

Populism – A Powerful Surge Fueled by Conflicting Demands

Welcome to the sixth edition of the *Ipsos Populism Report*, a 31country survey which tracks how people around the world feel about issues leading to the rise of populism.

"A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism," wrote Karl Marx in the opening lines of his *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Nearly two centuries later, the ideological spectre challenging mainstream politicians in Europe and much of the democratic world is no longer communism, but populism. Overused and often poorly defined, this term is routinely invoked by politicians, journalists, and academics to describe a wide range of parties, figures, and movements—sometimes radically

different.

But beyond semantics, our latest international survey sheds light on the deeper forces feeding this populist surge. And the diagnosis is stark: across the globe, a profound pessimism is settling in. Most citizens worldwide (57%) believe their country is in decline; 56% feel that the society they live in is broken. The sense of societal fracture is especially widespread in longestablished Western democracies such as the UK, the US, and France. But it's far from being a uniquely Western malaise—it resonates across most countries, even in the Global South.

What's fueling this sense of collapse? The picture is complex, but three major themes emerge from the data:

- 1. Economic discontent: Even as inflation retreats from the record highs of the 2021–2023 period, economic anxiety remains widespread. Many feel left behind or exposed to growing financial insecurity—fears often heightened by recent economic and trade policies, particularly those associated with the Trump administration. The perception of a worsening economic landscape continues to erode public trust.
- 2. The gap between elites and the people: There is widespread belief that traditional elites have grown distant from the people. Sixty-four percent of respondents agree that "traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me,"...

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There is widespread belief that traditional elites have grown distant from the people [...]. 68% say that "the main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite."



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...62% believe that "experts in this country don't understand the lives of people like me." More striking still, 68% say that "the main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite." These views are shared by a clear majority in almost every country and cut across generations and social classes.

3. Opposition to immigration:

Immigration has become another powerful fault line. A plurality of citizens (44%) believe their country "would be stronger if we stopped immigration"—only 28% disagree. Anti-immigration views have gained ground in recent years, often tightly interwoven with economic fears: 60% agree that "when jobs are

scarce, employers should prioritize hiring people of this country over immigrants".

It is difficult to untangle which of these factors plays the most important role in the rise of populist sentiment—especially since within electorates and political parties, we can find different shades of populism: some more aligned with the right, blaming immigration for economic struggles, while others lean to the left, putting the blame on the rich and powerful. But what unites these variants is a common rejection of the status quo—and a deep mistrust of traditional institutions.

Perhaps the most surprising finding from our survey is the coexistence of two seemingly contradictory demands. On one hand, a significant share of citizens (47%) say they want "a strong leader willing to break the rules" to fix their country—signaling a clear attraction to "illiberal" forms of democracy. On the other hand, an even larger majority (58%) believe that the most important decisions should be made by the people themselves, via referendums—not by elected representatives. This points to a desire for direct democracy—one that seems difficult to reconcile with the demand for a strong, personalized power.

This tension lies at the heart of contemporary populism: a call for both authority and decisive leadership, but also for citizen involvement and direct popular control. Reconciling these impulses poses one of the greatest political challenges of our time.

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Right-Wing Populism, Left-Wing Populism: Shared Anger, Diverging Agendas

Contrary to what one might assume, voters who support parties often labeled as "populist" or "radical" have relatively little in common—even on issues traditionally associated with populism.

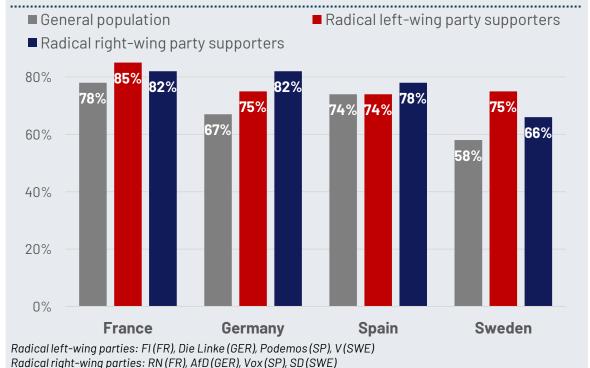
While they do tend to be more likely than the general population to believe that the main divide in society is between "ordinary citizens" and the political and economic elite rather than between generations, social classes or ideologies, the differences are ultimately modest (see chart). This feeling of disconnect is indeed no longer confined to the fringes-it has become mainstream, including among supporters of the most moderate, centrist parties. In France, for example, 85% of supporters of the radical left-wing party La France Insoumise and 82% of those of the farright party Rassemblement National

believe that the divide between people and elites dominates other divisions - but this is also the case for 78% of the population as a whole and all the same for 64% of supporters of *Renaissance*, Emmanuel Macron's party.

But beyond that point of convergence, the similarities quickly fade. When it comes to their relationship with democracy, parties, and elected officials, right- and left-wing populist voters part ways. Supporters of right-wing populist parties are much more likely to feel alienated from traditional politics and to favor direct democracy or strong leaders. By contrast, voters on the populist left remain closer to the general population on these issues. Their frustration with the system is real, but less rooted in institutional rejection.

Q: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? The main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite

% Agree by party





Right-Wing Populism, Left-Wing Populism: Shared Anger, Diverging Agendas

On economic issues, the dynamic is actually reversed. Left-wing populist voters are much more likely to believe that the economic system is rigged in favor of the wealthy and powerful. That belief is central to their political outlook—far more so than for right-wing populist voters, whose economic views tend to be less radicalized.

But the most striking divide concerns immigration. While hostility to immigration is widespread among farright electorates—and often seen as a key issue—left-populist voters hold markedly different views. Only a small minority of them support the idea that, in times of economic hardship, jobs should be reserved for citizens over immigrants. Among far-right voters, that position is

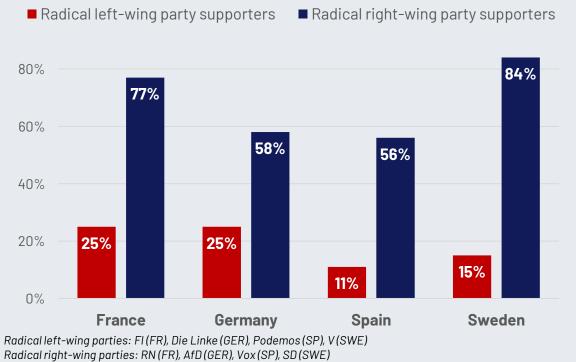
not only common—it is overwhelmingly dominant: 77% among supporters of France's far-right *Rassemblement National*, and even 84% among those of Sweden's radical right-wing party *Sverigedemokraterna*.

While "populism" may be a convenient label to describe a certain style of politics or rhetoric, it does little to capture the ideological diversity—and sometimes fundamental opposition—of the electorates grouped under its umbrella.

In this report, we examine all these aspects and hope to provide some useful insights into our times.

Q: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? When jobs are scarce, employers should prioritize hiring people of this country over immigrants

% Agree by party





Key findings

Thinking society is broken is more the rule than the exception

In 2025 56% across 31 countries feel society is broken in their country. Yet opinions improved in places where major political changes have happened between 2016 and now, such as Poland (-39 pp since 2016), Mexico (-29 pp), or Italy (-9 pp).

Support for economic "cakeism" remains high

A widespread aspect of a populistic approach to economics is the contradiction between calls for increased spending and demands for lower taxes. Across 31 countries 57% reject increased taxes aimed at financing additional public spending, but a majority support increased spending for all public services.

Many see their country in decline and in need of strong leader

Confronted with what 57% see as the decline of their country, 47% consider they need a strong leader that breaks the rules. In Brazil (58%) and South Korea (75%), two countries where the previous presidential election was defined by this issue, levels of agreement remain high.

Nativism is widespread but not universal

The "importance of being born in a particular country" is strong in 25 of the 31 countries surveyed. There are six countries where a majority doesn't consider it to be important - Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Belief that economy is rigged shows little change in a decade

This belief (68%) is strongly correlated with being in favour of a strong leader taking the country back from the rich and powerful (64%), but it resonates far more in emerging economies in Asia (Indonesia, 81%, Thailand, 77%, Malaysia, 76%), and in South Africa (77%).

Anti-immigration views in Europe no longer influenced by unemployment

While many countries worry about jobs being given to immigrants over those from the country (42%), this belief is much lower in Europe. In Spain (-8 pp) and France (-8 pp) we have seen a decline in those who express this fear since 2016 (when unemployment was much higher).



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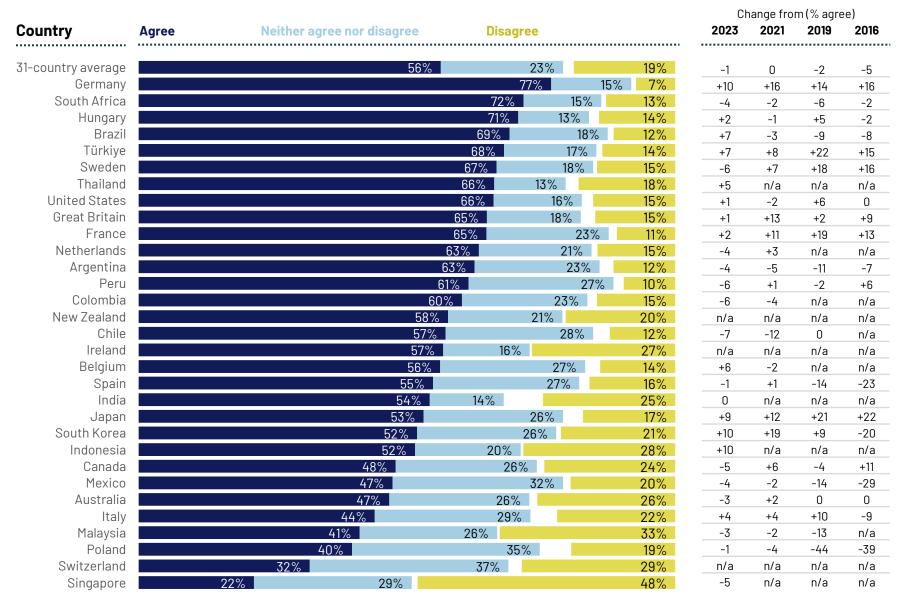


PART ONE: The System is Broken



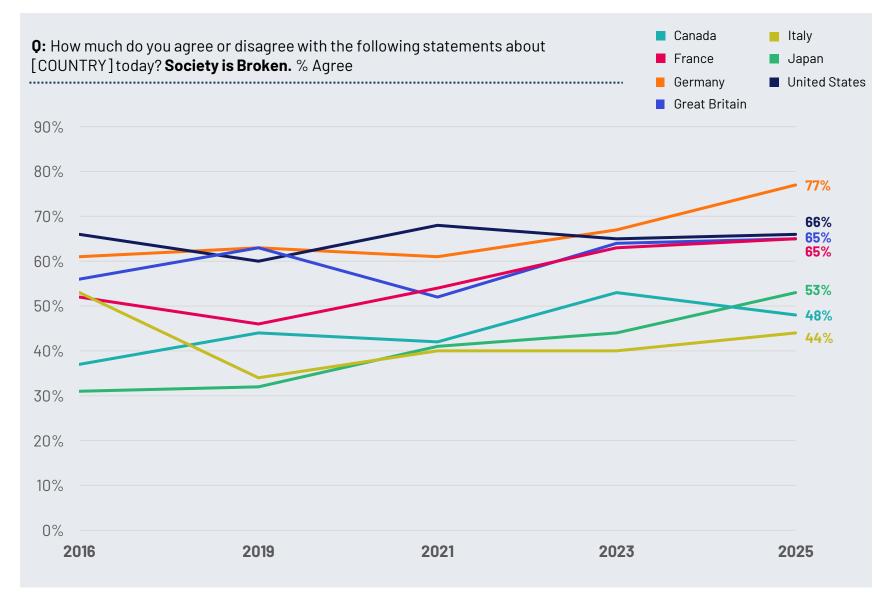
Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about [COUNTRY] today?

