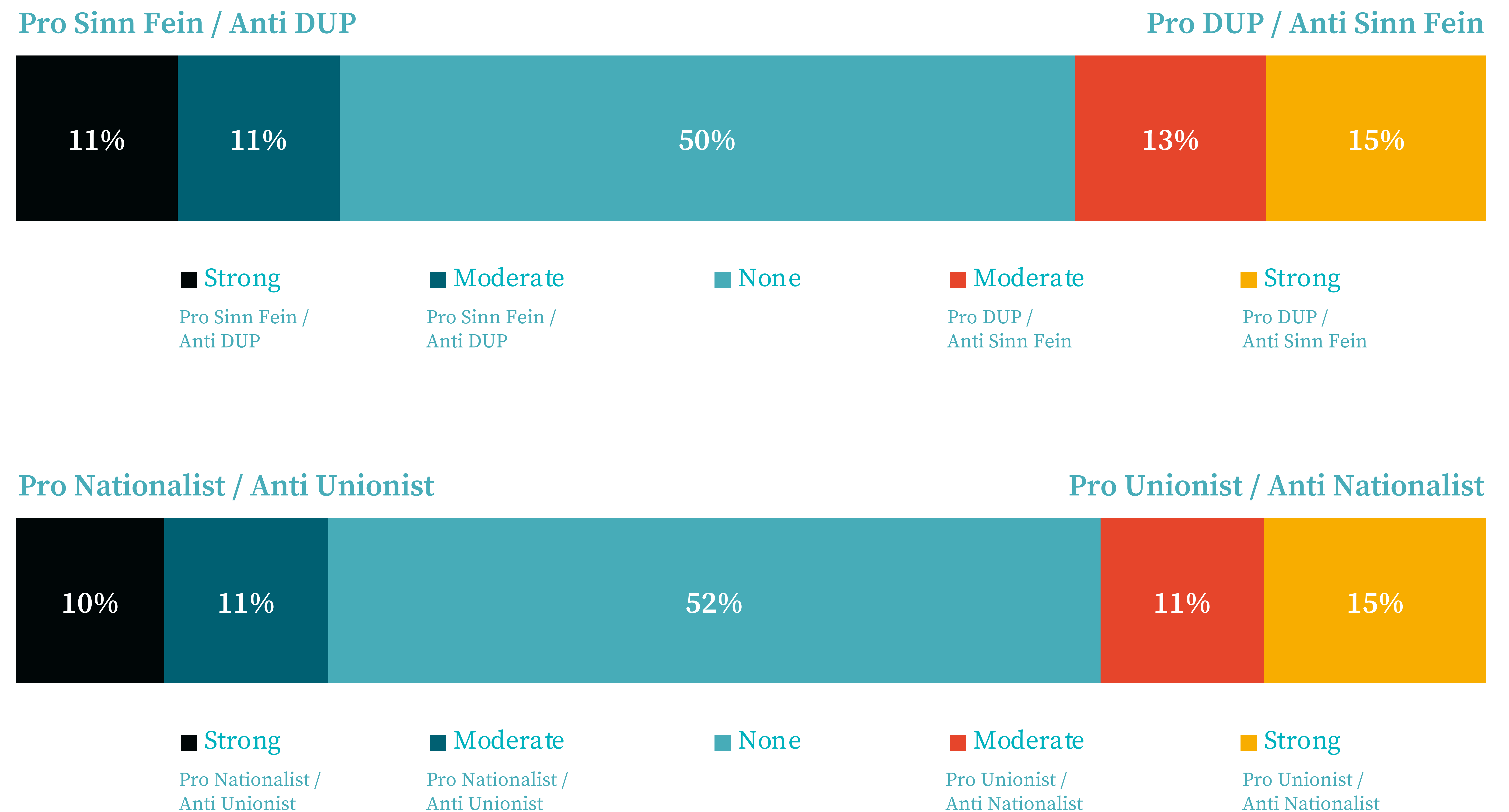
Despite the history of division, there is limited evidence of deep political polarisation in NI

Respondents in NI were asked a series of questions on how they feel about voters of the two main political parties in their country (DUP and Sinn Fein in NI) and the two political traditions (Nationalist and Unionist). These ‘thermometer’ measures range from 0 to 100, where 0 = negative feeling and 100 = positive feeling.

