

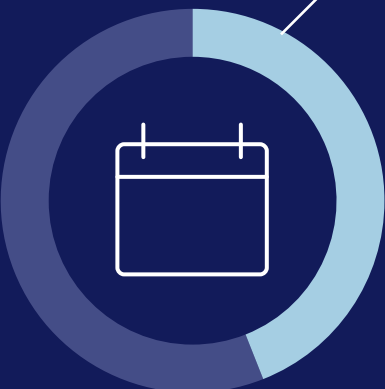
Is Life Getting Better?

1975 versus 2025

A 30-country
Global Advisor
survey



At a glance: 1975 versus 2025



44%

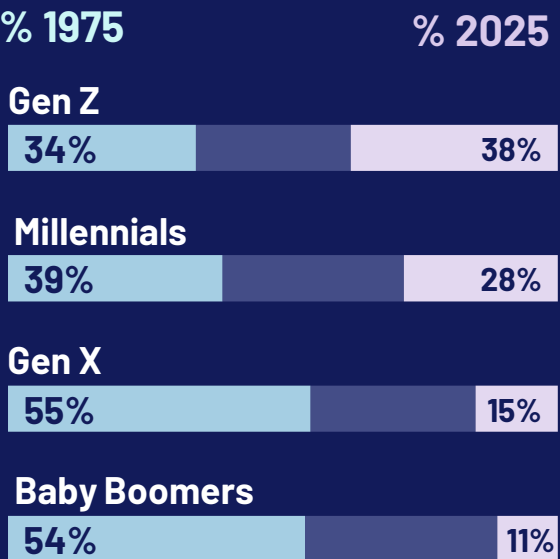
on average across 30 countries say they would rather have been born in 1975 than 2025, well ahead of the 24% who would prefer to be born today. 32% do not express a view either way.



55%

believe people were happier 50 years ago than they are today. Only 16% think we are happier in 2025, with a further 16% saying things are “about the same”. 13% say they don’t know.

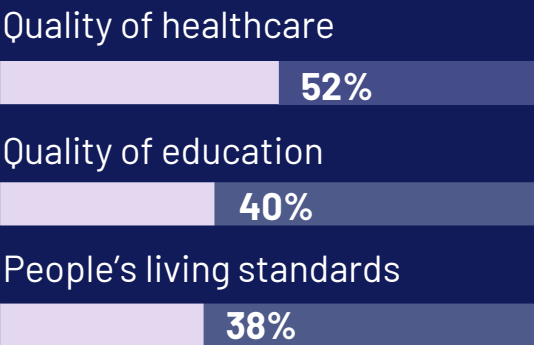
Gen Z is the only generation who choose 2025 over 1975 as the better time to be born



Better in 1975*:



Better in 2025*:



* according to respondents (30-country average)

Aspects of our lives: 1975 versus 2025

If you had to make a choice between being **born 50 years ago**, or being **born today**, which would you choose?

29
countries say
1975 was better

Countries where most people would have preferred to have been born in 1975



All things considered, how would you describe **things in your country today**, compared with **50 years ago**, in **1975**?

How **happy**
people are

30

countries say
1975 was better

Feeling **safe**
on the streets

28

Quality of the
environment

28

Living **without fear**
of **war or conflict**

24

People's **living**
standards

17

Quality of
education

13

Quality of
healthcare

2

Is life getting better?

Given the choice, more would prefer to have been born in 1975 than 2025

By a margin of almost two to one! On average across 30 countries, 44% say they would rather have been born 50 years ago than today. Only 24% say 2025 is a better time, while 32% don't express a view either way.

When you were *actually born* seems to come into play here. 54% of Baby Boomers* and 55% of Gen X favour being born in 1975 compared to 39% of Millennials and 34% of Gen Z.

Gen Z is the only age group more likely to say it's better to be starting out in life during the 2020s – albeit by a narrow margin.

Healthcare seen as better today, while the environment viewed as worse

People are more likely to think healthcare is better today than it was in 1975. Fifty-two per cent across 30 countries say this has improved over the decades, while 24% think it is worse.

In contrast, the environment is the area of our lives where people are particularly likely to feel things have been heading in the wrong direction. Sixty-one per cent overall (and a majority in 26 out of 30 countries) feel it was better in 1975; just 18% think it's better today.

Elsewhere, our happiness, the absence of war, and feeling safe on the streets all tend to be seen as having been better in 1975. Education, on the other hand, is felt to have improved, while people are split on the question of whether living standards are higher than they were.

Nostalgia reigns in Europe; South Korea is the outlier

South Korea is the only country out of the 30 surveyed where more people would rather have been born now than 50 years ago. Here, 44% favour 2025, while only 19% choose 1975.

Meanwhile, France is the country most likely to choose 1975 as the better time to be born (57%). Belgium, Mexico (both 53%), New Zealand and Great Britain (both 52%) are the other places where 1975 has majority support.

A sense that 'things were better back then' is particularly evident in France. The majority in France say that, back in 1975, people were happier, living standards were higher, education standards were stronger and prospects for living free of war were better.

*Baby Boomers born 1945–65, Gen X born 1966–79, Millennials born 1980–95, Gen Z born 1996–2012

Were things *really* better 50 years ago?

The last five years have brought much disruption to people everywhere. We've witnessed a global pandemic and repeated years of record high temperatures. Many have been hit by rising prices and interest rates. And that's before we come to the emergence of AI, which brings as much nervousness as it does excitement.

To describe this period of change, Ipsos has labelled the 2020s as the "Uneasy Decade". But is this decade worse than previous ones? Are our lives today *really* worse than 50 years ago?

Well, many think it most certainly is. Whatever the official statistics tell us about material and societal progress, in 29 of our 30 countries surveyed, more

people tell us that, given the choice, they would rather have been born in 1975 than today.

It's worth noting that, across our 30 countries, 72% of the population were born after 1975, so many of the views expressed here are not based on personal recollections.

The reality back then was perhaps not quite so rosy as we might think. In Britain, for example, where 52% say they would prefer to have been born in 1975, [inflation stood at 24% that year](#).

What's clear is that what people see today in the current environment alarms them. This year's [AXA Future Risks Report](#) finds 78% saying the world is more vulnerable now than in 2020.

Yet only 16% have full confidence in public authorities' capacity to manage future crises. The perception that things are regressing rather than progressing is strong. In our [Ipsos Global Trends](#) report, 61% say they would like things in their country to be "the way they used to be".

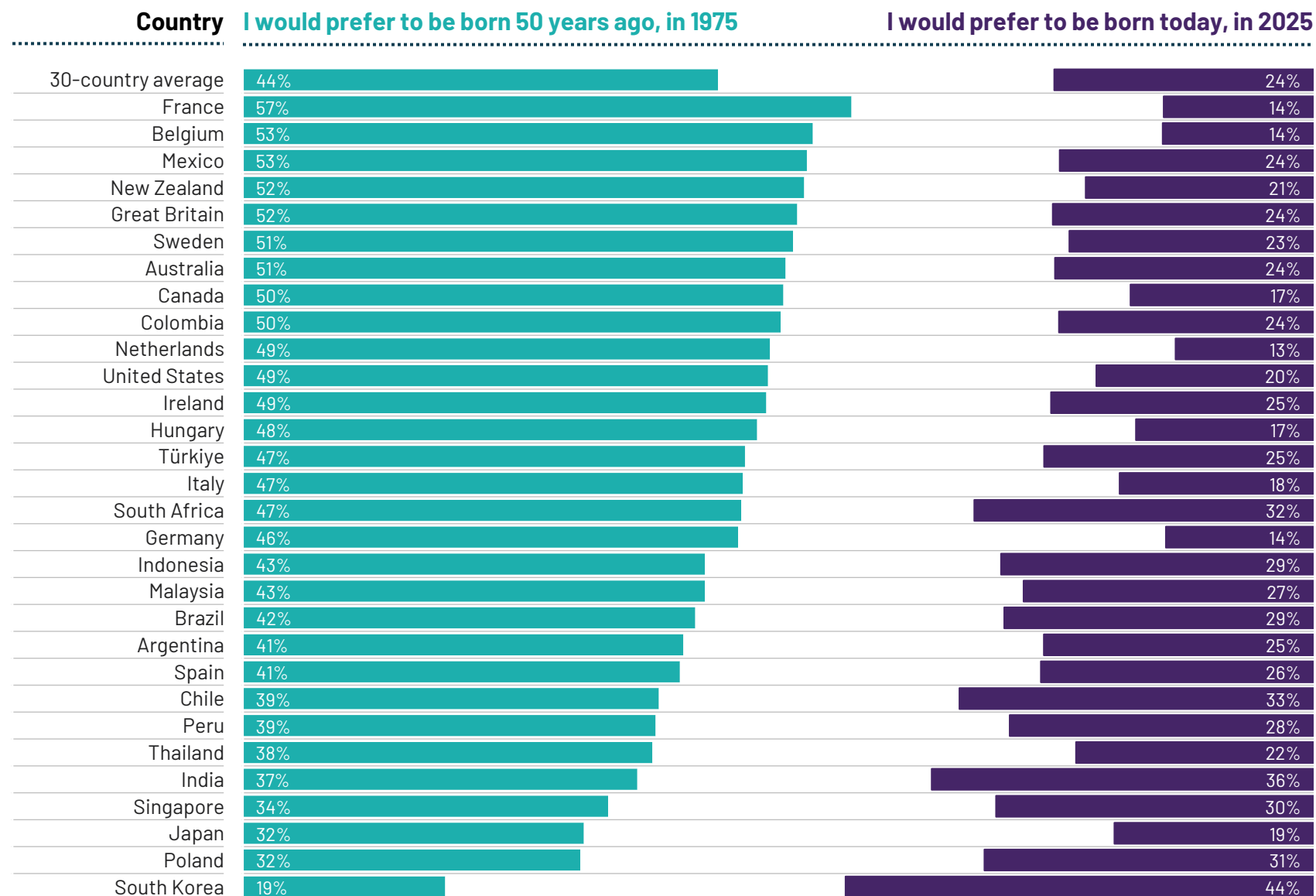
This is all about better understanding of people's perceptions, which are based on what they see in the communities and countries they live in. We hope this report can help us in getting closer to individuals' realities today, set against their sense of the dynamics of what is (and isn't) changing over time.

72%

of the population
across our 30
countries were
born after 1975

If you had to make a choice between being born 50 years ago, or being born today, which would you choose?

