



# OPEN SOCIETY BAROMETER

## CAN DEMOCRACY DELIVER?

SEPTEMBER 2023

OPEN SOCIETY  
FOUNDATIONS

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# OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

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# FOREWORD

Mark Malloch-Brown  
President  
Open Society Foundations

The reports of democracy's demise are greatly exaggerated. In fact, it has a strong pulse. And the gravest threat it faces is not the rival appeal of authoritarianism but rather the question of whether democratic leaders can deliver for their populations. People want to believe in open societies in which checks on power, pluralistic and independent institutions, minority protections, and individual rights enable all to participate. But the evidence of that model improving their lives is all-too-patchy.

That is the central finding of this new *Open Society Barometer*. Between May and July, our team and partners surveyed over 36,000 respondents in a representative group of 30 countries around the world. Building on a similar exercise conducted last year, the results paint a detailed picture of the attitudes, fears, and hopes of citizens in states with a collective population of over 5.5 billion. They are at once hopeful and sobering.

With the rise of authoritarianism and populism, new debates about the relative efficacy of rival systems of government, and the acceleration of the so-called "polycrisis," it is easy to conclude that democracy is doomed to decline. But our polling shows a broad and enduring faith in its principles among the global public.

On average, 86 percent of respondents want to live in a democratic state. People still believe in its potential for generating solutions to common challenges: presented with 10 imperatives like building schools and hospitals, protecting the environment, and reducing crime, those surveyed strongly tend to the view that authoritarian regimes are less able than democracies to fulfill these needs. Only 20 percent believe that the latter can "deliver what citizens want."

That makes sense. Ample recent evidence belies the supposed dynamism and resilience of authoritarian government. As president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro disastrously mishandled the pandemic and accelerated the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. China's zero-COVID strategy

ended in debacle and its economic outlook is going from bad to worse. Russia’s war in Ukraine is a blood-soaked quagmire and Vladimir Putin recently faced a coup attempt. Turkey, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has suffered several years of self-inflicted economic crisis. Each case demonstrates the weaknesses of closed-society leadership unbound by, or disdainful of, adequate checks and balances.

Not only are most people unconvinced by the alternatives to democracy, they also identify with open society principles. On average, majorities of between 85 percent and 95 percent agree it is wrong for governments to deny access to individual rights on grounds of appearance, religion, sexual or gender orientation, or in cases of disruptive acts of protest. Presented with a list of nine major countries and asked which most align with their values, respondents are most likely to pick democracies, and most frequently the United States. Moreover, 65 percent say they would prefer their country to build relationships with democracies rather than authoritarian governments.

Witness, too, the widespread confidence in other aspects of democratic and rules-based global governance, including the role of civil society organizations, international institutions, and sanctions on human rights violators.

And yet this confidence in the foundational elements of democracy coexists with profound doubts about its real-world practice and impact. People may believe that it has the potential to deliver results, but they are less convinced by its current performance.

Respondents in many democracies think their country is headed in the wrong direction. Globally, 58 percent worry that political unrest in their country could lead to violence in the next year. In nearly every country surveyed, people have less trust in local and national politicians than in other actors to work in their best interests—but trust in these representatives was especially low in democracies such as Argentina, Colombia, Japan, and Senegal.

In the United States, only 29 percent of those surveyed believe national politicians have their interests at heart.

In France and Brazil—two democracies that last year saw relatively narrow presidential runoffs between moderates and authoritarians—strong adherence to democracy as an idea sits alongside alarming pessimism about its present functioning. Although the vast majority of respondents in both countries say it is important for them to live in a democratically governed country, 50 percent and 74 percent of respondents, respectively, agree that the laws in their country do not keep “people like [them]” safe.

The same pattern applies to democracy’s global sibling: multilateralism. On average, 66 percent of respondents believe democracies contribute more than authoritarian countries to international cooperation. That sense was strongest among respondents in Kenya and Nigeria, where nearly 80 percent agreed.

However, people seem to believe that a more inclusive and equitable international system would be more effective. Overall, 61 percent of respondents think lower-income countries should have more of a say in global decision-making. When presented with the statement “human rights do not protect me and my family,” a plurality agree. Meanwhile 69 percent say that inequality between countries is a bigger challenge now than it was last year and people also see inequality and poverty as major challenges in their own countries and daily lives. Forty-nine percent of our respondents reported struggling to afford food at some point in the past year.

That may be linked to probably our most disturbing finding: there is a strong correlation between age and attitudes at odds with democratic principles. Among those aged 56 and above, 26 percent were supportive of a strong leader who does away with assemblies and elections.

But in 36-55 age group, the figure was 32 percent and among the those aged 18-35, it was 35 percent. A similar pattern is observed on the question of whether democracy is preferable to any other form of government: among those aged 56 and above, 71 percent agree with this, but among those aged under 36 only 57 percent do so.

Perhaps that should not surprise us. Today's young people have grown up and been politicized as the age of polycrisis has emerged, during which forms of climate, economic, technological, and geopolitical turmoil have grown and reinforced each other to a degree never seen before. So, although most people globally still have faith in democracy, that faith is running on fumes. And these findings suggest that it may be set to weaken with each generation.

It all recalls a comment by Hakainde Hichilema earlier this year. As Zambia's president put it bluntly: "You can't eat democracy."\* That is not a counsel of despair, but rather a reminder that government of the people, by the people, and for the people must do more than appeal in the abstract; it must put food on the table too, figuratively and literally, in the form of broad-based personal and economic security. This report should be read in the same spirit.

Democracy as an ideal continues to exert widespread appeal. But it has to be shown to deliver better, concrete outcomes.

At the Open Society Foundations, we are putting our experience, resources, and networks at the service of that goal. We are working to support the ecosystem of democratic norms and institutions, eroded in many places, to enable it to work as it should. We are backing the development, testing, and promotion of new ideas to contribute to democracy's renewal. And we are investing in causes of climate, equity, expression, and justice on which recognizably effective democratic government and thriving open societies depend, now and in the future.

These efforts are complemented by our work on restoring and renewing multilateralism. For the short-term, we are helping dynamic individuals and groups working to deliver better results within the current system. For the long-term, we want to play a role in remaking that system for the realities of the mid-21st century, from the climate emergency to the rise of artificial intelligence. All of this, we hope, will contribute to a world in which democracies can cooperate, manage global challenges, and ultimately deliver the outcomes that the respondents to our poll want to see. The future of democratic government hinges on those results. Faith alone is not enough.

\*Hichilema, Hakainde. "Zambia's President: 'You Cannot Eat Democracy,'" Bloomberg, March 28, 2023: [www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-03-28/debt-restructuring-is-no-recipe-for-democracy-says-zambia-president-hichilema](https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-03-28/debt-restructuring-is-no-recipe-for-democracy-says-zambia-president-hichilema)