By contrasting how people feel about those voting for the two main parties or those from a nationalist or unionist viewpoint, we can get a measure of affective polarisation i.e. the tendency to identify positively with one’s own group while viewing ‘the other group’ negatively.

A majority in Northern Ireland are either neutral in relation to the two main political parties or traditions, or feel only moderately pro or anti the ‘other’. The data suggests that affective polarisation is not a significant issue in NI - a combined 26% and 25% indicate strong levels of dislike for the ‘other’ party or tradition.

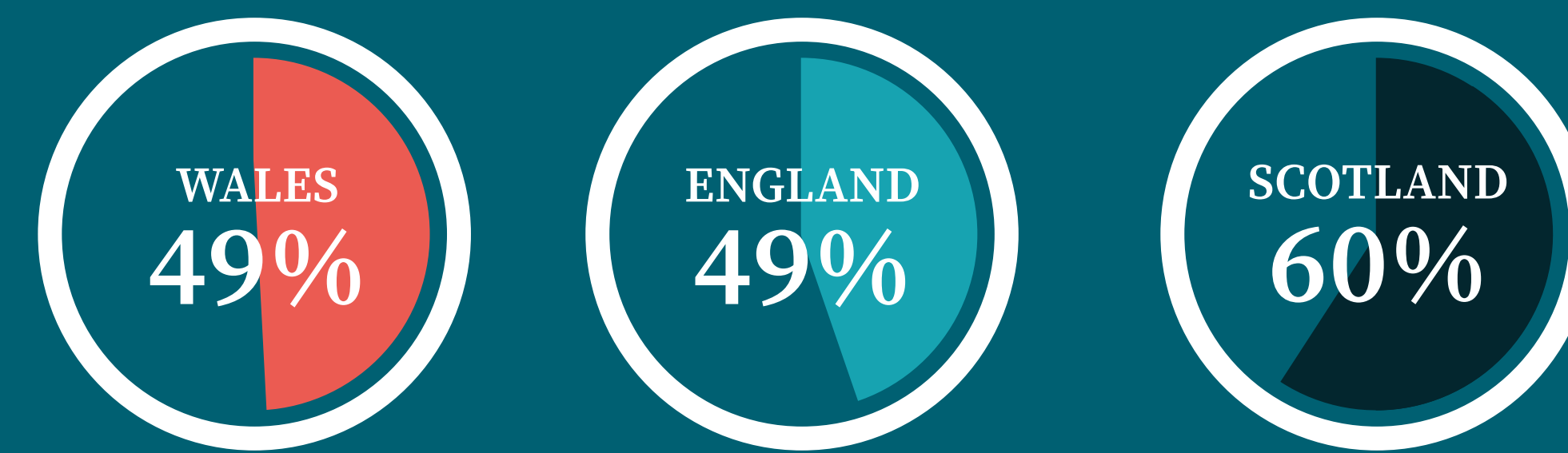
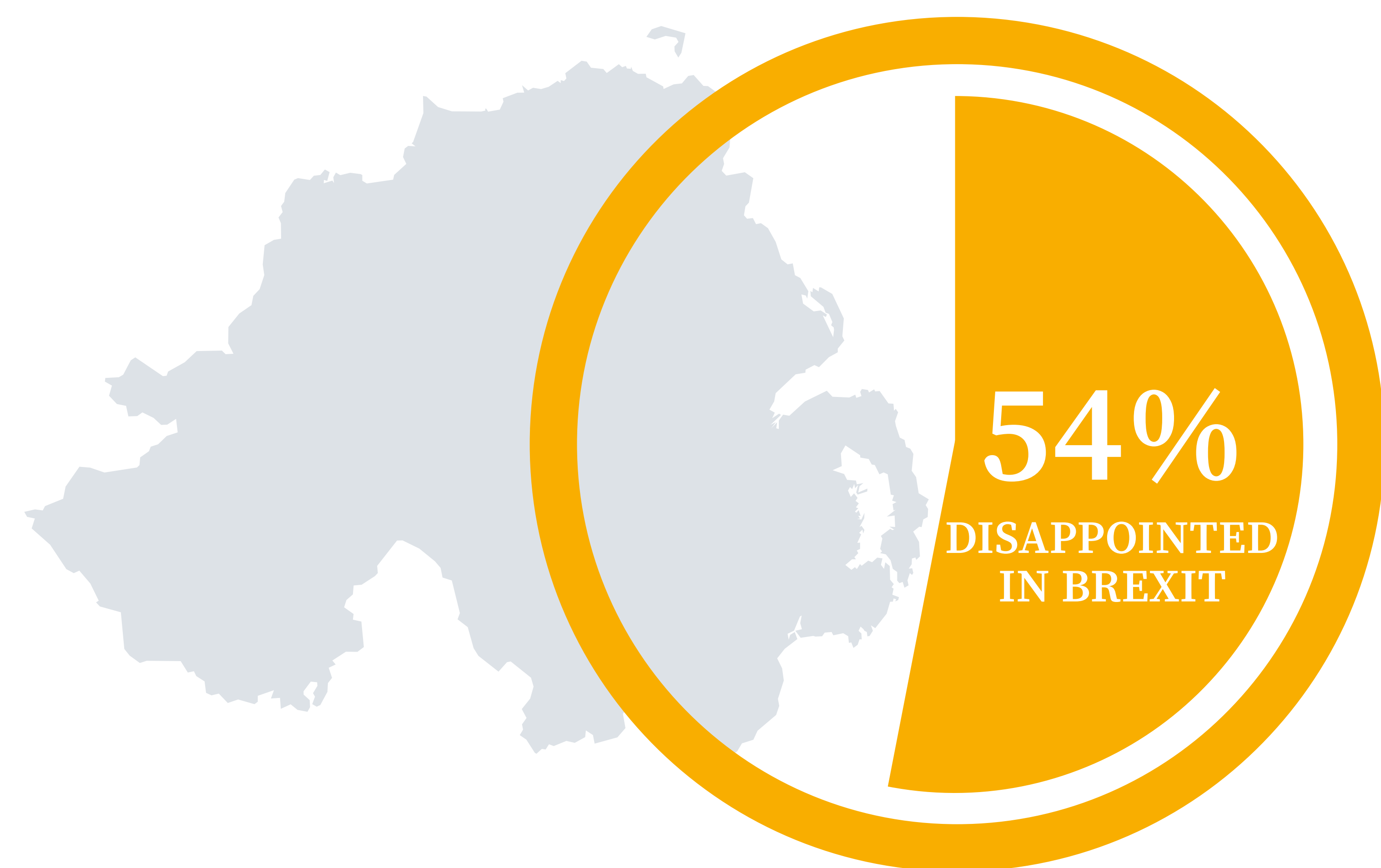
How do you feel towards each of the following on a scale of 0-100 (where 0 is as cold and negative as possible and 100 is as warm and positive as possible)?
 (Feelings about 2 main parties/traditions contrasted to derive measure of affective polarisation)*



*Responses on 0-100 scale grouped into Dislike (0-30), Neutral (31-69), Like (70-100) then combined to create polarization categories. For example, if a person dislikes Sinn Fein and likes DUP they are strongly polarised towards DUP; if they are neutral about Sinn Fein and like DUP they are moderately polarised towards DUP and if they have the same feelings about Sinn Fein and DUP they have no polarization. Base: 446 people in NI aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar–9 Sept 2022. See Technical Details for sample information.

