

# SOCIAL COHESION

## In the Pandemic Age

### A Global Perspective

October 2020

For more information about this survey, please visit:

<https://www.ipsos.com/en/social-cohesion-pandemic-age-global-perspective>

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**GAME CHANGERS**



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# WHAT THIS IS

*The OECD characterizes a society cohesive if “it works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility.”*

*And related, “social capital is the networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.”*

So, at its very core, social cohesion is a necessary condition for democratic countries to function.

There is no question that the pandemic created a more “cohesive” society in many countries in its early days. People will always pull together when there is a common enemy (COVID-19), especially the double challenge of a health enemy and an economic enemy. But our COVID-19 tracking surveys have suggested that social cohesion has started to fray as the pandemic has evolved.

Indeed, one has to look no further than recent protests in the US, Canada, Latin America, France, the UK and Russia as a demonstration that social cohesion might be increasingly challenged moving forward.

# WHAT THIS IS

Many pundits and others are talking about the importance of social cohesion and social capital in the pandemic recovery and beyond.

They note that the “group-think” and “what have you done for me and mine” perspective created by lower social cohesion can ultimately tear a society apart. People make demands of governments and businesses to act more to address how they think they are “wronged” and what their specific wants/needs are, than about what is good for the whole.

Therefore, social cohesion has widespread potential impact on marketing, messaging and positioning among the private sector, and public and social policy in the public sector moving forward.

But, absent from this discussion is any hard data about the current situation. To address this, we did a literature review on the topic. We then developed our own lens and series of questions that we believe best reflect social cohesion. We asked these questions on the October wave of our monthly 27 country Global Advisor vehicle.

**NB: Note that we are talking about social cohesion mostly in a “national” context, not within a specific region about that region or a specific demographic group about that group.**

# THE METRICS

The Ipsos Social Cohesion Index (ISCI) is a Combination of Metrics Generated from Key Questions in Three Core Aspect Areas\*:

## **Social Relations (People Trust, Shared Priorities, Diversity)**

I trust other (country citizens) to do what is in the best interests of the country

Having a diverse population, with different ethnicities, cultures, etc. is a very good thing for the country

I have the same outlook on life, opinions on important issues, etc. than other (country citizens)

## **Connectedness (Identity, System Trust, Fairness)**

I define myself as a (country) first before anything else

I trust government/our political system to do what is right

I am treated fairly as a (country citizens)

## **Focus Common Good (Help Others, Respect Laws, Corruption)**

I have a responsibility to help other (country citizens)

I respect our laws and ways of doing things

Our society/system is corrupt

\* Dragolov et al, 2016



# KEY OBSERVATIONS

For healthy social cohesion to exist, people must be more than just “sort of” committed. The challenges that constantly emerge in any society always put pressure on the degree of social cohesion that people feel. Therefore, “high” or “strong” social cohesion (we have labelled this “solid”) is a pre-requisite for a truly healthy society in order for that society to withstand the constant challenges that it inevitably faces. A marriage is much more likely to be healthy if the partners are in love, than if they are sort of in love, sort of not.

With that in mind, the Ipsos Social Cohesion Index (ISCI) suggests that Social Cohesion is under assault globally. Almost twice as many global citizens are “weak” than “solid” in their sense of social cohesion.

Interestingly, lack of social cohesion cuts across most individual countries, although some are more challenged than others. For example:

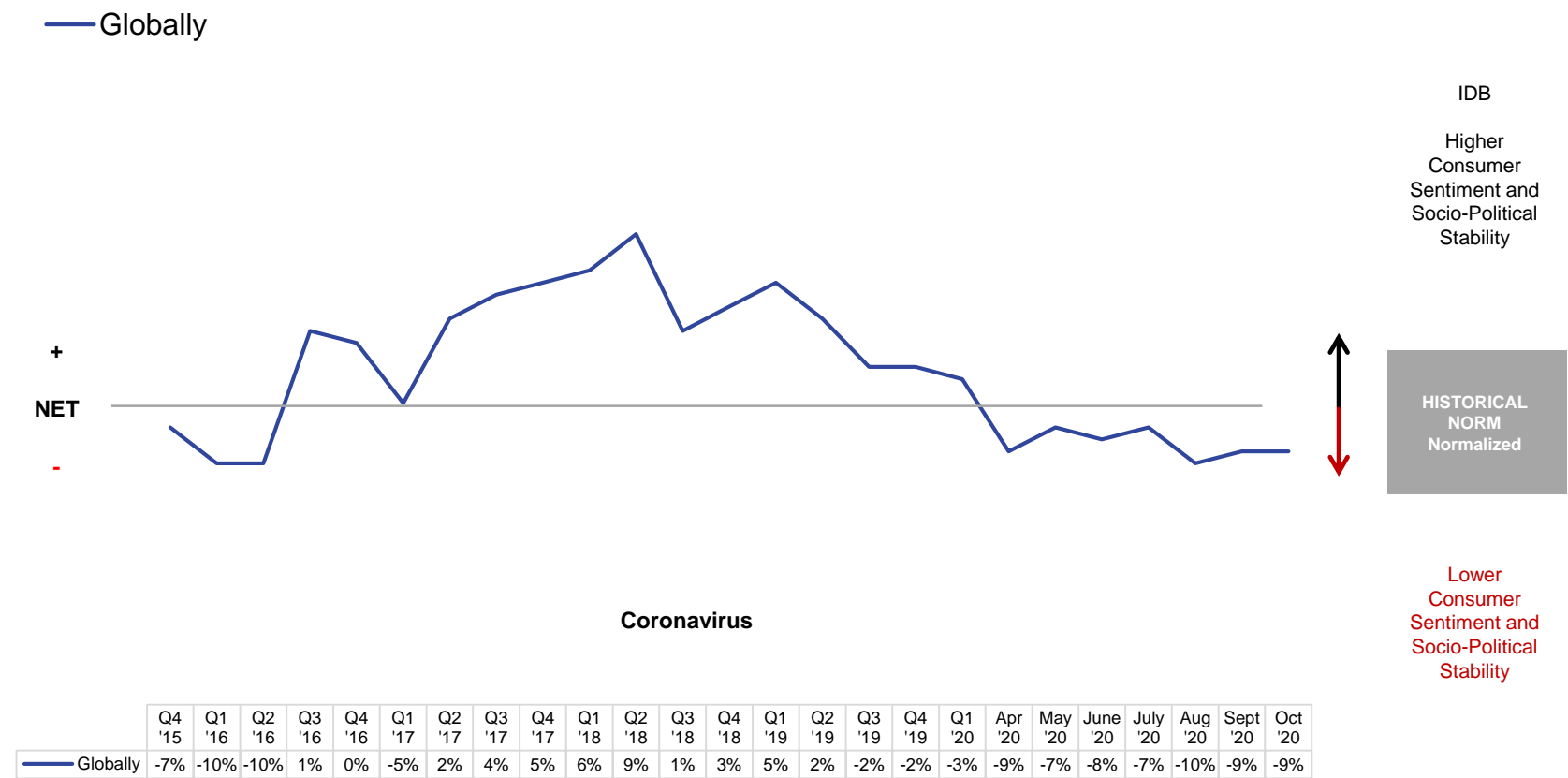
- Only 6 of 27 countries are net positive in Social Cohesion – China, Saudi Arabia, Australia, India, Malaysia and Sweden.
- The remaining countries are all net negative, with the most decidedly negative including Japan, South Korea, Poland, France and Belgium.