-Society is Broken





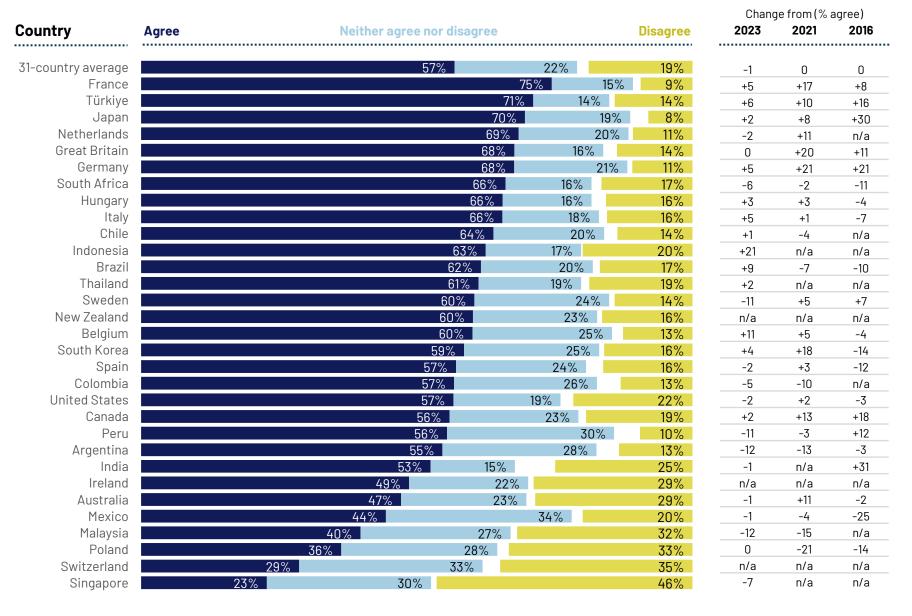
77% in Germany think society is broken, up from 61% in 2021.





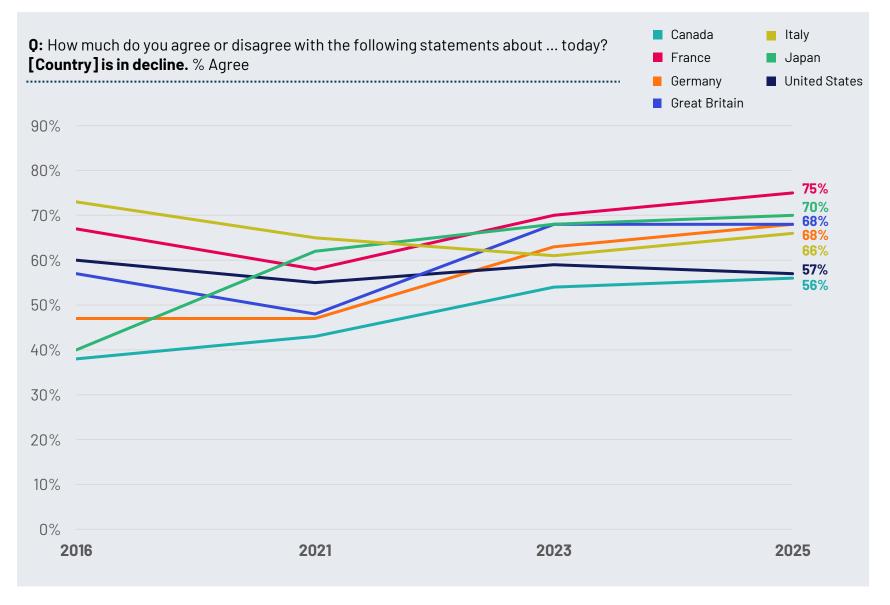
Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about [COUNTRY] today?

-is in decline





Since 2016, the proportion in Japan who feel the country is in decline is up 30pp.





The Ipsos Society is Broken Index is made up of the average agreement to the five statements below:

The [country's] economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful

Traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me

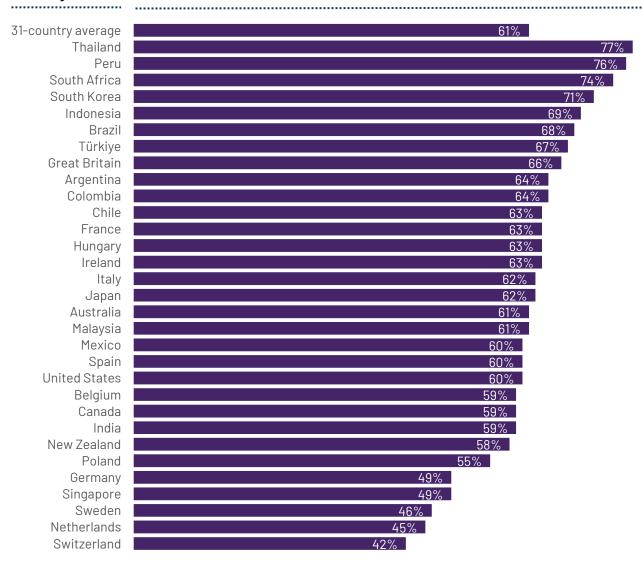
To fix [COUNTRY], we need a strong leader willing to break the rules

[COUNTRY] needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful

Experts in this country don't understand the lives of people like me

Base: Representative sample of 23,228 adults aged 16-74 in 31 participating countries, February 21st 2025 – March 7th 2025.

Country





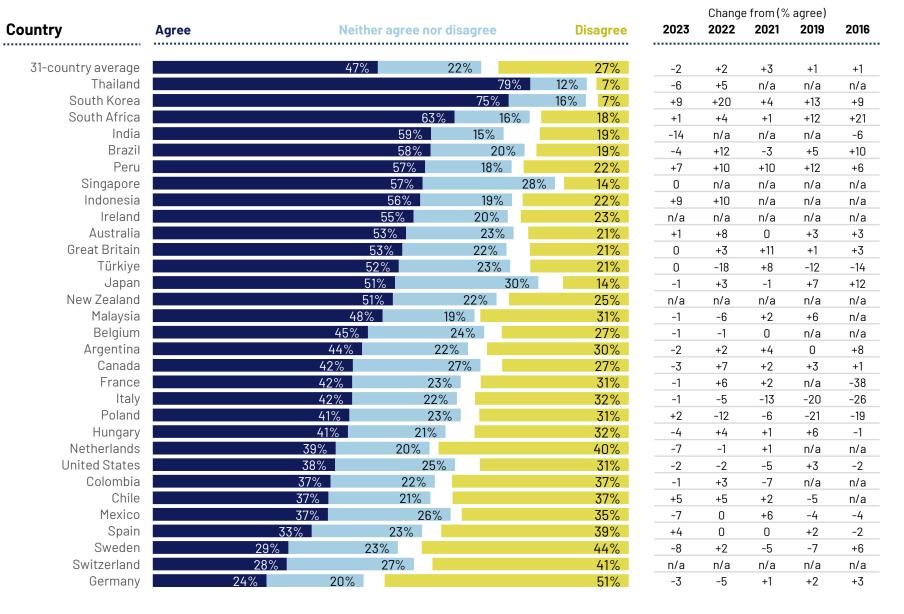
The Ipsos System is Broken Index over time

	2025	2023	2022	2021	2019	2016
Argentina	64%	64%	58%	63%	67%	59%
Australia	61%	60%	57%	61%	62%	62%
Belgium	59%	56%	60%	60%	64%	63%
Brazil	68%	67%	57%	72%	66%	62%
Canada	59%	58%	51%	54%	59%	56%
Chile	63%	59%	56%	71%	64%	N/A
Colombia	64%	63%	60%	74%	N/A	N/A
France	63%	63%	56%	61%	71%	74%
Germany	49%	48%	44%	47%	49%	44%
Great Britain	66%	64%	63%	57%	66%	60%
Hungary	63%	66%	61%	65%	64%	66%
India	59%	73%	N/A	N/A	N/A	65%
Indonesia	69%	62%	59%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ireland	63%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Italy	62%	57%	54%	68%	64%	69%
Japan	62%	59%	56%	61%	52%	45%
Malaysia	61%	62%	59%	67%	56%	N/A
Mexico	60%	62%	60%	64%	70%	71%
Netherlands	45%	48%	48%	48%	N/A	N/A
New Zealand	58%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Peru	76%	70%	63%	71%	68%	70%
Poland	55%	52%	57%	63%	64%	63%
Singapore	49%	52%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Africa	74%	73%	65%	71%	67%	58%
South Korea	71%	66%	56%	71%	64%	66%
Spain	60%	55%	53%	59%	64%	67%
Sweden	46%	49%	39%	42%	45%	35%
Switzerland	42%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Thailand	77%	76%	69%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Türkiye	67%	65%	69%	64%	63%	61%
United States	60%	60%	59%	65%	60%	62%



-To fix [COUNTRY], we need a strong leader willing to break the rules

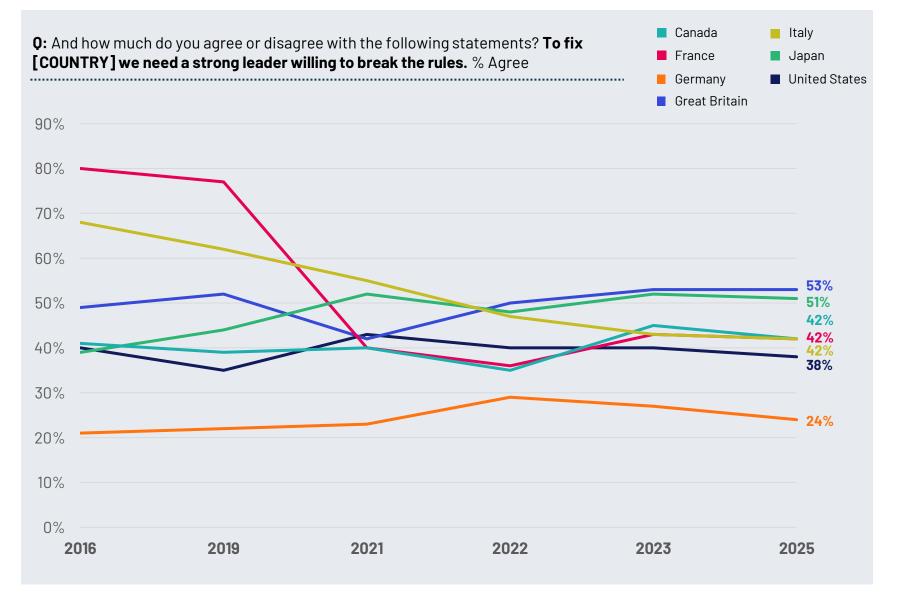
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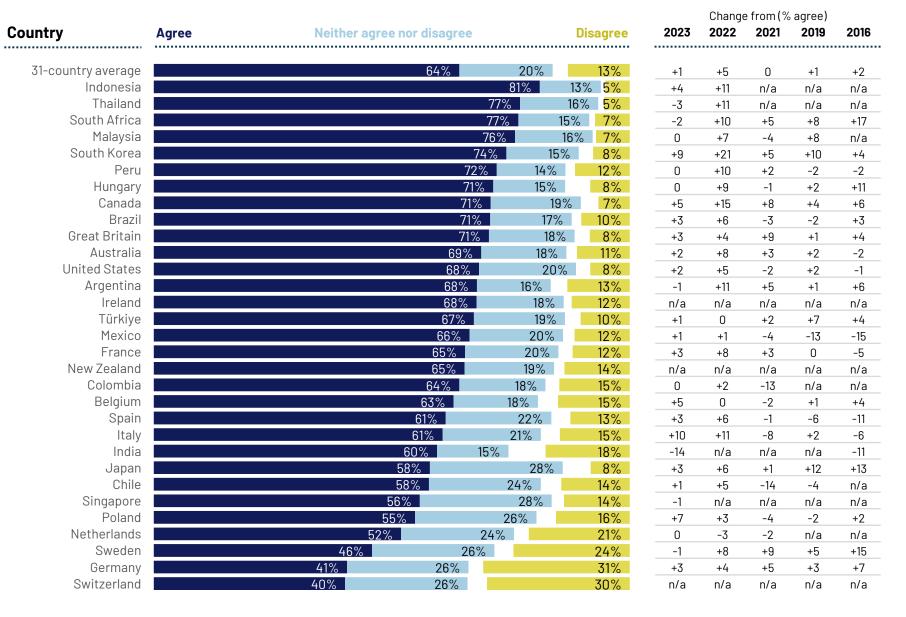
Support for a strong leader willing to break the rules in France is down 38pp since 2016 and down 26pp in Italy.





