

# PERILS OF PERCEPTION

A 30-Country Ipsos  
Global Advisor Survey

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# Introducing the Perils of Perception

**For the last decade Ipsos has been exploring the gap between people's perception and reality on a range of issues.**

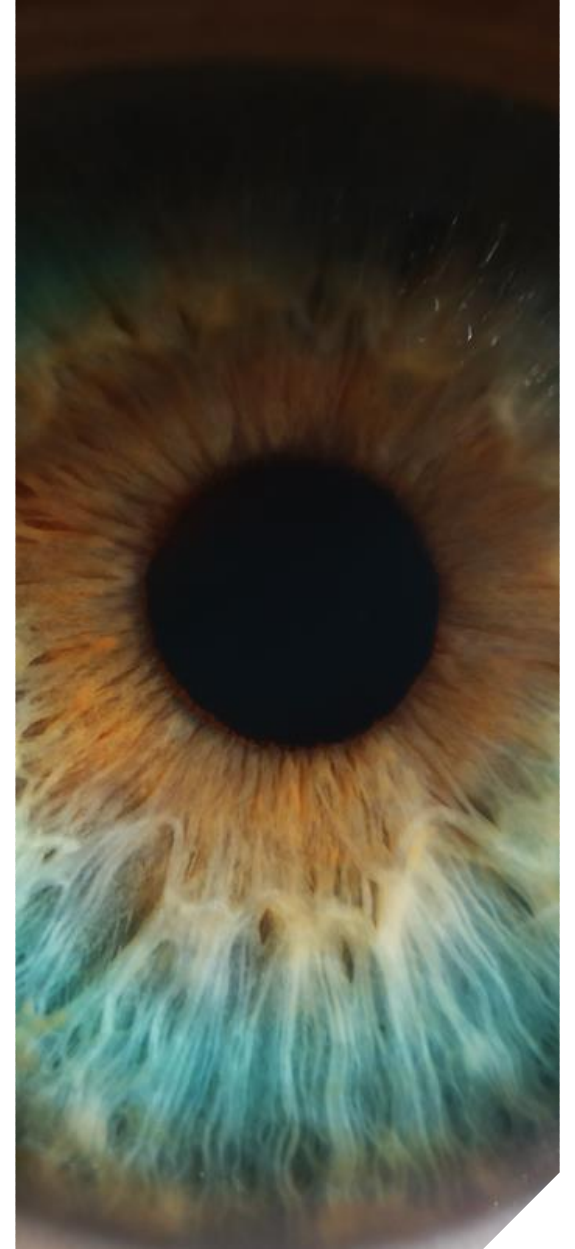
Based on over 200,000 interviews across more than 40 countries, our analysis dives into these misperceptions and explores why people around the world are so often wrong.

Public misperceptions prove to be persistent, spanning most countries and covering a wide range of topics including

society's demographic makeup, the prevalence of obesity, the leading causes of death, the cost of raising a family, the risk of terrorism, the impact of climate change and many more.

Consumer misperceptions may also result in misaligned expectations. Brands and organisation must take into account what consumers believe about a topic – even if they are 'wrong' – in order to meet – or try to change – these resultant expectations.

While misperceptions are often innocent/benign, the gap between perception and reality can have more serious consequences on the public's trust more broadly – in institutions, elites, experts, and even the reliability of elections.



# The 2024 landscape

**As entered 2024, we asked the public what their predictions were for the year ahead.**

While some were clearly off the mark (50% predicted that robots would look like, think like and speak like humans), others were [more on the money](#). Fewer than one in three people (31%) thought the war in Ukraine would end and eight in ten (81%) expected average global temperatures to rise. Meanwhile, people in China, Italy and South Korea were well aware that their population was set to continue to fall this year.

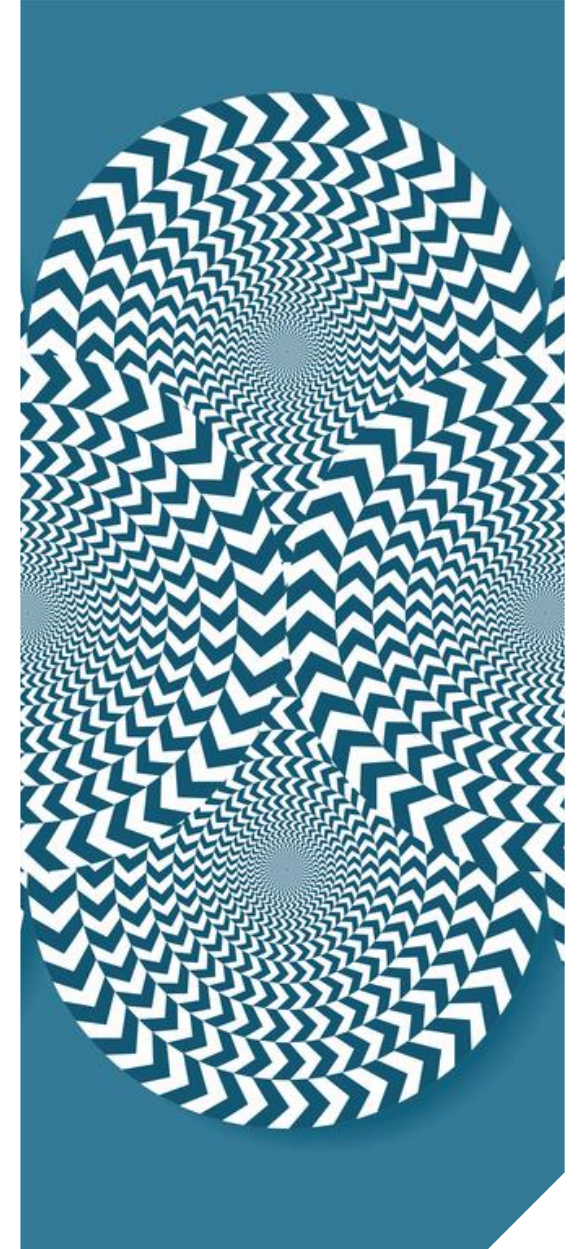
However, over the course of the year our international Global Advisor

research programme continues to find pockets where perception does not align with reality.

We found no correlation between public perceptions of [increased crime & violence in their neighbourhood](#) and 'factual increases'. People are similarly poor at accurately estimating their [risk of developing cancer](#) or estimating [the quality of their country's education system](#). And when it comes to tackling climate change, we continue to [overestimate the importance of low impact actions](#), while underestimating the importance of high impact actions.

All this fits within a broader context of (dis)trust, [with many professions – politicians, journalists and business leaders among them – deemed more untrustworthy than trustworthy](#).

What's new? What stays the same? After a decade of research, some things seem constant – our belief that crime rates are rising, our overestimation of the proportion of immigrants in the population. But we also see progress, with some improvements in our knowledge around climate change and – in some countries – in our accuracy in guessing how many people in our country are Muslim.

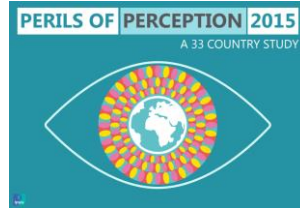


# Snapshots from our research programme



**2013** Population makeup and the scale of key policy issues.

*GB only*



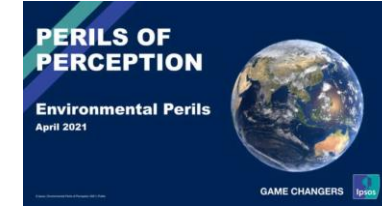
**2015** Spread of household wealth, obesity, religion, immigration, & population demographics.

*33 countries*



**2017** Public awareness and perceptions of key global issues and population makeup.

*38 countries*



**2021** Environmental Perils. Most impactful actions to tackle climate change, scale of current impact.

*30 countries*

**2014** Population makeup and the scale of key policy issues.

*14 countries.*



**2016** Population makeup, spread of homophobia, anti-abortion sentiment.

*40 countries*



**2020** Causes of death.

*32 countries*



**2023** Belief in conspiracy theories.

*10 countries*



# Snapshots from our research programme

[Read more about the research and explore the data on Ipsos' dedicated Perils of Perception site](#)



Americans think one in four (24%) of all teenage girls aged 15-19 give birth each year, when the actual figure is only 3%.



**2017** Public awareness and perceptions of key global issues and population makeup.

*38 countries*

# 22%

believe the **current Ukrainian government is heavily infiltrated by neo-Nazi groups.**

**2014** Population makeup and the scale of key policy issues.

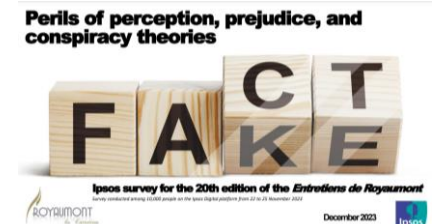
*14 countries.*



People hugely overestimate the proportion of prisoners in their countries who are immigrants: the average guess is 28% when it's actually only 15%.

**2023** Belief in conspiracy theories.

*10 countries*





# Why are we so 'wrong'? A wide range of causes

## How we THINK

Maths and  
statistical  
skills and  
critical  
literacy

Biases and  
heuristics

Rational  
ignorance  
(Do I NEED  
to pay  
attention?)

## What we're TOLD

Media

Social  
media

Politics

Our own  
experience

Cognitive  
capabilities

External  
context

# Why understanding the perils of perception is important

1

Our misperceptions provide clues to what people are worried/not worried about.

2

Our perceptions also highlight what we think of certain behaviours, how we view other people and what we think are social norms.

3

A 'perils of perception' mindset can help uncover which biases and sources of information are having the biggest influence on us.

4

And all of this can power conversations about how everyone in society can be better informed about the world around us.



# The 2024 Perils of Perceptions survey

# Key findings



## Perception is not reality

People tend to overestimate the scale of issues they worry about, whether that's the murder rate in their country, how much household wealth the richest 1% own, or the share of immigrants in their country.

While this is not a new picture - as shown by our research over the last 10 years - the context is always changing.



## Has blaming politicians peaked?

Belief that misperceptions are primarily due to politicians misleading people has fallen six percentage points since 2018. However, politicians still have a long way to go to gain public trust and they remain at the bottom of the rankings in our [Global Trustworthiness Index](#).

Social media has now moved into the top spot, with 45% on average across 30 countries citing it as the biggest reason why people are wrong about key social realities.



## A context of (dis)trust

These misperceptions sit in a broader climate of mistrust, impacting how we view experts and elites in our societies. Even trust in democracy is not immune to this - a 30-country average of one in four (24%) don't think elections in their country ensure reliable results.

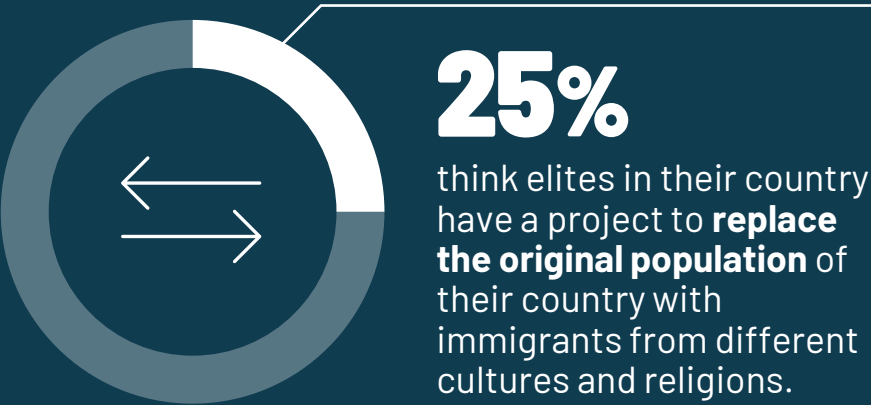
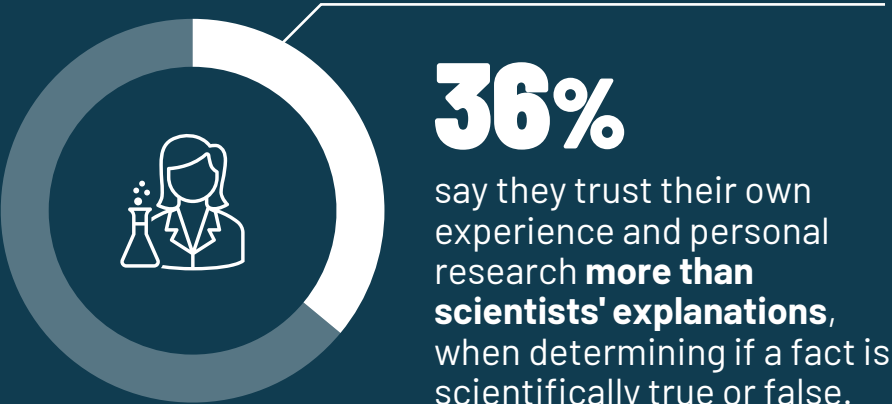


## Traditional vs non-traditional news media

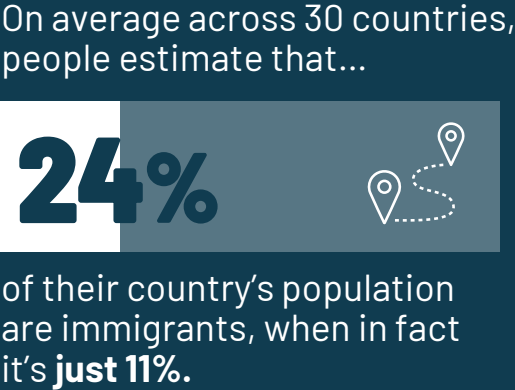
People who report getting their news primarily via tv, radio or newspapers are more likely to trust scientists, elites and elections than those who get their news primarily from messaging apps, social media or from friends and family.