Given the turmoil created by the pandemic, it is concerning that we have such a low level of social cohesion globally going into a period where significant challenges will emerge with any recovery. All is not lost of course. The largest proportion of citizens in most countries have a “moderate” (soft) sense of social cohesion. But, this simply means that they could go either positive or negative depending on how their situation and the country’s situation evolves.

# SOCIAL COHESION GLOBALLY

# CONTEXT: CITIZEN/CONSUMER SENTIMENT – THE IPSOS DISRUPTION BAROMETER (IDB)

The broader citizen/consumer environment is a breeding ground for challenges to social cohesion. Global citizens/consumers were turning negative on the Ipsos Disruption Barometer (IDB) leading into the coronavirus outbreak, but they became and remain much more negative since. This suggests continued lower consumer sentiment and higher potential for socio-political disruption. This is obviously relevant for social cohesion as it puts pressure on solidarity as people look for solutions.

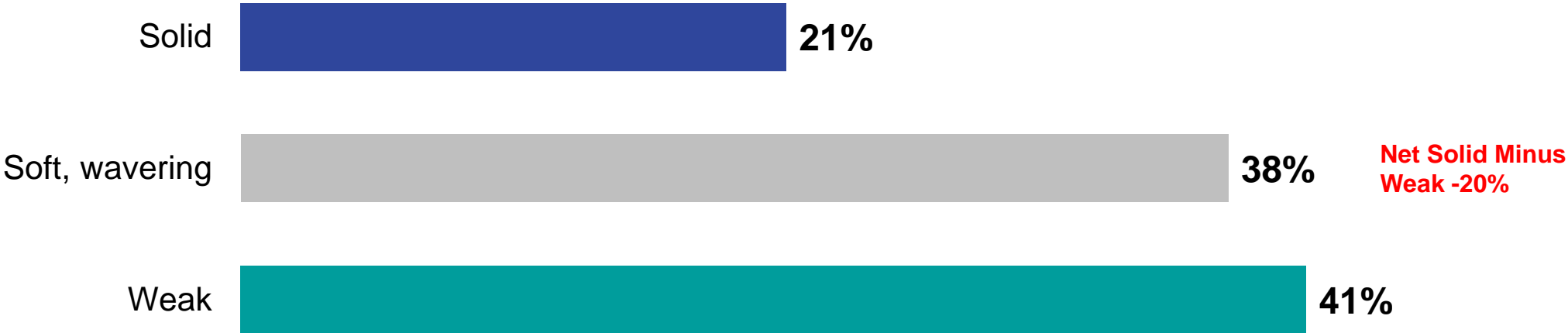




# SOCIAL COHESION SNAPSHOT

Social Cohesion worldwide is under assault. Almost twice as many citizens are “weak” than “solid” in their sense of social cohesion.

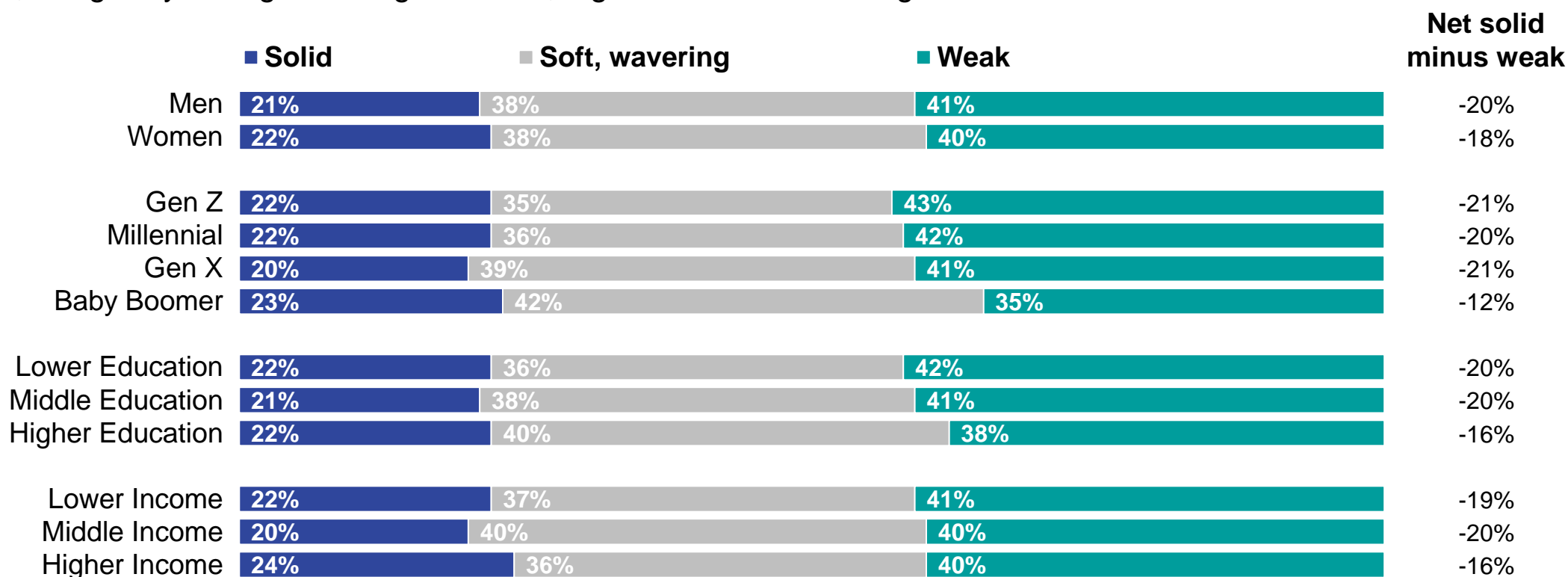
## SOCIAL COHESION INDEX



*“Solid” = “Solid” on all 3 of the sub-indices or “Solid” on 2 and not worse than “soft, wavering” on 1.*