-[COUNTRY] needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful

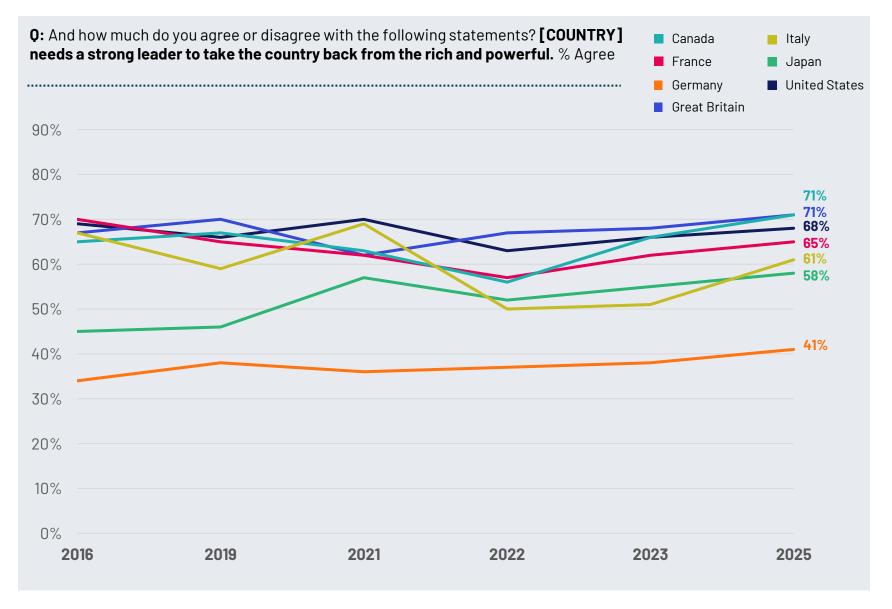
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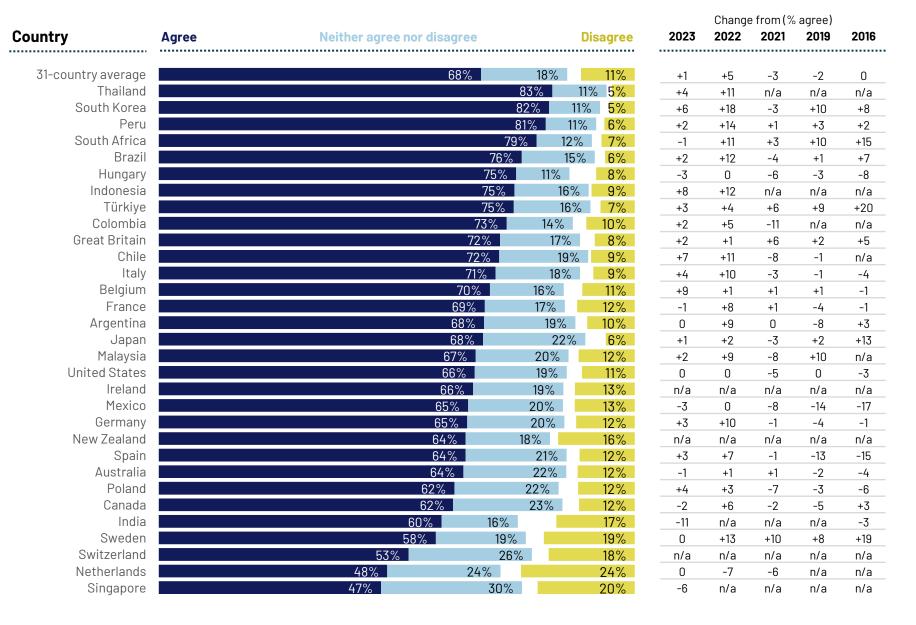


Despite the growth in belief that society is broken, comparatively few Germans want a strong leader.



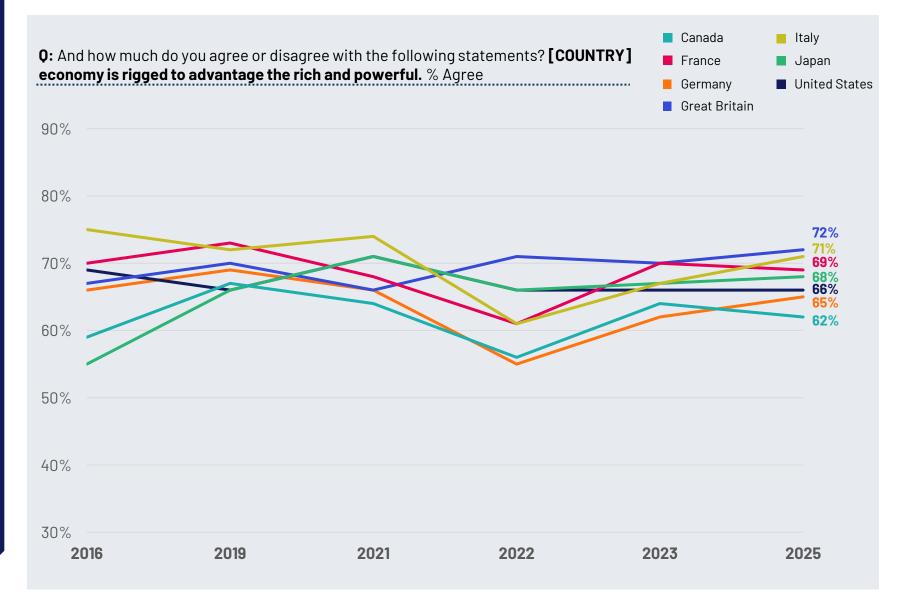


-[COUNTRY] economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful



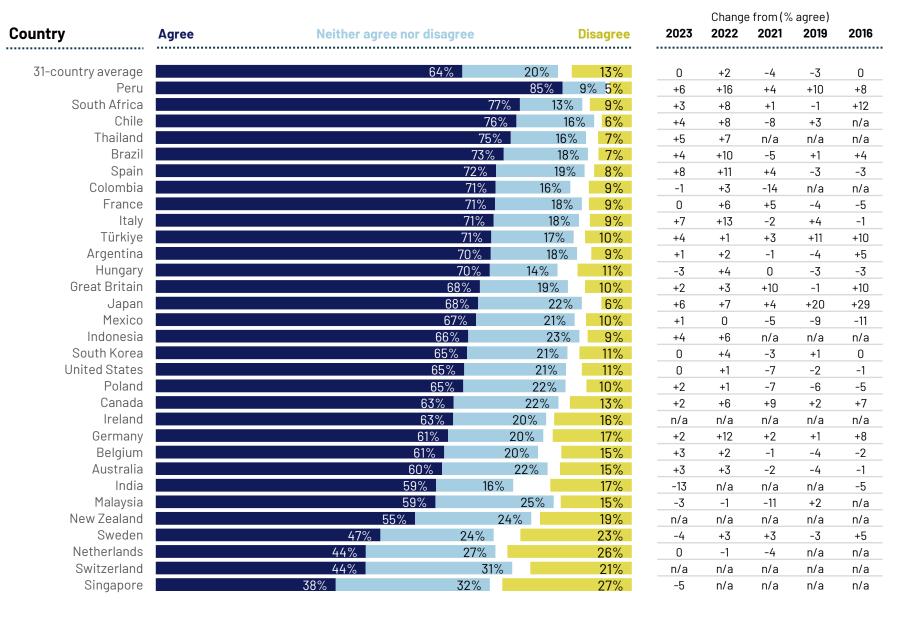


Italy, France, Canada and **Germany have** seen significant rises in belief the economy is rigged since the start of the cost-of-living crisis.



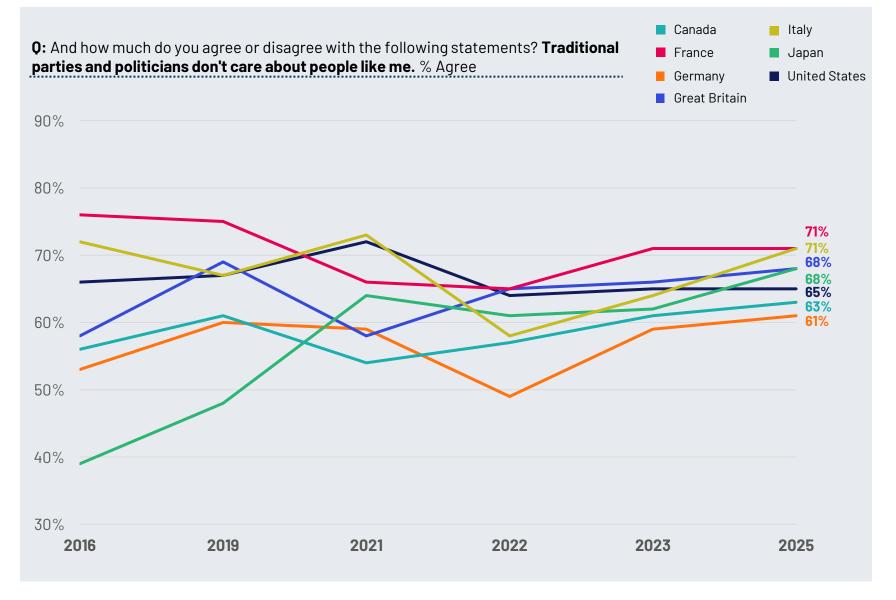


-Traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me



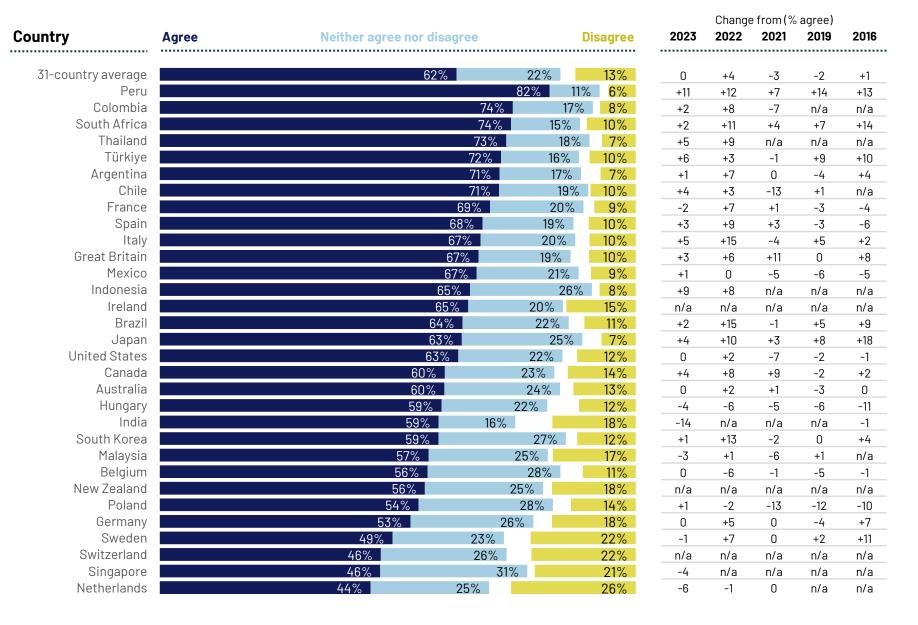


In Japan the proportion who think traditional parties don't care about them has risen 29pp since 2016.