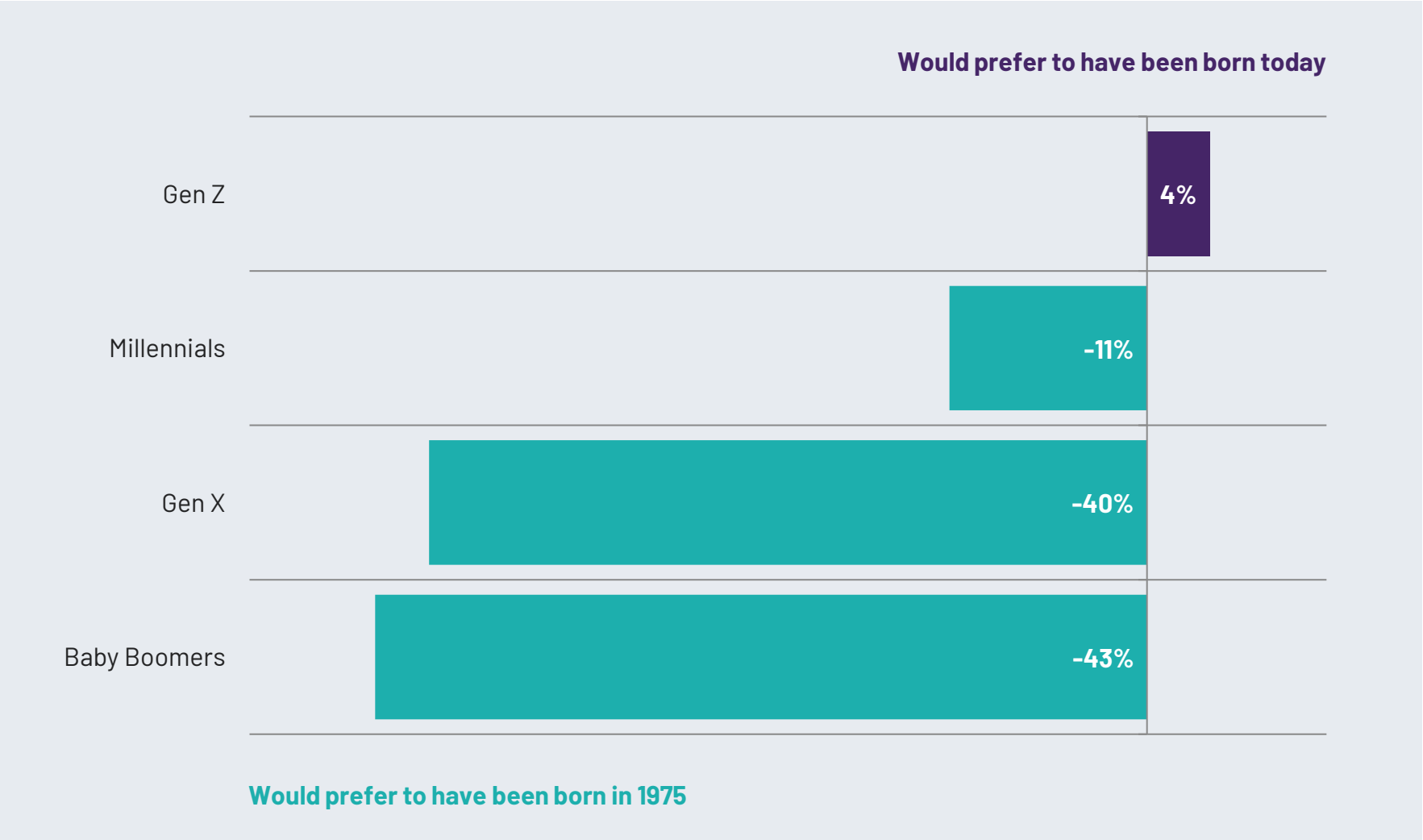
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



If you had to make a choice between being born 50 years ago, or being born today, which would you choose?

30-country average

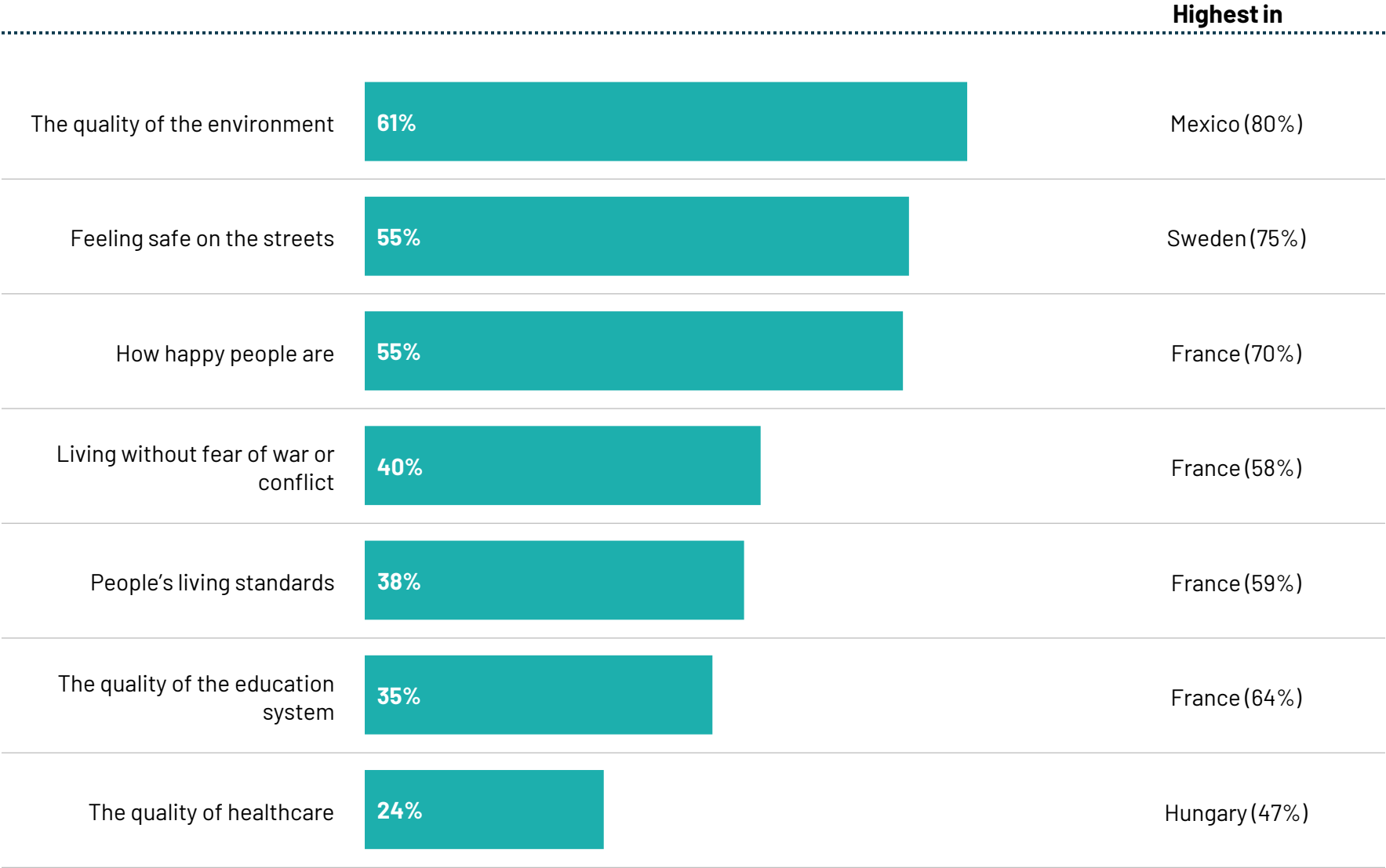
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975? 30-country average

Better in 1975

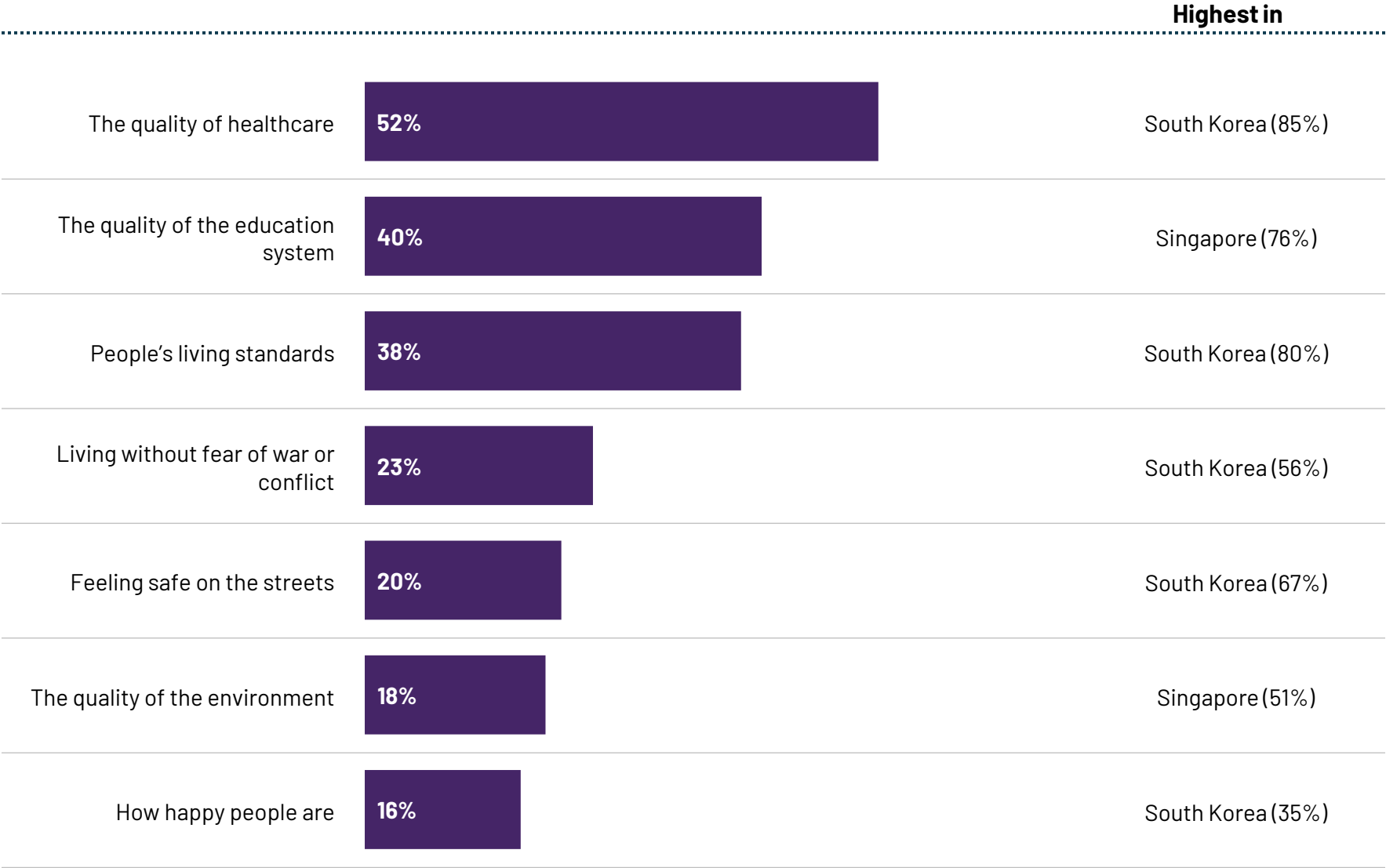
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975? 30-country average

Better today

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



The view from here: South Korea

South Korea has experienced some of the fastest economic growth in the world over the past 50 years.