# SOCIAL COHESION DEMOGRAPHICS

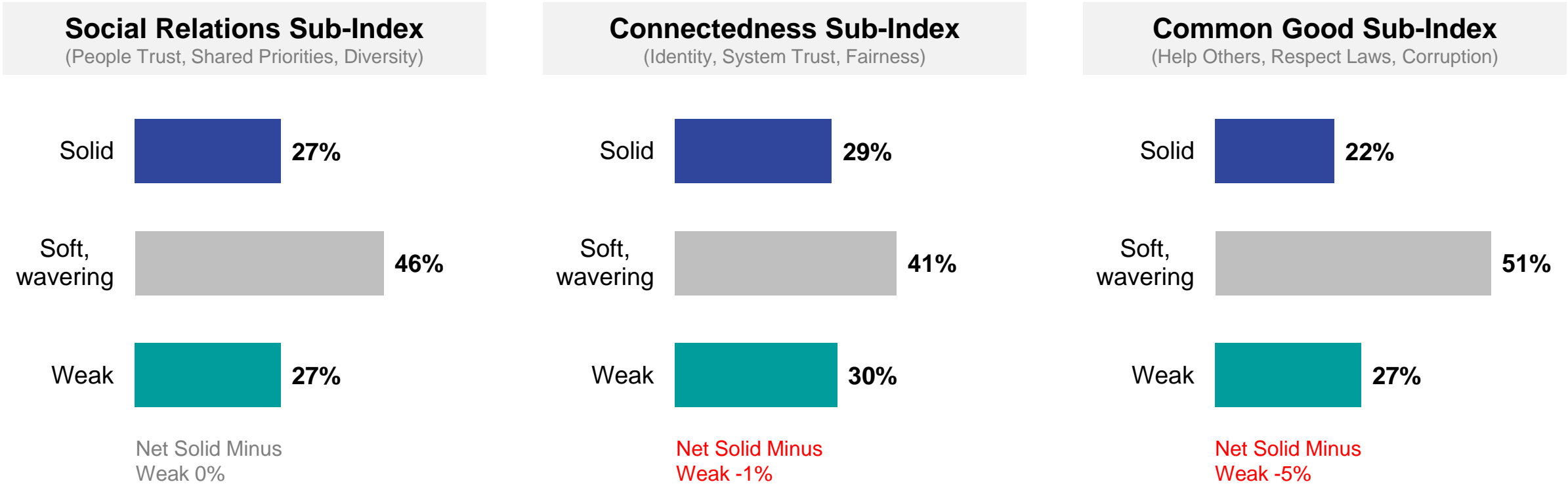
Unlike the case where we see big differences by demographics on other attitudes and behaviours, sense of social cohesion is fairly consistent across key demographics. It is, however, marginally stronger among Boomers, higher education and higher income.



“Solid” = “Solid” on all 3 of the sub-indices or “Solid” on 2 and not worse than “soft, wavering” on 1.

# SOCIAL COHESION SUB-INDICES

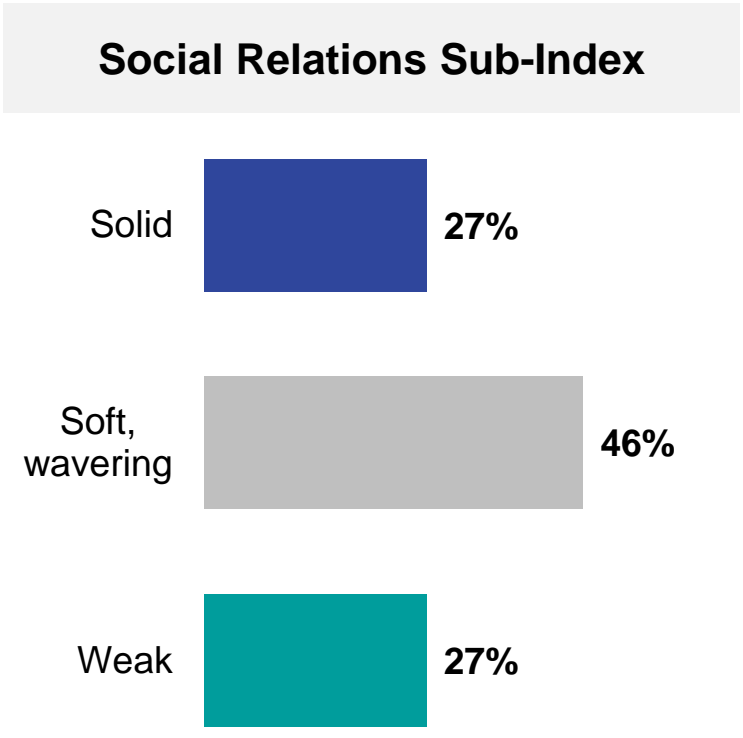
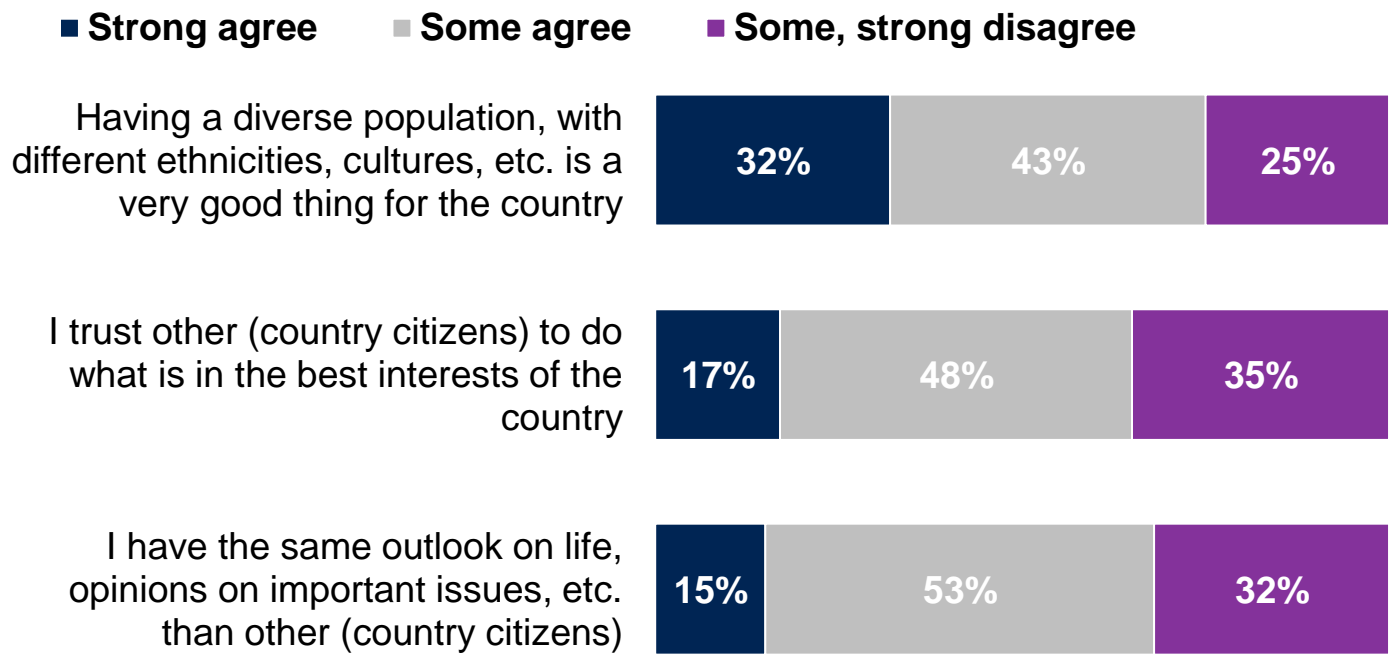
None of the 3 sub-indices is particularly strong -- Common Good is the lowest.