Since the Brexit referendum, there is continued regret about the UK having left the EU and there are mixed views on the possibility of NI leaving the UK

Over half of respondents in Northern Ireland said they were disappointed that the UK voted to leave the EU (54%). This was higher among women (59% vs men 51%), university educated people (70% vs non 47%), and Catholics and those with no religion (78% and 67% respectively vs 35% protestants).



Disappointment with Brexit was slightly lower in England and Wales (49% and 44% unhappy respectively) and those in Scotland were most unhappy that the UK left the EU (60%). The figures reflect voting patterns in the Brexit referendum, where 56% voted to remain in NI, 47% in England, 48% in Wales and 62% in Scotland.



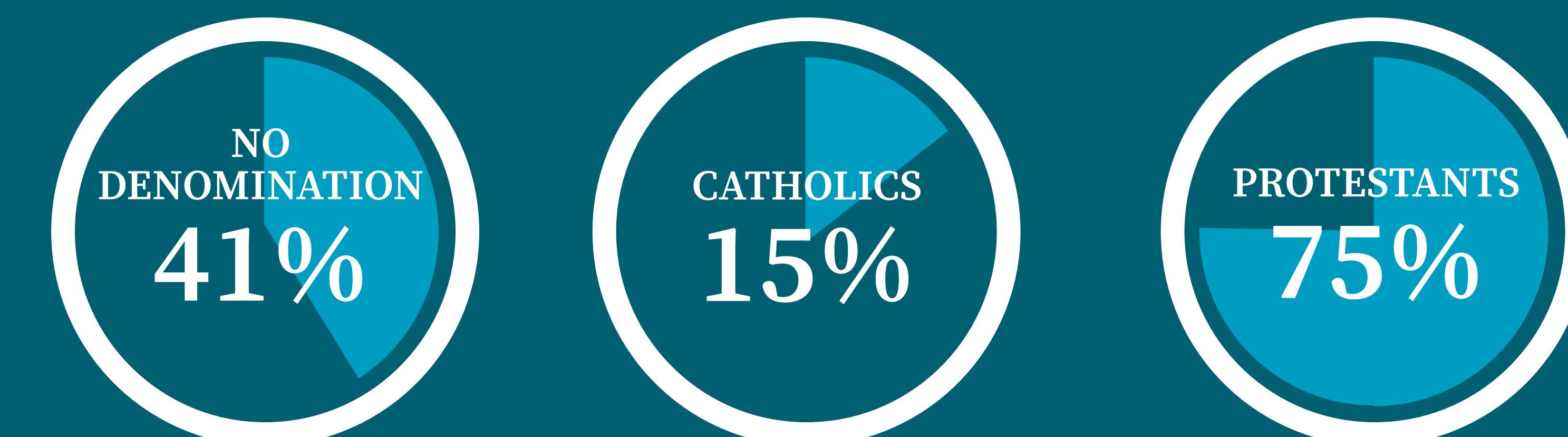
Since Brexit, the levels of confidence in the EU have increased in NI and GB, though they remain lower than in other European states.

Note: Responses for questions on leaving EU and leaving UK given on 1-10 numerical scale where 1-3 = Happy, 4-7 = Neither Happy nor Unhappy, 8-10 = Happy. Don't knows not shown. Other religions not reported due to low numbers. Base: 446 people in NI aged 18+, surveyed 1 Mar-9 Sept 2022. See Technical Details for sample information.

