IPSOS PRESS RELEASE:

MALAYSIAN VIEWS ON TERTIARY EDUCATION

Malaysians believe in the power of a degree, but does it deliver?

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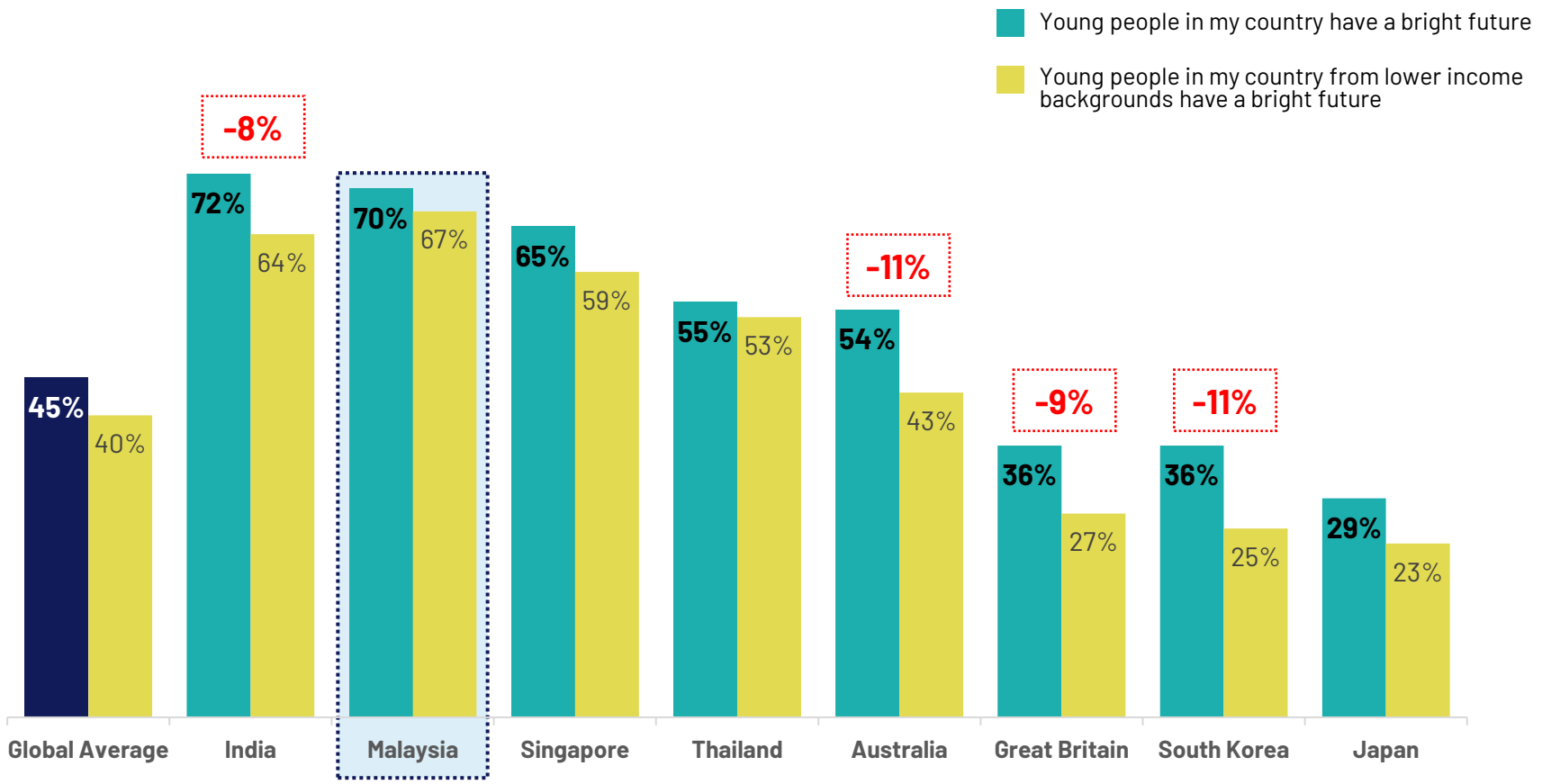
A bright future belongs to every Malaysian youth, regardless of income status

In an equitable society, background should never dictate potential. In Malaysia, optimism about young people's future prospects is notably strong, with 70% believing they have a bright future, well above the global average of 45%.