In a similar vein, the more time people spend on social media daily, the more likely they are to regard these topics with suspicion.

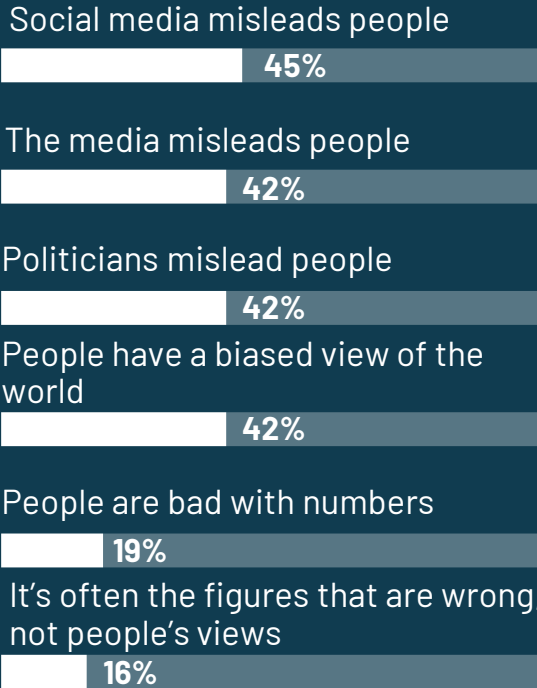
# At a glance



Majorities in...  
**25 of 30** countries say the homicide rate in their country is now higher than in 2000. But it is actually about the same or lower in all countries except Mexico.



## Biggest reasons why people think members of the public are often wrong about key social realities within their country:



# PERILS OF PERCEPTION 2024

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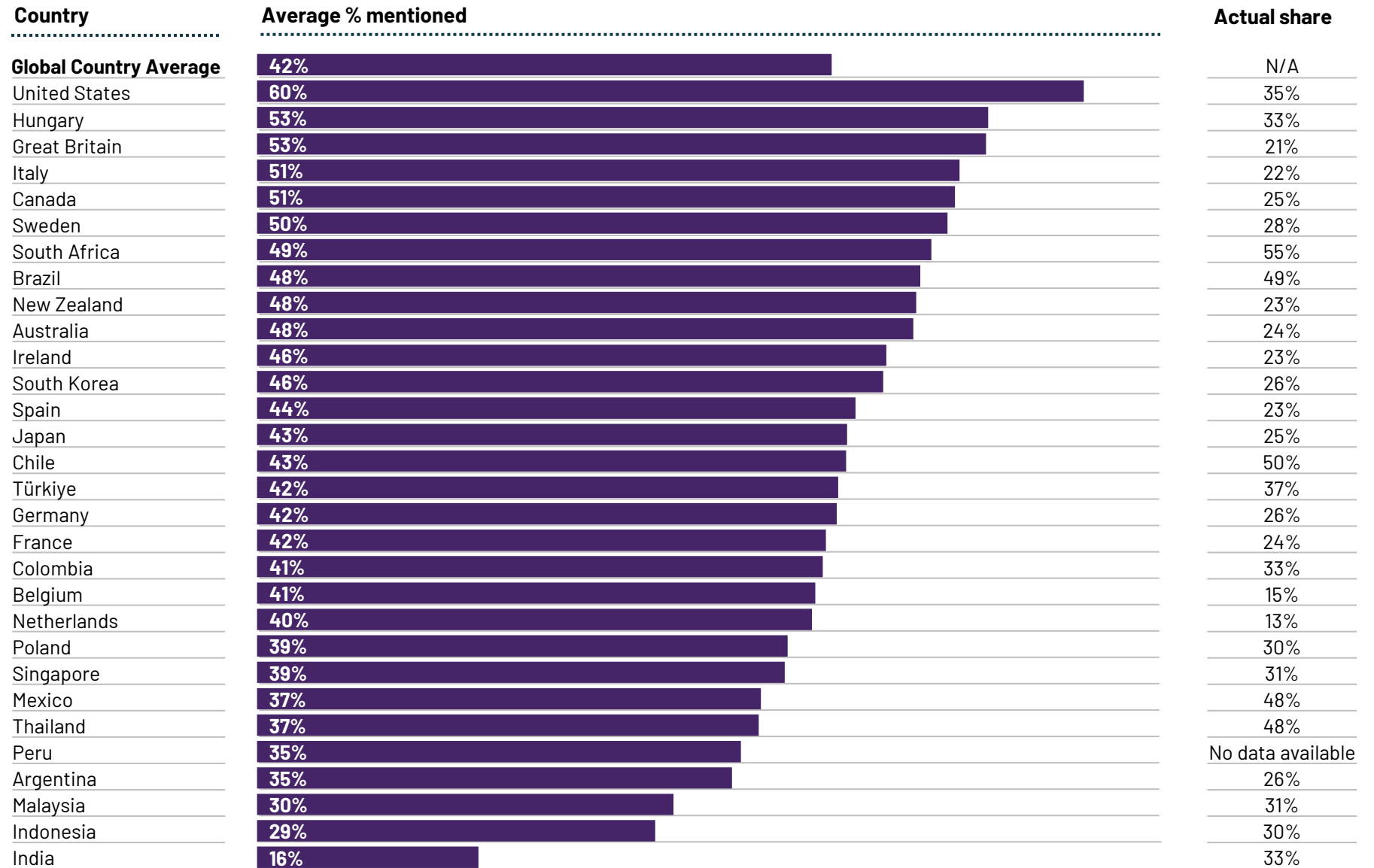
October 2024



## What percentage of your country's total household wealth do you think is owned by the top 1% of richest households?

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

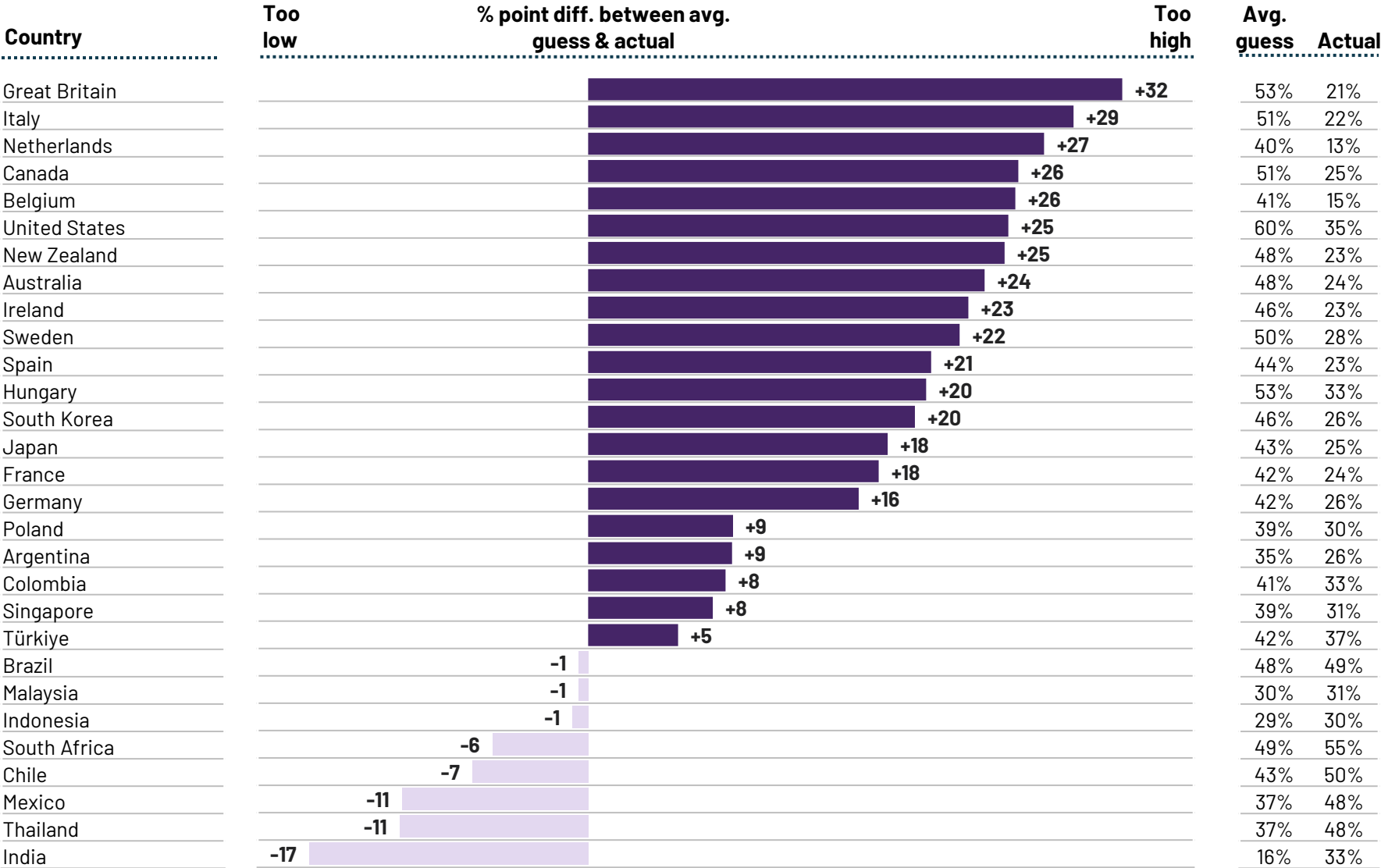
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [World Inequality Database](#)