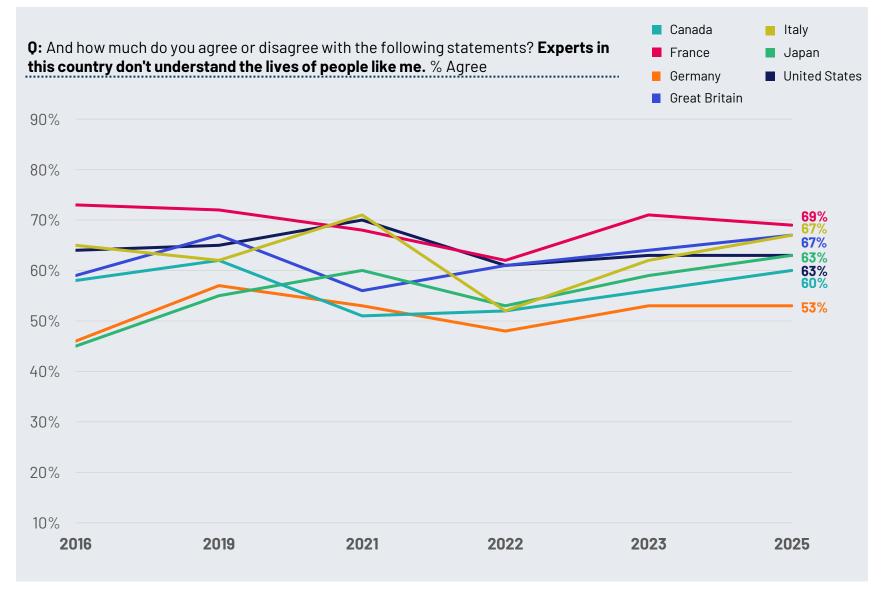


-Experts in this country don't understand the lives of people like me





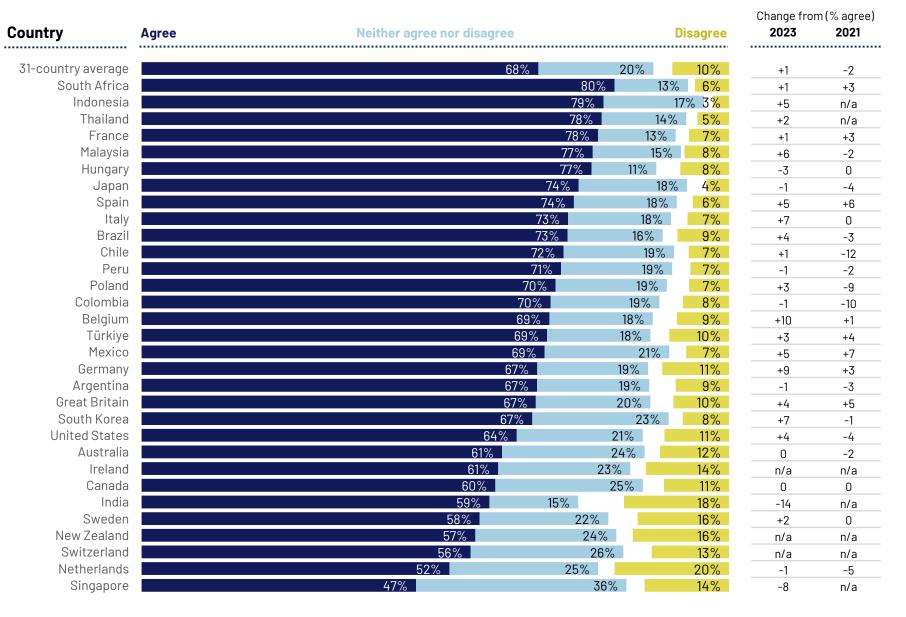
In Italy the proportion who think experts don't understand them is up 15pp since 2022.





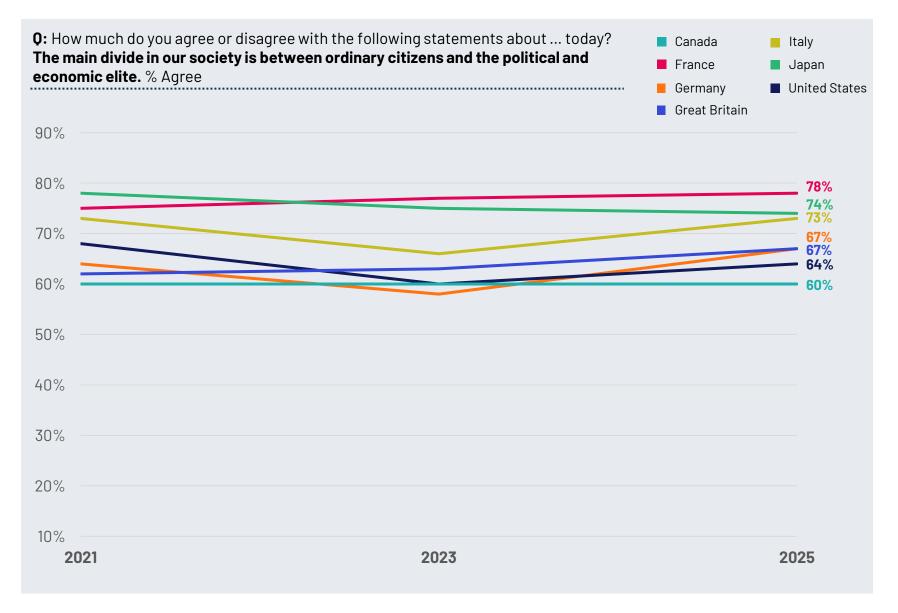


-The main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite



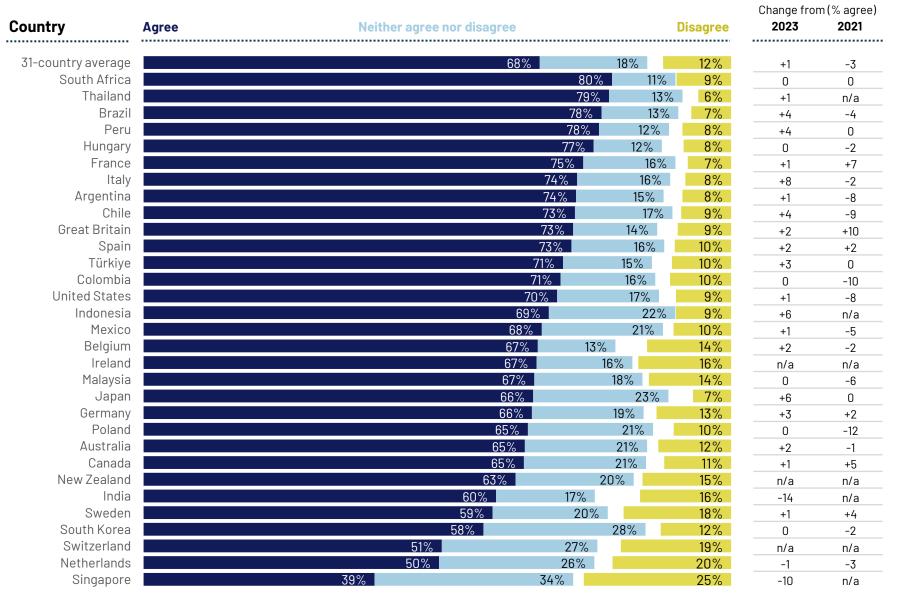


In Germany those who think the main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the elite is up 9pp since 2023.



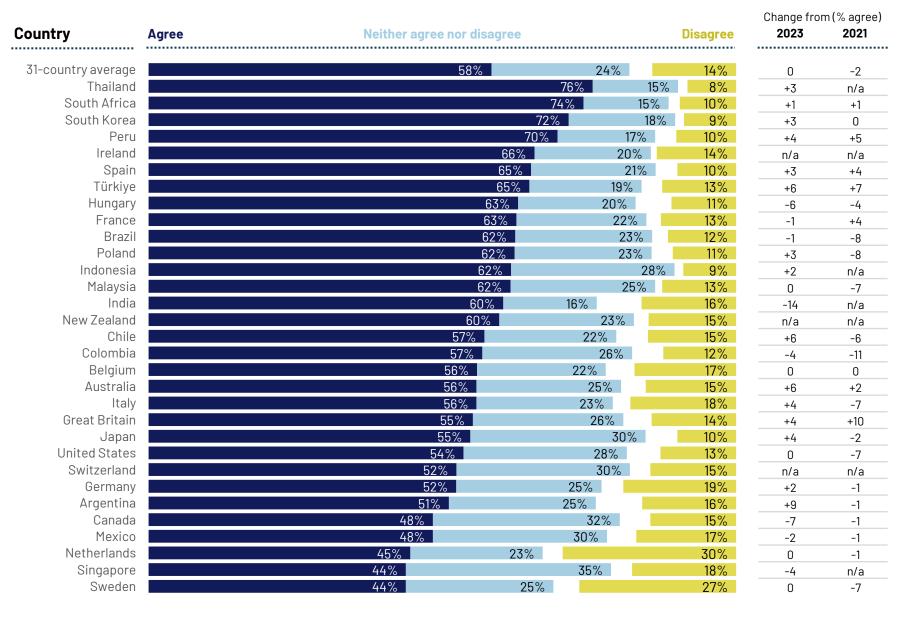


-The political and economic elite don't care about hard-working people



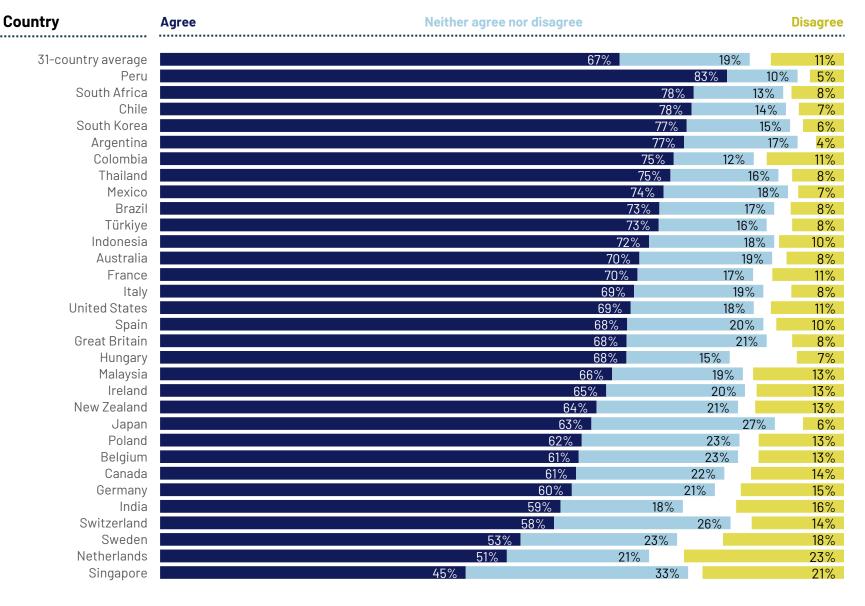


-The most important political issues in [COUNTRY] should be decided directly by the people through referendums, not by the elected officials