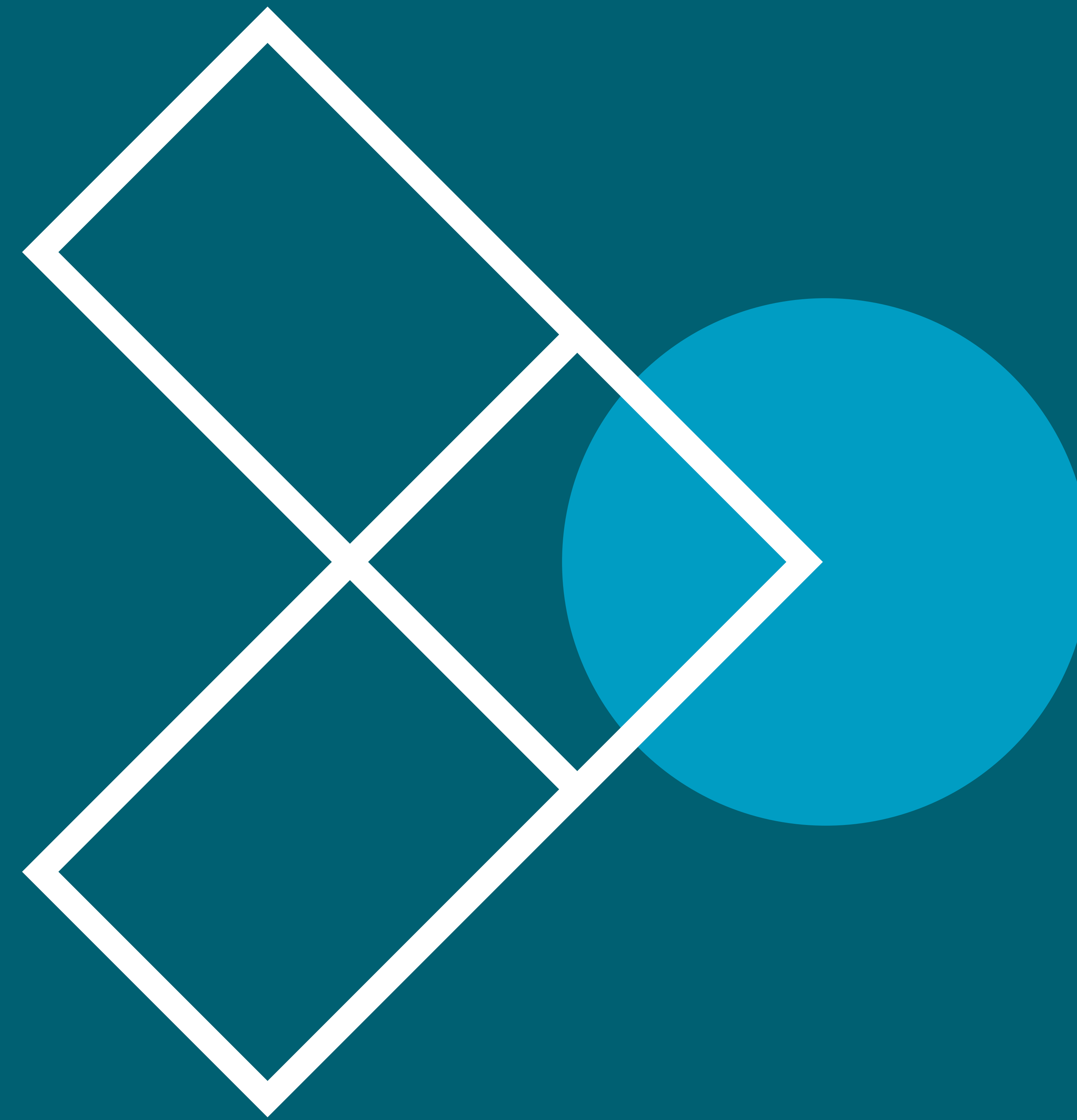
48% of respondents in Northern Ireland would be sad if Northern Ireland were to leave the UK, with 23% neither happy nor sad and 27% being happy. In England 50% would be sad if Northern Ireland left the UK. However in Scotland and Wales feelings are more split, with only 38% and 42% respectively being sad if Northern Ireland were to leave the UK.