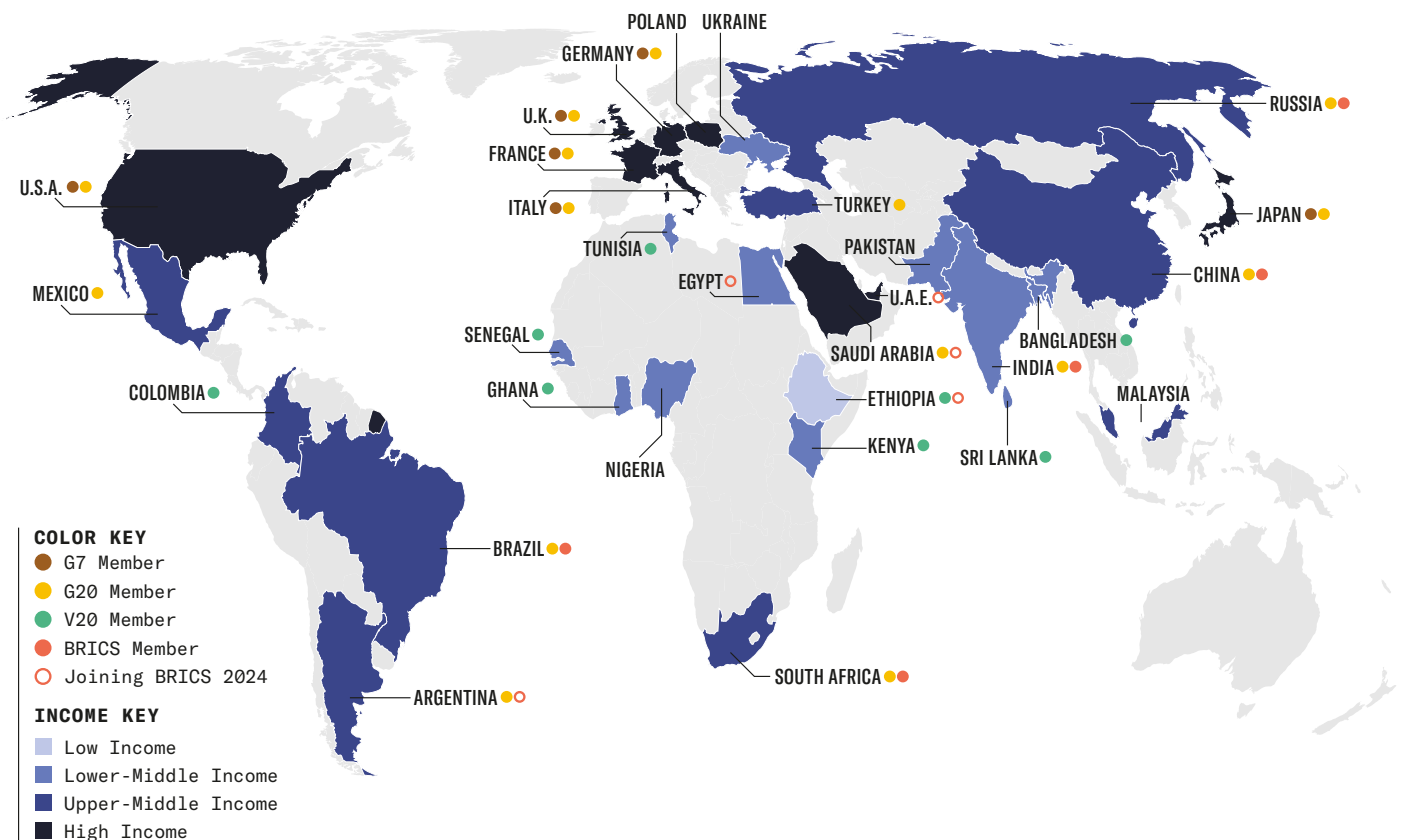
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched in September 2023, the *Open Society Barometer* serves as a global reality check, asking people each year about the issues affecting their lives, communities, countries and the wider world—and how best to address them.

This year’s survey is based on representative polling in 30 countries. Chosen to reflect geographic, economic, and political diversity, these countries have a combined population of 5.5 billion people. In each country, we aimed to survey a statistically representative sample of 1,000 people, tailoring questions to national contexts where appropriate, and providing definitions of key words such as “democracy” and “authoritarianism.”

Learn more at [osf.to/OpenSocietyBarometer](https://osf.to/OpenSocietyBarometer)

The Open Society Foundations surveyed 36,344 respondents across 30 countries:



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

### 1. DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS—STILL GOT IT

- **People have faith in democracy.** Eighty-six percent of respondents say they want to live in a democracy. Only 20 percent believe that authoritarian countries can deliver “what citizens want.”
- **Human rights are ingrained the world over.** Seventy-two percent believe that human rights have been a “force for good” in the world, and 71 percent agree that “human rights reflect values that I believe in.”
- **But authoritarianism appeals to some, especially the young.** Just 57 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds think democracy is preferable to any other form of government, compared to 71 percent of older respondents.

### 2. EQUITY AND JUSTICE—LITTLE PROGRESS

- **Democracy and rights fall short of their potential.** The ability of leaders to deliver outcomes at the national level raises questions at a time when one in two respondents (49 percent) has worried about putting food on the table.
- **Political violence is a palpable fear.** Fifty-eight percent and majorities in 21 of the countries polled are worried that political unrest in their countries could lead to violence in the next year. In the United States, that figure rises to 67 percent.
- **Rich countries should do more on debt and climate.** People see the lack of action on climate change and high levels of debt in the developing world as global failures—and they want high-income countries to respond. Eighty-four percent think lenders should help countries struggling with debt by cancelling, reducing or renegotiating repayment conditions. Seventy-five percent want high-income countries to increase overseas aid and 71 percent believe they should compensate low-income countries for economic loss due to climate change.



### 3. PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES—IT'S PERSONAL

- **Climate change is a major concern and increasingly seen as a personal issue.** Seventy percent are anxious that climate change will affect their lives next year and it ranks as the most important issue facing the world today, alongside poverty and inequality.
- **Corruption is seen as the biggest national problem.** When asked about the most important challenge facing their country, respondents chose corruption. Trust in national and local politicians was low in most of the countries polled.
- **Migration is highly visible but of low concern.** Despite headlines to the contrary, just 7 percent of respondents said migration was their biggest concern. Two-thirds want to see more safe and legal routes for migrants.

### 4. POWER AND POLITICS—A PUSH FOR INCLUSION

- **People are generous but reluctant to cede power.** Respondents in most high-income countries believe their governments should increase assistance, but they are less enthusiastic about giving low-income countries a greater say in decision-making.
- **Influence is diversifying but slowly.** The United States and the United Kingdom come out on top when people select countries aligned with their values. Respondents gravitated to established regional powers when asked about expanding the UN Security Council. And they prefer to get financial support from international institutions. Only 10 percent would want their government to borrow from China.
- **China leads the pack.** Respondents believe that China will be the most influential country by 2030. Apart from Japan, less than half of those polled in each country think this will have a negative impact on their country.



# 1. DEMOCRACY AND RIGHTS: STILL GOT IT

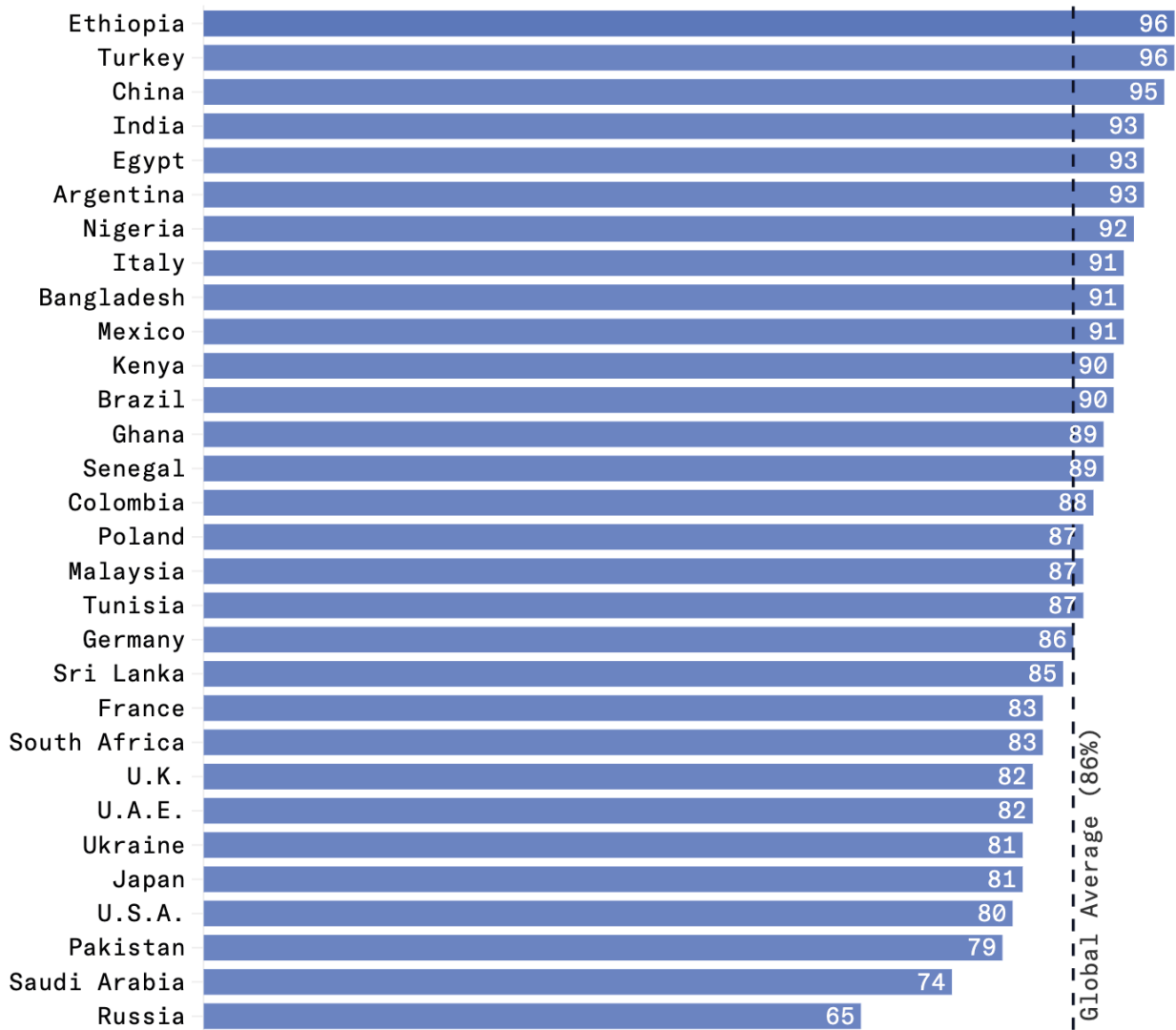
## 1.1 PEOPLE HAVE FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

Democracy remains the most popular form of government globally, with 86 percent of respondents wanting to live in a democratic state and nearly two-thirds (62 percent) preferring it over any other system.