Encouragingly, this positive perception remains largely consistent even among young people from lower-income backgrounds.

Base:
23,537 online adults under the age of 75 across 31 countries, interviewed 19 Jun – 3 Jul 2026.

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(% Agree)



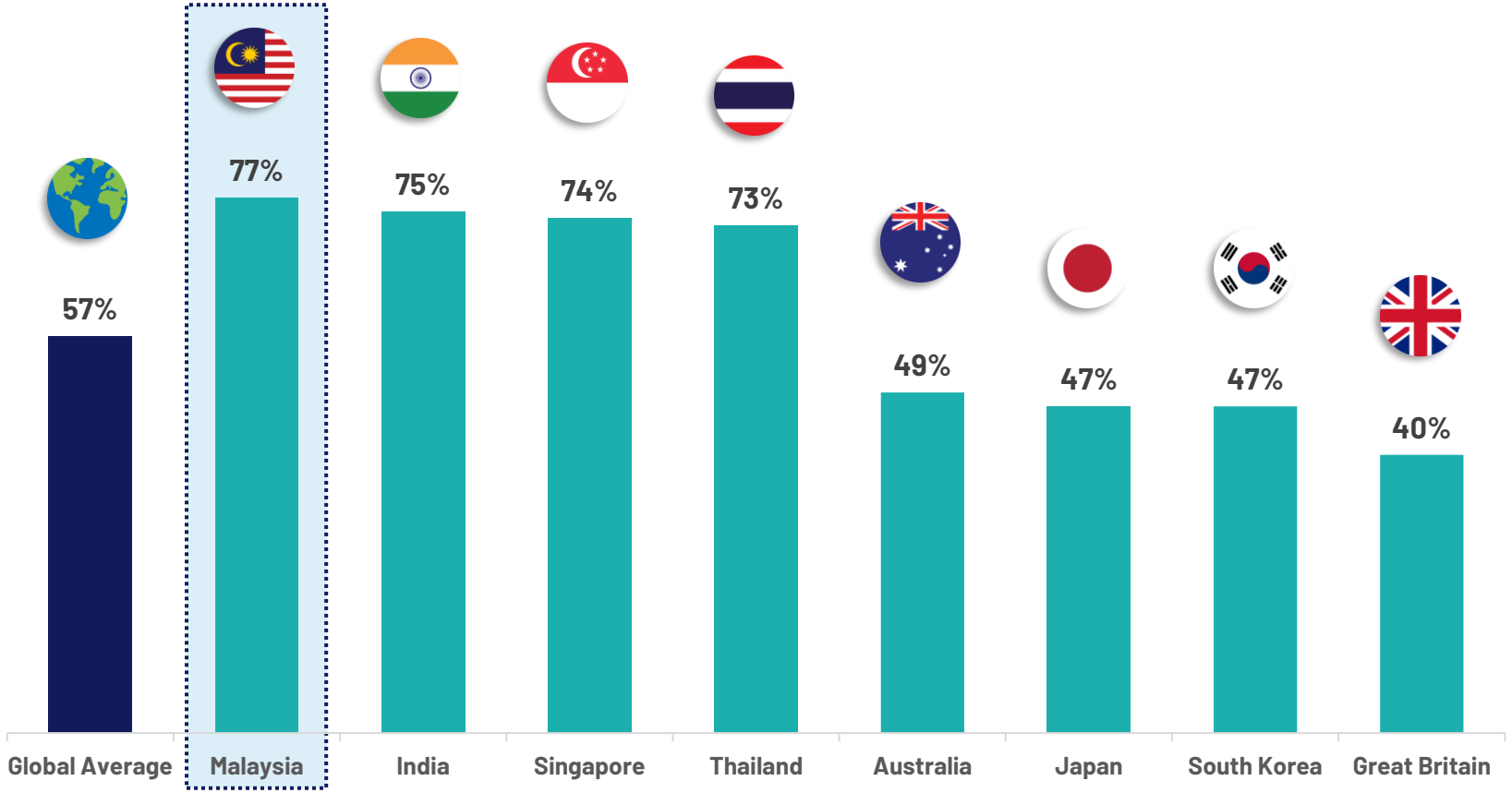
University degrees remain key to a bright future in most Asian countries