How can the 3 sub-indices that comprise the overall index all be more positive than the overall? It is all in the math. For example, for someone to be "Solid" overall they need to be "Solid" on all 3 of the sub-indices or "Solid" on 2 and not worse than "soft, wavering" on 1. There is a sizeable proportion of people who have starkly different ratings on each sub-index (i.e., they move from negative to positive and visa versa). Therefore the overall is not simply an "average."

# SOCIAL RELATIONS SUB-INDEX

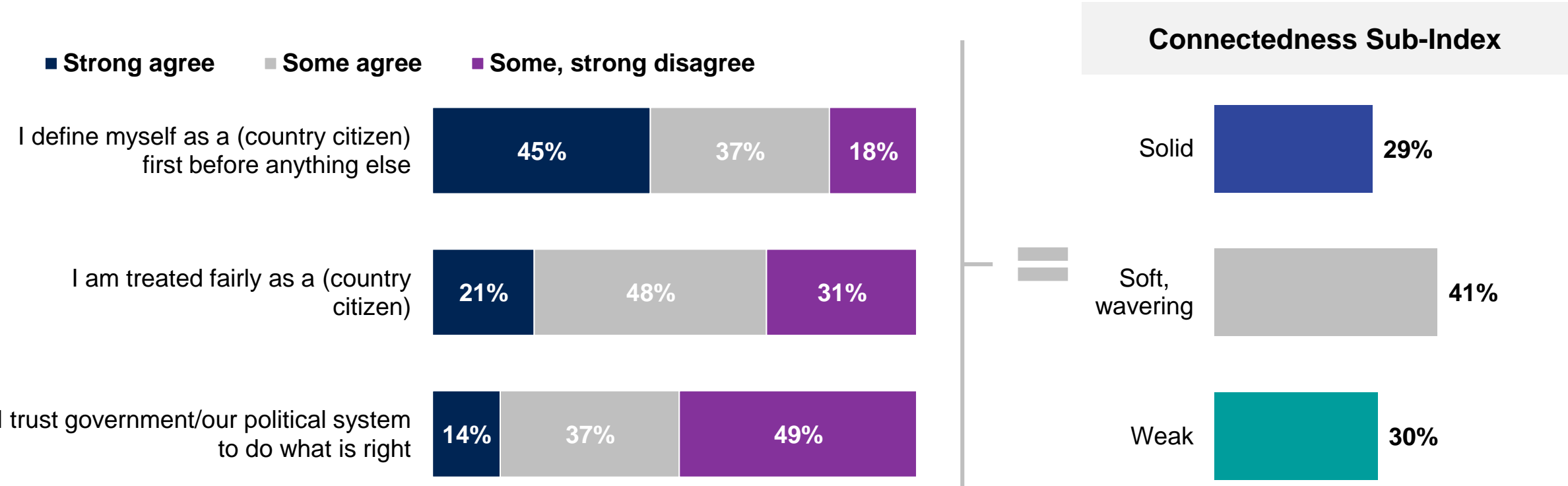
Within Social Relations, assessment of the importance of diversity is much higher than trust in other citizens and sharing priorities.