Respondents were asked if they believe authoritarian countries perform better than democratic ones across 10 key indicators.

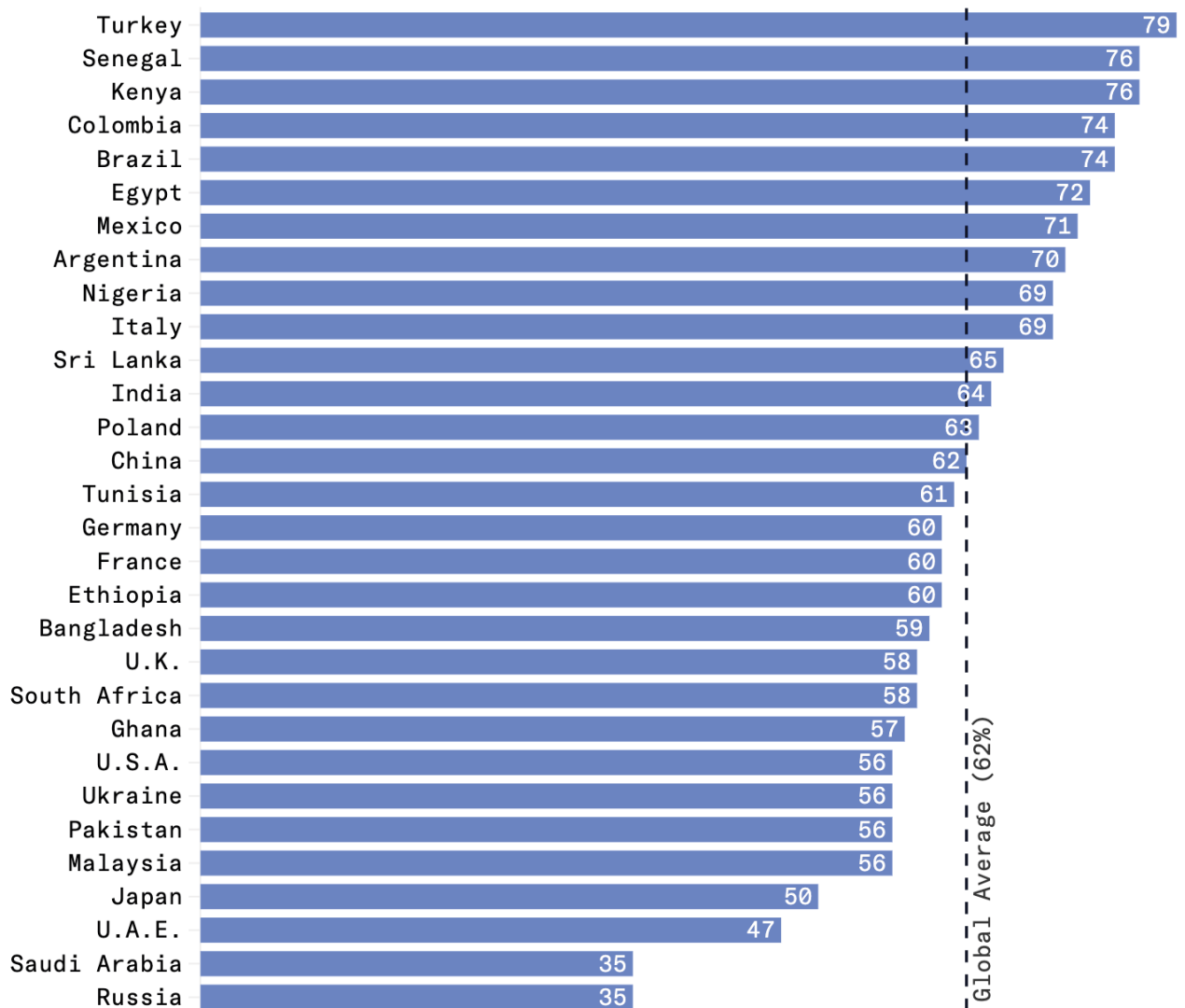
## IMPORTANCE OF LIVING IN A DEMOCRACY

Percentage of respondents per country who say it is important to them to live in a country that is democratically governed



## DEMOCRACY AS THE PREFERRED FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Percentage of respondents per country who believe democracy is preferable to any other kind of government



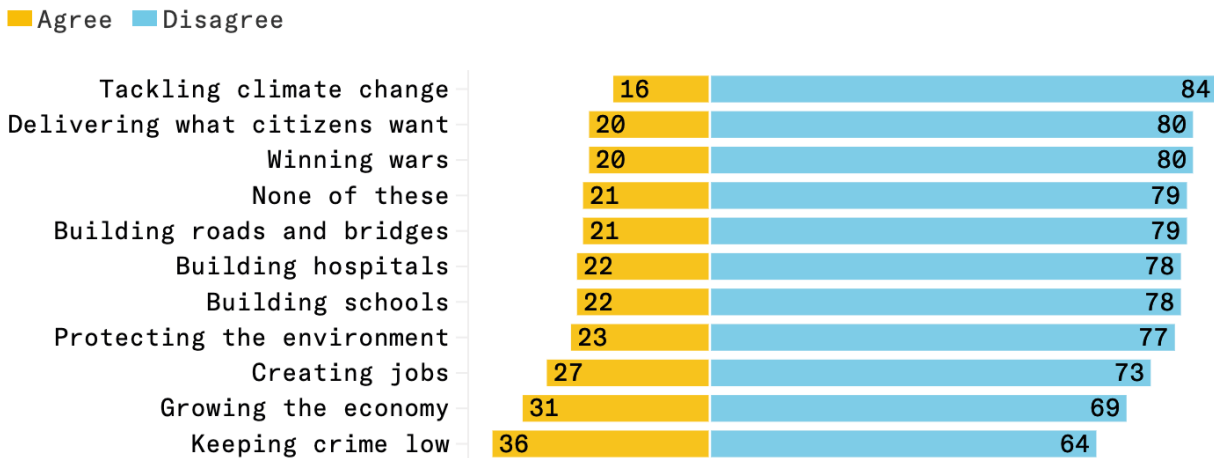
Only 20 percent believe that authoritarian countries are more capable of delivering “what citizens want.” Just 16 percent of respondents think authoritarian states are better than democracies at tackling climate change—which many identified as their top concern facing the world.

Even in countries where there was more sympathy for authoritarianism, people were skeptical about its ability to perform. In Turkey, for example, half of respondents (50 percent) think having a leader who does not bother with elections or parliament is a good way of running a country, yet less than a third (26 percent) believe that authoritarian regimes deliver better than democracies on four or more indicators.

Looking beyond national borders, people also think democratic states perform better at the global level. Few respondents (29 percent) think countries should cooperate less when making decisions on the global stage, and two-thirds (66 percent) think democracies contribute more to global cooperation, with Kenya and Nigeria reporting higher figures (nearly 80 percent). Sixty-five percent of those polled want their countries to “build relationships with democratic countries rather than authoritarian countries.” Respondents also felt their values were most aligned with those of the United States (29 percent) or United Kingdom (27 percent) than those of China (15 percent) or Russia (12 percent).

## AUTHORITARIAN COUNTRIES' CAPACITY TO DELIVER

Global average of respondents who believe authoritarian countries are better than democratic countries at delivering on the following indicators



## 1.2 HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INGRAINED THE WORLD OVER

Seventy-five years after the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people believe the concept of human rights retains relevance and value globally. When asked if human rights have been a “force for good in the world,” a global average of 72 percent of people agreed. Only one country—Japan—indicated less than majority support (45 percent).