Malaysia leads globally in the perceived importance of university degrees, with a considerably higher proportion believing a degree is very important to succeed in life than the global average. This strong belief is also reflected in other Asian markets, including India, Singapore and Thailand.

With degrees seen as key to success, accessible education and high-skilled career pathways remain essential to helping graduates fully realise their potential.

Base:
23,537 online adults under the age of 75 across 31 countries, interviewed 19 Jun – 3 Jul 2026.

Q. Having a college / university degree is very important to succeed in life
(% Agree)



Younger Malaysians see university degree as a trusted route to career advancement

More than 8 in 10 younger Malaysians (Gen Z and Millennials) believe a university degree improves career prospects, compared with their parents' generation (Gen X and Baby Boomers). A similar generational pattern emerges in perceptions of how well the tertiary education syllabus prepares students for future careers.

This contrast raises an interesting generational question: while younger Malaysians increasingly see a degree as essential to securing career opportunities, are older generations more conscious of the investment required and whether the returns justify the rising cost of tertiary education?

Base:
23,537 online adults under the age of 75 across 31 countries, interviewed 19 Jun – 3 Jul 2026.



80%

of Malaysians believe having a college or university degree helps to improve their career prospects, compared to only 61% of the global average

%, percentage agreed across generations



Gen Z
84%



Millennial
80%



Gen X
76%



Baby Boomer
67%

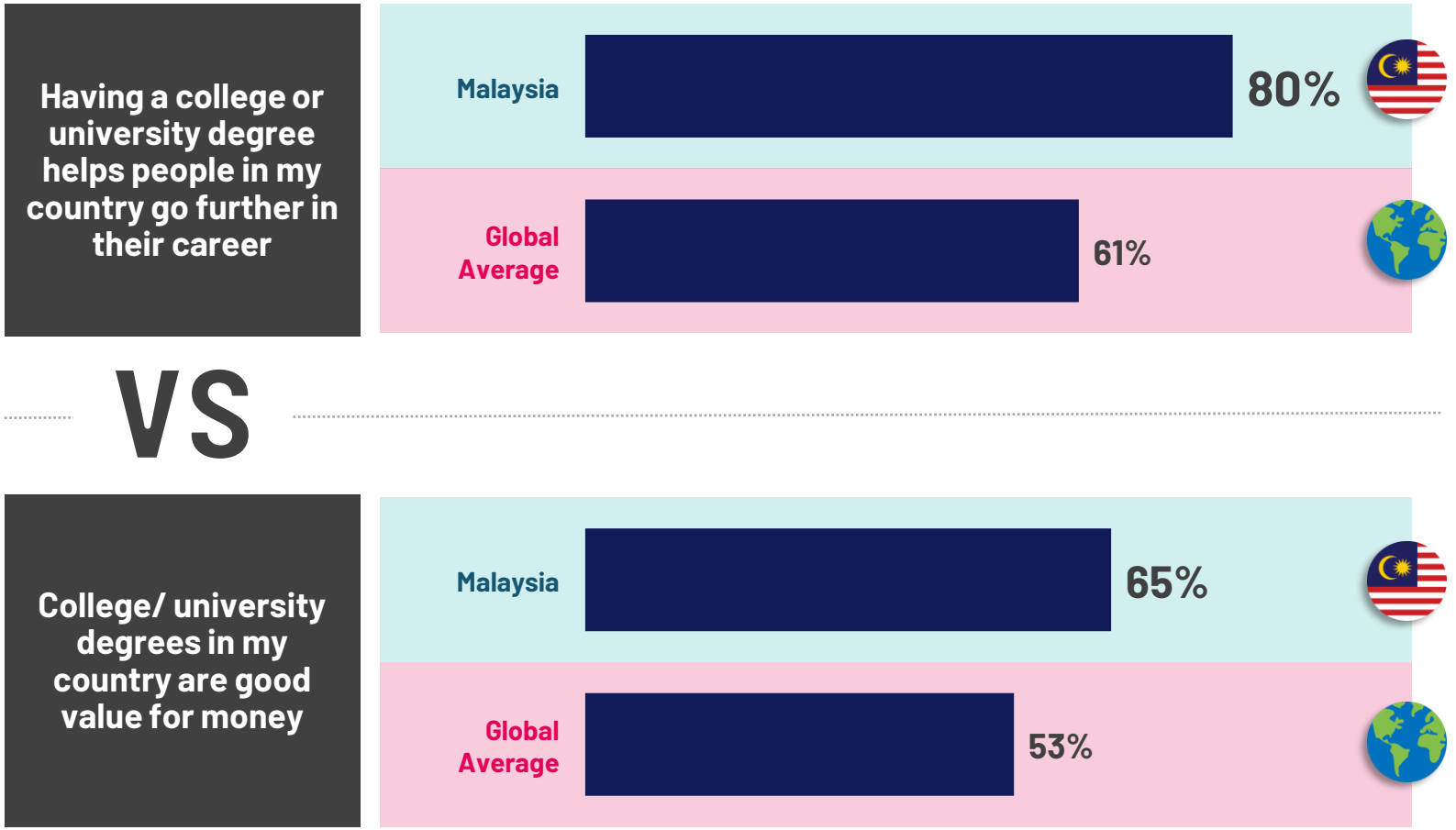
However, belief in the value of degrees lags in its investment