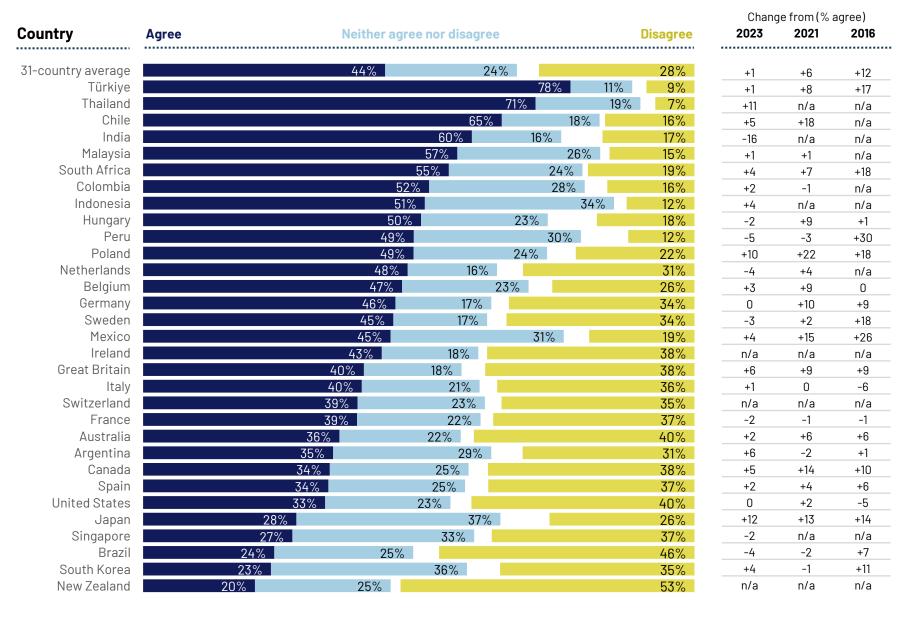
-The mainstream media is more interested in making money than telling the truth





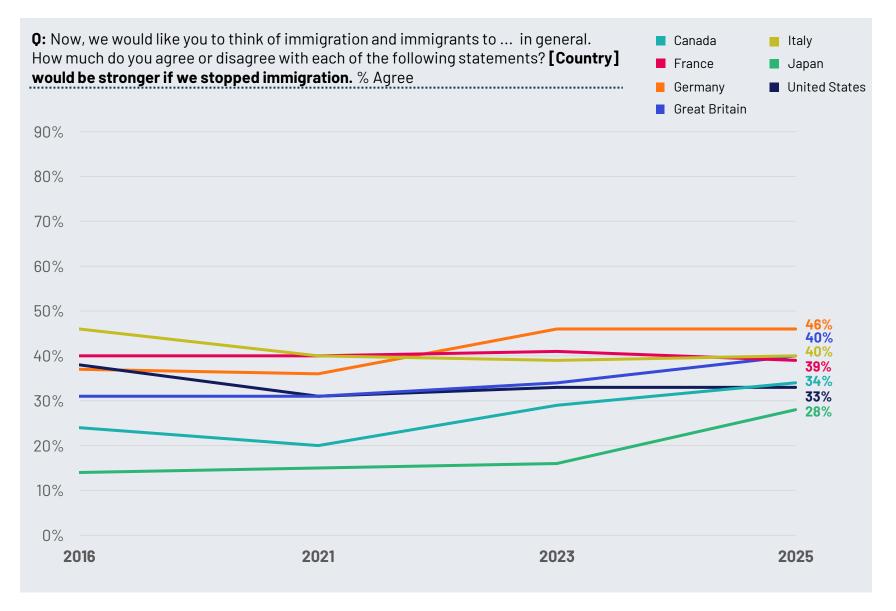
Q: Now, we would like you to think of immigration and immigrants to ... in general. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

-[COUNTRY] would be stronger if we stopped immigration





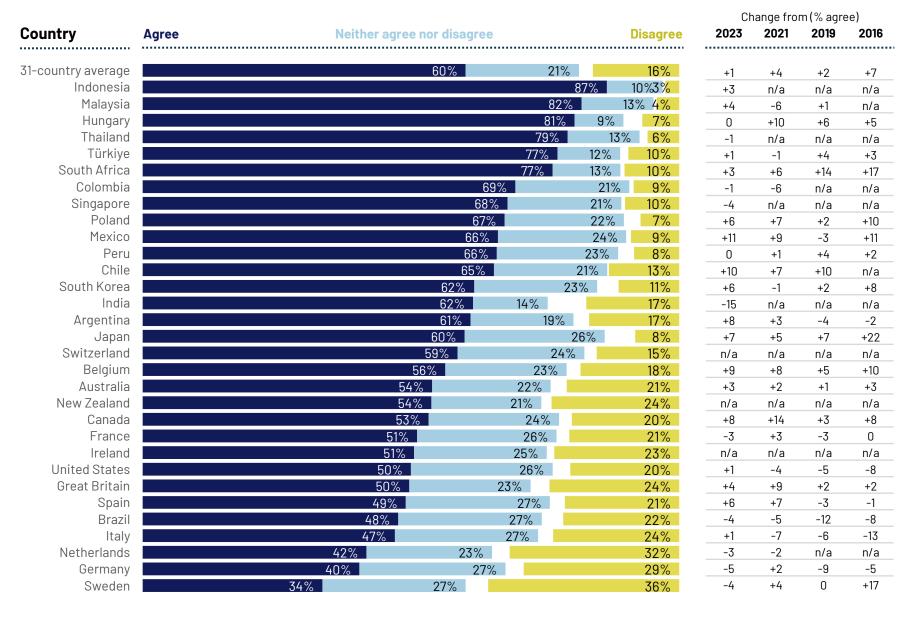
Since 2016, anti-immigrant beliefs in the US have been falling.





Q: Now, we would like you to think of immigration and immigrants to ... in general. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

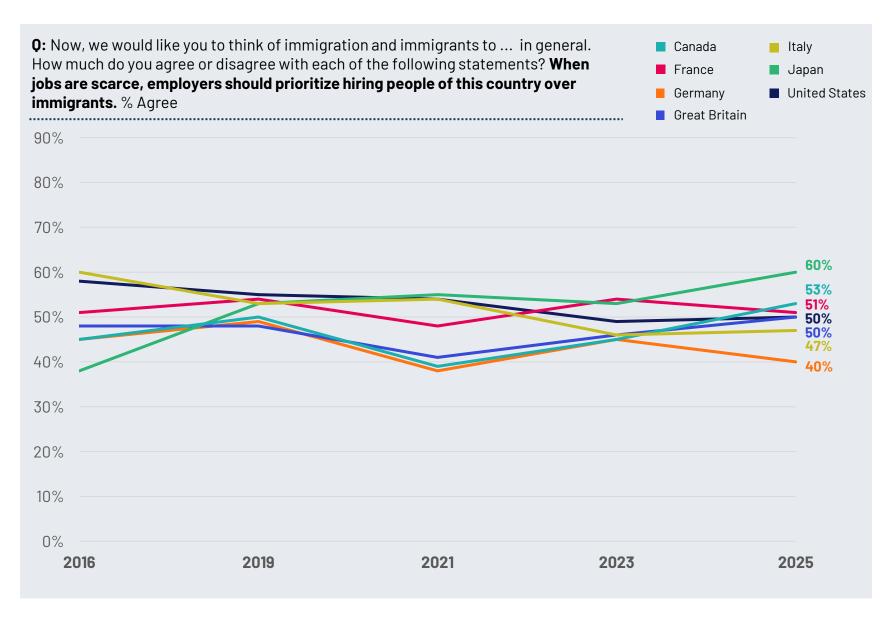
-When jobs are scarce, employers should prioritize hiring people of this country over immigrants





In Japan antiimmigrant beliefs are growing.

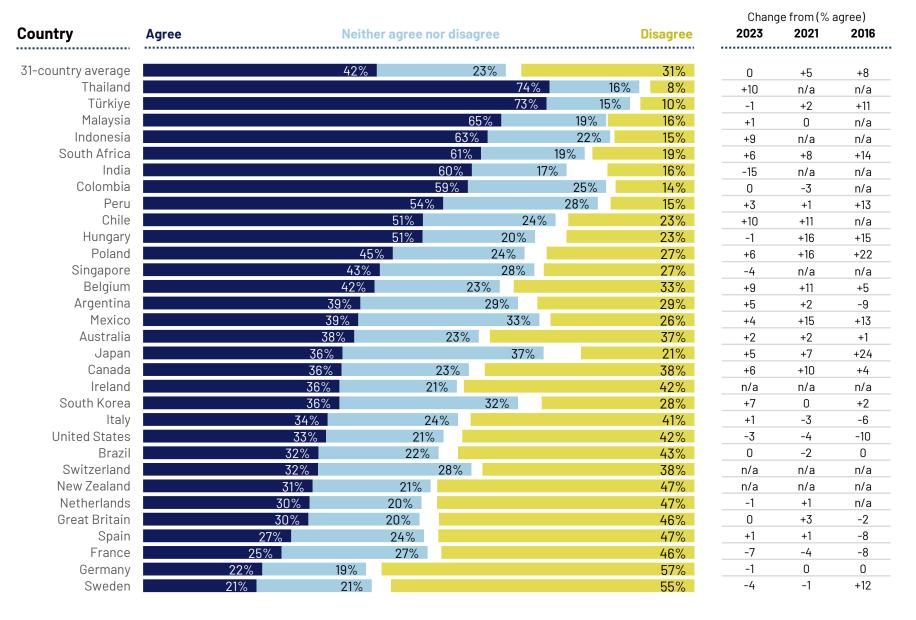






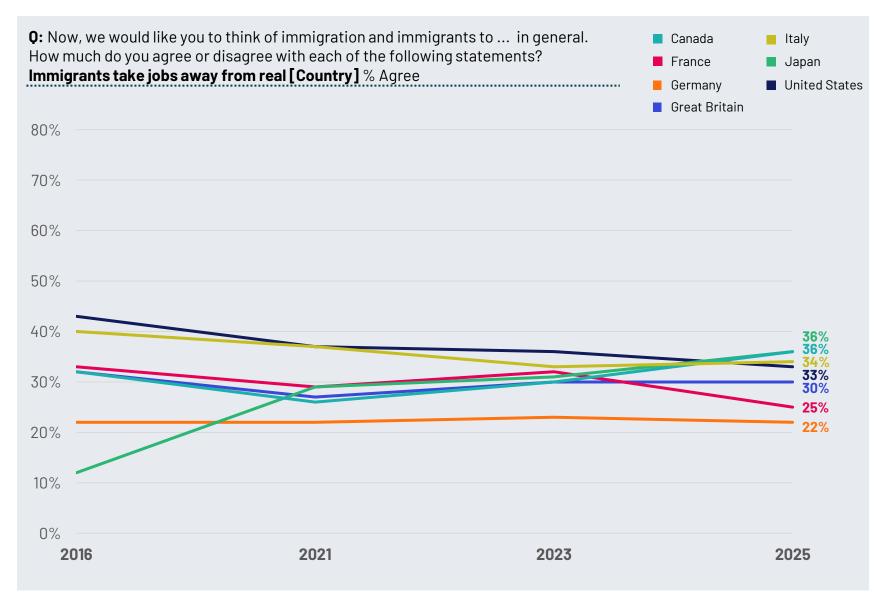
Q: Now, we would like you to think of immigration and immigrants to ... in general. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