When given the statement “human rights reflect values that I believe in,” an average of 71 percent agreed, with just 9 percent disagreeing. Japan showed the lowest levels of agreement (34 percent).

Among the countries with most support for the statement were Nigeria (86 percent), Kenya (85 percent), Bangladesh, Colombia, and Ethiopia (each 82 percent), and India (80 percent).

The perception that civil and political rights are prioritized in high-income countries and economic and social rights are prioritized in middle- and low-income countries does not appear to hold true.

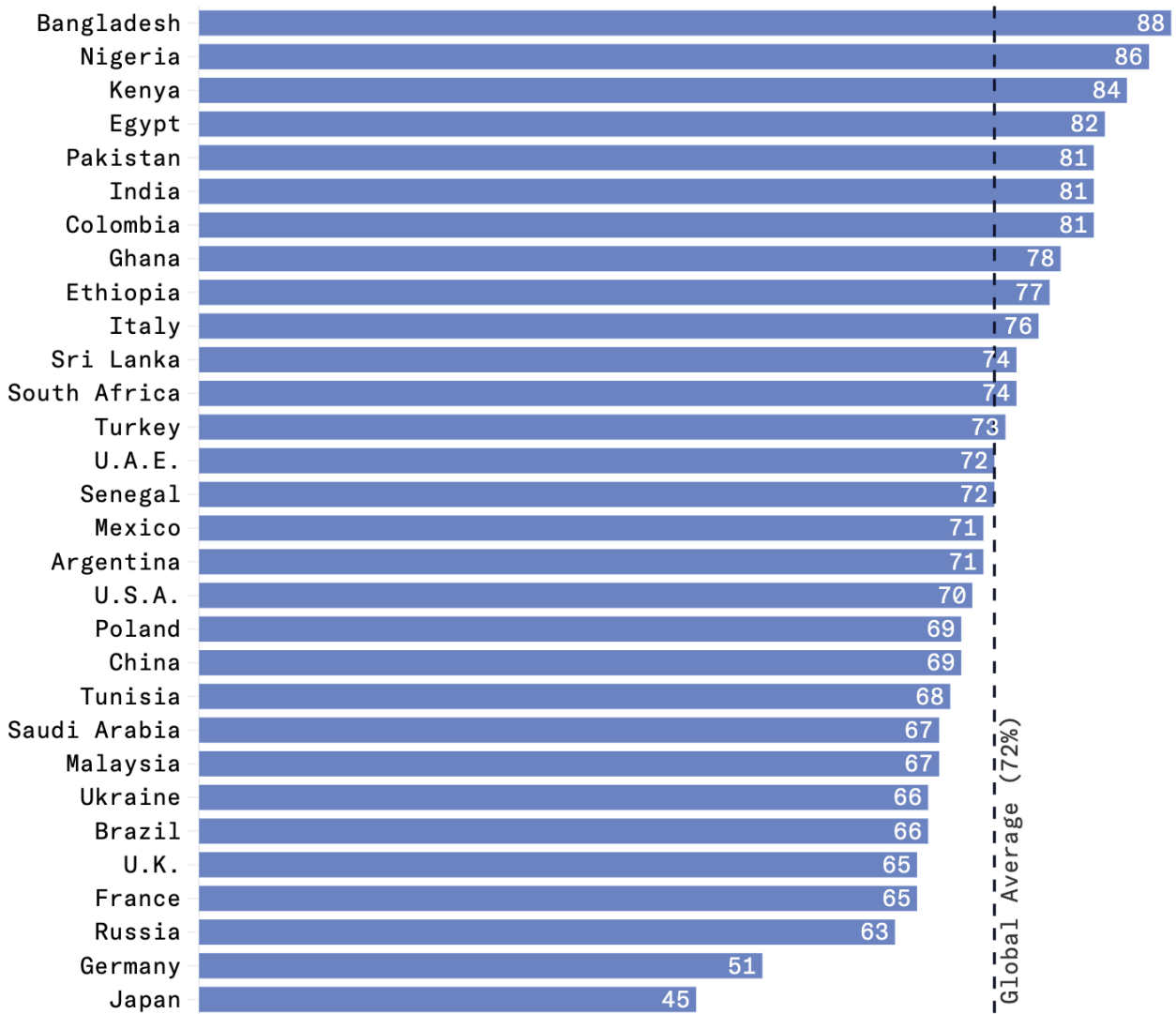
When asked to choose from a list, 41 percent of respondents globally said the rights to food, housing, education, health and social security were the most relevant to them. Bangladesh was unique among countries polled in returning a higher answer for civil and political rights (36 percent) over economic and social rights (28 percent).

Respondents in India, Saudi Arabia, and Ghana ranked environmental rights ahead of civil and political rights.

Respect for rights remains strong when applied to groups that are often marginalized. An overwhelming 95 percent of respondents said it was not “OK for governments to remove the human rights of people who do not look like me.”

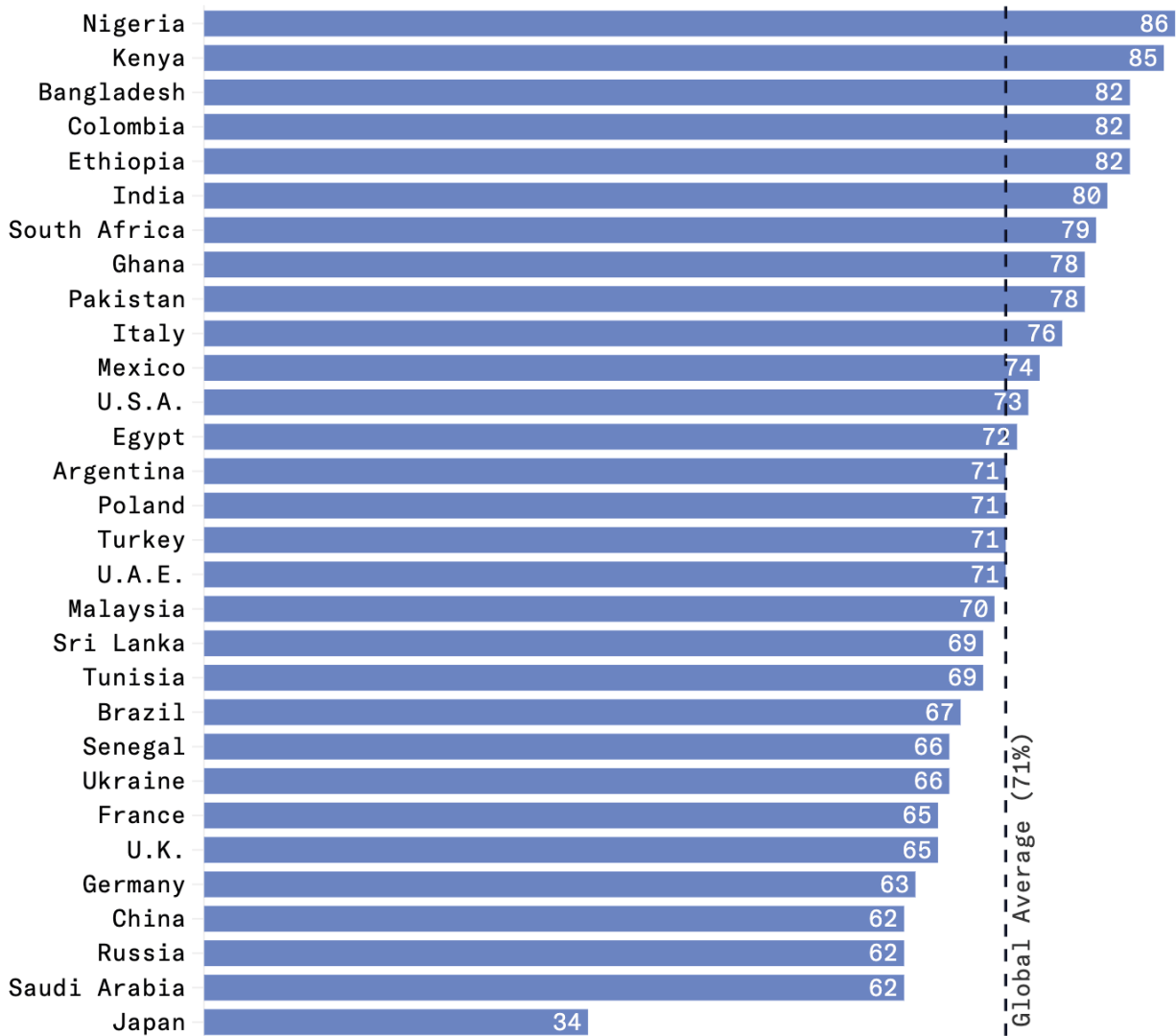
## HUMAN RIGHTS AS A FORCE FOR GOOD IN THE WORLD

Percentage of respondents per country who believe human rights have been a force for good in the world