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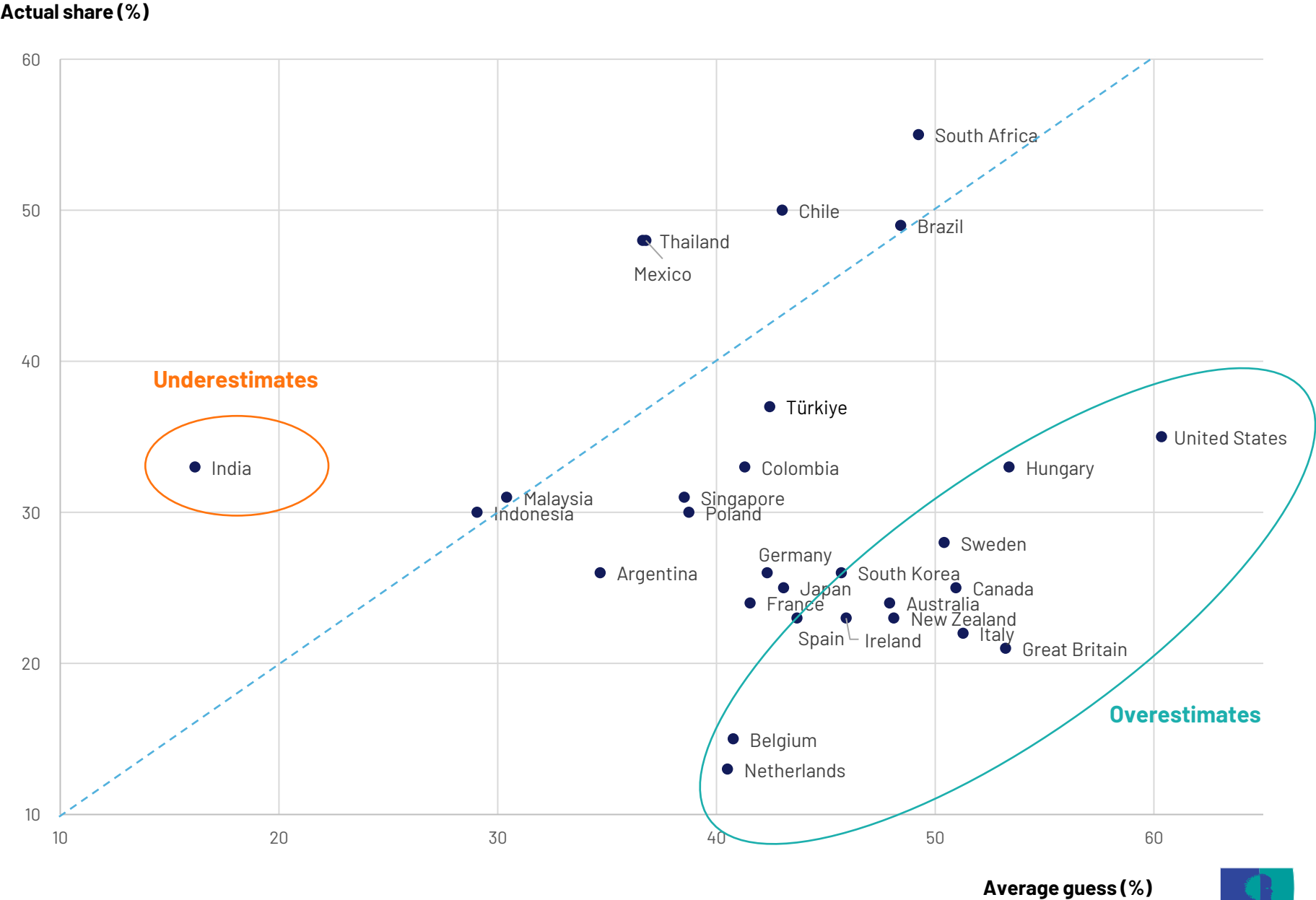
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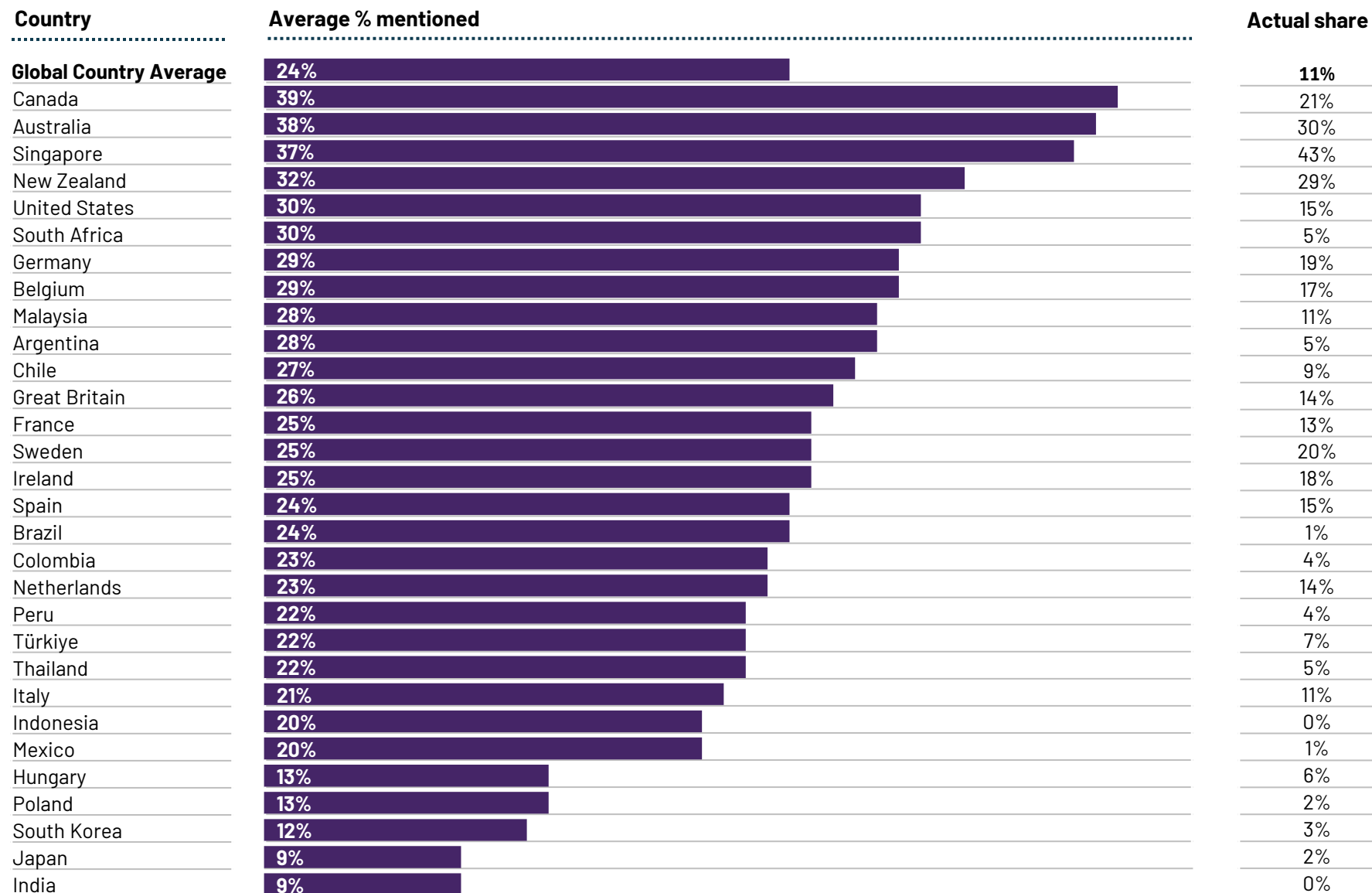
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [World Inequality Database](#)



## What percentage of your country's population do you think immigrants (i.e., people born in another country) represent?

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [UN International Migrant Stock](#)

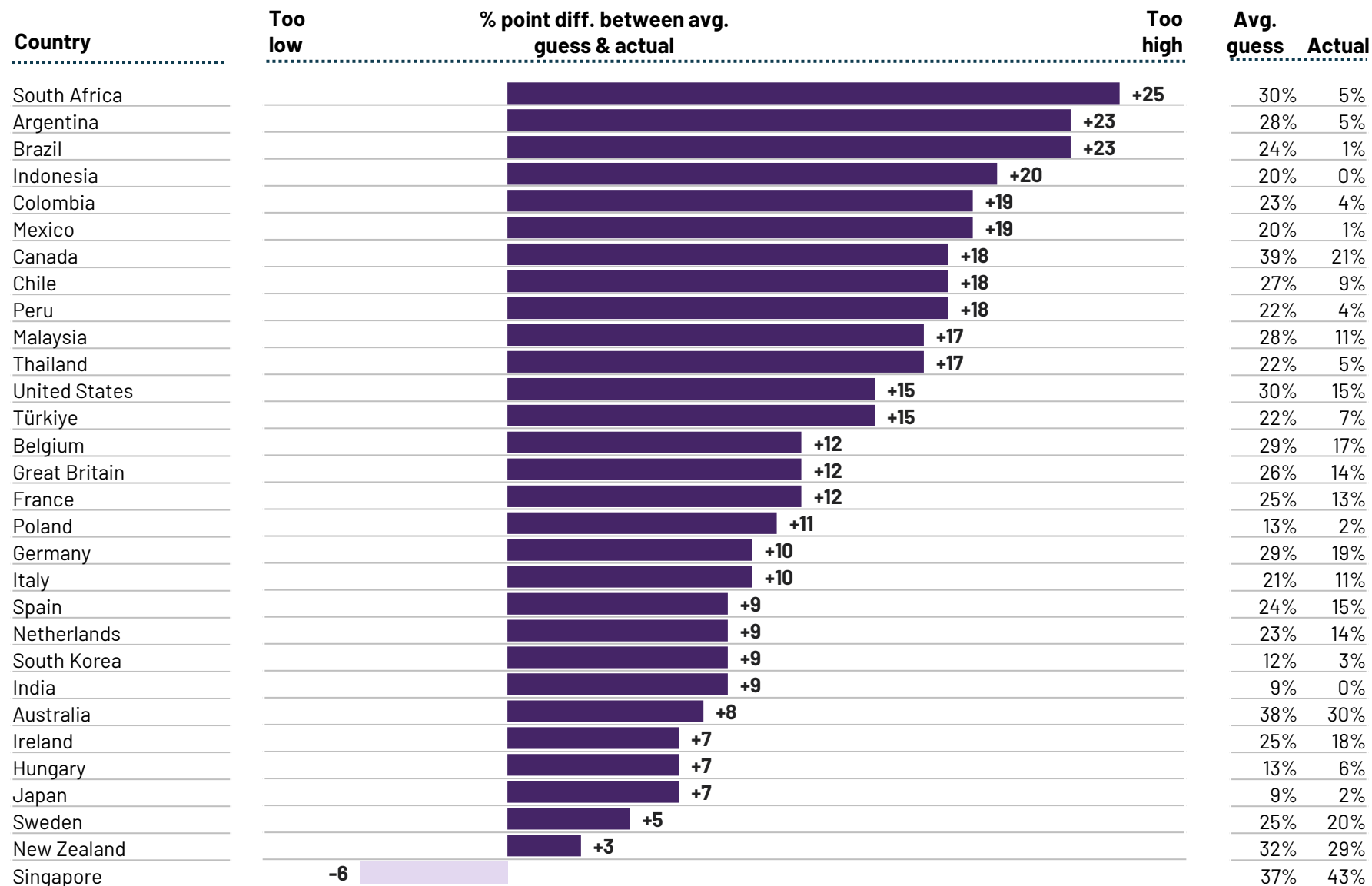




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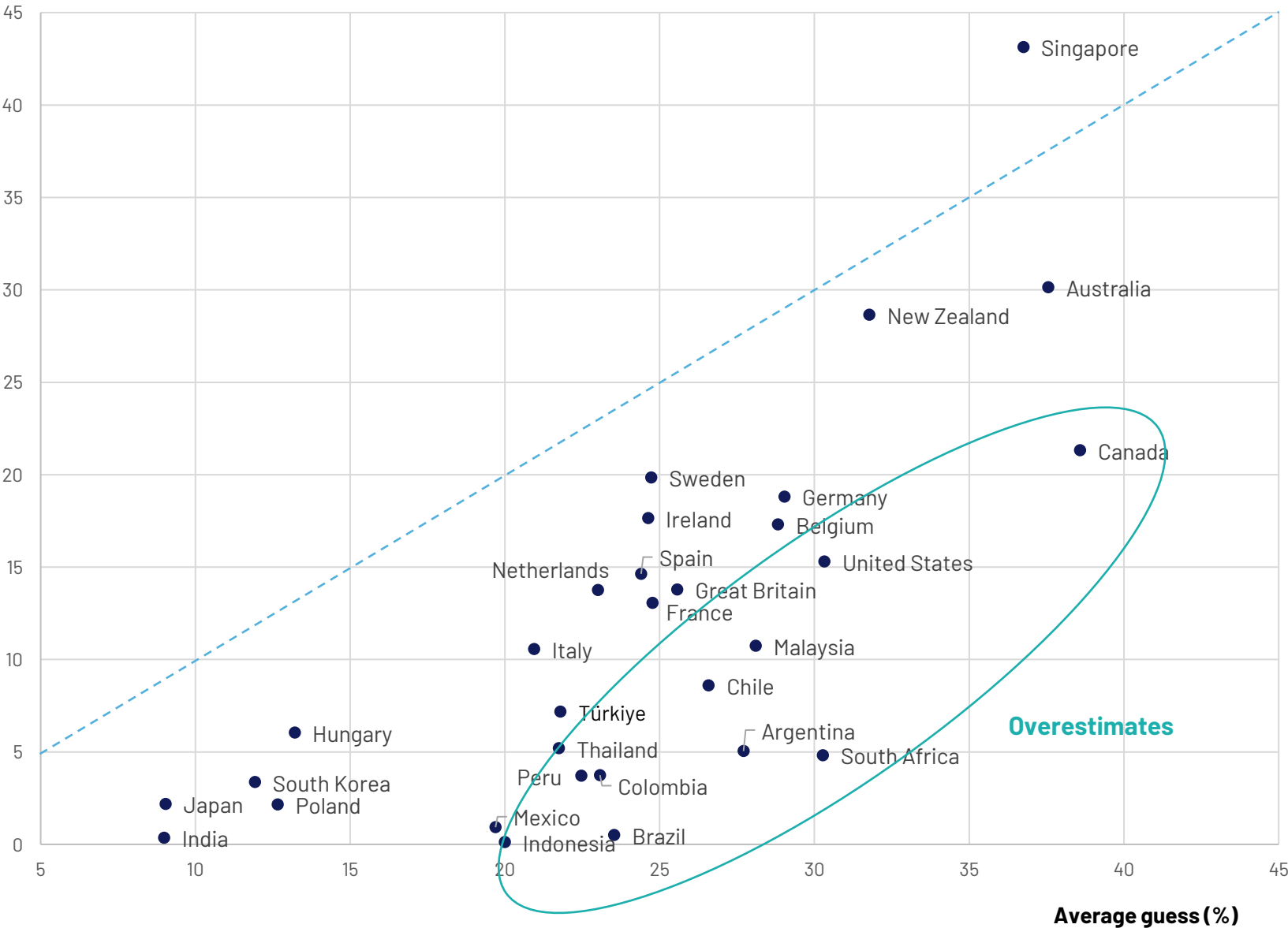


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Actual share (%)