Since its industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s after the war, it has become a top 10 global economy, a highly educated nation, and a global cultural influence (K-pop, film, etc.). For many South Koreans, "the Korea of today" feels like a much better life than the poor and insecure times of the past. In other words, the past is perceived as a symbol of deficiency and the present as a symbol of achievement.

Unlike other developed countries, South Korea is a country where living standards have changed dramatically within a single generation. For example, our parents' generation lived through the poverty of the immediate post-war period, while their children are living in the era of smartphones and AI. This generational gap makes "50 years ago" feel like a completely different world, not just a long time ago. As a result, there is a much stronger sense that "now is better" than the past.

Previously, South Korea was a society with limited personal freedoms due to wars, political instability, and authoritarian control. Today, however,

we have greater political freedom, social diversity, and access to technology. Even if it's competitive and stressful, it feels better because it's an era of choice.

I would say that many Koreans believe that "now" is better than the past - and that belief powers consumption in the present tense. In other words, for Koreans, the "present" is perceived as the result of accumulated achievements and the most meaningful moment. This perception has led to a culture of instant gratification centred on "me now", "satisfaction now", and "expression now".

This is why many brands are approaching things with more of an "Innovation Narrative" rather than dwelling on "Heritage" in the past, while it is also worth noting that Korean consumers trust brands' "ability to change" as a basis for trust.



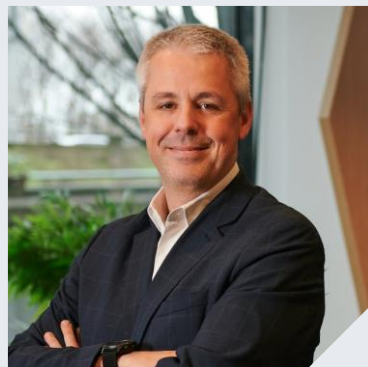
Hwanglye Park
**Country Manager,
Ipsos in South Korea**

The view from here: France and Belgium

Nostalgia is a French trend.

Is this why, out of 30 countries, France is the most likely to say that they would rather have been born in 1975 compared to today? Yes, because idealising the past is a reflex to face an uncertain present and a distressing future. The French need outlooks and good news to reconcile themselves with optimism and a future synonymous with progress, not problems. 75% of French people believe that “in France, things were better in the past” and – when they think about France in the years to come – only 36% of French people believe their future is full of opportunities and new possibilities.

We explore these themes in the new Ipsos Flair publication by Le Cherche Midi: “Beyond Appearances – Reasons to Be Optimistic in France.” Available later in November!



Alexandre Guerin
**Country Manager,
Ipsos bva, France**

It's no real surprise that we are among the most nostalgic over here in Belgium.

The country has actually fared quite well in the past two decades, but is now faced with one of the largest budgetary deficits, and people just know that tough choices will need to be made that will impact our living standards.

Add to the mix our ageing population, the current global tensions and you have a high degree of nostalgia!



Gerd Callewaert
**Country Manager,
Ipsos in Belgium**

The view from here: Mexico and New Zealand

A key trait in Mexican culture is the quick normalization of difficult situations. This often simplifies our collective memory, making the past seem less complicated.

Mexico's main worries today, such as crime, violence, and economic uncertainty, feel intense because they are still being lived and have not yet been normalized.

So, choosing 1975 isn't really about comparing two eras in terms of economic or social development.

It's about a feeling. It shows that people today long for the safety and simplicity they believe existed in the past.



Jorge Vargas
**Country Manager,
Ipsos in Mexico**

Given the current economic challenges of high living costs, export tariffs, declining house prices, and unemployment in the post-COVID era, it's not surprising that New Zealanders might be feeling nostalgic about the 'good old days'.

However, they may be wearing their rose-tinted glasses, as oil shocks, a protectionist government and record inflation, meant the big issues facing

New Zealand during the mid to late 70's were very similar.



Carin Hercock
**Country Manager,
Ipsos in New Zealand**

The view from here: Great Britain and the United States

Nostalgia is a powerful force in public opinion, as clearly evidenced by the data.

These results reflect a widespread dissatisfaction with the current direction of our country, a persistent theme in recent years. Consequently, when we ask people to compare present times with the past, they perceive a nation that was happier and more secure. As always, research like this highlights the distinctive characteristics of each country. The British, for instance, are famously protective of our National Health

Service and proud of its achievements. Therefore, it's unsurprising to see the British public acknowledge that healthcare quality is one aspect that has actually improved since 1975.



Trinh Tu
**Head of Public Affairs,
Ipsos in the UK**

"If only things were like the good old days," we hear so often.

Part of it is simple nostalgia.

But more fundamentally, it reflects a widespread belief that the system is broken – that people, and their children, won't be better off than before. That sentiment is the grist of the populist mill.



Clifford Young
**President of Polling
and Societal Trends,
Ipsos in the US**

The view from here: ESG

I am not surprised by these results, given we are approaching temperatures that are 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

Although cars in 1975 were all leaded, and petrol and coal were a major source for energy, the transition to renewable energy and electrification of vehicles has not yet penetrated widely enough to have the positive impact on air quality that would affect people's lived experience.

What's more, communication around biodiversity depletion, deforestation and rising temperatures on land and

sea will add further concern about environment quality. There's still much work to be done...