-Immigrants take jobs away from real... [NOUN FOR PEOPLE FROM COUNTRY, PLURAL]



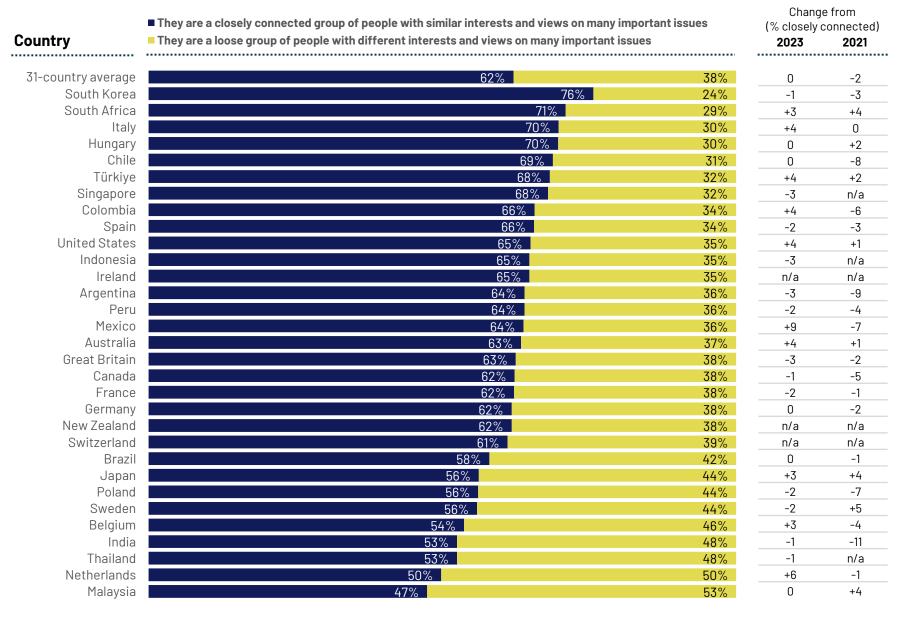


G7 countries have some of the lowest level of belief immigrants take jobs away from native people.





Q: The people who exercise power or influence in politics, business, the media, technology, science, and academia are often called 'the elite'. Which of these two statements is closest to your opinion of the "elite" in ...?

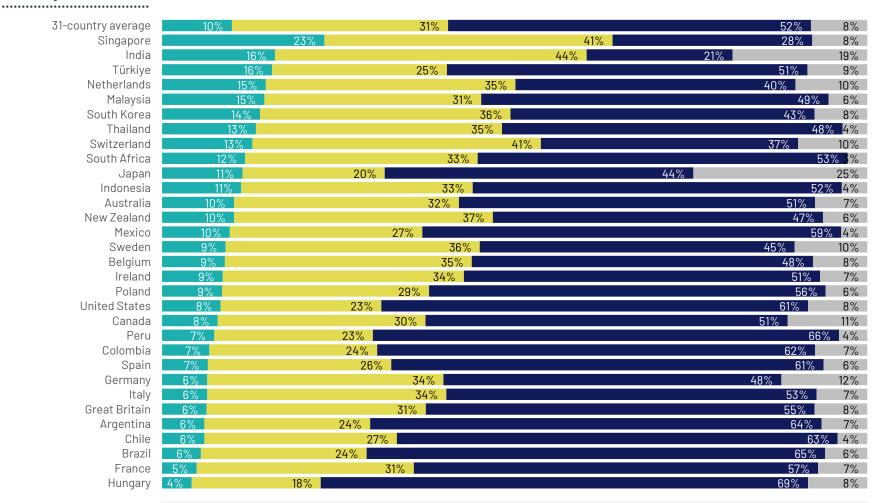




Q: And which of these three statements is closest to your opinion of the "elite" in ...?

Base: Representative sample of 23,228 adults aged 16-74 in 31 participating countries, February 21st 2025 – March 7th 2025.

Country

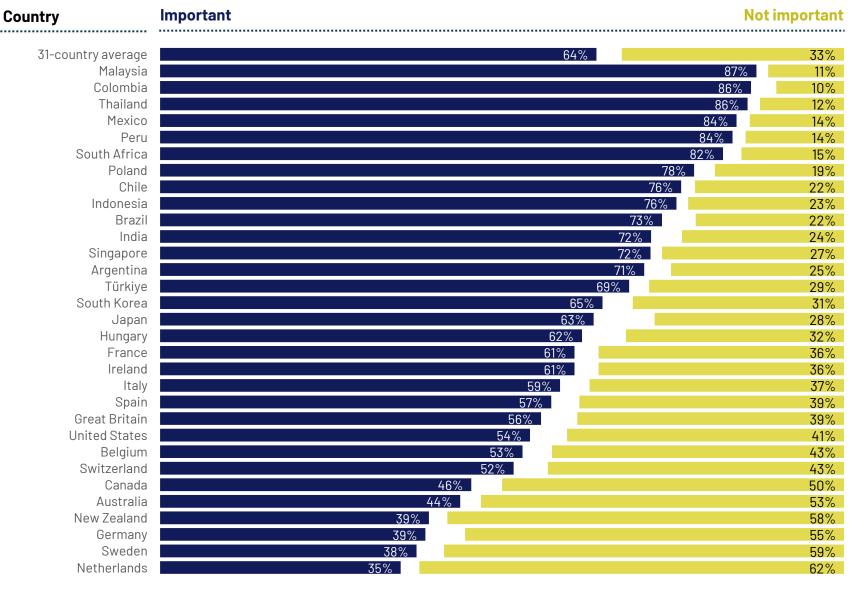


- They tend to make decisions that are in the best interest of most people in ...
- They sincerely believe their decisions are in the best interest of most people in ..., but that is often not the case
- They tend to make decisions based on their own interests and the needs of the rest of the people in ... do not matter
- None of these



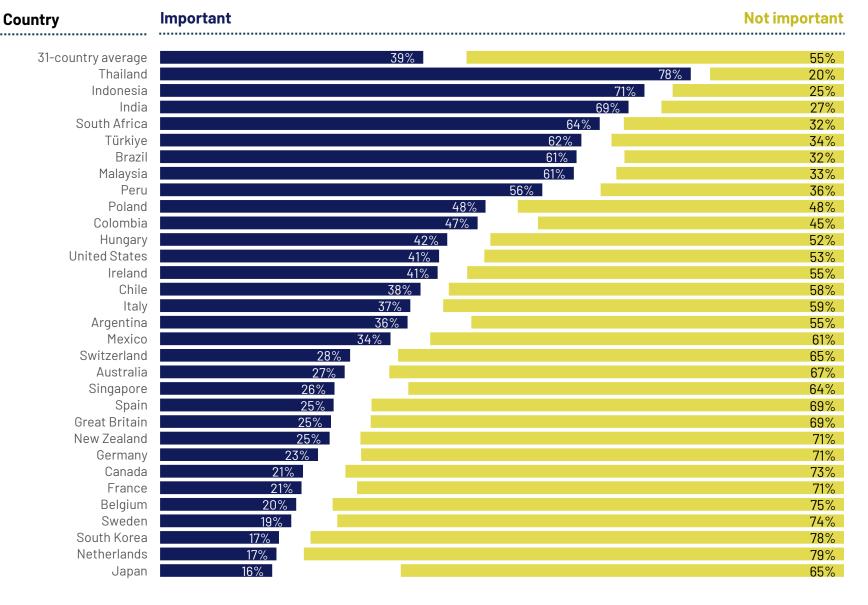


-Having been born in...
[COUNTRY]



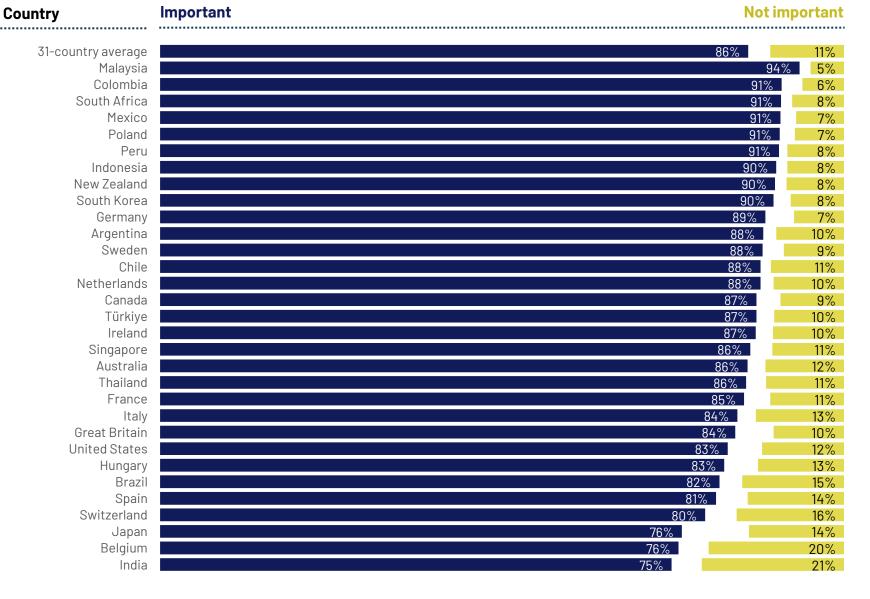


-To be a [RELIGIOUS MAJORITY]