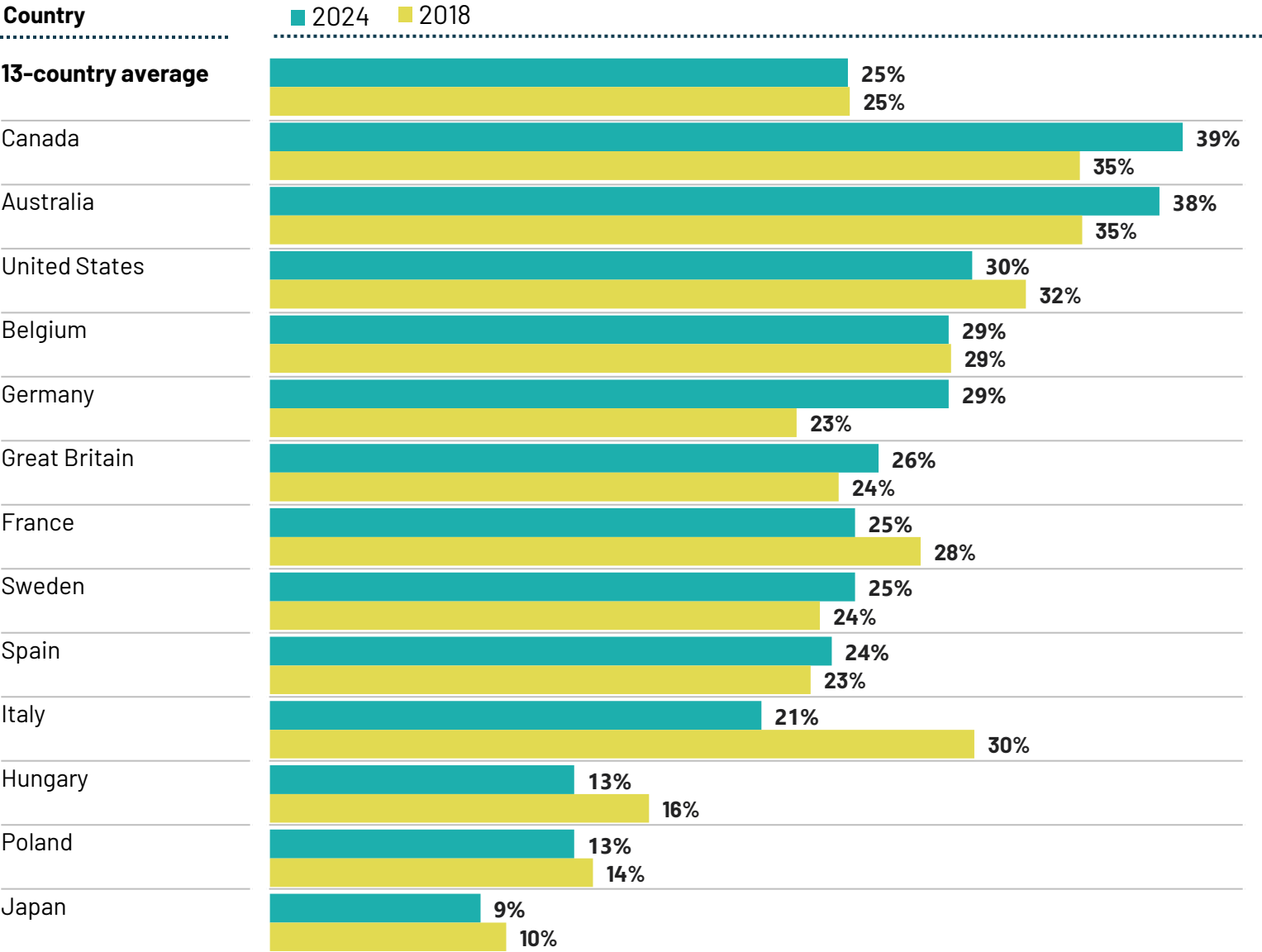
What percentage of your country's population do you think immigrants (i.e., people born in another country) represent?

(Average guess over time among 13 comparator countries)

Base 2014: 11,527 online adults under the age of 65 across 14 countries, interviewed 12 August – 26 August 2014.

Base 2024: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

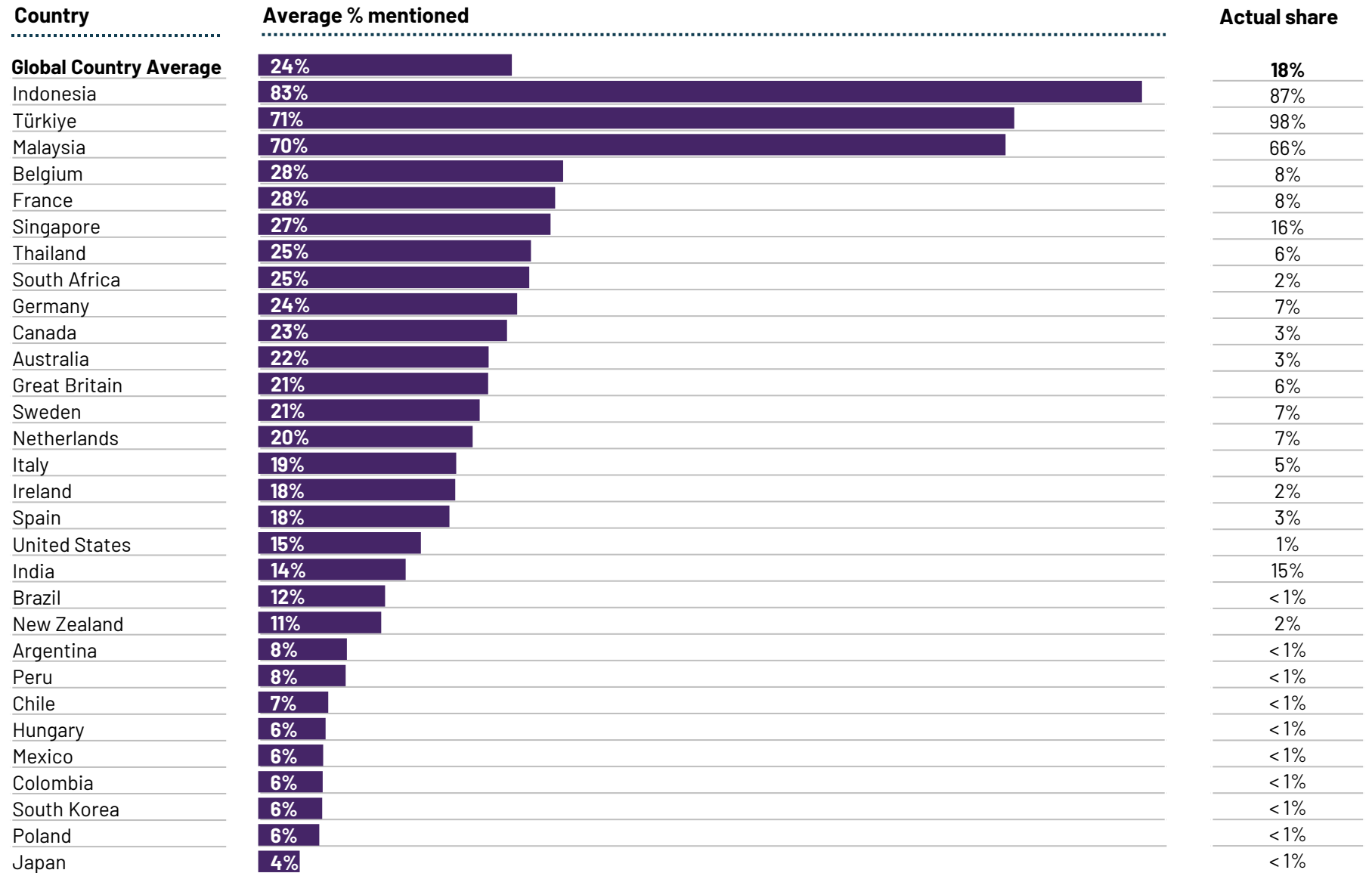
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



**In your country, out of 100 people, how many do you think are Muslim?**

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [Pew Research](#)



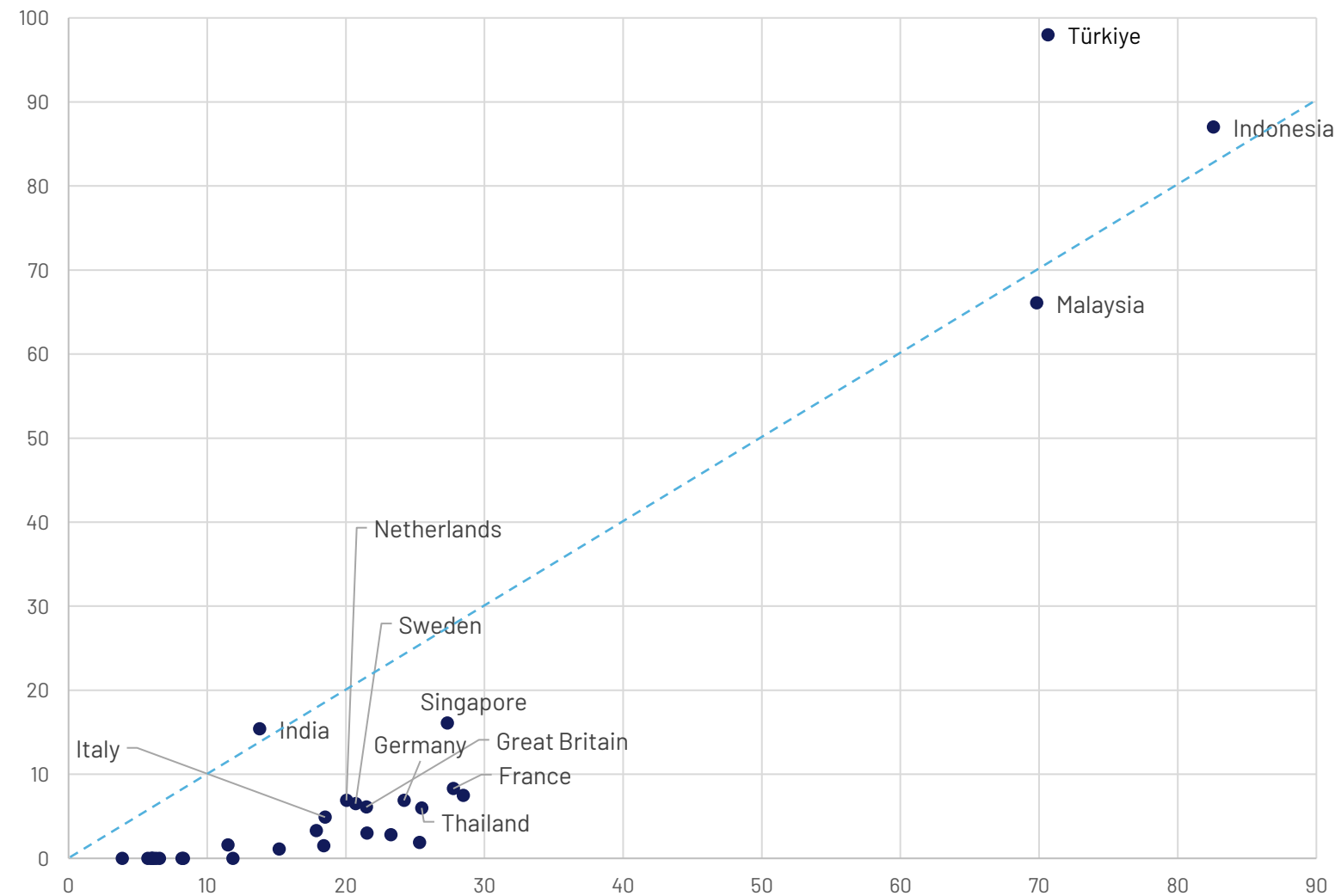


In your country, out of 100 people, how many do you think are Muslim?

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Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [Pew Research](#)

Actual share (%)



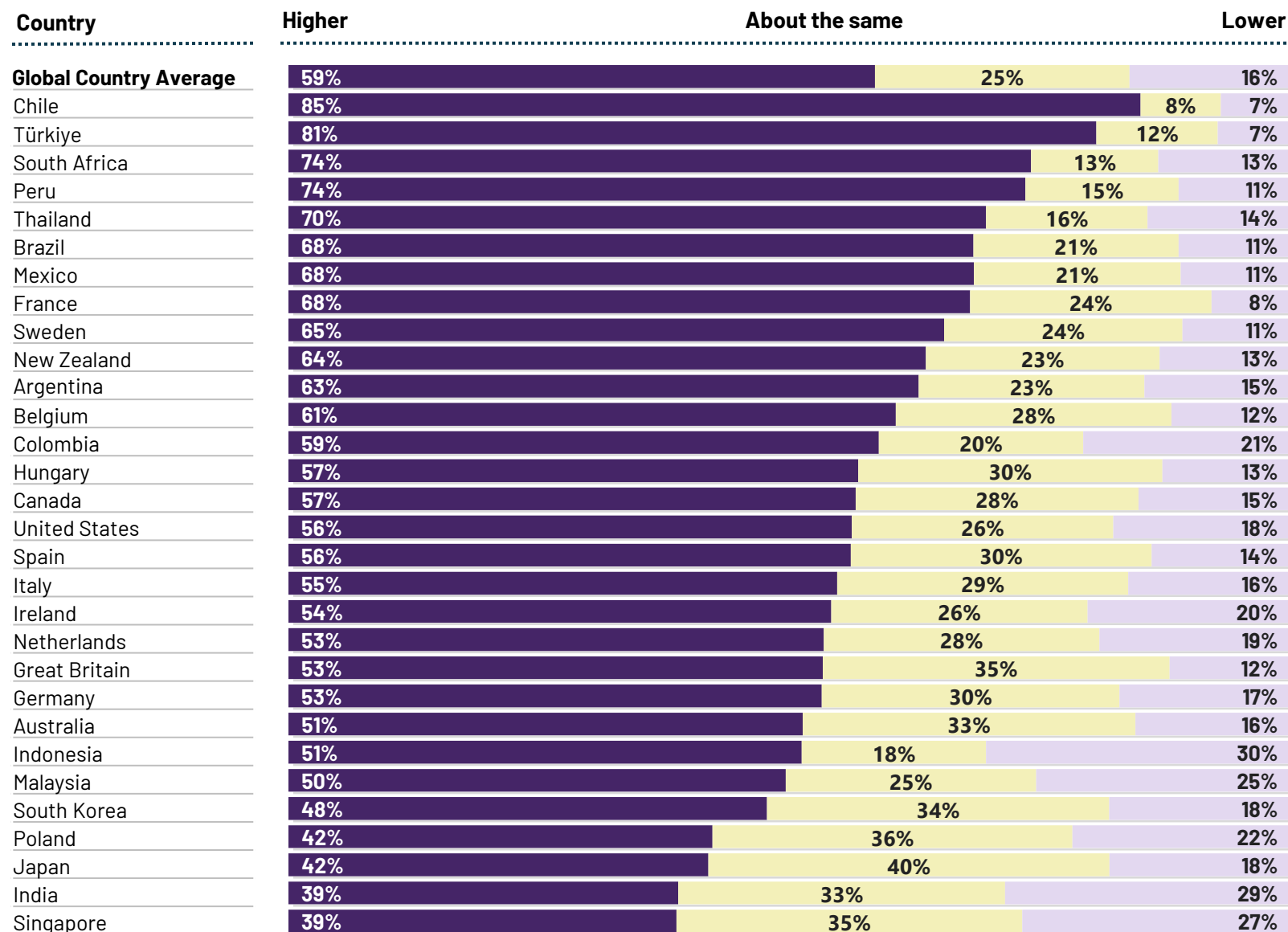
Average guess (%)