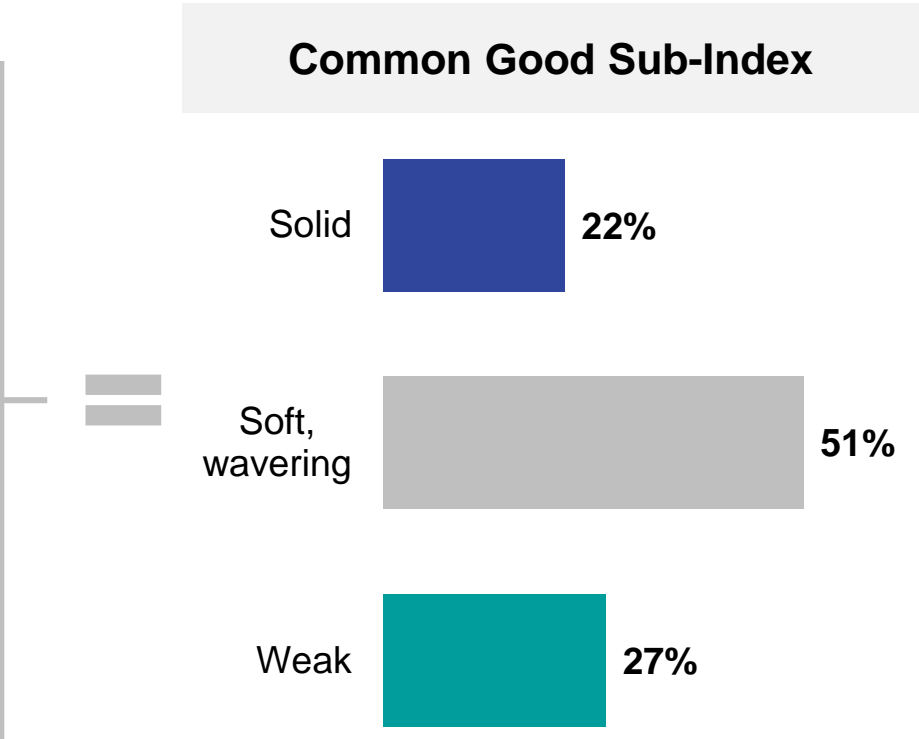
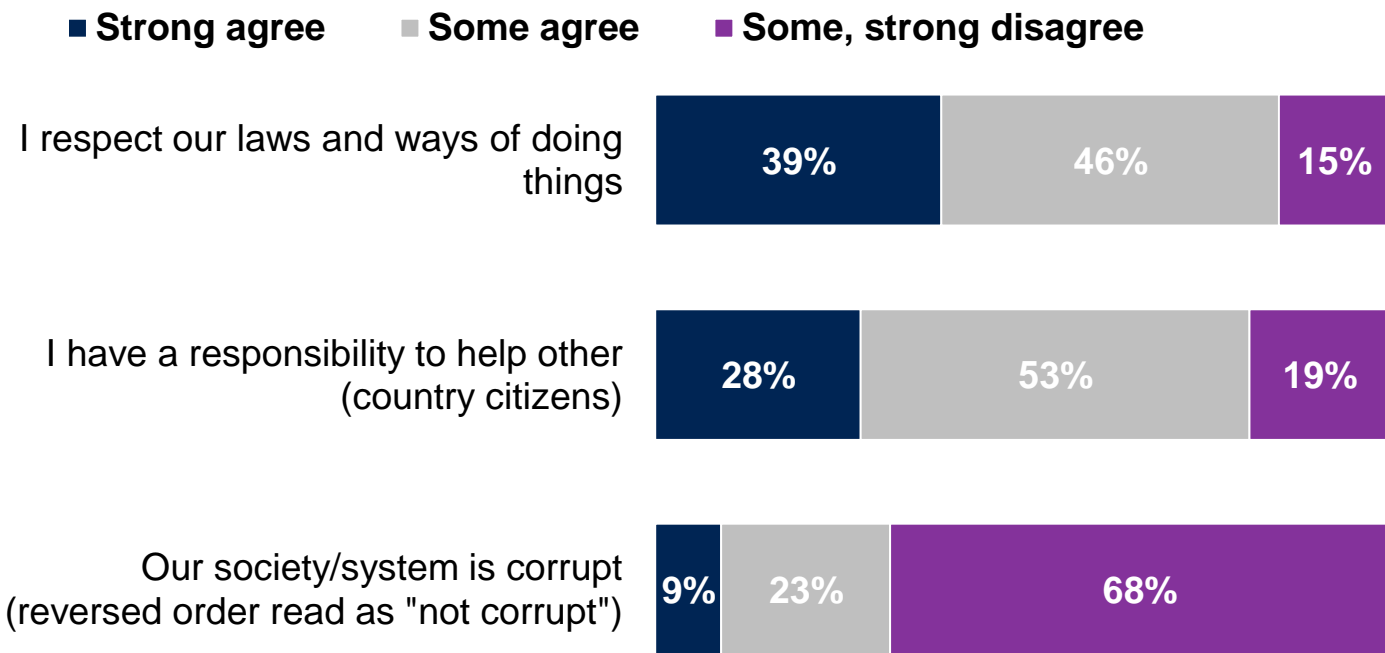
# CONNECTEDNESS SUB-INDEX

Within Connectedness, assessment of defining oneself as a citizen of the country is much higher than perceptions of being treated fairly and trust in the system.



# COMMON GOOD SUB-INDEX

Within Common Good, respect for laws and responsibility to help are much higher than beliefs that the system is corruption-free.





# SOCIAL COHESION COUNTRY COMPARISONS



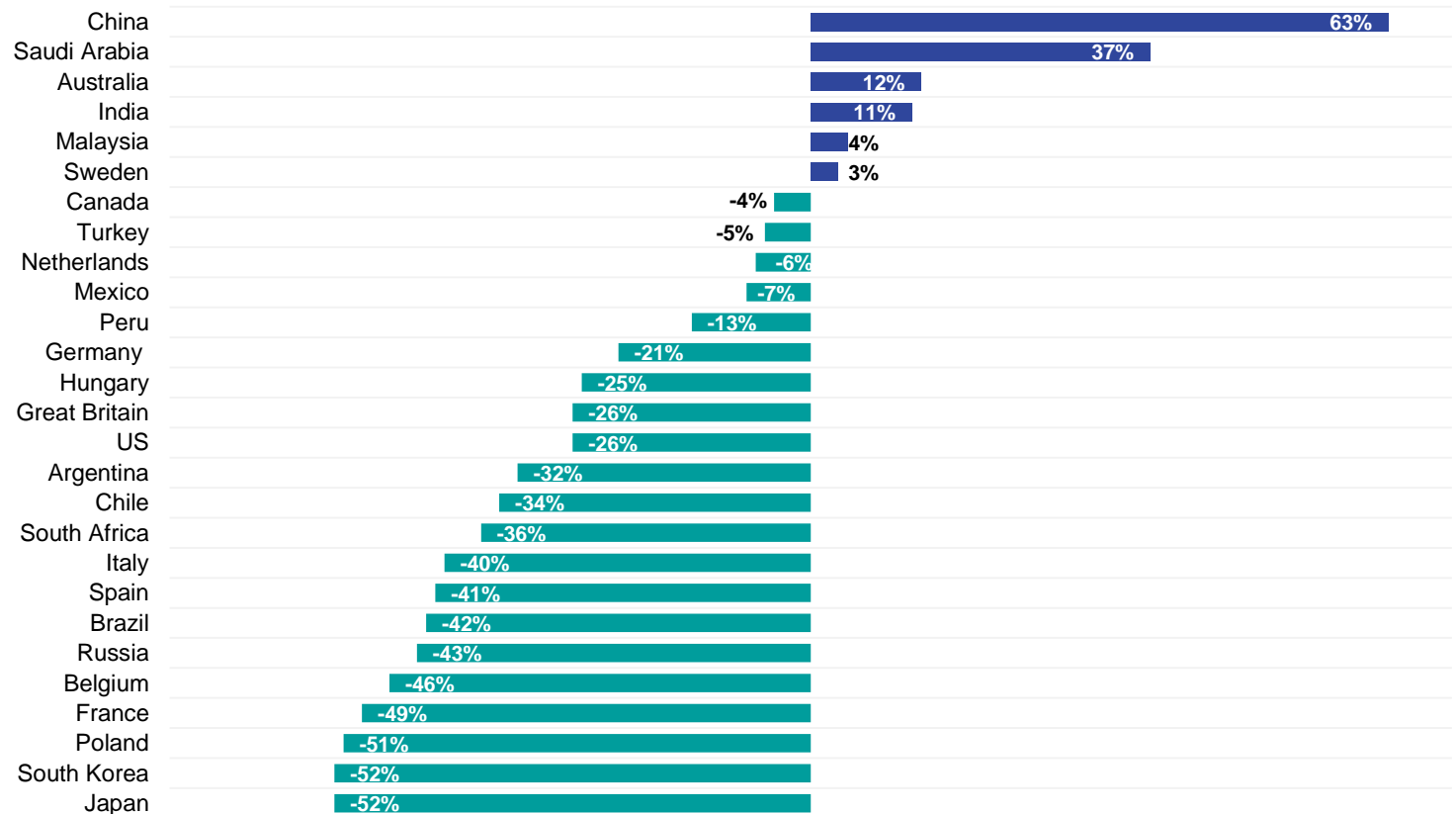
# A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT COMPARING SOCIAL COHESION BY COUNTRY

Only 6 of 27 countries are net positive in Social Cohesion – China, Saudi Arabia, Australia, India, Malaysia and Sweden.