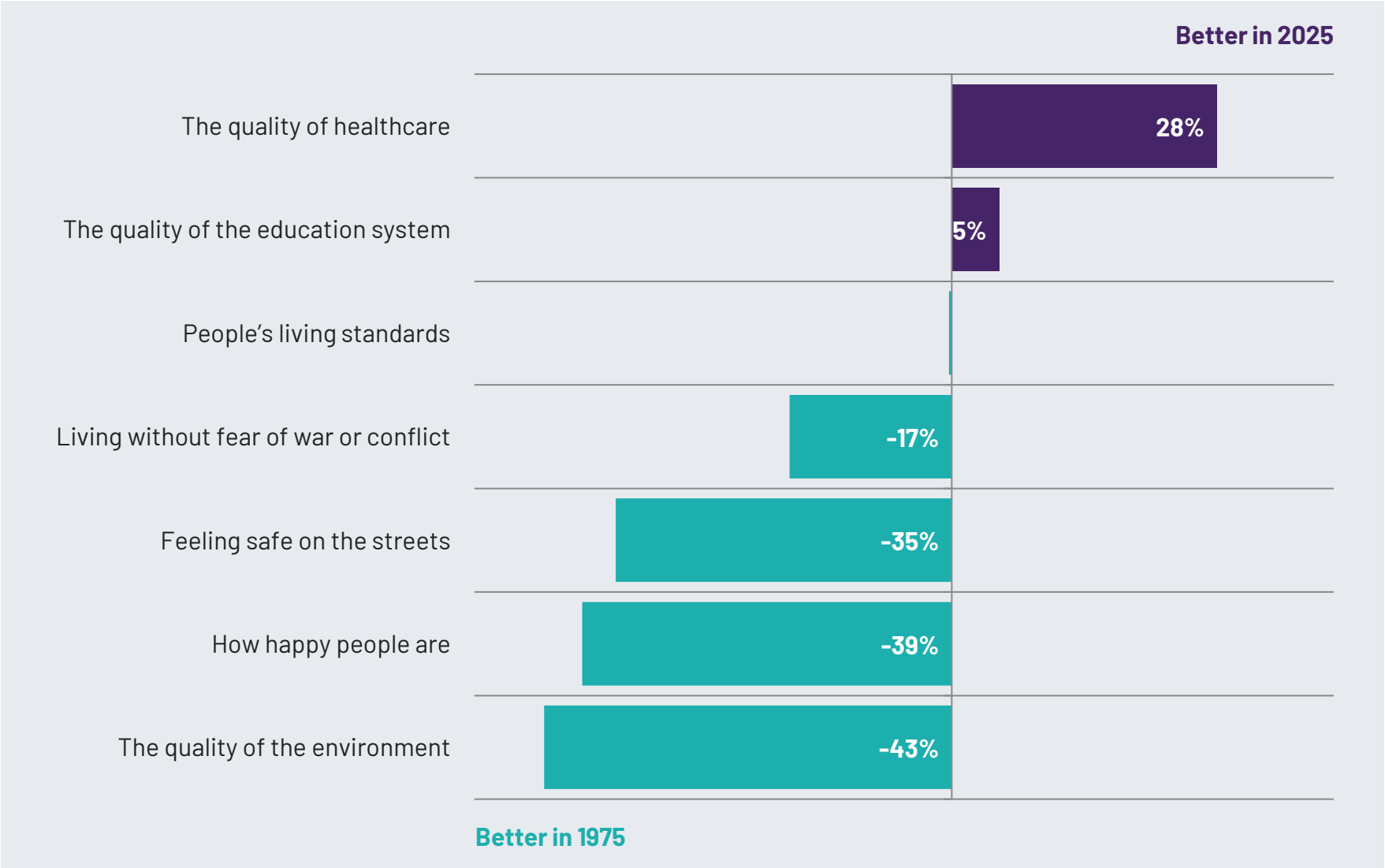
Sue Phillips
**ESG Global Lead,
Ipsos**



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

30-country average

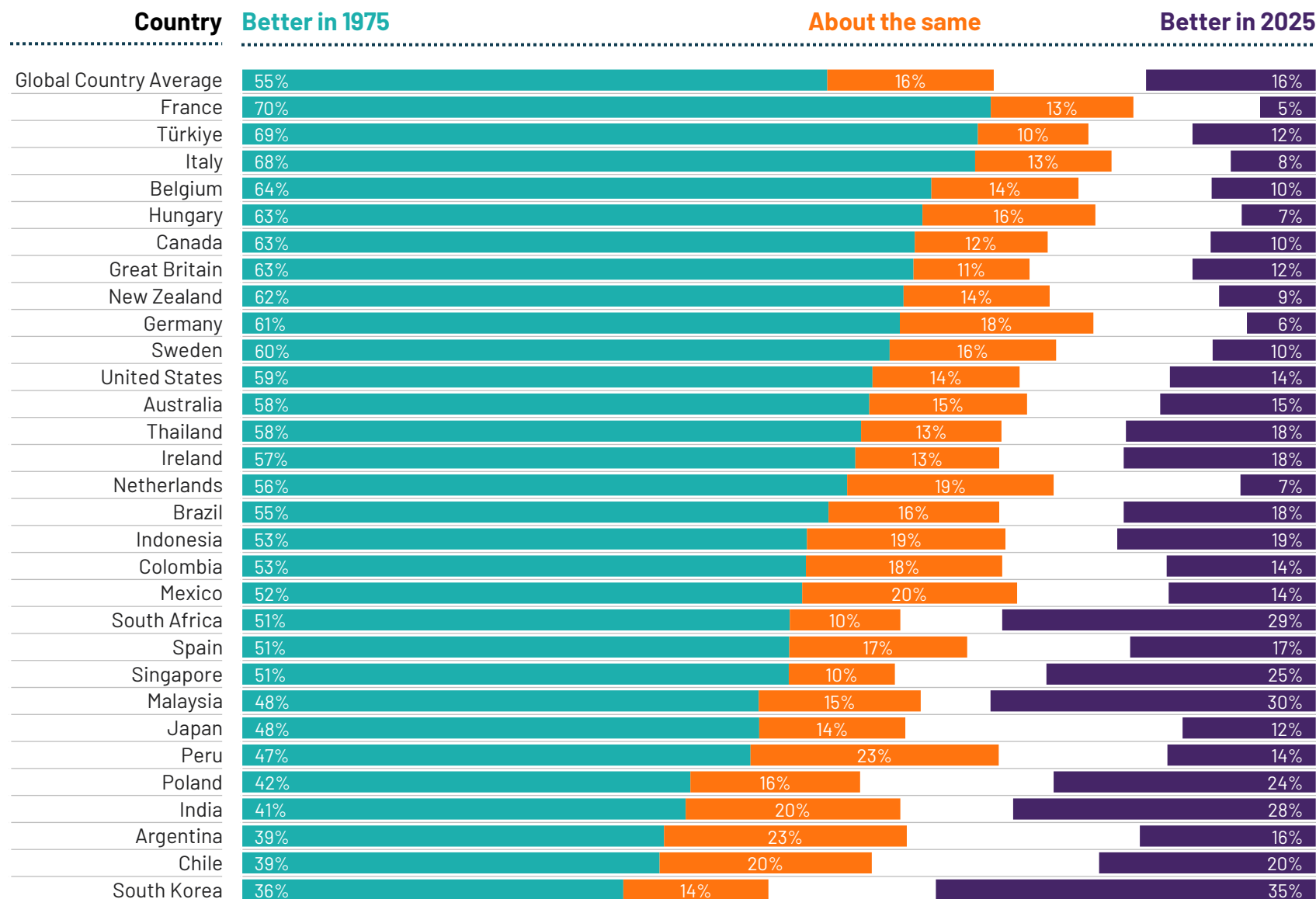
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

How happy people are

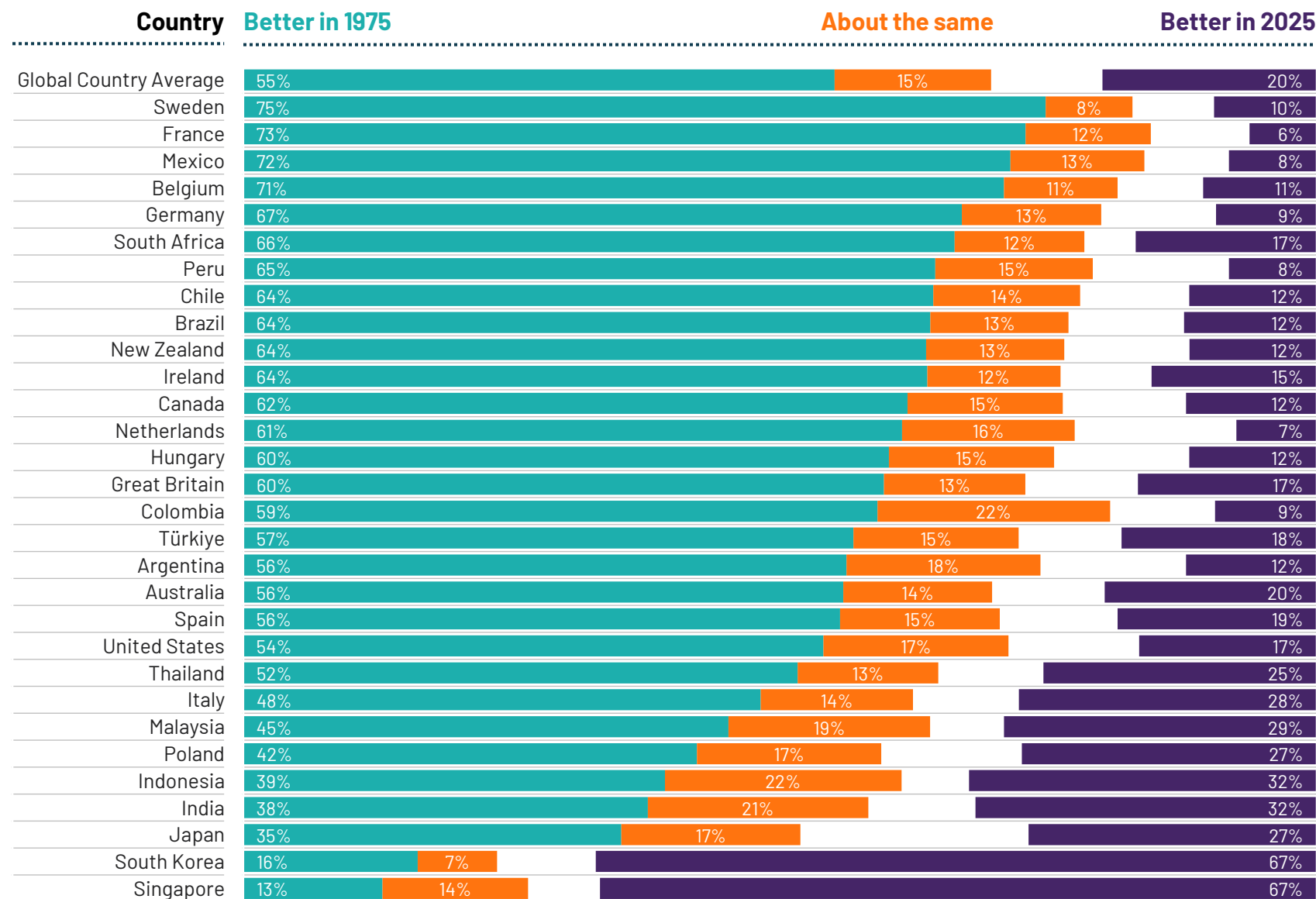
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

Feeling safe on the streets

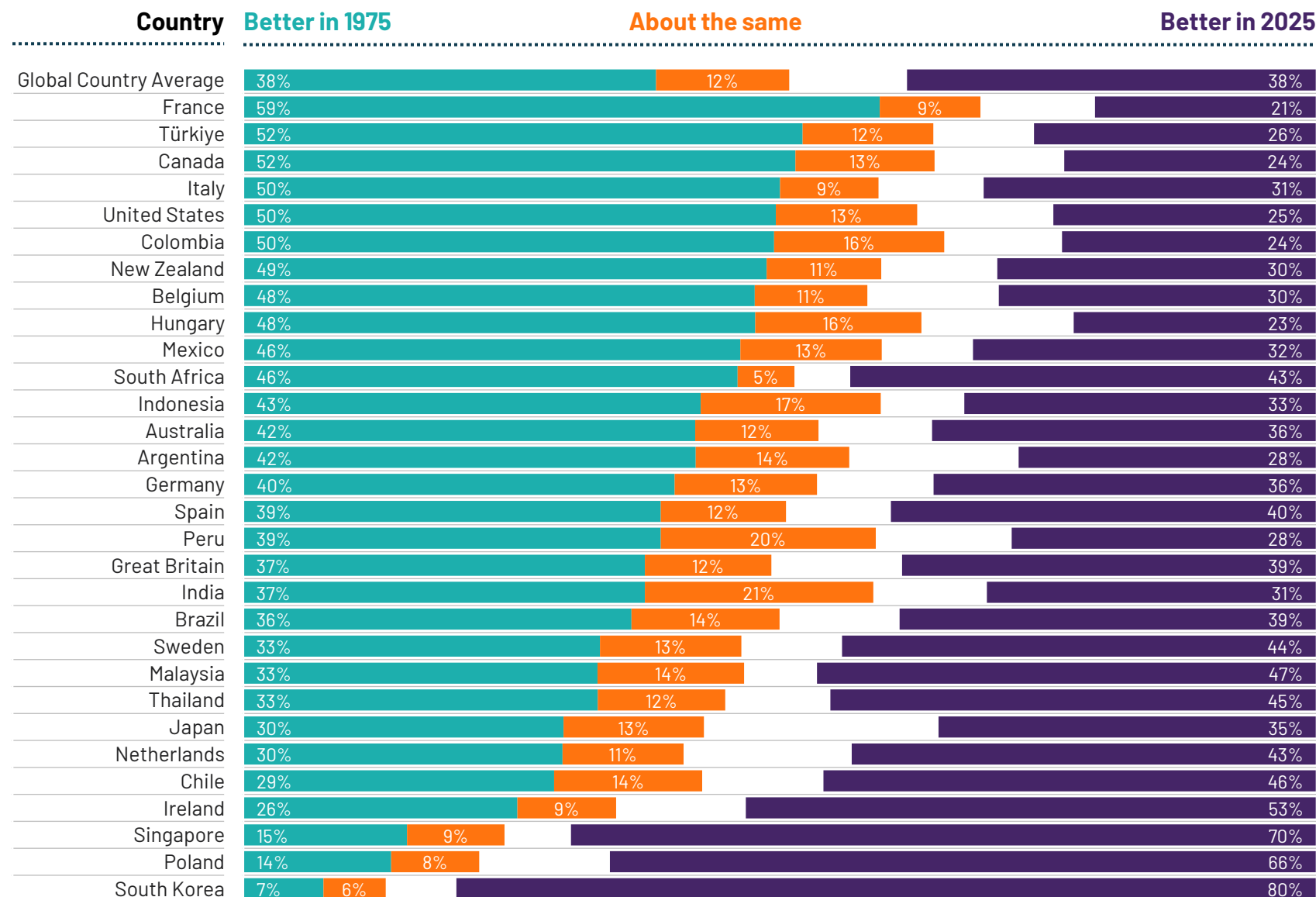
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