## Do you think the homicide rate in your country is higher, lower, or about the same as in 2000?

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

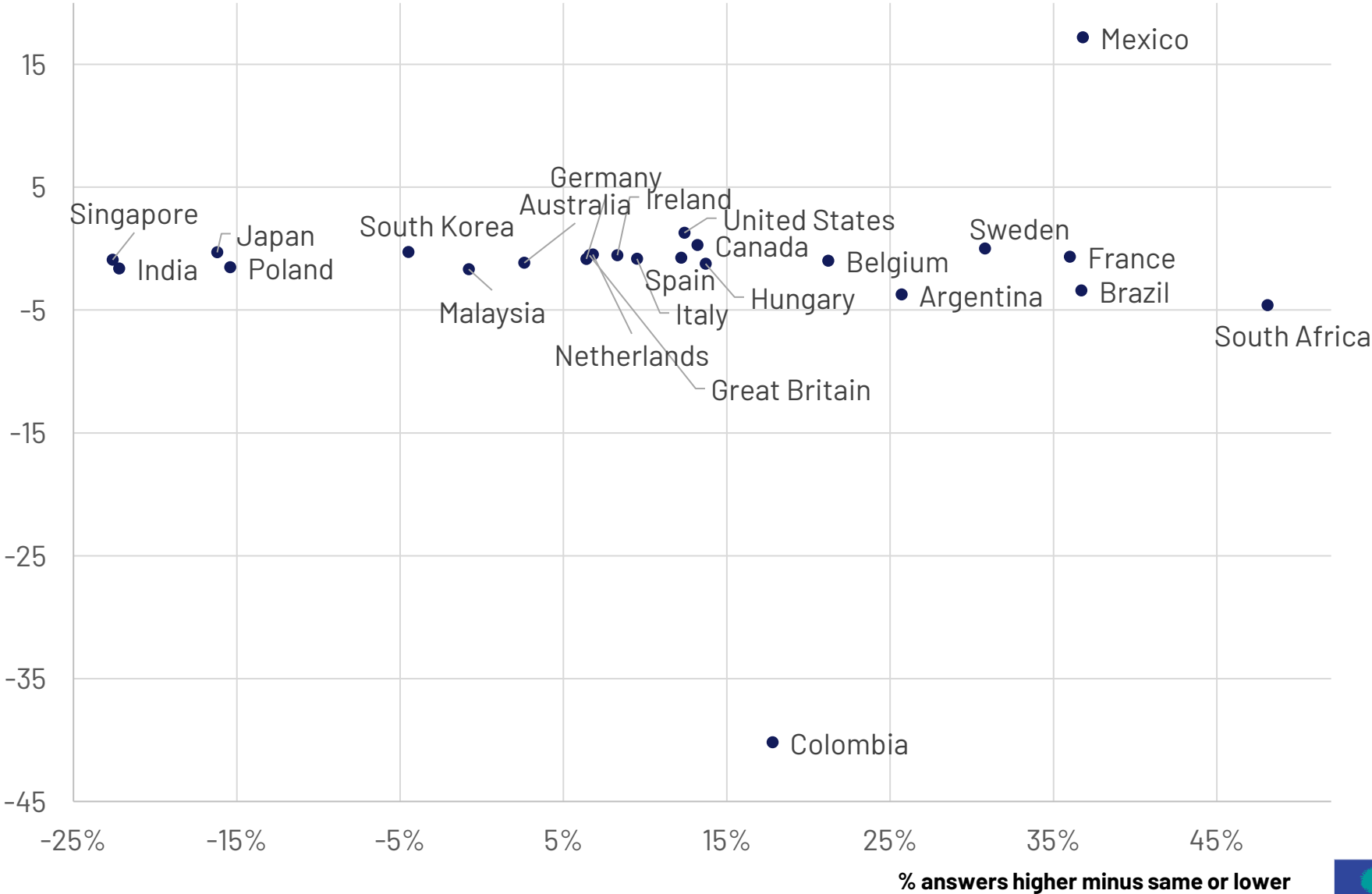
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#)



Do you think the homicide rate in your country is higher, lower, or about the same as in 2000?

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.  
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Actual change since 2000



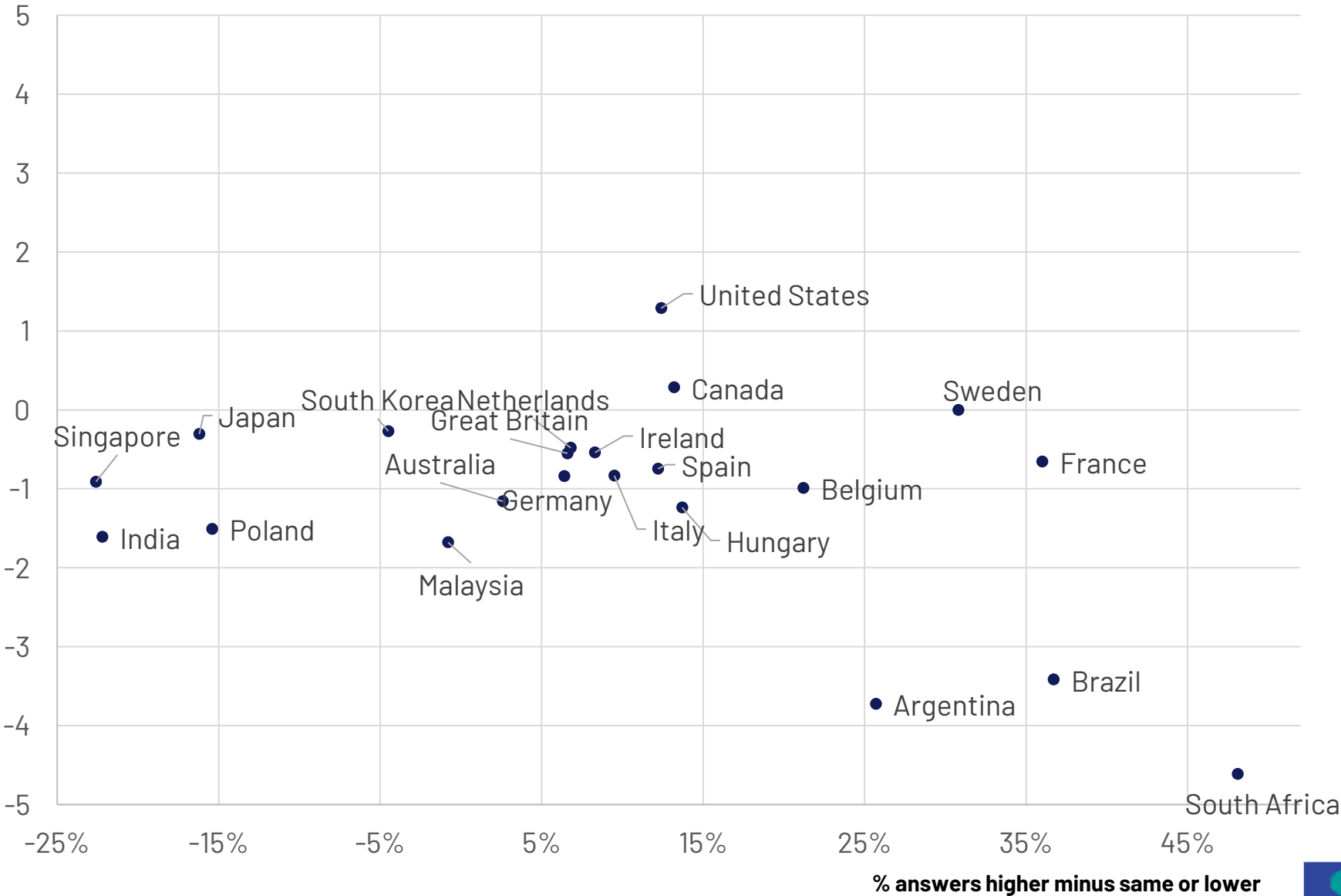
Do you think the homicide rate in your country is higher, lower, or about the same as in 2000?

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Source: Ipsos Global Advisor, [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#)

Actual change since 2000

Excluding Mexico and Colombia

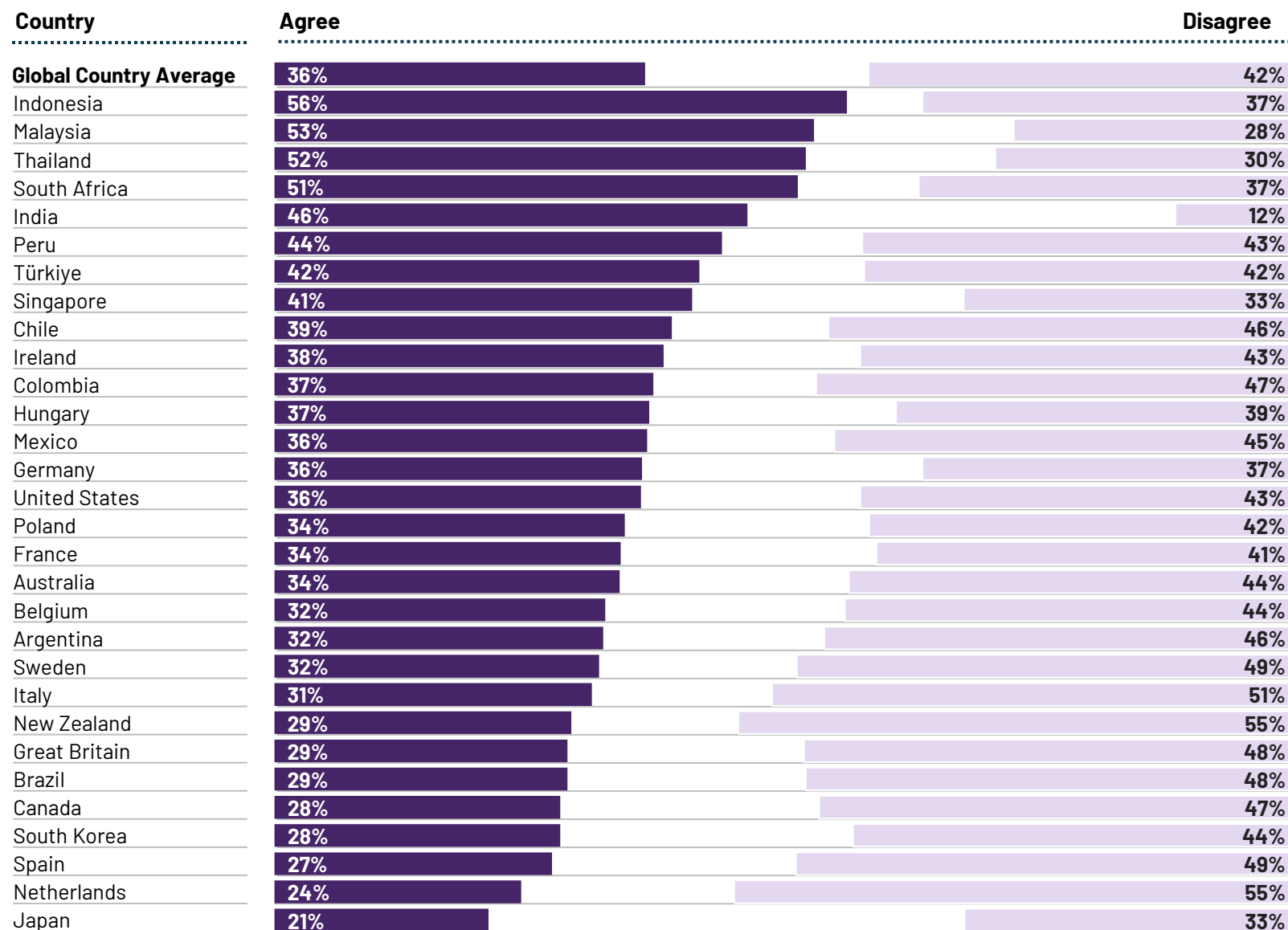


Personally, do you agree with the following statement?