Despite strong confidence in the quality of local higher education, this confidence is less pronounced when it comes to value for money, with only 65% agreeing that university degrees offer good value.

This disconnect raises a bigger question: beyond acquiring relevant knowledge and qualifications, are graduates able to translate their education into jobs that match their skills and expectations?

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Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(% Agree)



About 2 in 3 Malaysians eye opportunities abroad, signaling brain drain risk

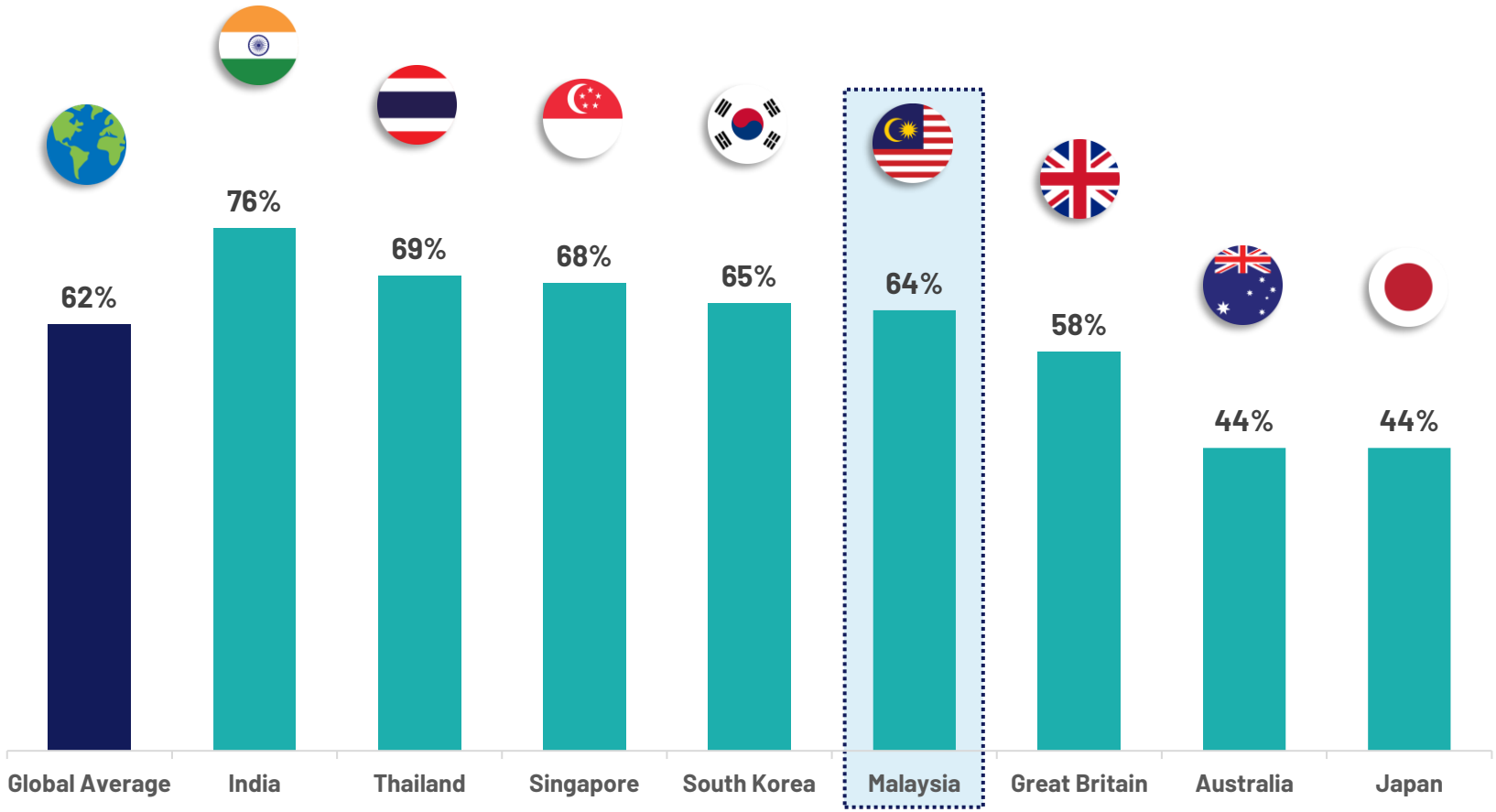
This raises broader concerns about whether Malaysia can offer enough attractive career opportunities for its graduates. While the country's education institutions continue to produce capable graduates, the availability of well-paying, high-value jobs at home will be key to retaining local talent.

The bigger question is whether young Malaysians increasingly see working abroad not just as an opportunity to explore, but as a way to secure better career prospects and advancement.

Base:
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Q. Young people in my country today would have better opportunities by moving abroad

(% Agree)



Malaysia has built strong, equitable access through higher education. The real test is whether it can deliver economically.

Ipsos' latest Education Monitor survey shows that Malaysia's faith in higher education is among the strongest in the world. Malaysians are among the most likely to say a degree is very important to succeed in life, with four in five saying it improves career prospects. This confidence is supported by continued progress in the higher education sector, including Universiti Malaya reaching 56th in the QS World University Rankings 2027, Budget 2027 allocating RM19.1 billion to the Ministry of Higher Education, and PTPTN repayments deferred for borrowers earning RM2,500 or less, benefiting over 400,000 people.

Yet belief in the degree runs ahead of its payoff. About one in three graduates work below their qualification level, while the Higher Education Deputy Minister noted graduate numbers are growing faster than high-skilled jobs. The consequences extend beyond job mismatch: the World Bank estimates that underemployed graduates earn 49.3% less than those in jobs matched to their qualifications.

The risk is not that Malaysians lose faith in degrees, but that they see better opportunities elsewhere. With 2 in 3 Malaysians believing young people have improved prospects abroad, the country faces a broader talent-retention challenge. Ultimately, the success of the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (*Rancangan Pendidikan Tinggi Malaysia*) 2026–2035 depends not only on producing capable graduates, but on creating opportunities to realise their potential at home.



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