People's living standards

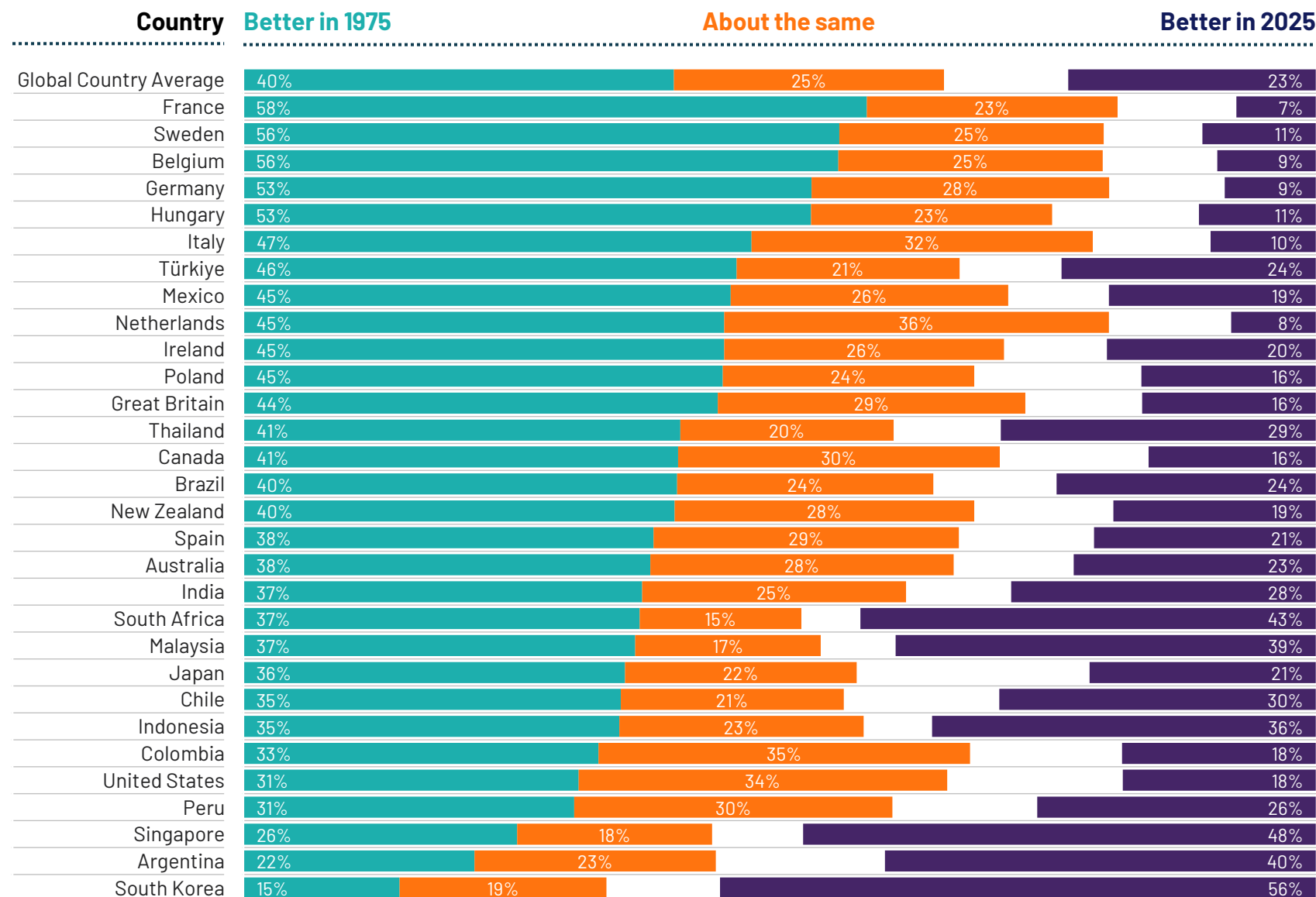
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

Living without fear of war or conflict

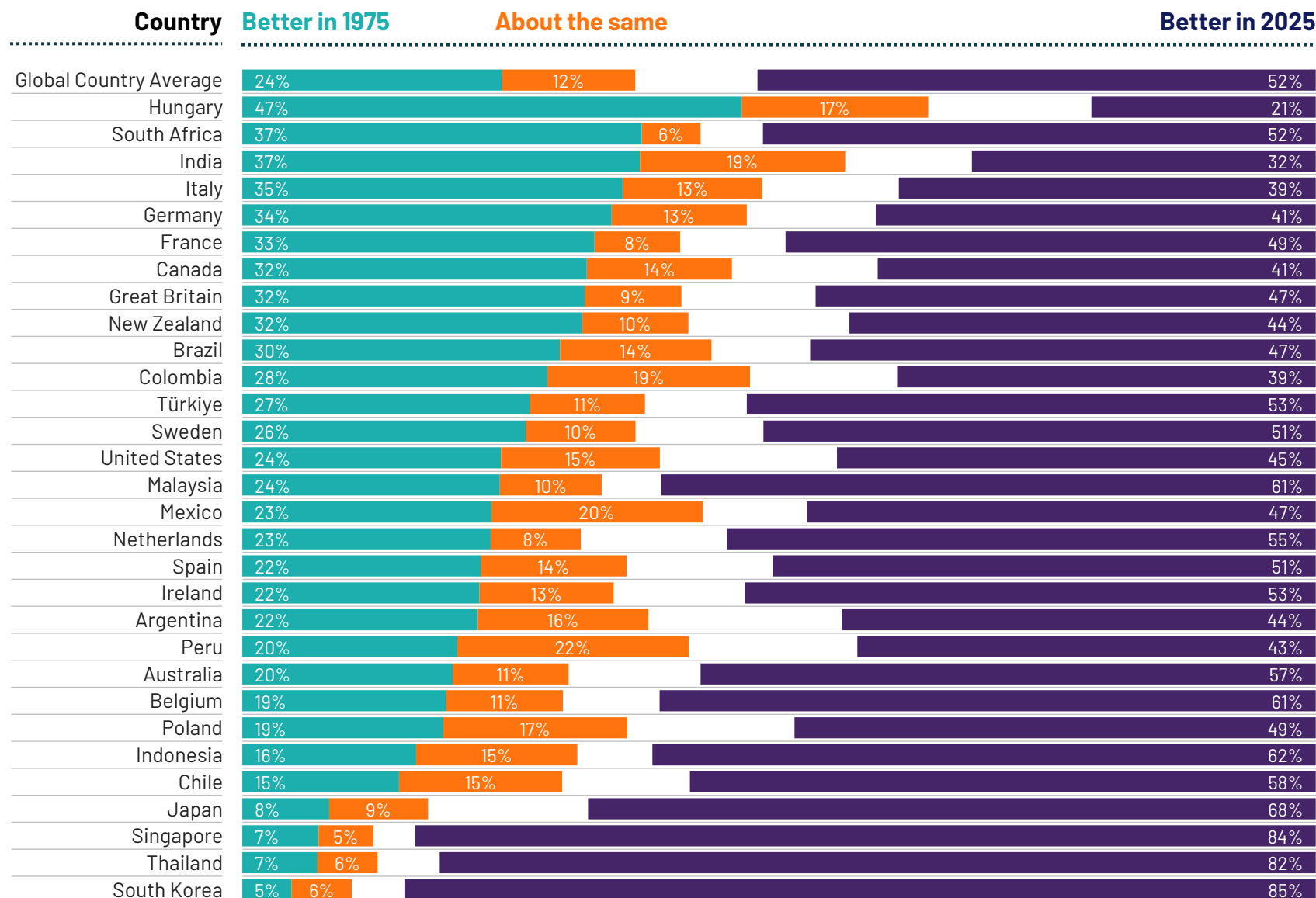
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

The quality of healthcare

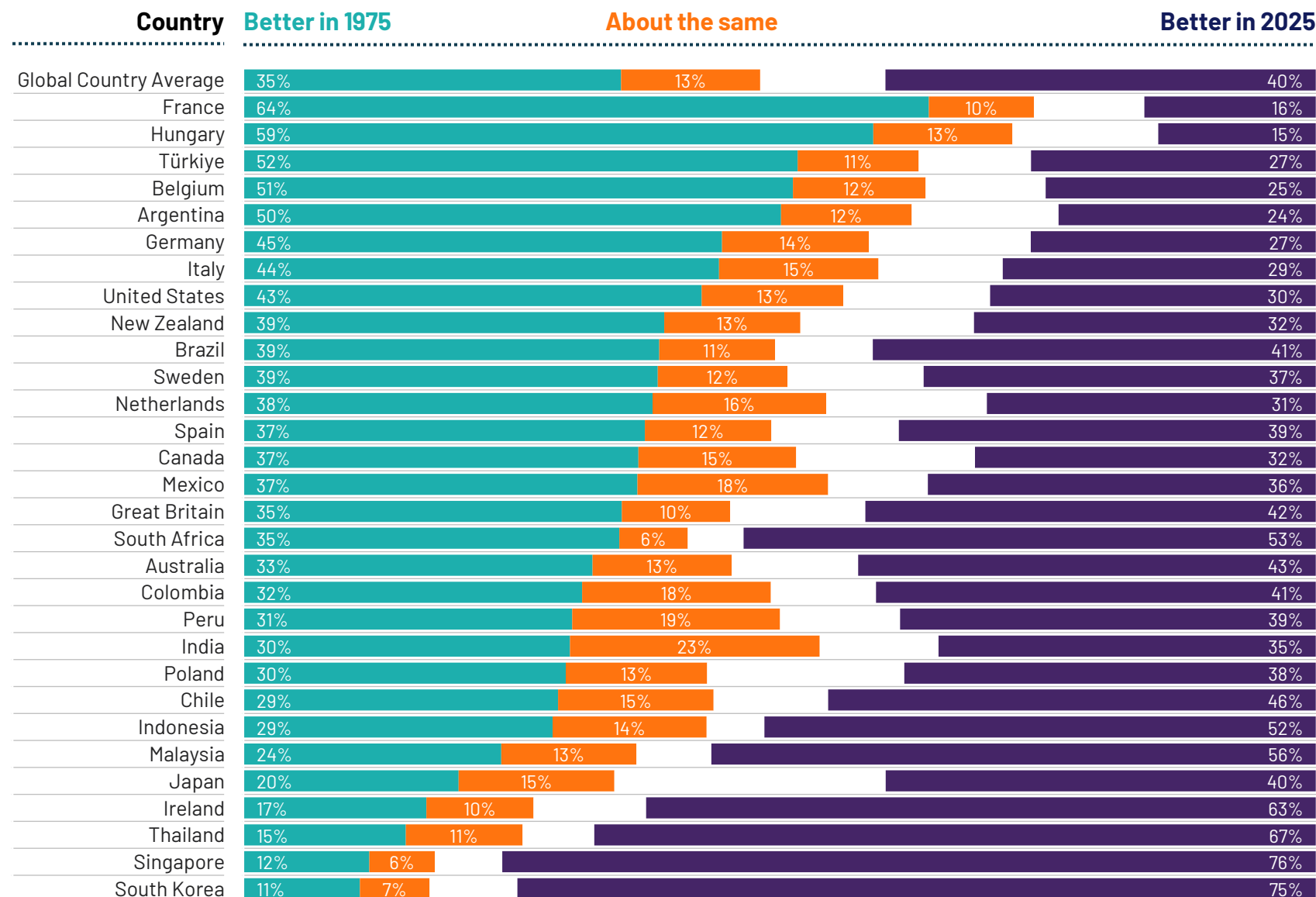
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