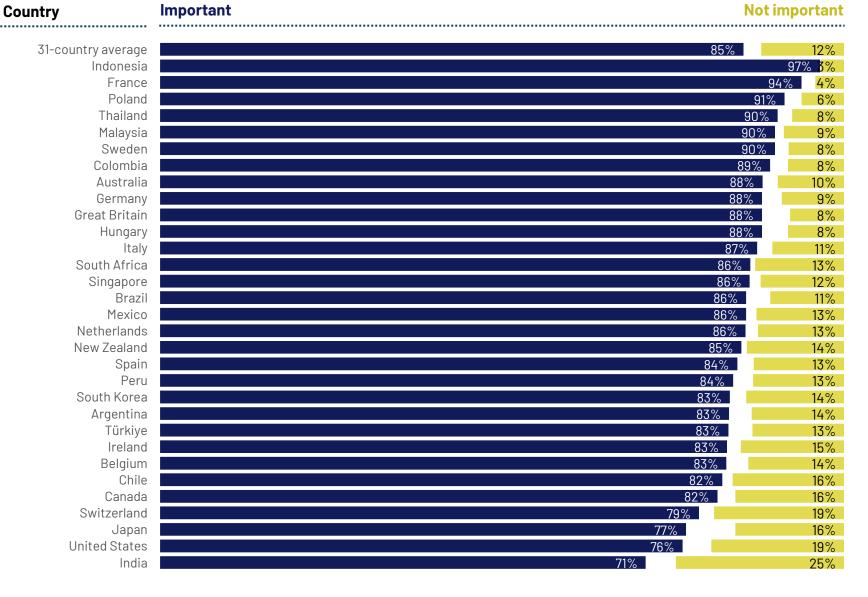


-Voting



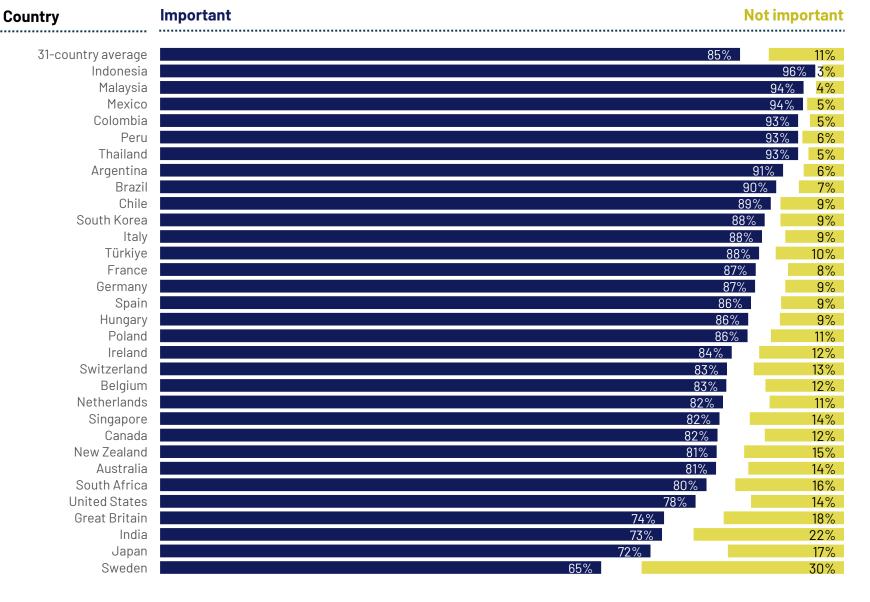


-To be able to speak
[LANGUAGE OF SURVEY]



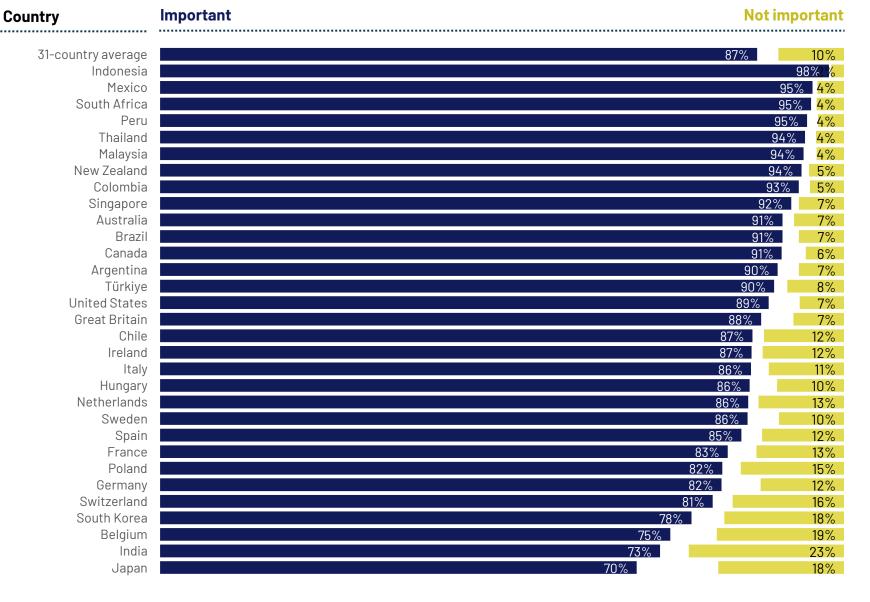


-Trying to get ahead on one's own efforts



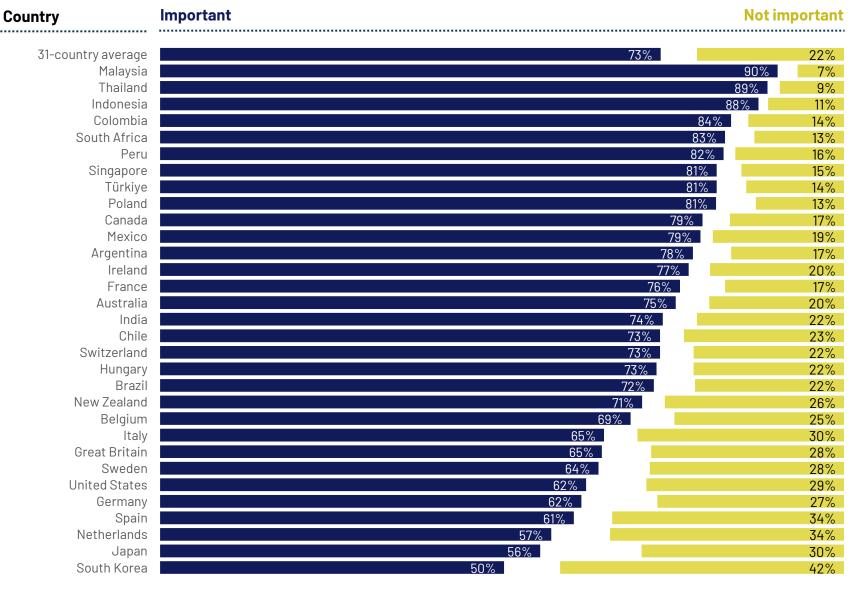


-Treating people of all backgrounds equally





-Defending [COUNTRY] when it is criticized

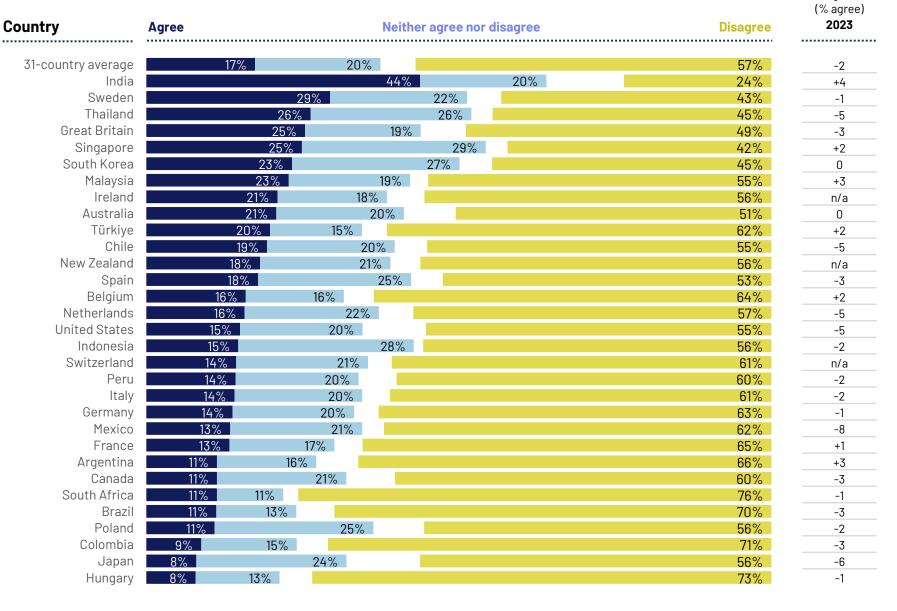






Q: Do you agree or disagree that the [COUNTRY ADJECTIVE] government should increase taxes to pay for any additional public spending?

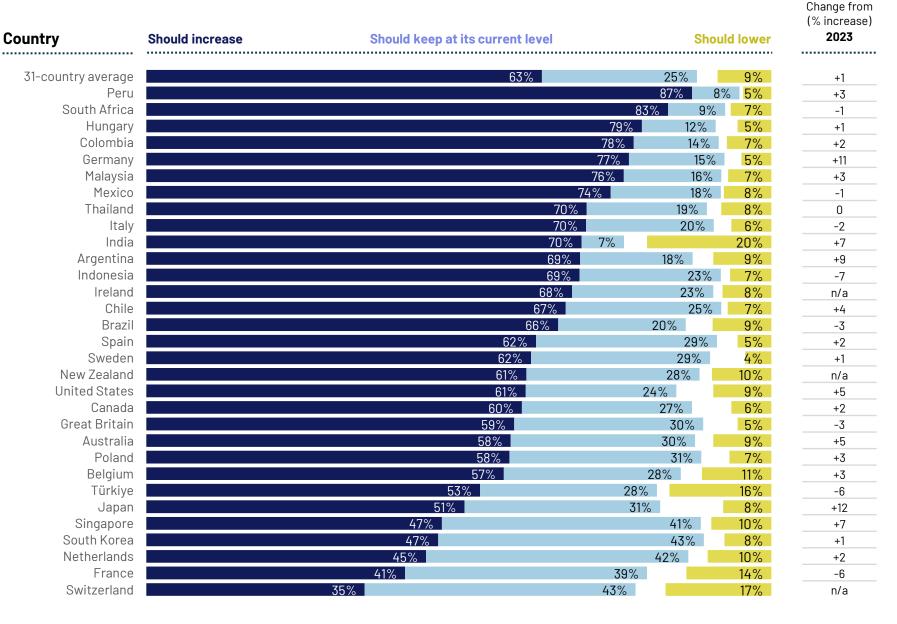
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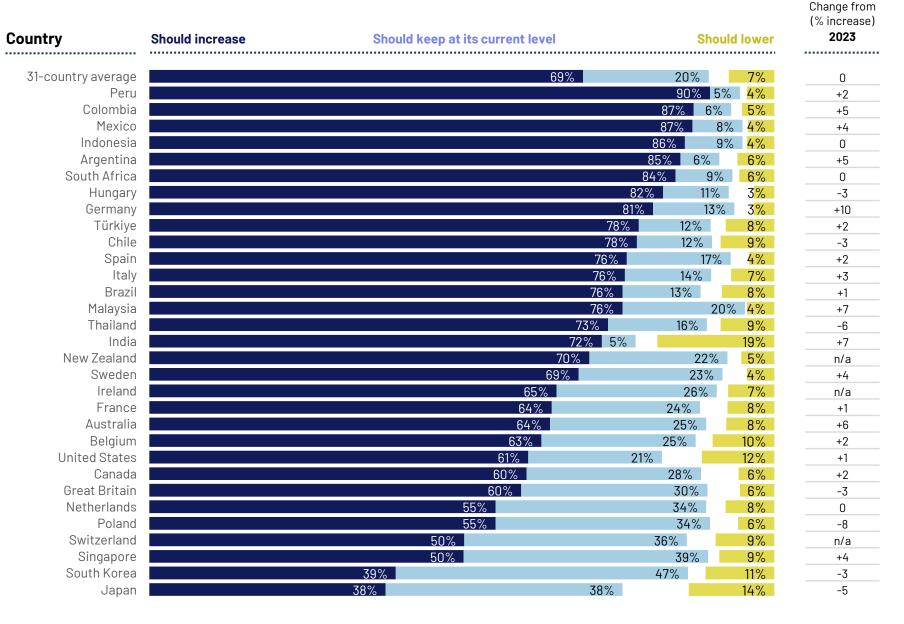
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-Infrastructure (e.g., roads and bridges, rail and air networks, water, electricity, broadband)