Younger respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely to be sad if it were to leave the UK (18-34, 40%) compared to older generations (44% of 34-54 year-olds and 57% of 55+ year-olds).



Religious denomination was again an important factor, with 41% of people with no denomination saying they would be sad if NI left the UK, 15% of Catholics and 75% of Protestants. People with a higher level of education were also more likely to be happy if Northern Ireland left the UK, with 37% with a degree saying they would be sad compared to 53% without.



Implications for the Future

Implications for the Future

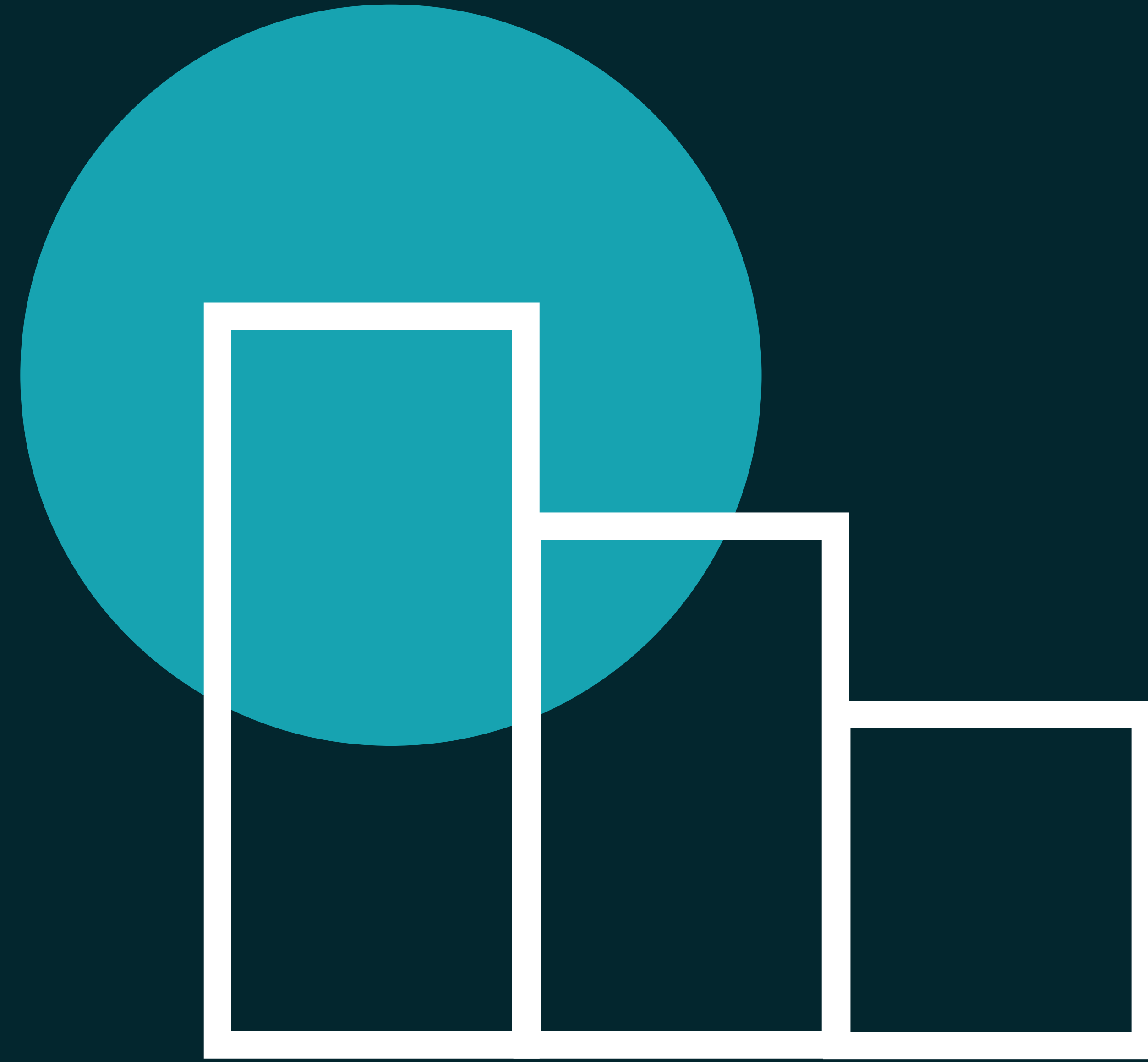
The WVS findings for NI indicate a shift in social attitudes and values among the population and challenge some of our long-held perceptions. They raise several concerns, but also suggest ways forward that build on our shared values:

- Social attitudes are changing right across the population and there is increasingly a high degree of inclusivity and acceptance of difference, but the pace of change is variable – younger people are more socially liberal and older people and the religious tend to hold more traditional views.
- We need to create spaces for value-based conversations, focusing less on religion and identity politics and more on the issues that are most important in people's lives (family, friends, leisure, work), acknowledging the plurality of views and experiences that exist.
- Those conversations also need to address social inequalities including the issue of substance misuse, which is a growing concern impacting on social cohesion.

NI is not as polarised or divided a society as is often portrayed. The data suggests more common ground exists across and between groups around shared values, with less support for extreme positions. This presents opportunities for further dialogue and conversation.

- Confidence in democratic institutions and satisfaction with the current operation of the political system here are all strikingly low. There is also very low trust in the press. However, we have an interest in politics and believe the democratic process can realise change. Civil society institutions such as universities, women's groups and other NGOs enjoy much higher levels of confidence and could take a more leading role in building inclusive civic engagement and encouraging more participative democracy.
- The survey suggests young people are more disillusioned with the functioning of a democratic society, presenting a challenge for future stability if left unattended. Civil society must encourage and support the involvement of younger people in civic conversations.





Technical Details

Technical Details

Fieldwork and Sample

UK Wave 7 fieldwork was completed in Mar-Sept 2022 by Ipsos, among a random probability sample of 3,056 UK adults aged 18+. This included respondents in England (1,645) and boost samples in Scotland (523), Wales (437) and NI (446). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents could complete the survey either face-to-face, via a video interview through MS Teams, or via a self-completion paper or web survey.

Care has been taken to ensure that a representative sample of residents from Northern Ireland was captured and a specific Northern Ireland weight is applied resulting in the following profile:

- Age: 16–34 (21%); 34-54 (34%); 55 and over (45%)
- Sex: Male (50%); Female (50%)
- Education: Lower than university degree (71%); university degree or higher (28%)
- Religious Denomination: None (22%); Catholic (33%); Protestant (34%); Other (10%)
- Location: Urban (63%); Rural (37%)

The NI sample size allows for extrapolation to the wider population within certain limits. Firstly, the margin of error is $\pm 5\%$, at 95% confidence interval, meaning that if 25% of the sample answer 'yes' to specific question in the survey then we can say that between 20% and 30% of the NI population say 'yes' to that survey question. Secondly, the sample size allows for some disaggregation of responses (e.g. by gender or broad age groups) but cell numbers are too low to investigate more complex patterns (e.g. gender and age together).

Full sample details can be found on [WVS website](#).

Longitudinal Analysis

Trend analysis for NI uses data from European Values Survey (EVS) as follows:

| EVS Wave | Year | Sample size |
|----------|------|-------------|
| 1 | 1981 | 312 |
| 2 | 1990 | 304 |
| 3 | 1999 | 1000 |
| 4 | 2008 | 500 |

International Comparisons

International comparisons include a cross-section of 24 countries from WVS wave 7 and EVS wave 5. 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).

Other Data Sources

European Social Survey in Ireland: [Round 10](#)

NI Census 2021 Data Tables: [Country of Birth](#); [Sexual Orientation](#); [Marital Status](#)

NI Life and Times Survey: [Update 151](#)

For more information

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