The quality of the education system

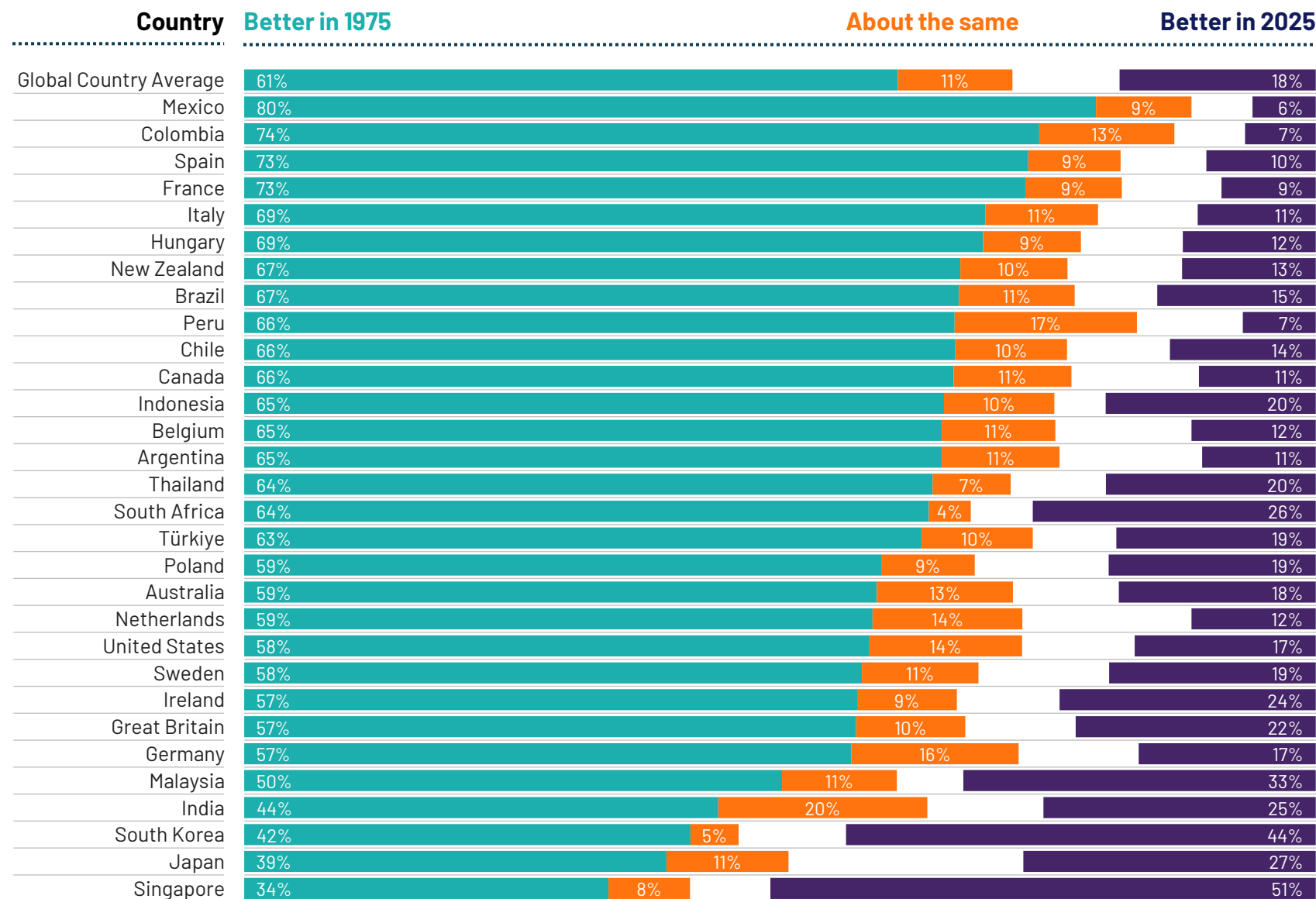
Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



All things considered, how would you describe things in your country today, compared with 50 years ago, in 1975?

The quality of the environment

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



Understanding life 50 years ago

While many people say 1975 was a better year to be born than 2025, just how well do they know the world of 50 years ago? After all, nearly three-quarters of the population in our surveyed countries were born during the years that followed.

To find out more, we asked people questions on life expectancy, demographics and literacy rates.

Life expectancy is over 75 these days in most of the countries in our survey, yet almost everywhere, people underestimate just how long people are living today. Mexicans, for example, say someone born today will live to be 68.5, seven years fewer than the 75.4 average lifespan. South Korea is the most accurate country when it comes to estimating their life expectancy.

Meanwhile, people tend to over-estimate how long people lived in 'the old days'. In Mexico, the average guess for life expectancy back in 1975 is 71.8; it was actually 61.9.

And what about our perceptions when it comes to demographic matters? One in two (49%) know China was the country with the biggest population in 1975, but people are less correct about today. Forty-one per cent currently pick China as the most populous country in 2025, ahead of the 38% who (correctly) choose India.

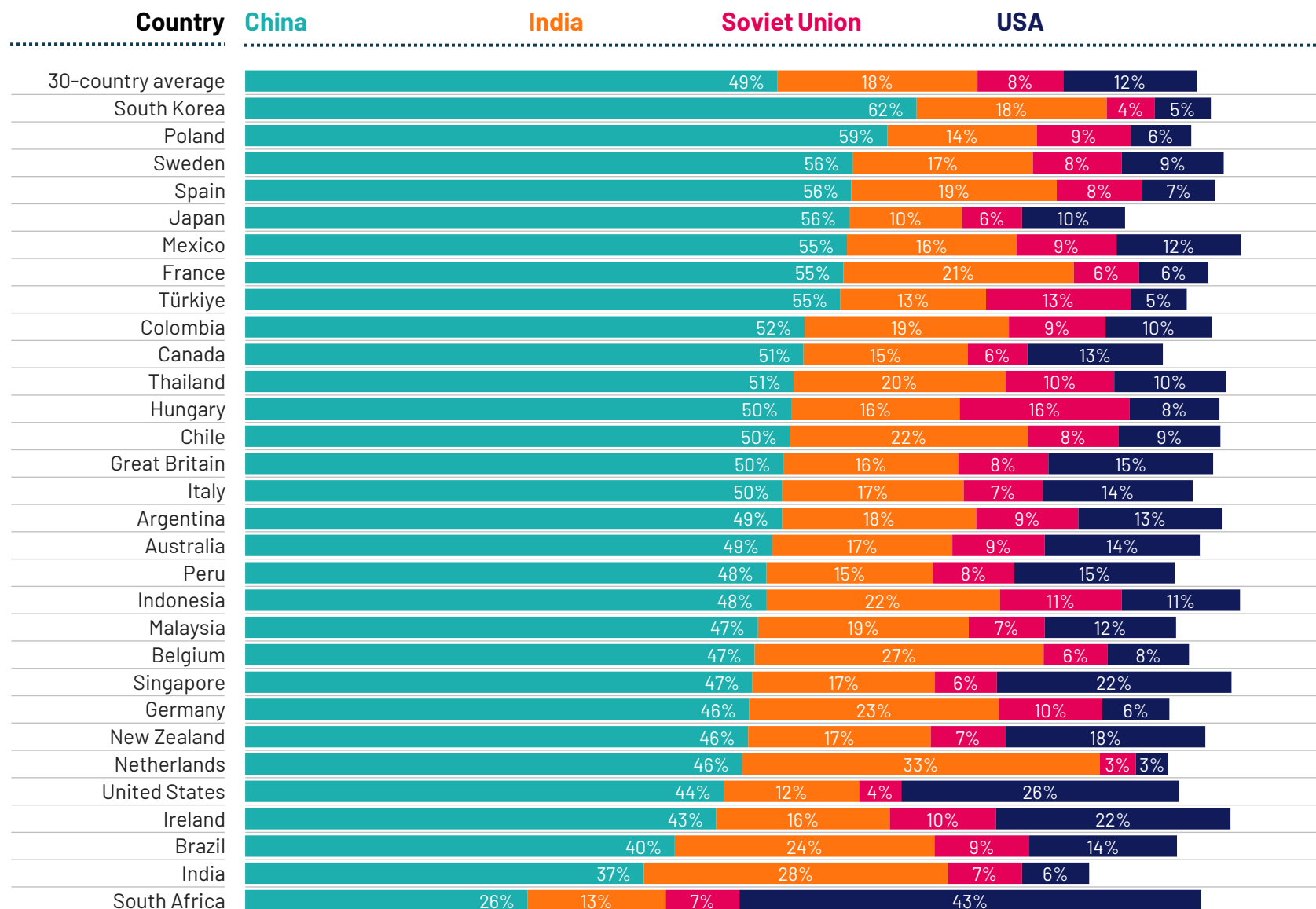
There is less accuracy all round when it comes to literacy rates. People are more likely to underestimate literacy rates in their country in both 1975 and in 2025.



All but South Africa have China (correctly) out in front as the most populous country in 1975.

Q: Back in 1975, which of these do you think was the world's most populous country?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.