**To determine if a fact is scientifically true or false, I trust my own experience and personal research more than scientists' explanations**

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



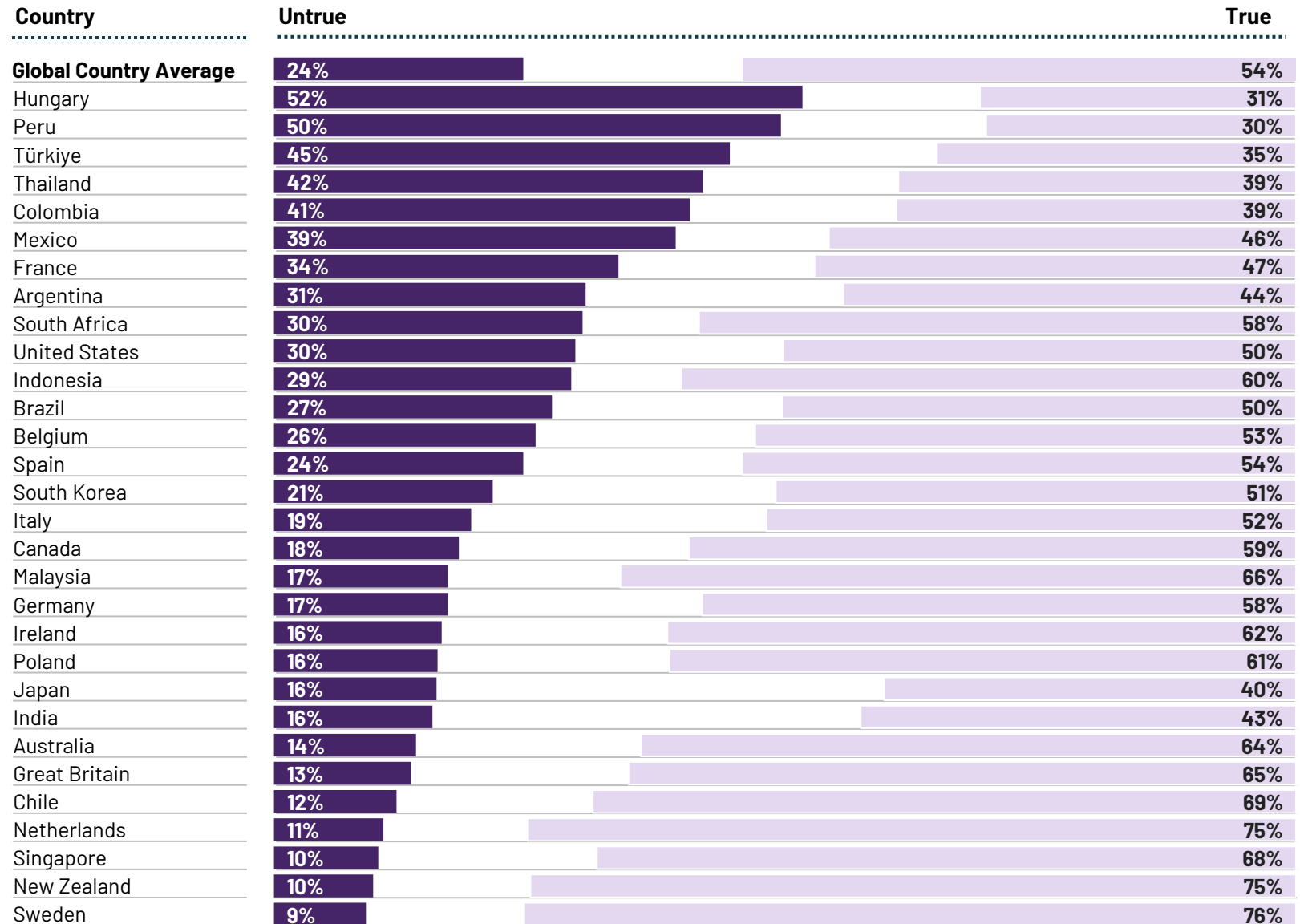


Personally, do you agree with the following statement?

**Elections in my country are organised in a secure and transparent way, ensuring the reliability of their results**

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor

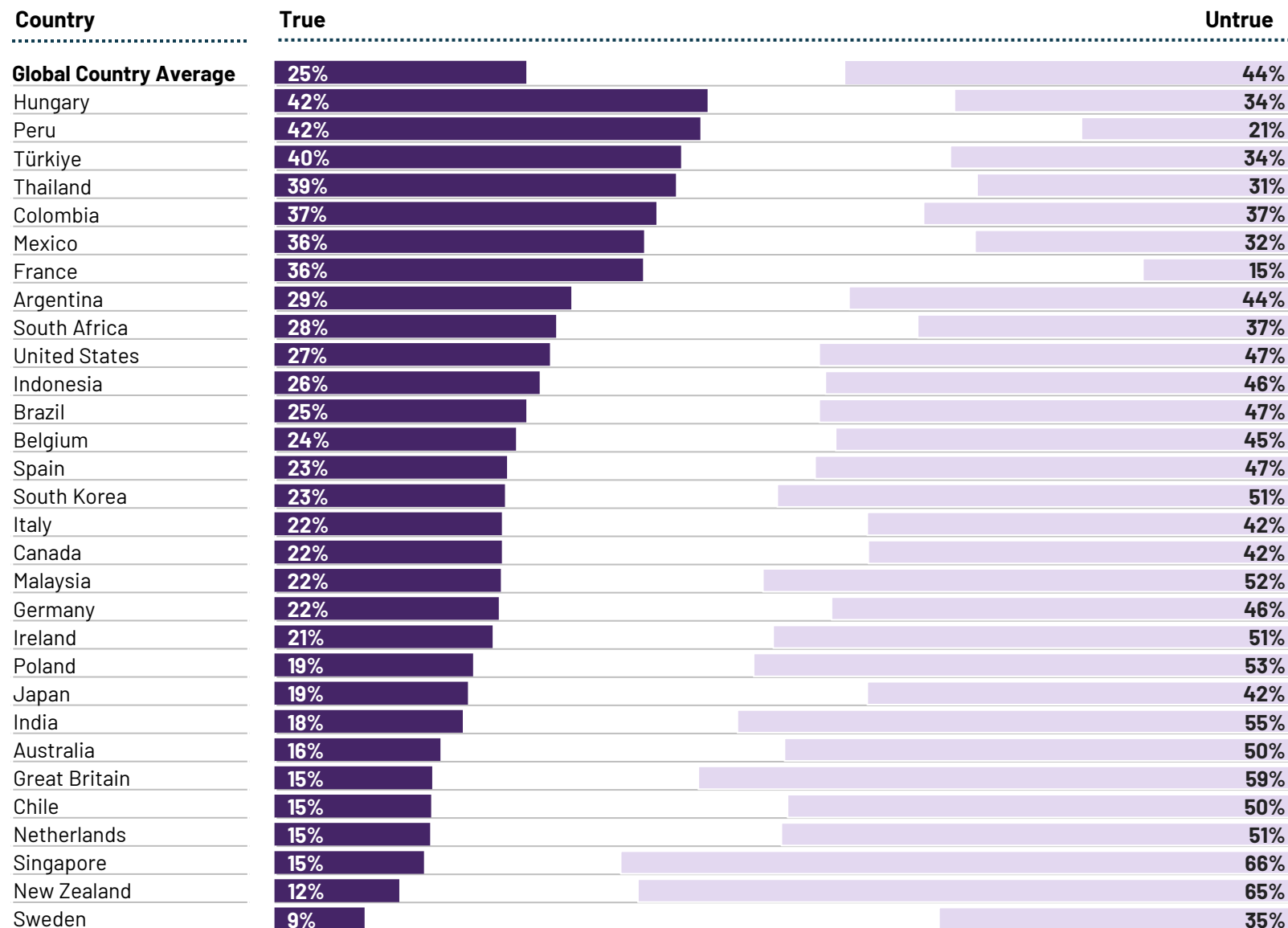


Do you think the following statement is true or false?

**The elites in my country have a project to replace the original population of our country with immigrants from different cultures and religions**

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

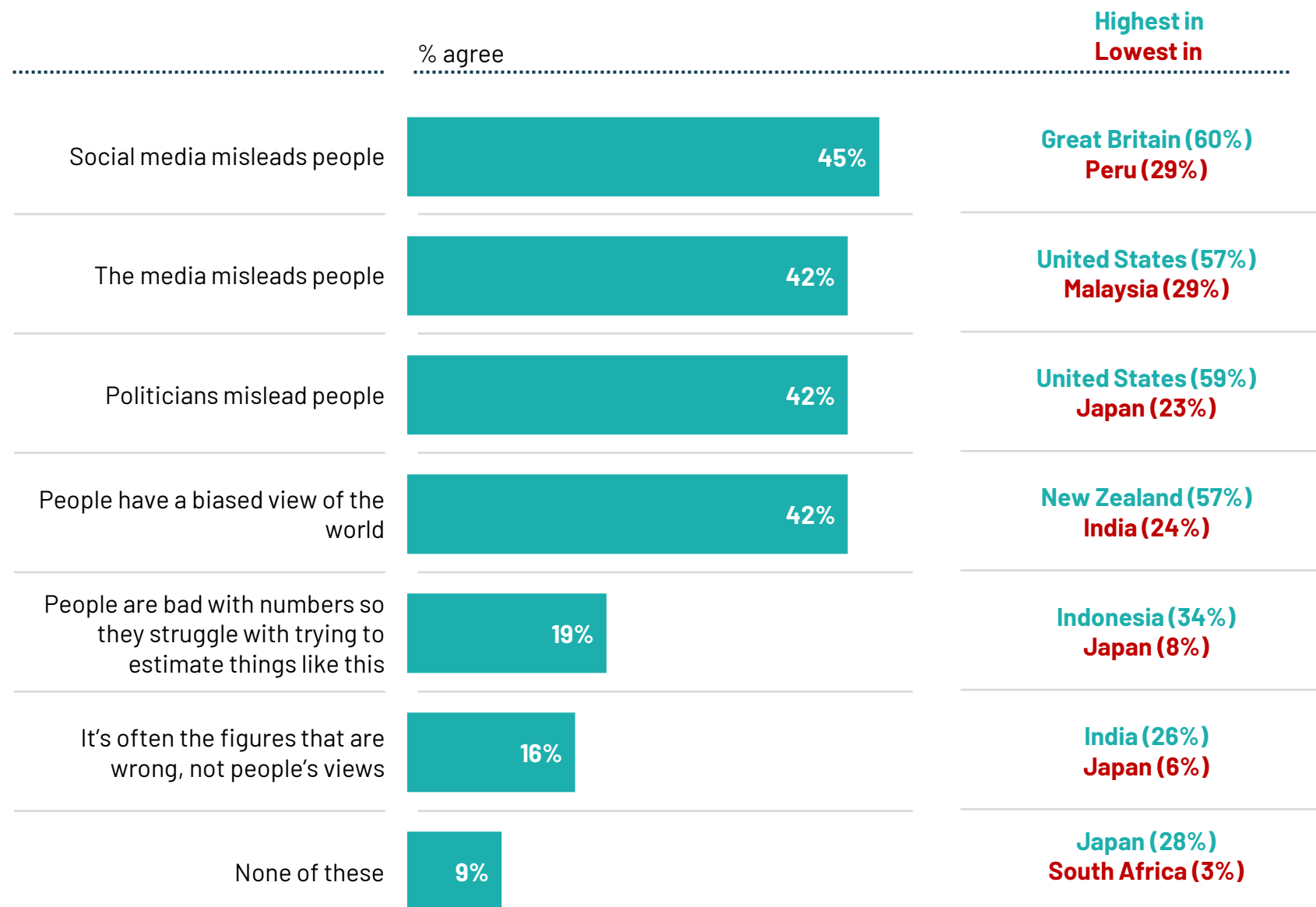
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



People often get lots of things wrong about their countries and how they're changing, for example, what proportion of the population are immigrants, or whether crime is going up or down. **Which of these, if any, do you think are the biggest reasons for this?**