## HUMAN RIGHTS AS A REFLECTION OF VALUES

Percentage of respondents per country who believe human rights reflect values they believe in

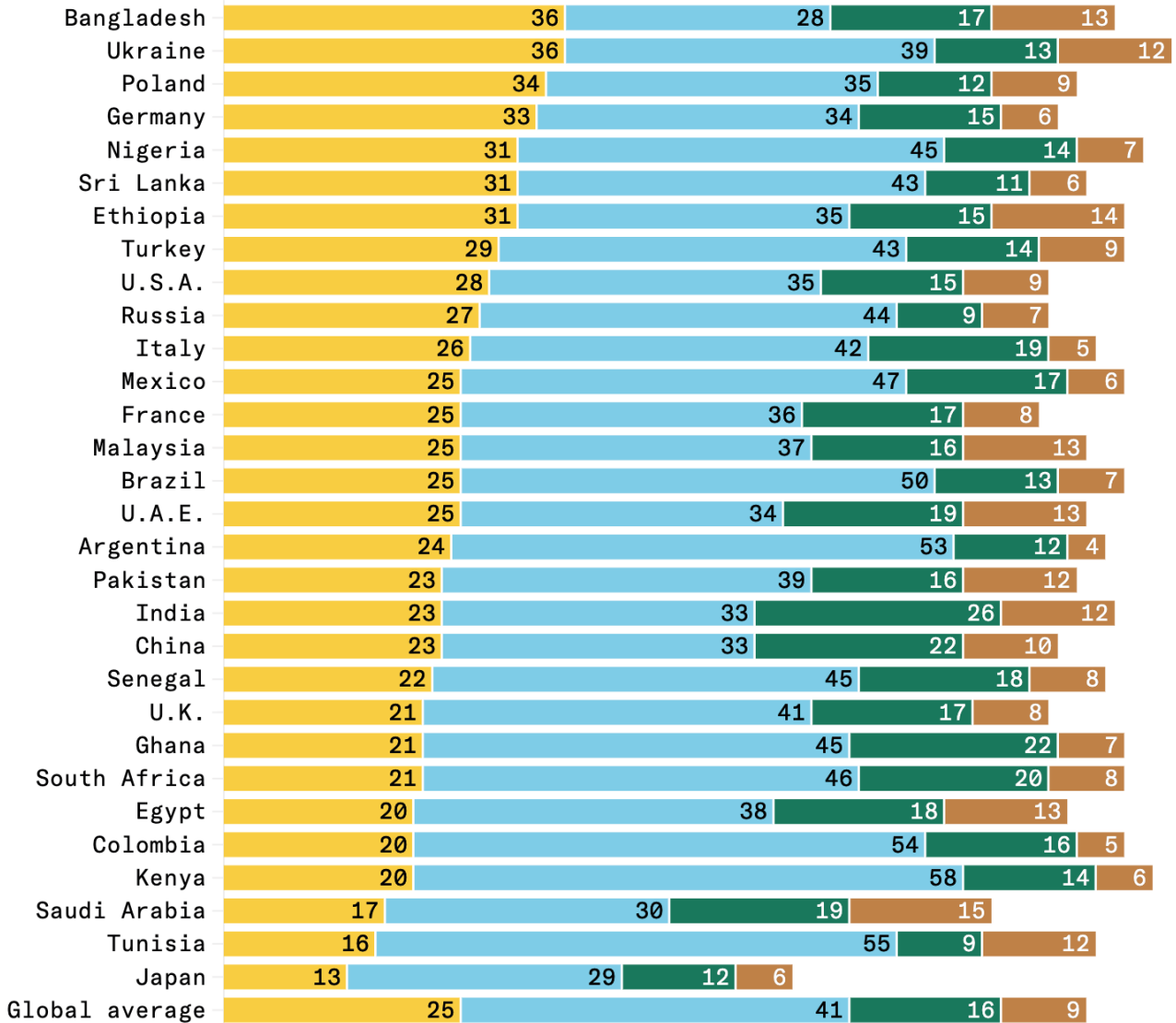




## WHICH CATEGORIES OF RIGHTS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TO PEOPLE?

Percentage of respondents per country who rank the following categories of rights as most important to them and their communities

■ Civil and political rights\* 
 ■ Economic and social rights\*\* 
 ■ Environmental rights\*\*\* 
 ■ Digital rights\*\*\*\*



\*Civil and political rights (the right to vote, a fair trial if accused of a crime, freedom of speech, a ban on torture, stopping discrimination),

\*\*Economic and social rights (right to food, housing, education, health, social security), \*\*\*Environmental rights (right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment), \*\*\*\*Digital rights (ability to communicate online, control over one's own data)

There is also considerable support for accountability when rights are abused. A global average of 63 percent agreed that “tools such as travel bans and freezing bank accounts are useful ways to bring human rights violators to justice.”

Respondents from Asia and Africa were most likely to endorse this statement, with Bangladesh (79 percent), Nigeria (78 percent), Egypt (74 percent),

Ethiopia and Kenya (both 73 percent), and Pakistan (72 percent) all registering above average support.

Russia, which has seen extensive travel bans and asset freezing since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, was the only country where more respondents disagreed (37 percent) than agreed (34 percent).

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## GOVERNMENTS SHOULD NOT "REMOVE" HUMAN RIGHTS

Global average disagreement with the statement "It is OK for governments to remove the human rights of people who..."

Belong to other religious groups

94

Are refugees

92

Are transgender

89

Hold the wrong political views

88

Are lesbian, gay or bisexual

86

Are politically disruptive protesters

85

Don't pay taxes

84

Are criminals

67

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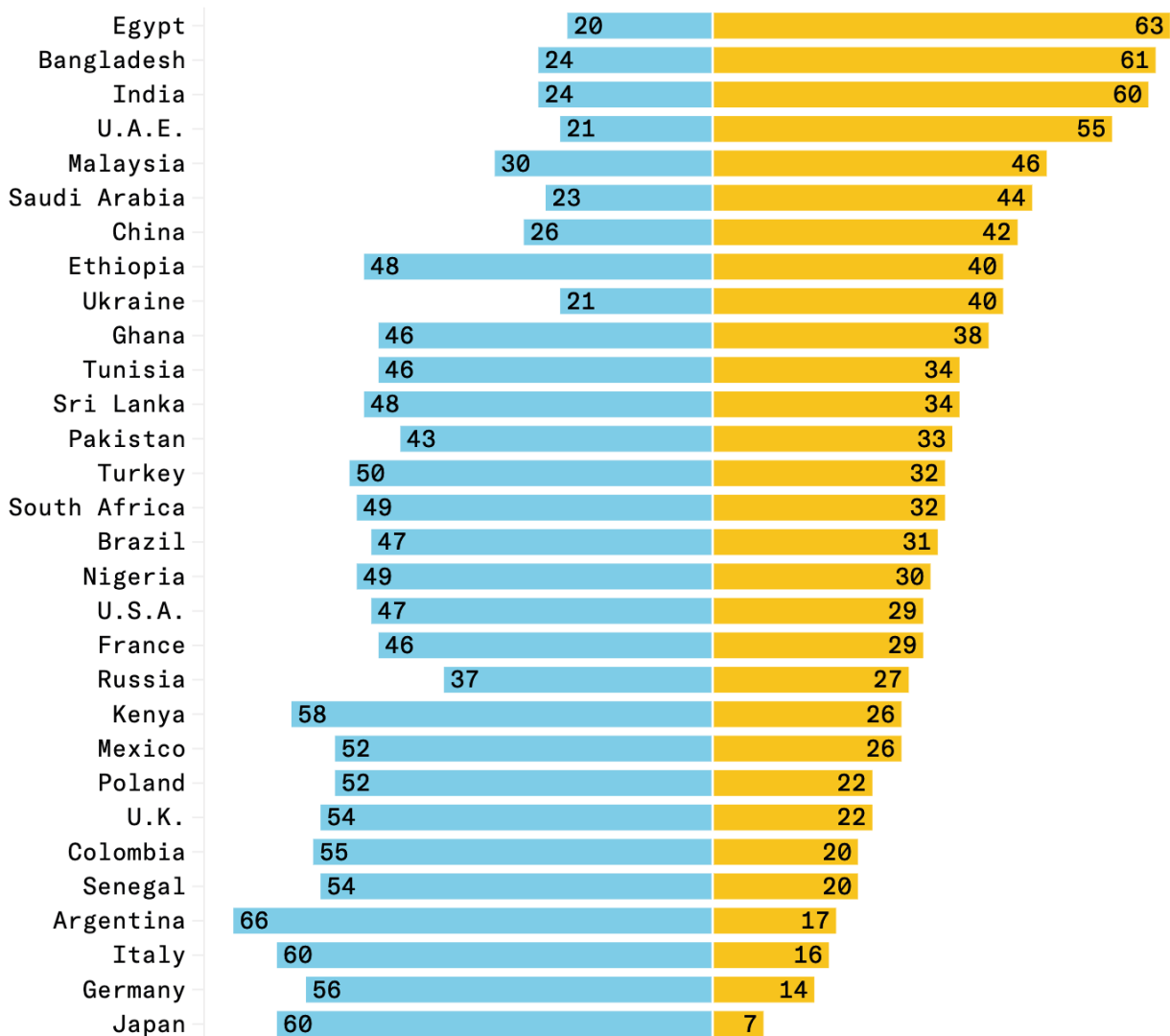
## 1.3 BUT AUTHORITARIANISM APPEALS TO SOME, ESPECIALLY THE YOUNG