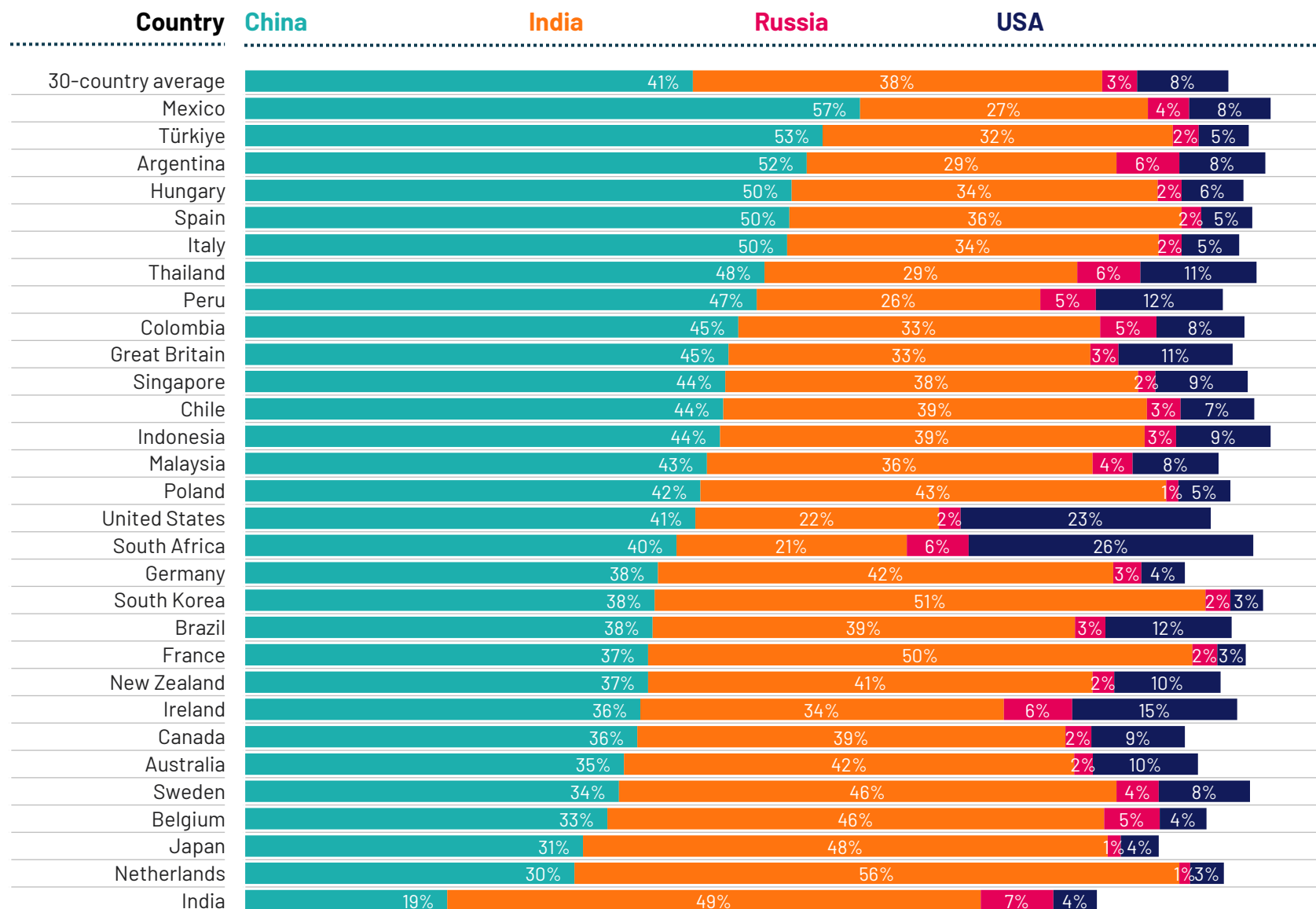


However, people are less correct about which country has the largest population today. In 2023, India surpassed China and became the world's most populous country.

Thirty-eight per cent (on average across 30 countries) know this, while for 41%, China remains the most populous country.

Q: And today, in 2025, which of these is the world's most populous country?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



In many cases people tend to overestimate the life expectancy for those who were born in 1975.

In eight countries this difference is greater than five years.

In Europe, the estimates are often very accurate.

Q: Back in 1975, what would you say was the average life expectancy at birth in your country?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.

Country	Difference between avg. guess & actual	Avg. guess	Actual
India	19	69.4	50.8
Peru	13	71.1	58.2
Indonesia	11	66.8	56
Mexico	10	71.8	61.9
Türkiye	9	68.9	59.5
Brazil	9	68.6	59.6
South Africa	6	63.8	57.6
Colombia	6	69.7	64
Chile	3	69.2	66
Malaysia	3	68.4	65.7
New Zealand	2	74.6	72.2
Germany	2	73.5	71.5
Hungary	2	70.9	69.4
Argentina	1	68.4	67
Australia	1	73.9	72.8
France	1	73.9	72.9
Italy	1	73.6	72.7
South Korea	1	65.4	64.7
Poland	1	71.3	70.6
Canada	0	73.6	73.4
Belgium	0	72	72
Netherlands	0	74.4	74.6
Sweden	0	74.8	75
Great Britain	-1	72	72.7
Ireland	-1	70.7	71.7
Spain	-2	72	73.5
Singapore	-2	68.2	70.2
United States	-3	70	72.5
Thailand	-4	55.9	59.7
Japan	-5	69.9	74.4

Almost everywhere, people underestimate current life expectancy in their country.

Places where people are particularly likely to underestimate how long people live these days include Thailand, India and Colombia.

South Koreans are the most accurate at guessing how long the average person will live in their country these days.

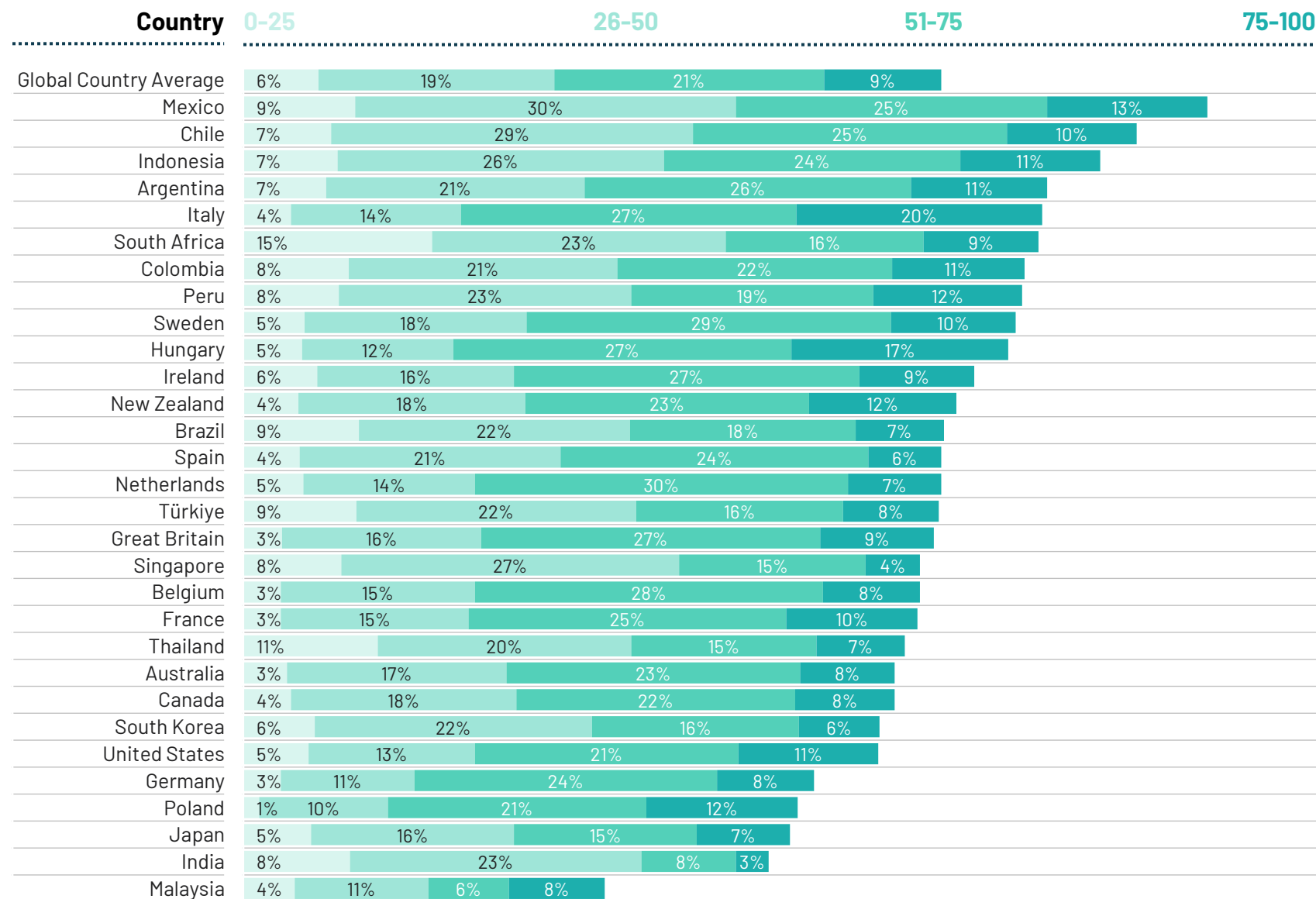
Q: And today, in 2025, would you say is the average life expectancy at birth in your country?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.

Country	Difference between avg. guess & actual	Avg. guess	Actual
Thailand	30	46.8	76.8
India	20	52.1	72.5
Peru	16	62	78.1
Colombia	15	63	78.1
Malaysia	12	64.9	77
Türkiye	9	69.3	77.8
Singapore	8	75.9	84
South Africa	8	58.8	66.5
Indonesia	8	63.8	71.4
Hungary	7	70.1	77.3
Mexico	7	68.5	75.4
United States	7	73	79.6
Brazil	7	69.7	76.2
Australia	5	79.3	84.2
Poland	4	74.8	79
Chile	4	77.4	81.5
Ireland	4	78.7	82.7
New Zealand	4	78.6	82.4
Italy	4	80.4	84
Spain	4	80.3	84
Canada	4	79.2	82.9
Great Britain	4	77.9	81.6
Argentina	3	74.3	77.7
France	3	80.3	83.6
Japan	3	82.1	85
Belgium	3	79.6	82.4
Sweden	2	81.6	83.6
Netherlands	2	80.9	82.4
Germany	1	80.3	81.7
South Korea	0	84.7	84.5