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



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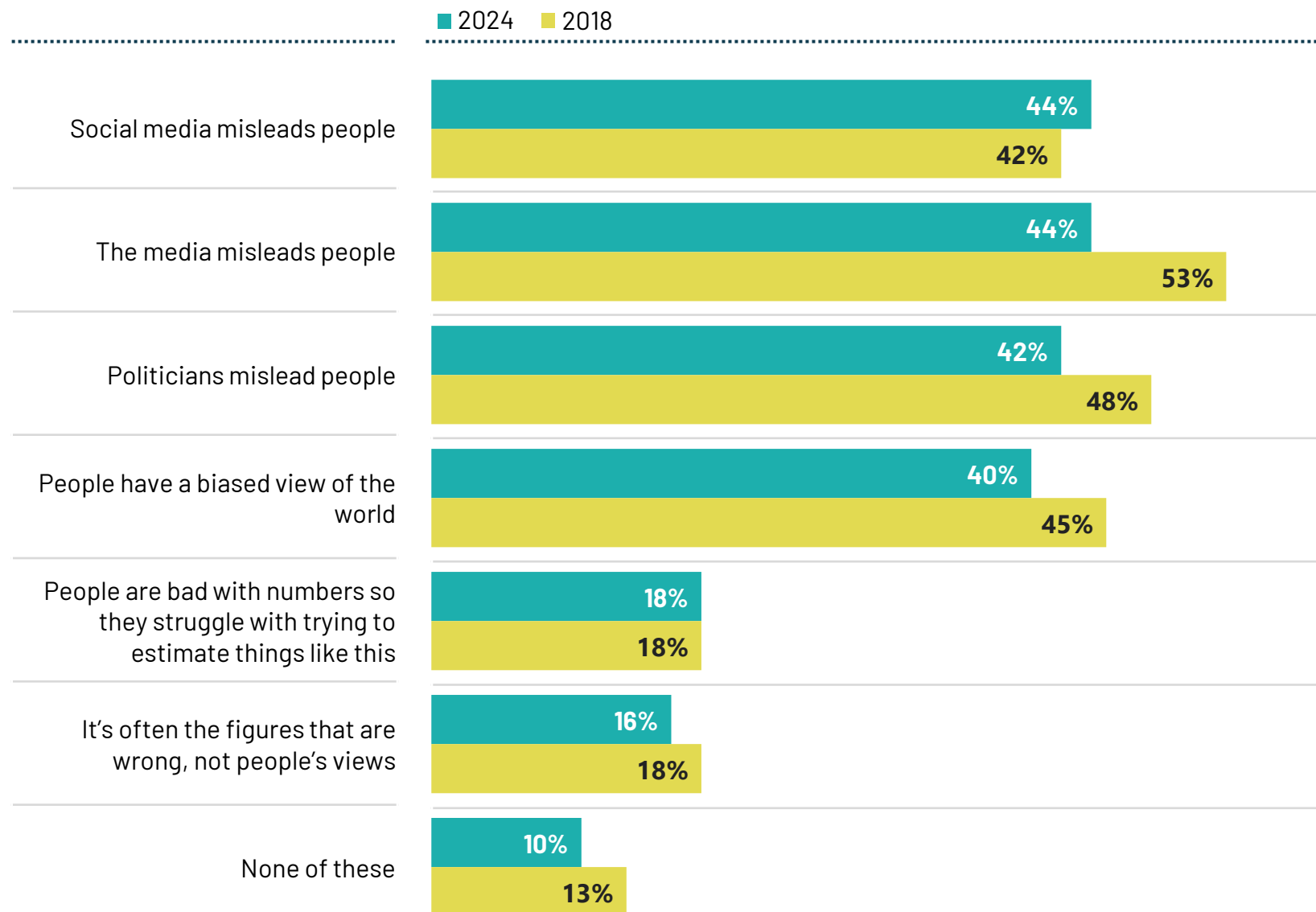
Changes over time among 22 comparator countries

(% agree)

Base 2018: 19,243 online adults under the age of 65 across 27 countries, interviewed 22 June – 6 July 2018.

Base 2024: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



People often get lots of things wrong about their countries and how they're changing, for example, what proportion of the population are immigrants, or whether crime is going up or down. **Which of these, if any, do you think are the biggest reasons for this?**

(% saying "social media misleads people" among 22 comparator countries)

Base 2018: 19,243 online adults under the age of 65 across 27 countries, interviewed 22 June – 6 July 2018.

Base 2024: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor

## Country

### 22-country average

Great Britain

US

Germany

Canada

Belgium

Sweden

Australia

India

France

South Africa

Spain

Poland

Chile

Türkiye

Malaysia

Brazil

Hungary

Mexico

Argentina

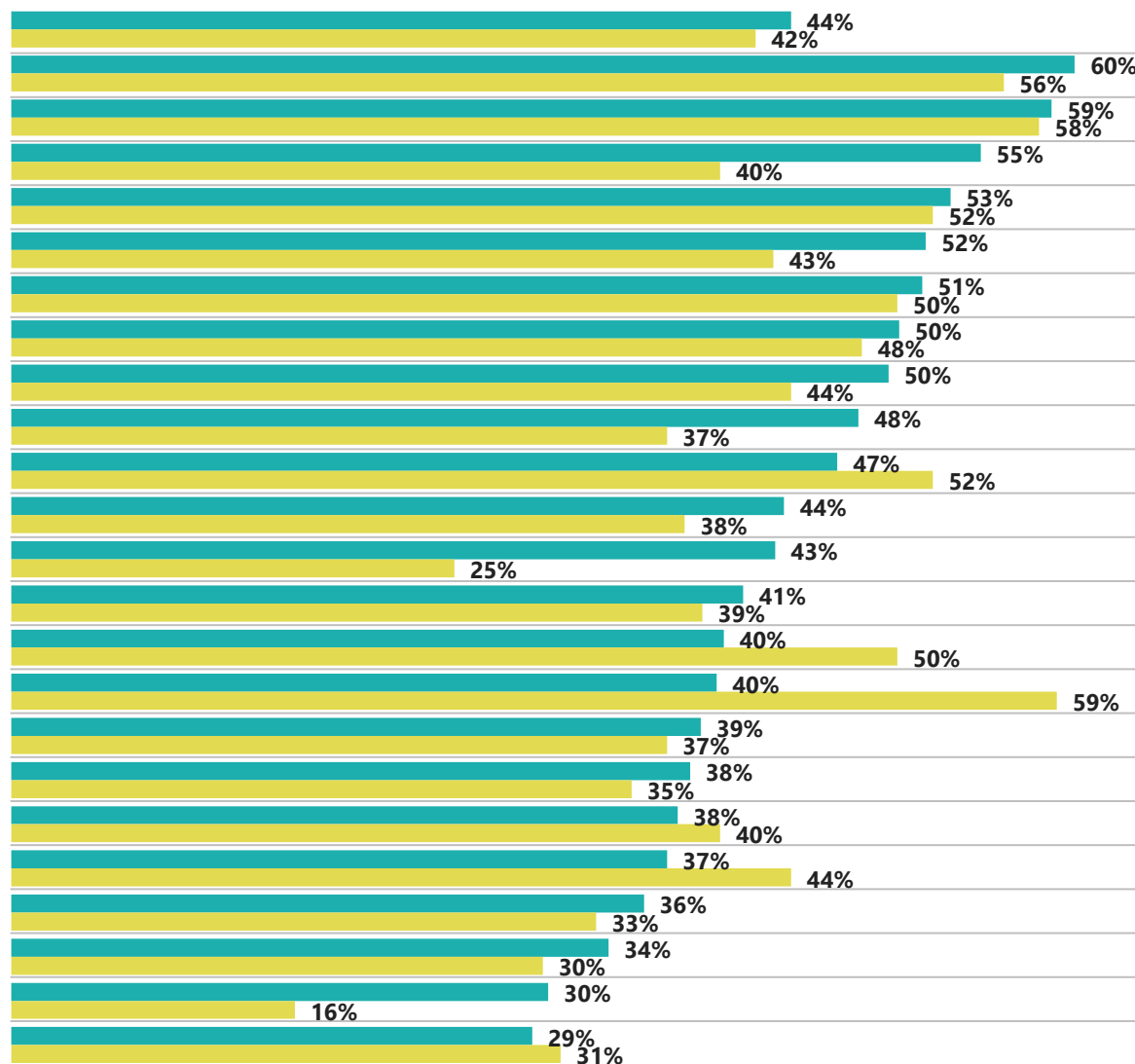
South Korea

Italy

Japan

Peru

2024 2018



People often get lots of things wrong about their countries and how they're changing, for example, what proportion of the population are immigrants, or whether crime is going up or down. **Which of these, if any, do you think are the biggest reasons for this?**

(% saying "the media misleads people" among 22 comparator countries)

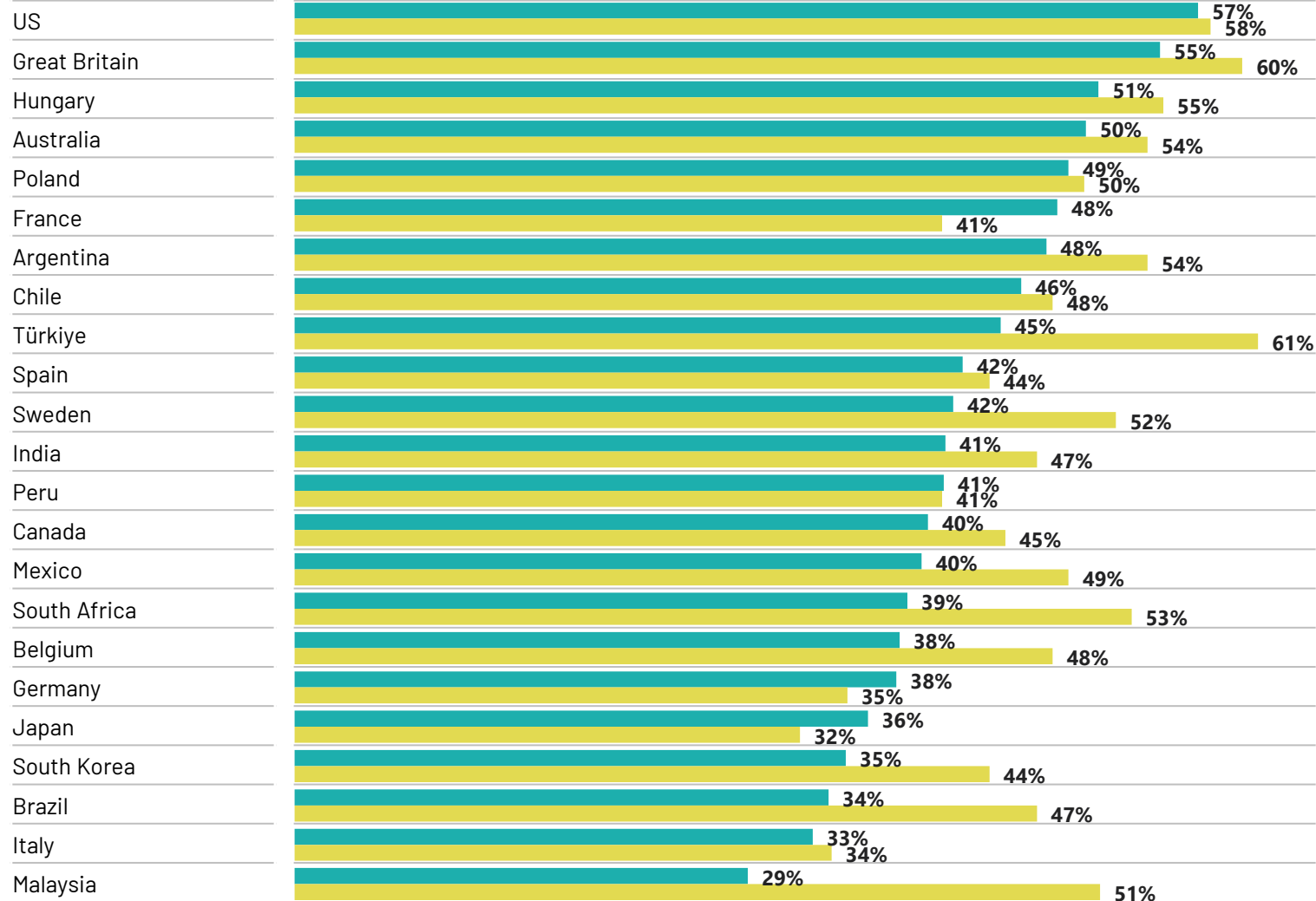
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## Country