Although support for a democratic system of government is highest, about one-third of respondents say that having the army rule or a leader who “does not bother” with parliament or elections is a good way of running a country—33 percent and 32 percent, respectively.

### ARMY RULE AS A GOOD WAY OF RUNNING A COUNTRY

Percentage of respondents per country who believe having army rule is a good way of running a country

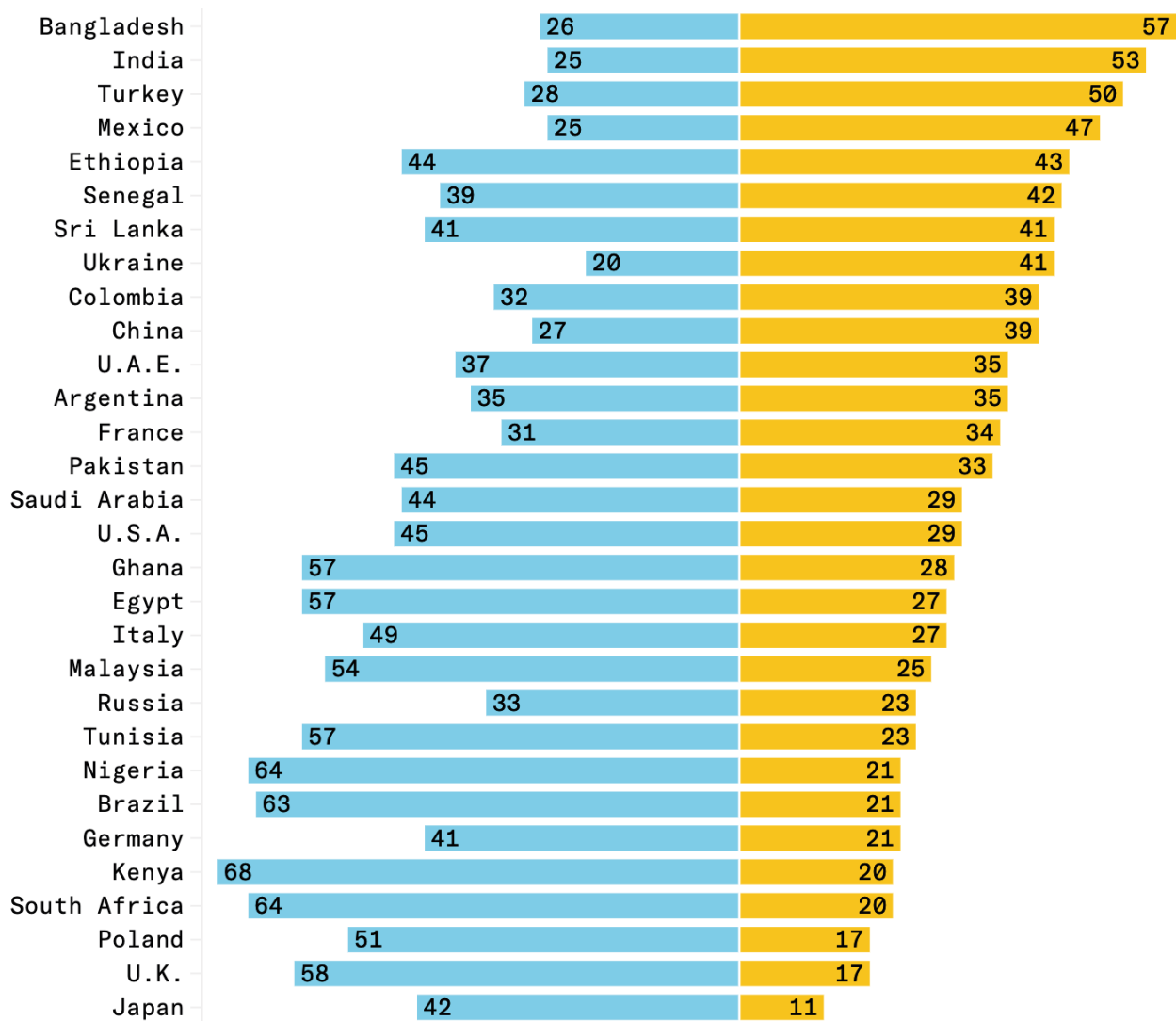
Disagree Agree



## PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERS WHO DO NOT BOTHER WITH PARLIAMENT OR ELECTIONS

Percentage of respondents per country who believe having a leader who does not bother with parliaments or elections is a good way of running a country

Disagree Agree



These results must be interpreted according to the country context. For example, in Ukraine, sympathy for army rule may be linked to high levels of support for the military as Ukraine defends its territory against Russia. Meanwhile, elections may be less appealing to people in countries that have experienced election violence such as Egypt.

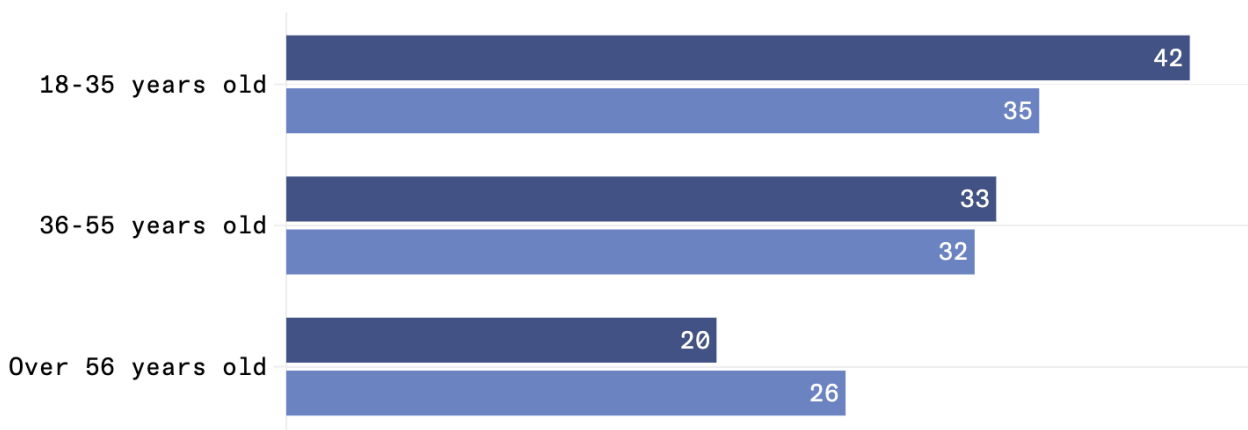
Age appears to be a factor in shaping attitudes toward democracy. There was less enthusiasm among 18-to-35-year-olds for democracy, with 57 percent preferring it to other forms of government. For those aged 56 and above, the figure was 71 percent.

The 18-35 cohort recorded higher support for army rule (42 percent) than those aged 36-55 (33 percent) and those aged 56 or above (20 percent). Similarly, 35 percent of this youngest age category was sympathetic to the idea of a strong leader who does away with parliaments and elections. The figures were 32 percent for those aged 36-55 and 26 percent for those aged 56 and above.