A variety of countries are decidedly negative in their net Social Cohesion, lowest in Japan, South Korea, Poland, France and Belgium.

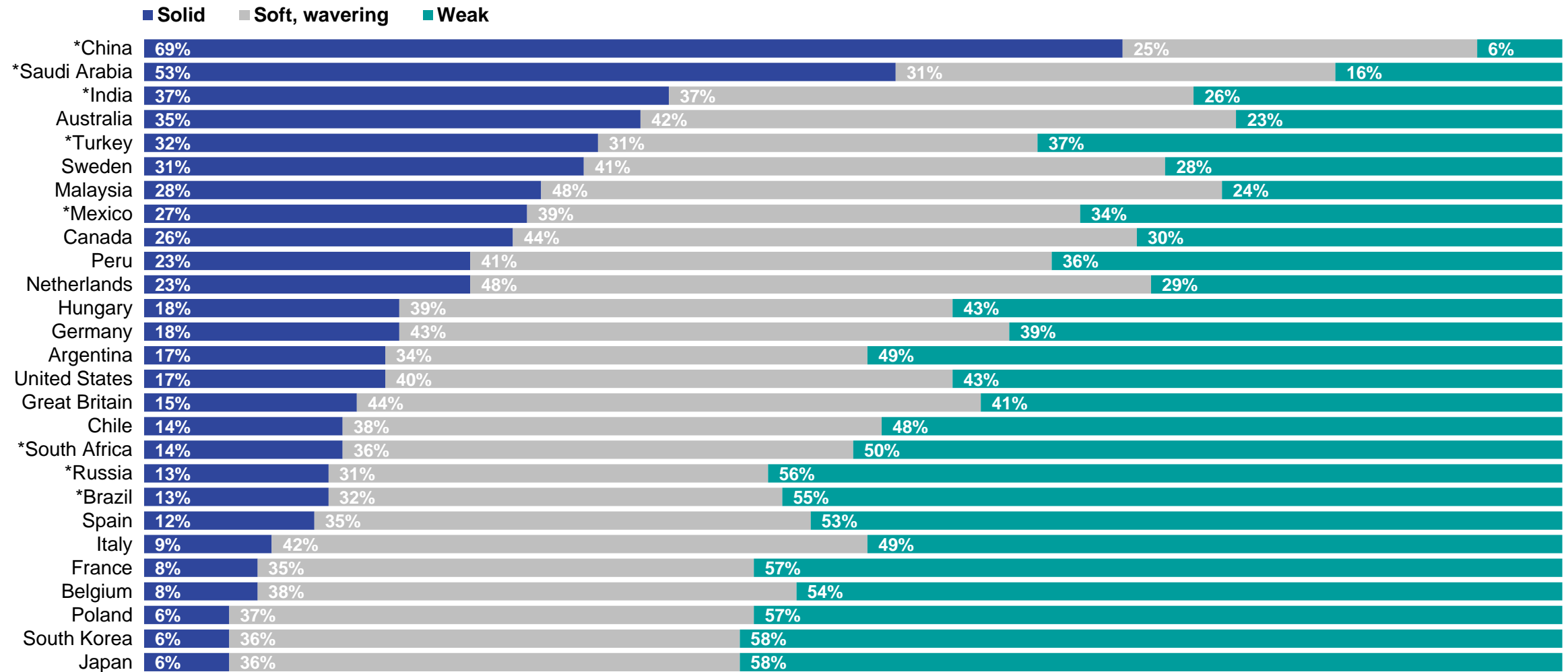
It is interesting that while much attention has been paid to the social rancor currently in the US, it ranks in the middle of countries on Social Cohesion, although it is decidedly negative as well.

## Social Cohesion Oct 2020 (Net “Solid” Minus “Weak”)





# OVERALL SOCIAL COHESION INDEX



\*samples represent a more affluent, connected population

# A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT COMPARING SOCIAL COHESION AND IPSOS DISRUPTION BAROMETER (IDB)

Some countries are at more risk for disruption than others beyond simple levels of Social Cohesion. This is based on comparing Social Cohesion with the Ipsos Disruption Barometer (IDB) (Ipsos' global metric of citizen/consumer sentiment and socio-political stability).

For example...

- While Social Cohesion is moderately positive in India, citizen/consumer sentiment is among the most negative worldwide.
- Belgium and Poland are faced with a double challenge. They have among the lowest Social Cohesion and the lowest levels of citizen/consumer sentiment.

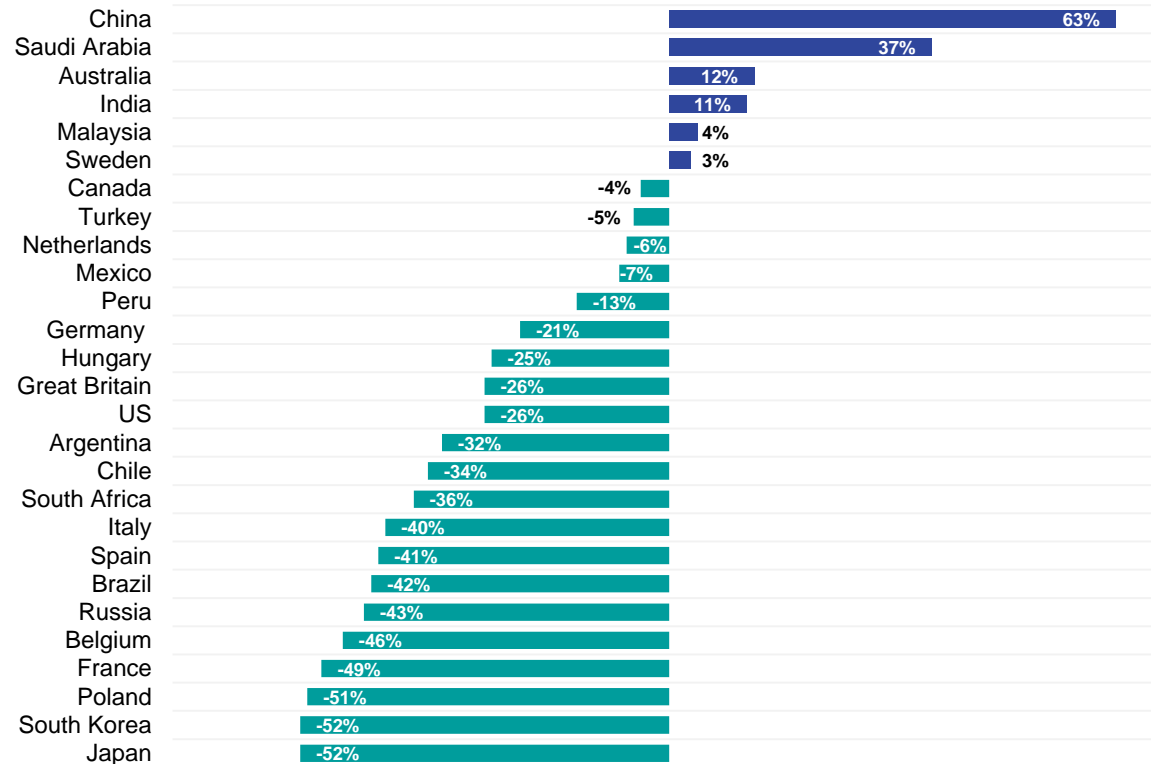
- While Sweden is among the most positive on Social Cohesion, it is among the lowest on citizen/consumer sentiment.