### 22-country average





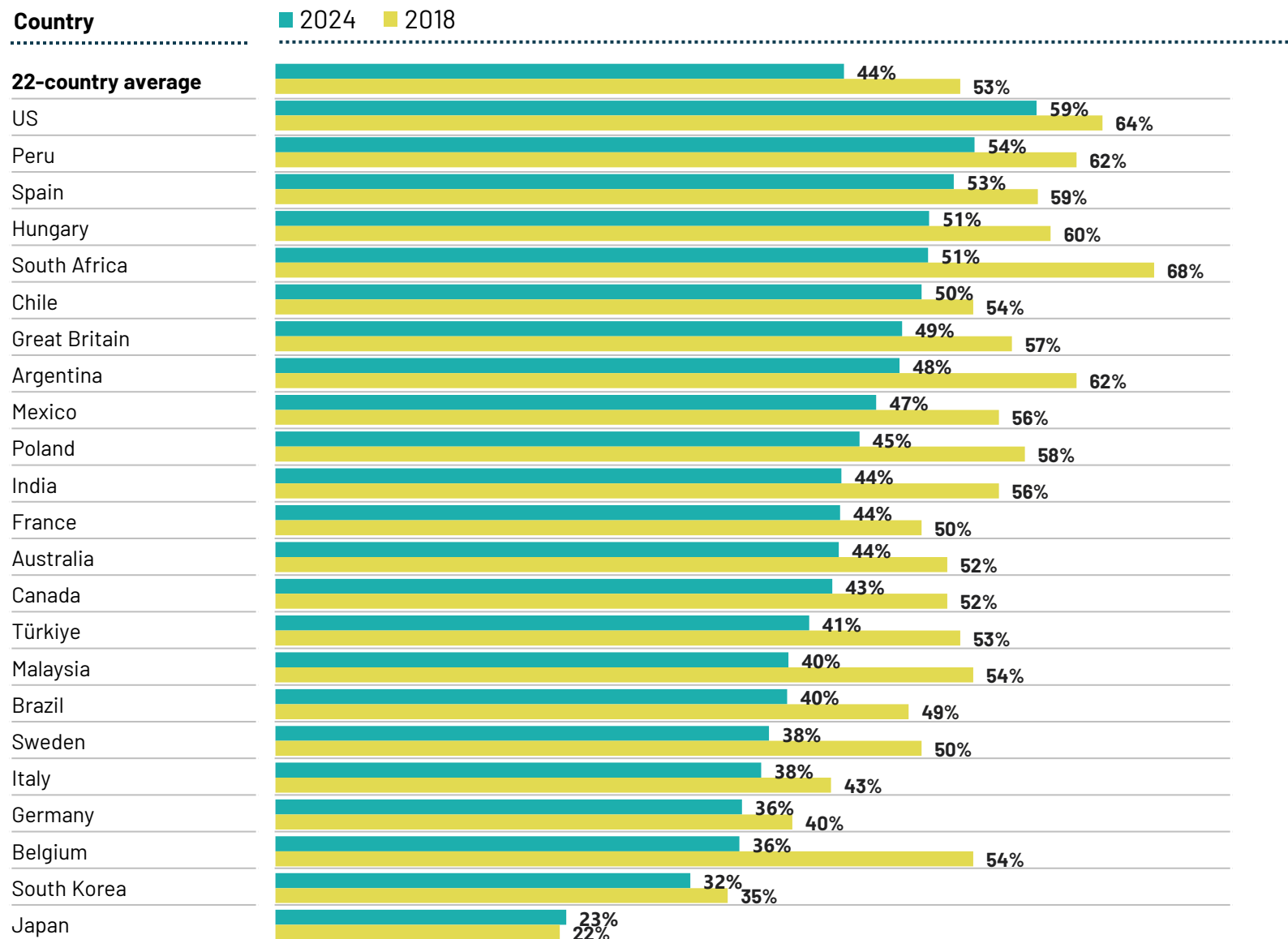
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Base 2024: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



**People often get lots of things wrong about their countries and how they're changing, for example, what proportion of the population are immigrants, or whether crime is going up or down. Which of these, if any, do you think are the biggest reasons for this?**

	Global Country Average	Argentina	Australia	Belgium	Brazil	Canada	Chile	Colombia	France	Germany	Great Britain	Hungary	India	Indonesia	Ireland	Italy
Social media mislead people	45%	37%	50%	52%	39%	53%	41%	40%	48%	55%	60%	38%	50%	48%	51%	34%
The media mislead people	42%	48%	50%	38%	34%	40%	46%	45%	48%	38%	55%	51%	41%	38%	34%	33%
Politicians mislead people	42%	48%	44%	36%	40%	43%	50%	46%	44%	36%	49%	51%	44%	39%	29%	38%
People have a biased view of the world, for example, they tend to focus on negative things or think things are getting worse, or generalise/generalization from their own experience	42%	30%	50%	43%	33%	46%	38%	39%	37%	48%	48%	36%	24%	49%	46%	43%
People are bad with numbers so they struggle with trying to estimate things like this	19%	13%	18%	23%	15%	16%	20%	13%	23%	14%	17%	18%	23%	34%	16%	23%
It's often the figures that are wrong, not people's views.	16%	15%	13%	13%	15%	11%	18%	18%	16%	21%	17%	22%	26%	23%	13%	15%

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor

**People often get lots of things wrong about their countries and how they're changing, for example, what proportion of the population are immigrants, or whether crime is going up or down. Which of these, if any, do you think are the biggest reasons for this?**

	Global Country Average	Japan	Malaysia	Mexico	Netherlands	New Zealand	Peru	Poland	Singapore	South Africa	South Korea	Spain	Sweden	Thailand	Türkiye	United States
Social media mislead people	45%	30%	40%	38%	59%	58%	29%	43%	45%	47%	36%	44%	51%	45%	40%	59%
The media mislead people	42%	36%	29%	40%	38%	50%	41%	49%	34%	39%	35%	42%	42%	38%	45%	57%
Politicians mislead people	42%	23%	40%	47%	37%	43%	54%	45%	26%	51%	32%	53%	38%	26%	41%	59%
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People are bad with numbers so they struggle with trying to estimate things like this	19%	8%	30%	18%	24%	18%	13%	24%	18%	20%	12%	19%	16%	22%	17%	16%
It's often the figures that are wrong, not people's views.	16%	6%	17%	23%	10%	11%	20%	20%	18%	19%	13%	12%	12%	18%	17%	12%

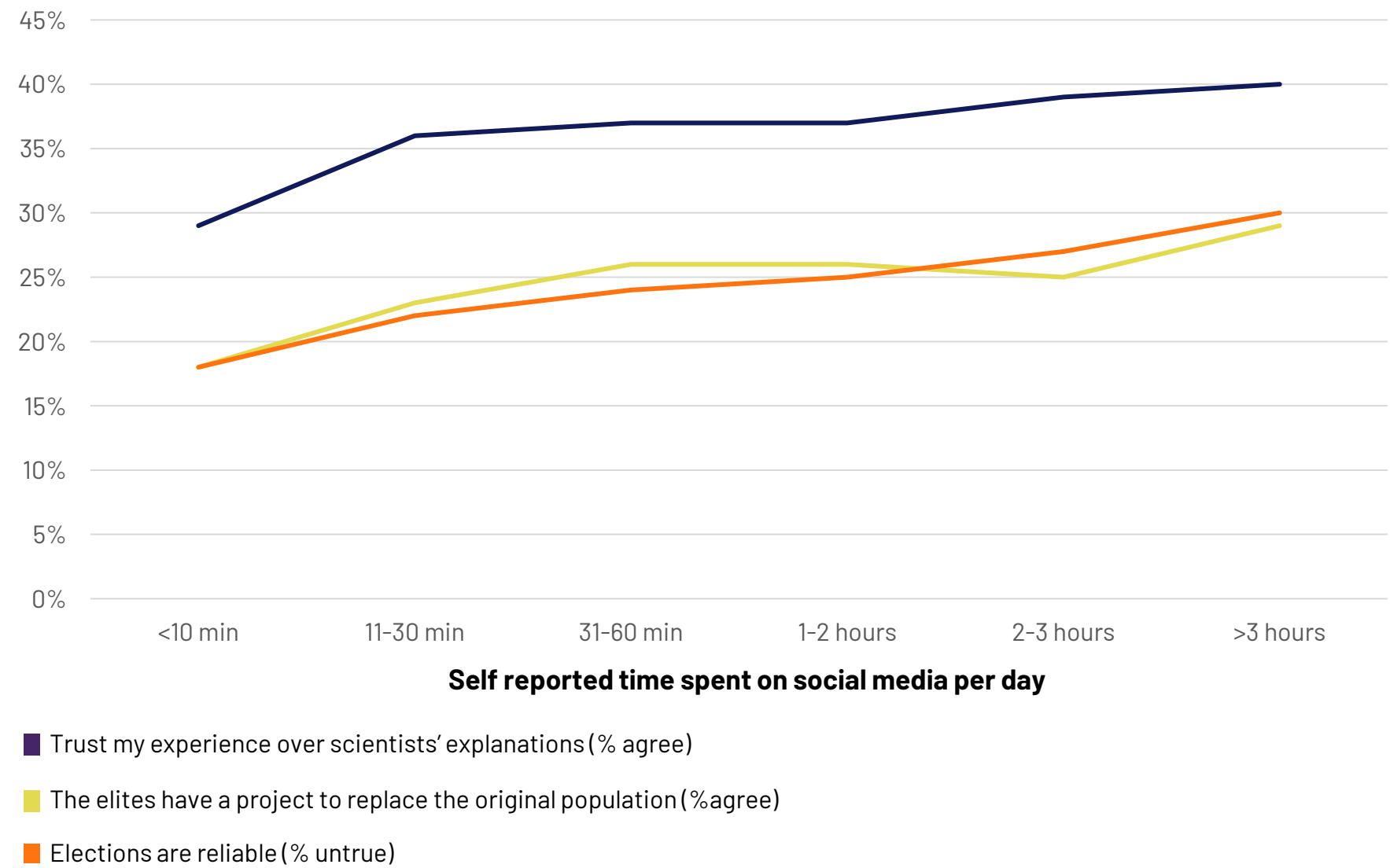
Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor

The more time spent on social media daily, the more likely someone is to buy into conspiracy theories / the less likely they are to trust in elites, scientists and elections.

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

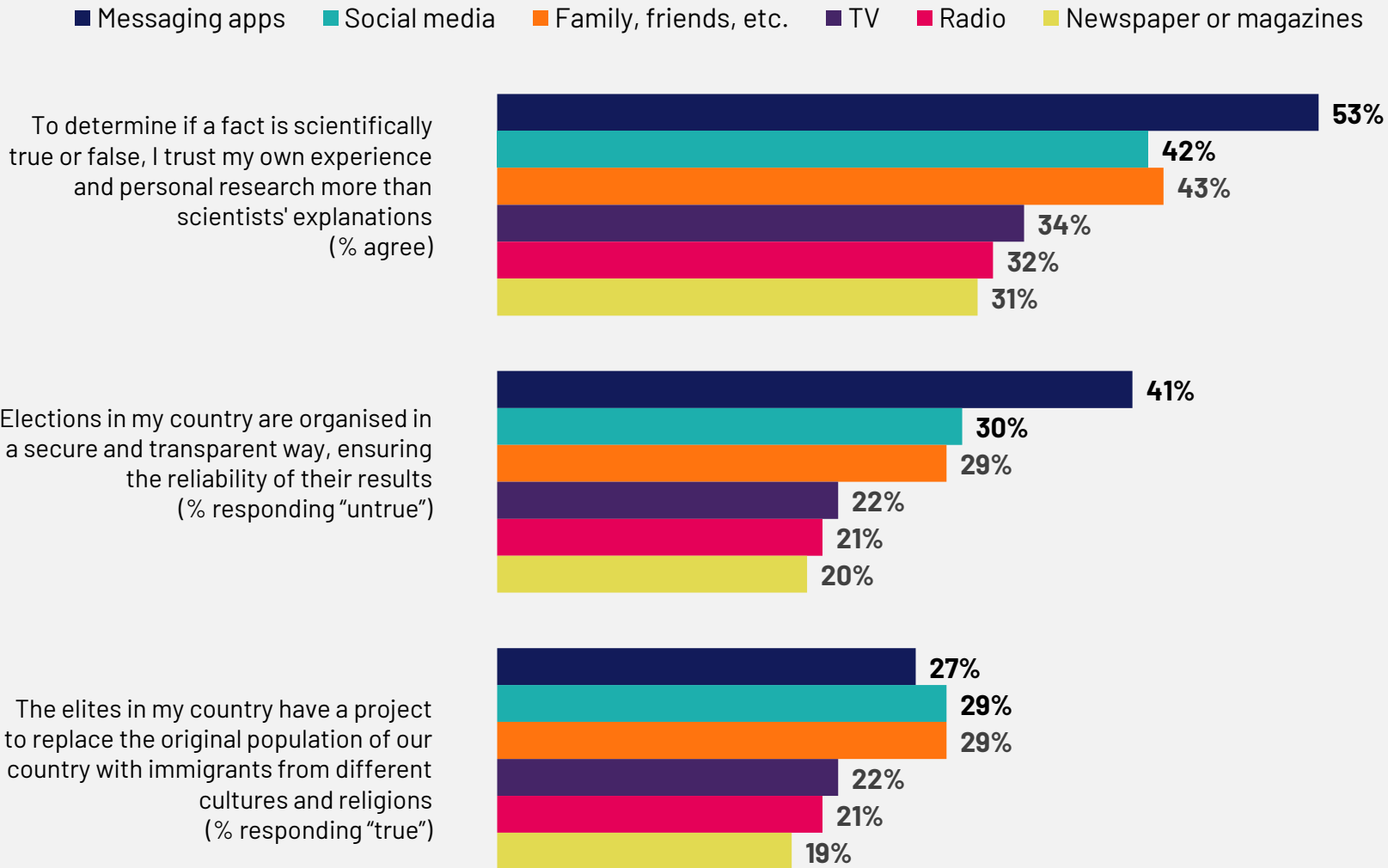
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



On average across 30 countries, people who report getting their news primarily from traditional news media outlet such as tv, radio or newspapers are more likely to trust scientists, 'elites' and elections than those who get their news primarily from 'new' media or from friends or family.

Base: 22,989 online adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed 20 September – 4 October 2024.

Source: Ipsos Global Advisor



# Methodology



# METHODOLOGY

These are the results of a 30-country survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform and, in India, on its IndiaBus platform, between Friday, September 20 and Friday, October 4, 2024. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 22,989 adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18-74 in Canada, 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, New Zealand, Spain, and the U.S., and 500 individuals each in Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, and Türkiye. The sample in India consists of approximately 2,000 individuals, of whom approximately 1,800 were

interviewed face-to-face and 200 were interviewed online.

Samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S. can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. Samples in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Israel, 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 Global 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 not 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

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