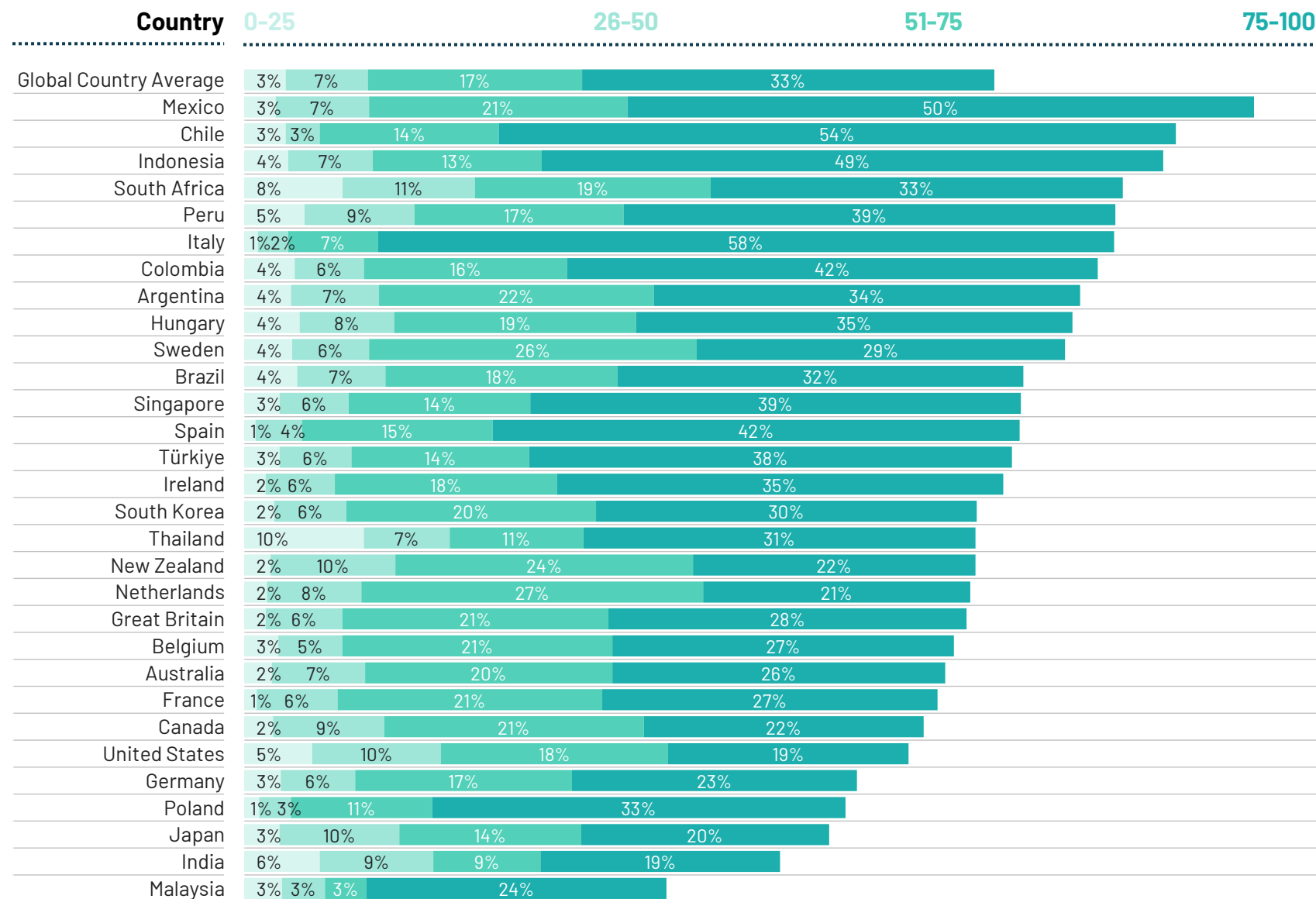
And, still thinking about 1975, what share of the adult world population do you think could read and write?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



And, today, in 2025, what share of the adult world population do you think can read and write?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.

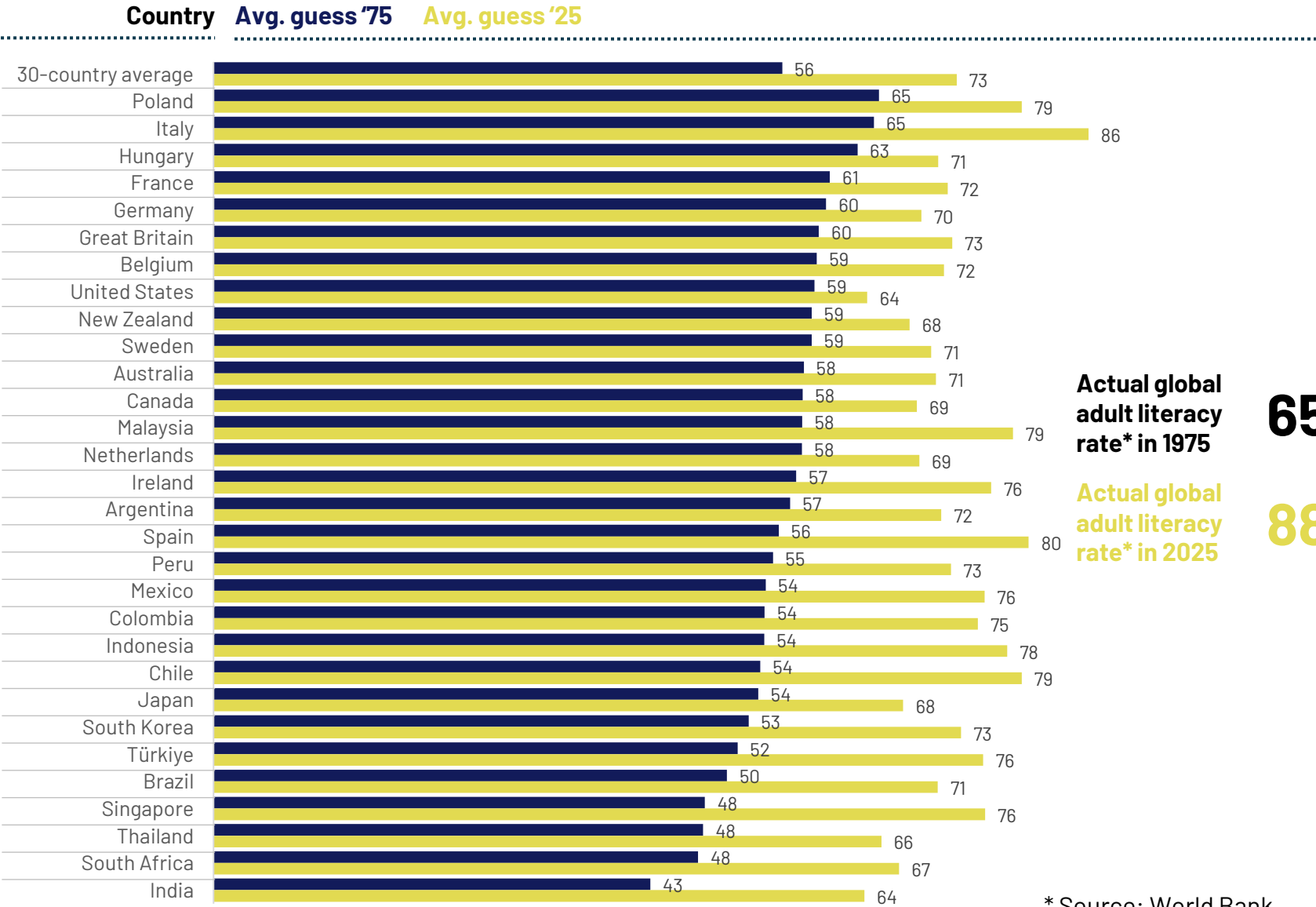


People in all countries surveyed underestimate the global adult literacy rate both for 1975 and 2025.

Q: And, still thinking about 1975, what share of the adult world population do you think could read and write?

And, today, in 2025, what share of the adult world population do you think can read and write?

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



Actual global adult literacy rate* in 1975

65%

Actual global adult literacy rate* in 2025

88%

* Source: World Bank

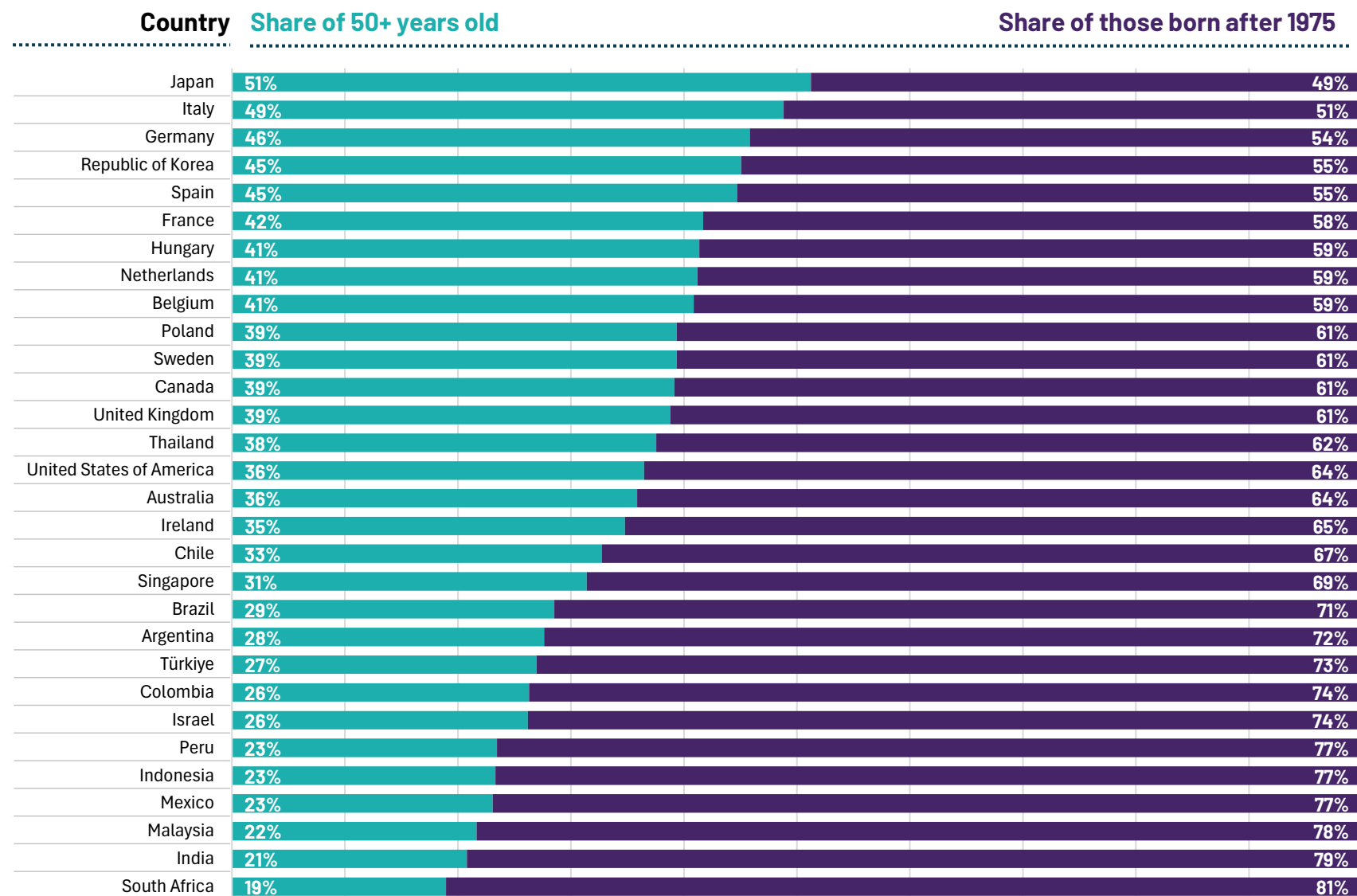


APPENDIX AND METHODOLOGY

72% of the population of our 30 countries were born since 1975.

Here's how it breaks down by country

Base: 23,772 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries, interviewed between Friday, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025.



* Source: World Bank

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, August 22, and Friday, September 5, 2025. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 23,772 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, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Spain, Türkiye, and the U.S., and 500 individuals each in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, and Thailand. 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, 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 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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