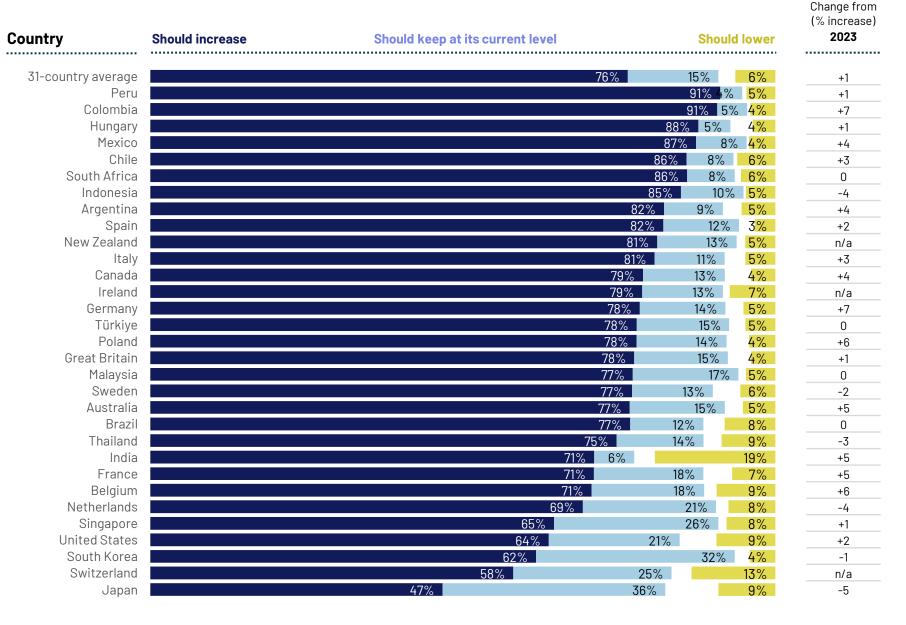


-Education (e.g., schools, universities, job training)



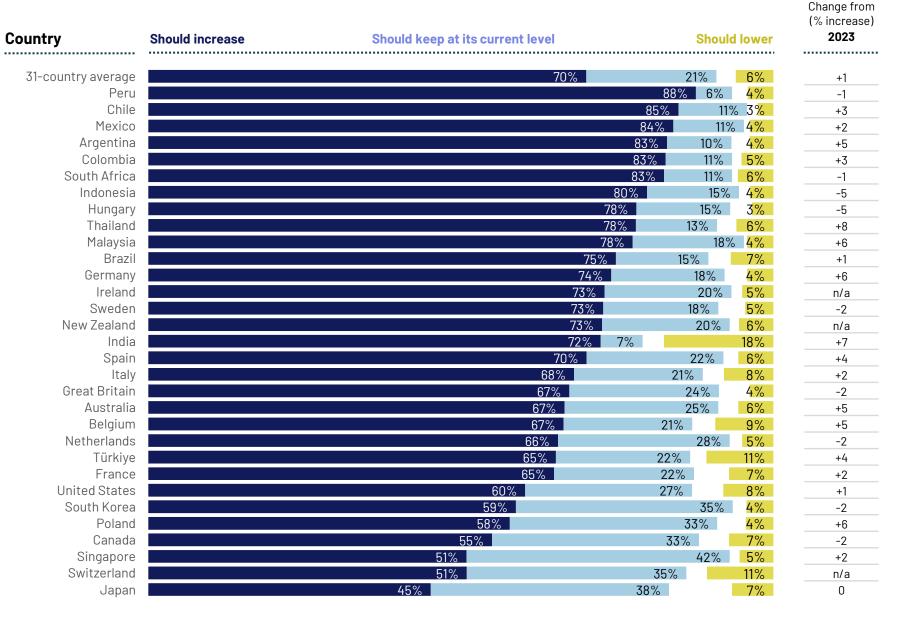


-Healthcare (e.g. disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, research)





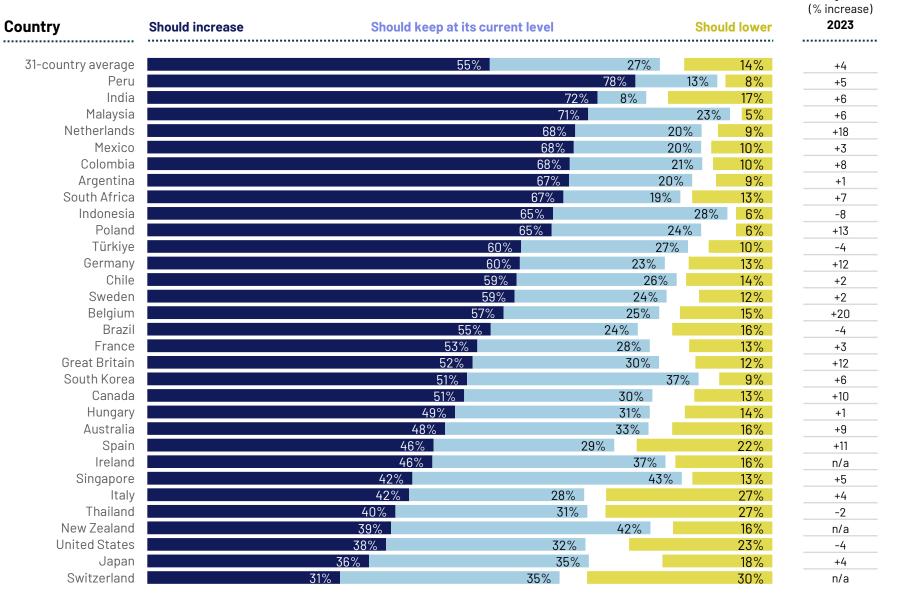
-Public safety (e.g., law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services)





-Defense and national security (e.g., the military)

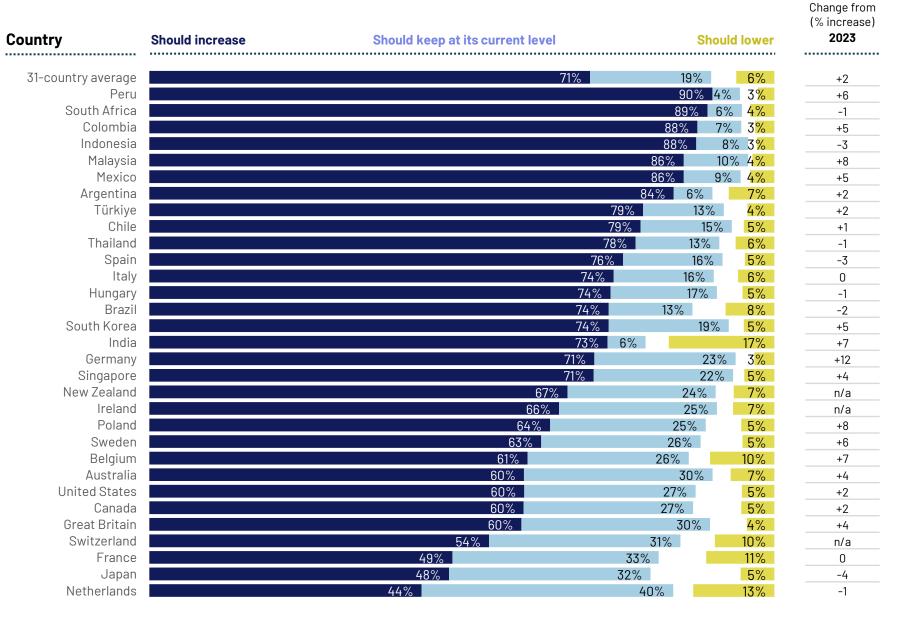
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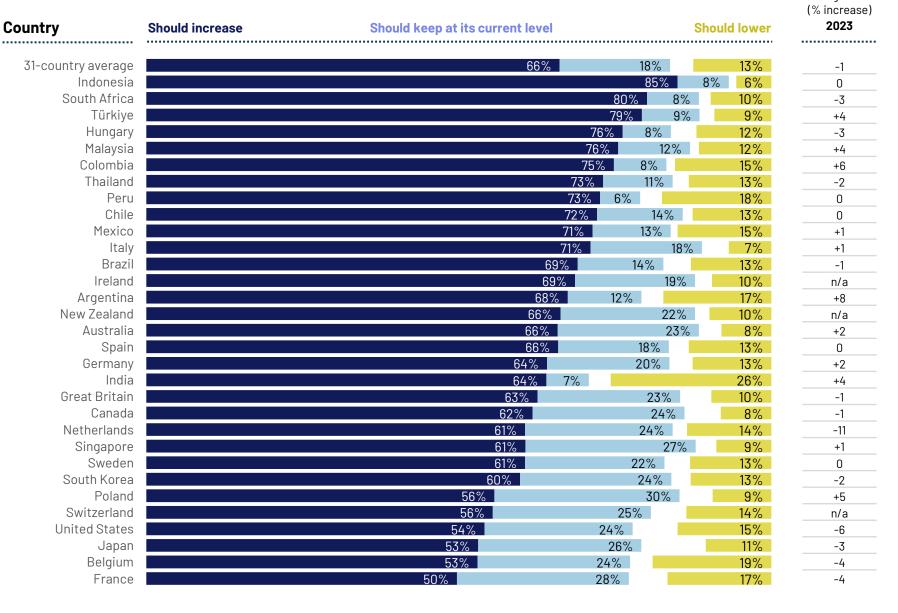
-Creating jobs





-Reducing poverty and social inequality

Base: Representative sample of 23,228 adults aged 16-74 in 31 participating countries, February 21st 2025 – March 7th 2025.





Change from



Methodology

These are the results of a 31-country survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform and, in India, on its IndiaBus platform, between Friday, February 21, and Friday, March 7, 2025. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 23,228 adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18-74 in Canada, Republic of Ireland, Malaysia, South Africa, Türkiye, and the United States, 20-74 in Thailand, 21-74 in Indonesia and Singapore, and 16-74 in all other countries.

The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals each in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain, and the U.S., and 500 individuals each in Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, and Türkiye. The

sample in India consists of approximately 2,200 individuals, of whom approximately 1,800 were interviewed face-to-face and 400 were interviewed online.

Samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.S. can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. Samples in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, and Türkiye are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for these countries should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more "connected" segment of their population.

India's sample represents a large subset of its urban population — social economic classes A, B and C in metros and tier 1-3 town classes across all four zones.

The data is weighted so that the composition of each country's sample best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data.

"The 30-country average" reflects the average result for all the countries and markets in which the survey was conducted. It has not been adjusted to the population size of each country or market and is <u>not</u> intended to suggest a total result.

When percentages do not sum up to 100 or the 'difference' appears to

be +/-1 percentage point more/less than the actual result, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of "don't know" or not stated responses.

The precision of Ipsos online polls is calculated using a credibility interval with a poll where N=1,000 being accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of where N=500 being accurate to +/- 5.0 percentage points. For more information on Ipsos' use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website.

The publication of these findings abides by local rules and regulations.



For more information

Jamie Stinson

Content Director Ipsos Knowledge Centre

<u>Jamie.Stinson@ipsos.com</u>