## PERCEPTIONS OF ARMY RULE AND LEADERS WHO DO NOT BOTHER WITH PARLIAMENT OR ELECTIONS BY AGE GROUP

Global averages by age of respondents who believe army rule and leaders who do not bother with parliaments\* or elections is a good way of running a country

■ Army rule ■ Leader who does not bother with parliament/or elections



\*Terminology of "parliament" was adapted to respondents' country context in the survey



## 2. EQUITY AND JUSTICE: LITTLE PROGRESS

### 2.1 DEMOCRACY AND RIGHTS FALL SHORT OF THEIR POTENTIAL

Open society principles—democratic governance and human rights—had strong support in almost all countries surveyed, even those that might be classified as closed. But despite faith in democracy on paper, respondents living in countries deemed more open do not necessarily report better performance in practice.

People in all countries polled face many of the same challenges, and more than half (53 percent) feel their country is headed in the wrong direction. Presented with six different issues, respondents were evenly split among the three or four they deemed most important in their country, in the world, and in terms of their impact on their daily lives.

But globally, the largest share of people polled (21 percent) said “poverty and inequality” has the most impact on them personally. This was true of both Senegal—the smallest economy surveyed, where 26 percent ranked poverty and inequality first—and the United States—the largest economy surveyed, where 19 percent did.

Similarly, food insecurity and hunger affect people in high- and lower-income countries. **Across the 30 states surveyed, nearly half (49 percent) of respondents said they have struggled to feed themselves or their families within the last year.** In Bangladesh, as in the United States, 52 percent of people agreed with this statement.

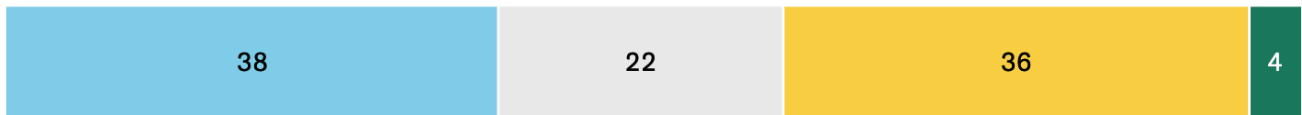
On human rights, nearly two in five respondents agreed with the statement that human rights “do not protect me and my family.” Forty-two percent feel the laws of their country do not keep them safe.

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## HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN REALITY

Percentage of respondents who believe human rights do not protect them and their families

■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know



There is also a widespread perception that human rights are applied selectively at the global level. When asked if human rights are “used by Western countries to punish developing countries” on average 42 percent agreed, rising to 76 percent

in Bangladesh and 61 percent in Pakistan. Unlike respondents in most European countries, people in the United States were more likely to agree (34 percent) than disagree (28 percent).

## 2.2 POLITICAL VIOLENCE IS A PALPABLE FEAR

Respondents demonstrated a widespread fear of political unrest leading to violence.

A global majority of 58 percent—and majorities in 21 of the countries polled—agreed with the statement “I fear that political unrest in my country could lead to violence in the next year.”

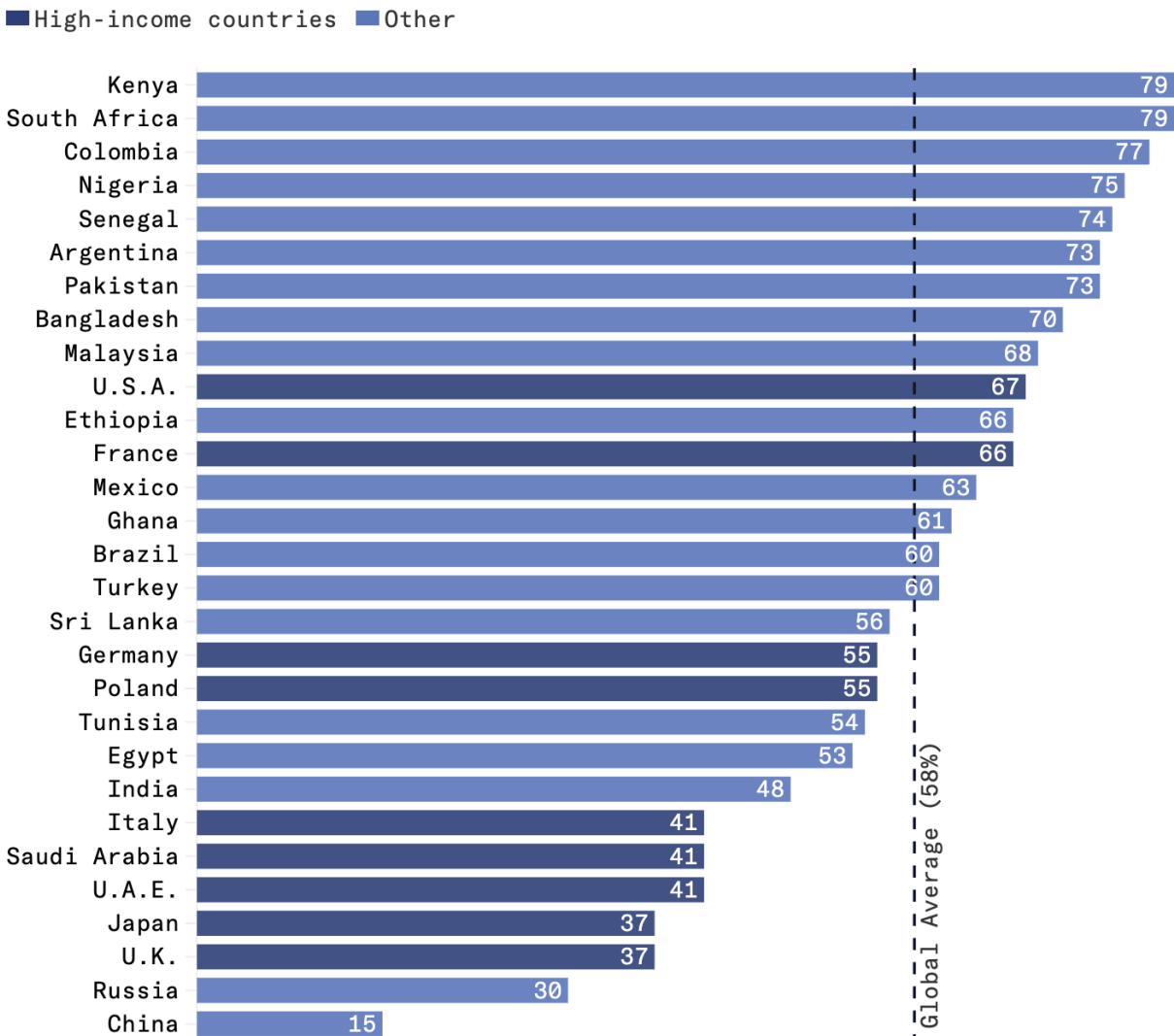
Fear was highest in South Africa and Kenya (79 percent), Colombia (77 percent), Nigeria (75 percent),

Senegal (74 percent), and Argentina and Pakistan (both 73 percent). But large majorities in high-income countries were also worried, notably around two-thirds of respondents in the United States and France.

Similarly significant numbers (42 percent) around the world did not feel “the laws of [their] country keep people like [them] safe.” Insecurity was especially strong in Brazil (74 percent), Argentina (73 percent), South Africa (72 percent), Colombia (65 percent), Mexico (60 percent), Nigeria (60 percent), Italy (53 percent), and Senegal (52 percent) where majorities disagreed with the statement.