So, the bottom-line for the private and public sector with interest in this space is understanding how the two metrics fit with each other and in combination what they might suggest for each country.

# A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT COMPARING SOCIAL COHESION AND IPSOS DISRUPTION BAROMETER (IDB)

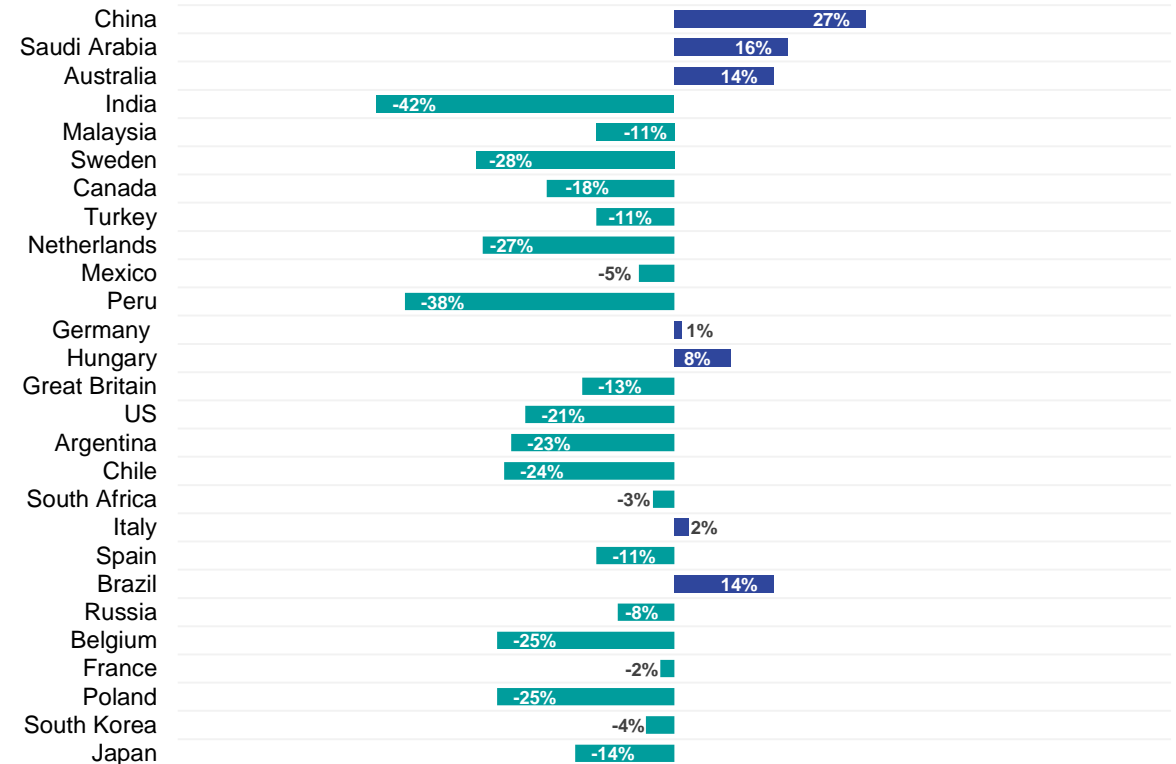
## Social Cohesion Oct 2020

(Net "Solid" Minus "Weak")



## Ipsos Disruption Barometer Oct 2020

(Net "Positive" Minus "Negative" vs Country Norm)



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# STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

It should come as no surprise that most countries do better on some Social Cohesion sub-indices than others. For example, the next page shows that...

- In Russia, the Social Cohesion score is clearly dragged down by Common Good (Help Others, Respect Laws, Corruption)
- In Sweden, the sub-index score is much higher for Connectedness (Identity, System Trust, Fairness) and Common Good (Help Others, Respect Laws, Corruption) than for Social Relations (People Trust, Shared Priorities, Diversity).
- In Great Britain, the score is much higher for Common Good (Help Others, Respect Laws, Corruption) than for Social Relations (People Trust, Shared Priorities, Diversity) and Connectedness (Identity, System Trust, Fairness).

- In South Africa, the sub-index score for Social Relations (People Trust, Shared Priorities, Diversity) is decidedly positive, but is countered by a negative score for Common Good (Help Others, Respect Laws, Corruption).
- In the US, Connectedness (Identity, System Trust, Fairness) drags the overall Social Cohesion Index down.

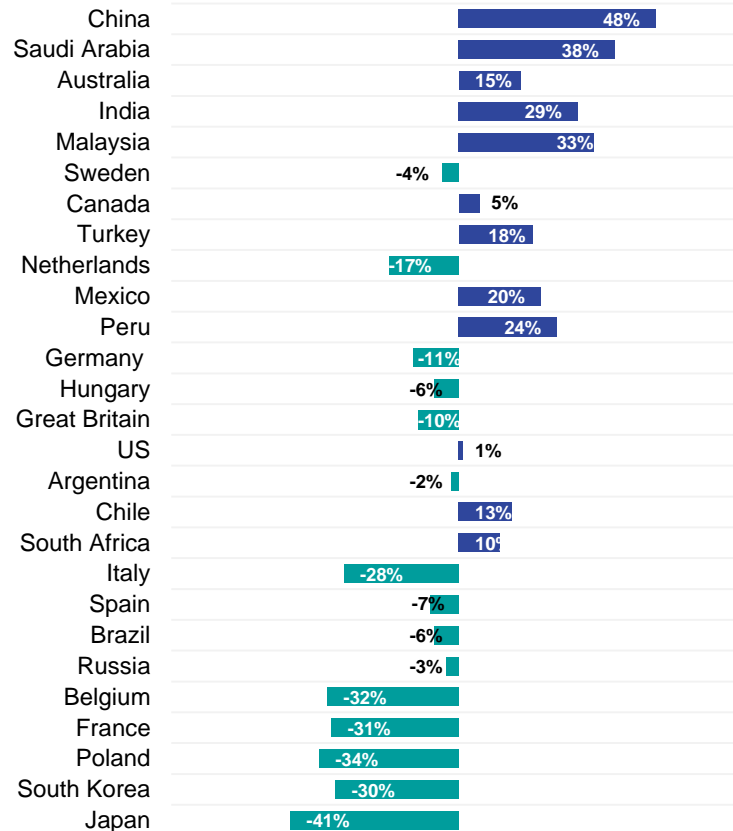
Recognizing these differences is key for private and public sector organizations if they are to target any initiatives to address Social Cohesion challenges.



# COMPARING SOCIAL COHESION SUB-INDICES BY COUNTRY

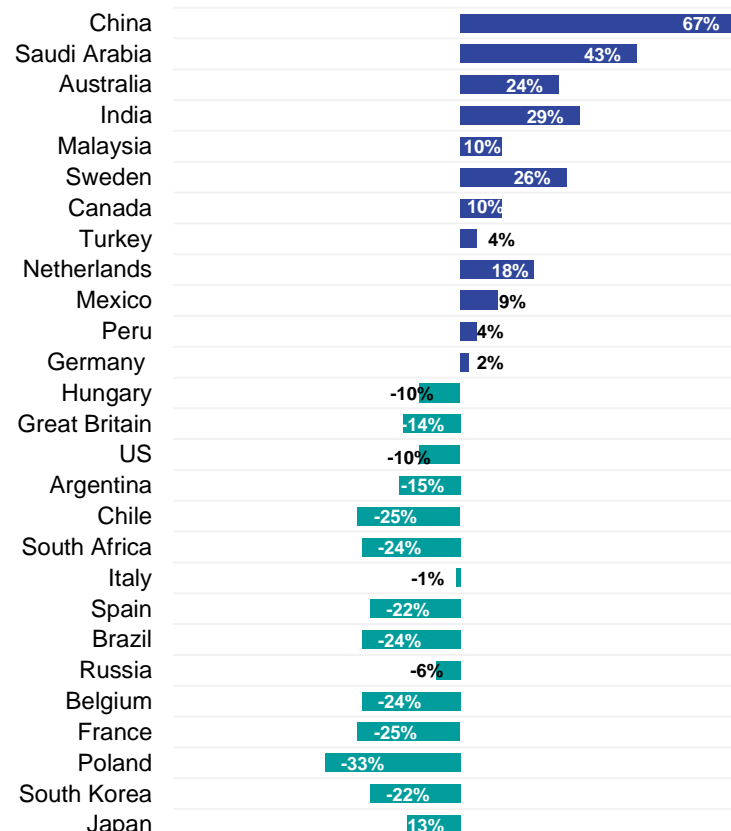
## Social Relations Sub-index

(People Trust, Shared Priorities, Diversity)  
(Net "Solid" Minus "Weak")



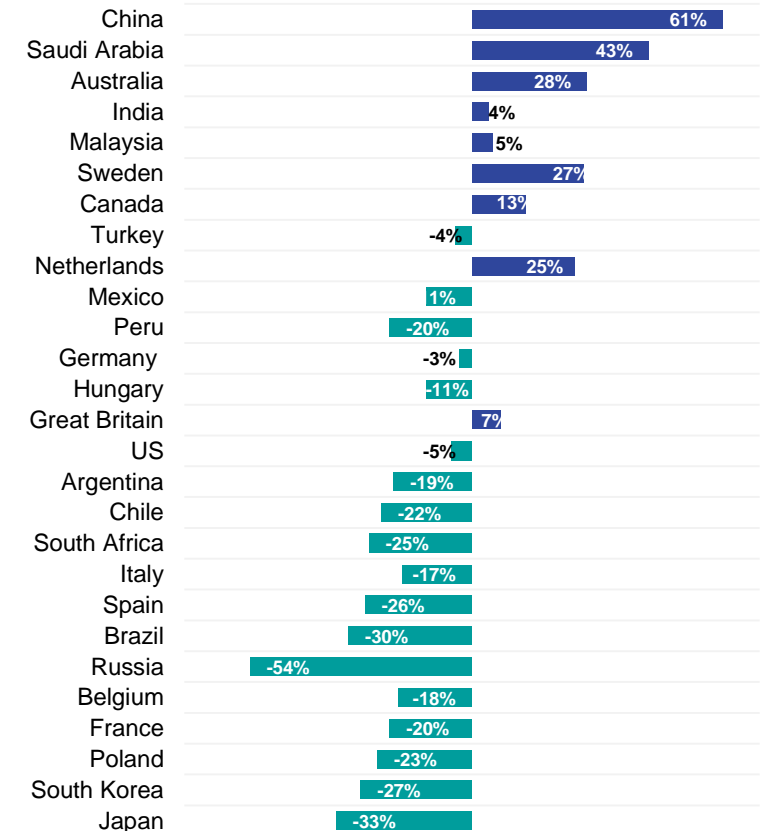
## Connectedness Sub-index

(Identity, System Trust, Fairness)  
(Net "Solid" Minus "Weak")



## Common Good Sub-index

(Help Others, Respect Laws, Corruption)  
(Net "Solid" Minus "Weak")



# METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted in 27 countries via the Ipsos Online Panel system between September 25 and October 9, 2020.

Interviews were conducted with 20,011 adults aged 18-74 in Canada, the U.S.A., South Africa, Malaysia and Turkey and 16-74 in all other countries.

Approximately 1000+ individuals participated on a country by country basis via the Ipsos Online Panel with the exception of Argentina, Belgium, Hungary, India, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey, where each have a sample of approximately 500+.

In most of the countries surveyed internet penetration is sufficiently high to think of the samples as representative of the wider population within the age ranges covered: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

Brazil, Chile, China (mainland), India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey have lower levels of internet penetration and so these samples should not be considered to be fully nationally representative, but instead to represent a more affluent, connected population. These are still a vital social group to understand in these countries, representing an important and emerging middle class.

Weighting has been employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to the most recent country census data.

The precision of Ipsos online polls are calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of N=1,000 accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and N=500 accurate to +/- 4.8 points. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website. The publication of these findings abides by local rules and regulations.

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