### FEAR OF POLITICAL UNREST LEADING TO VIOLENCE

Percentage of respondents who fear that political unrest in their country could lead to violence in the next year





## 2.3 RICH COUNTRIES SHOULD DO MORE ON DEBT AND CLIMATE

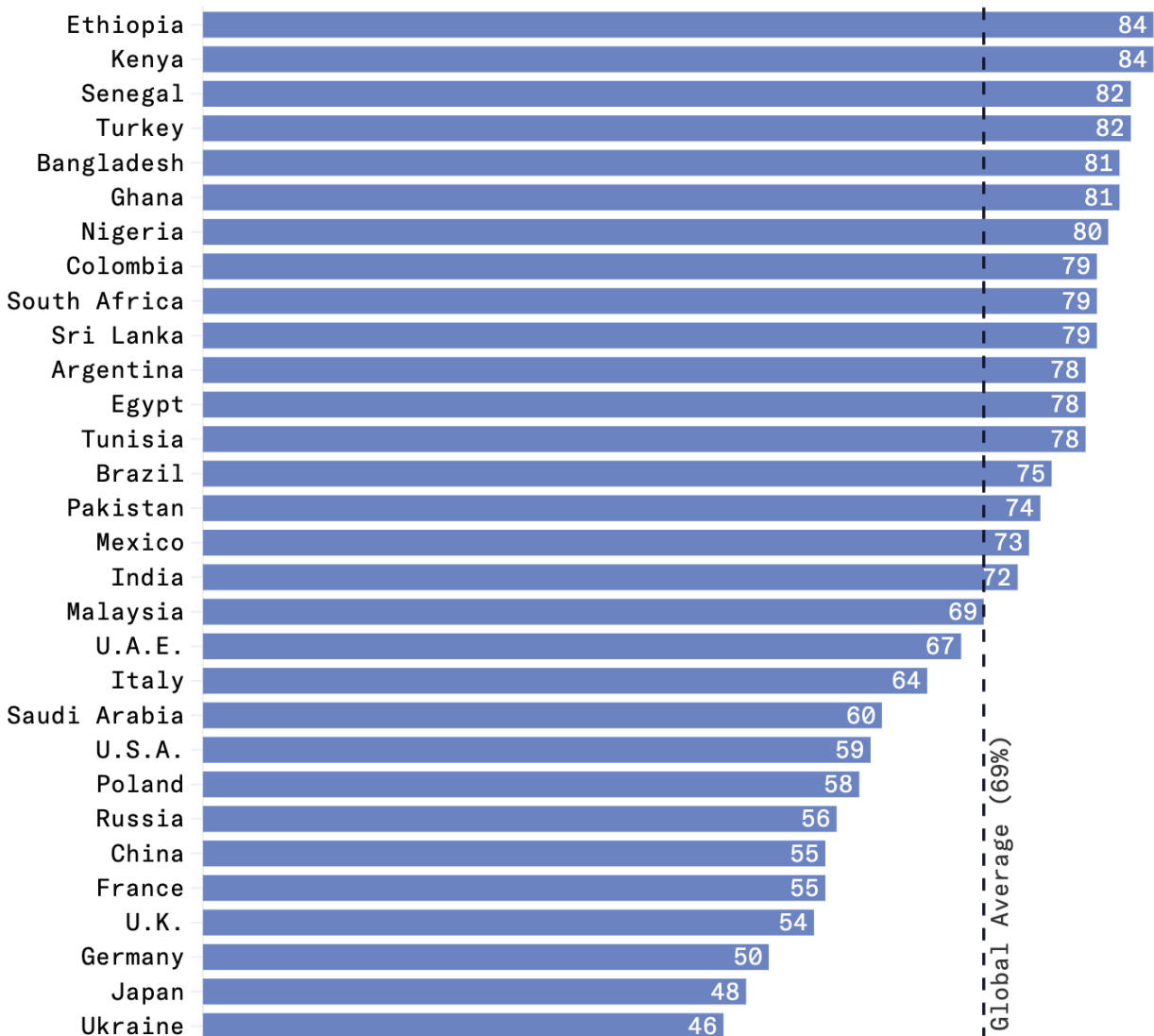
The cost-of-living crisis is global. But its impact has been most acute for people in low-income countries and those that are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Irrespective of government system, people face repercussions. Sixty-nine percent of those surveyed

believed that economic inequality between countries is a bigger challenge this year than last. At least half of respondents agreed in all but two countries surveyed (Japan and Ukraine, 48 and 46 percent, respectively), with agreement highest among countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

### ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AS A GROWING CHALLENGE

Percentage of respondents per country who believe economic inequality between countries is a bigger challenge now than last year



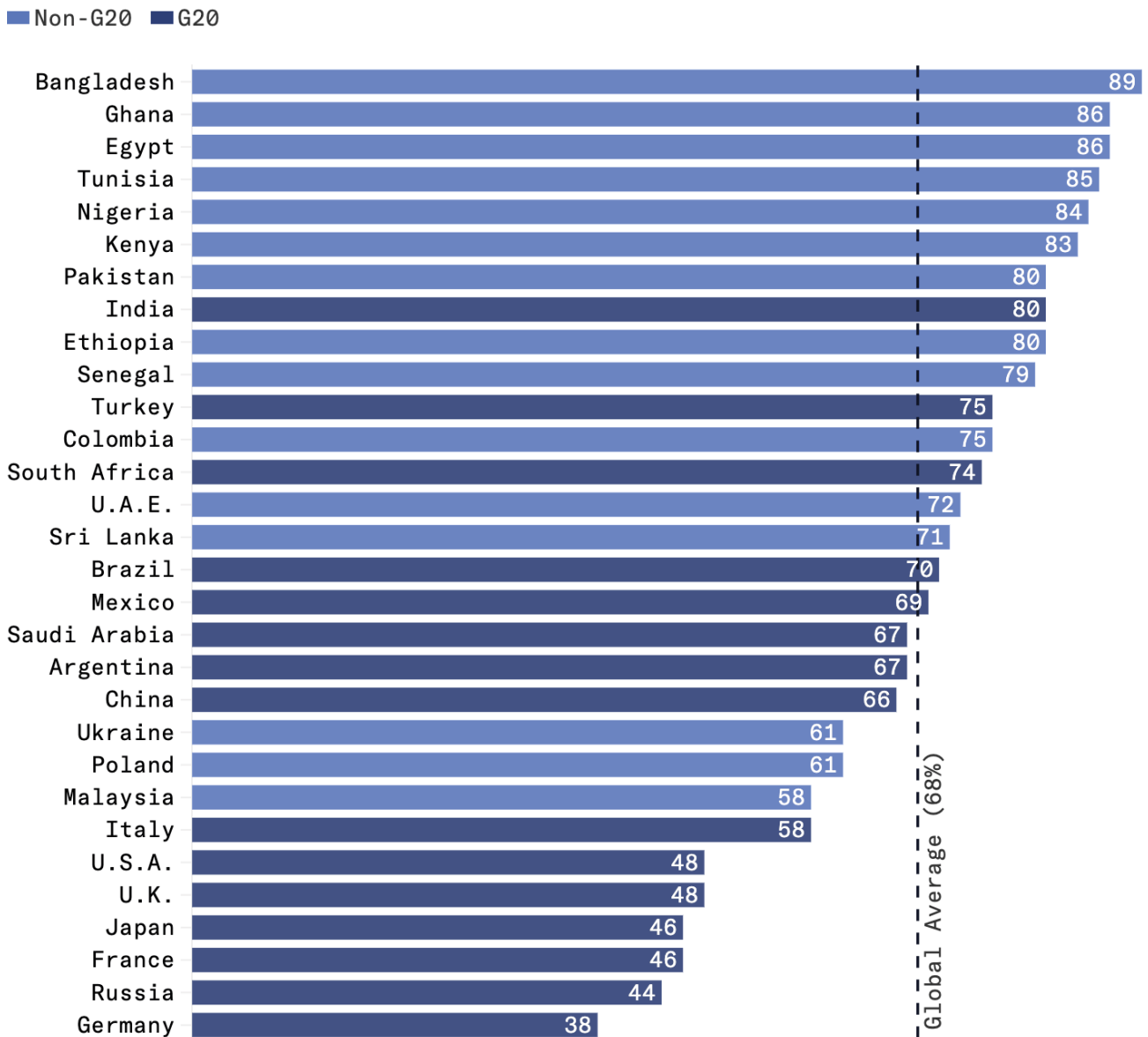
According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 60 percent of low-income countries and a quarter of middle-income countries are now in debt distress or at high risk of it. Our results show that more than three-quarters of respondents globally (78 percent) reported feeling concerned about their country’s debt—rising to over 90 percent in certain countries.

Respondents’ suggested remedies imply that people across the world have a strong sense of where responsibility for action lies.

Across the 30 countries polled, 75 percent believed that high-income countries should increase their overseas aid. There are clear majorities for doing so in all G7 countries apart from Germany.

## SUPPORT FOR HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES GIVING MORE MONEY TO THE WORLD BANK

Percentage of respondents globally who agree that high-income countries should give more money to the World Bank to support other countries



Sixty-eight percent of respondents globally also felt that high-income countries should give more money to the World Bank to support developing countries.

On debt, 84 percent of respondents and majorities in all G20 countries said lenders should help indebted countries.

On climate change, there was strong agreement—79 percent—that high-income countries should take the lead on reducing emissions.

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## VIEWS ON OPTIONS FOR COUNTRIES STRUGGLING TO REPAY INTERNATIONAL DEBT

Percentage of respondents globally who think lenders should do the following when countries are struggling to repay their international debt:

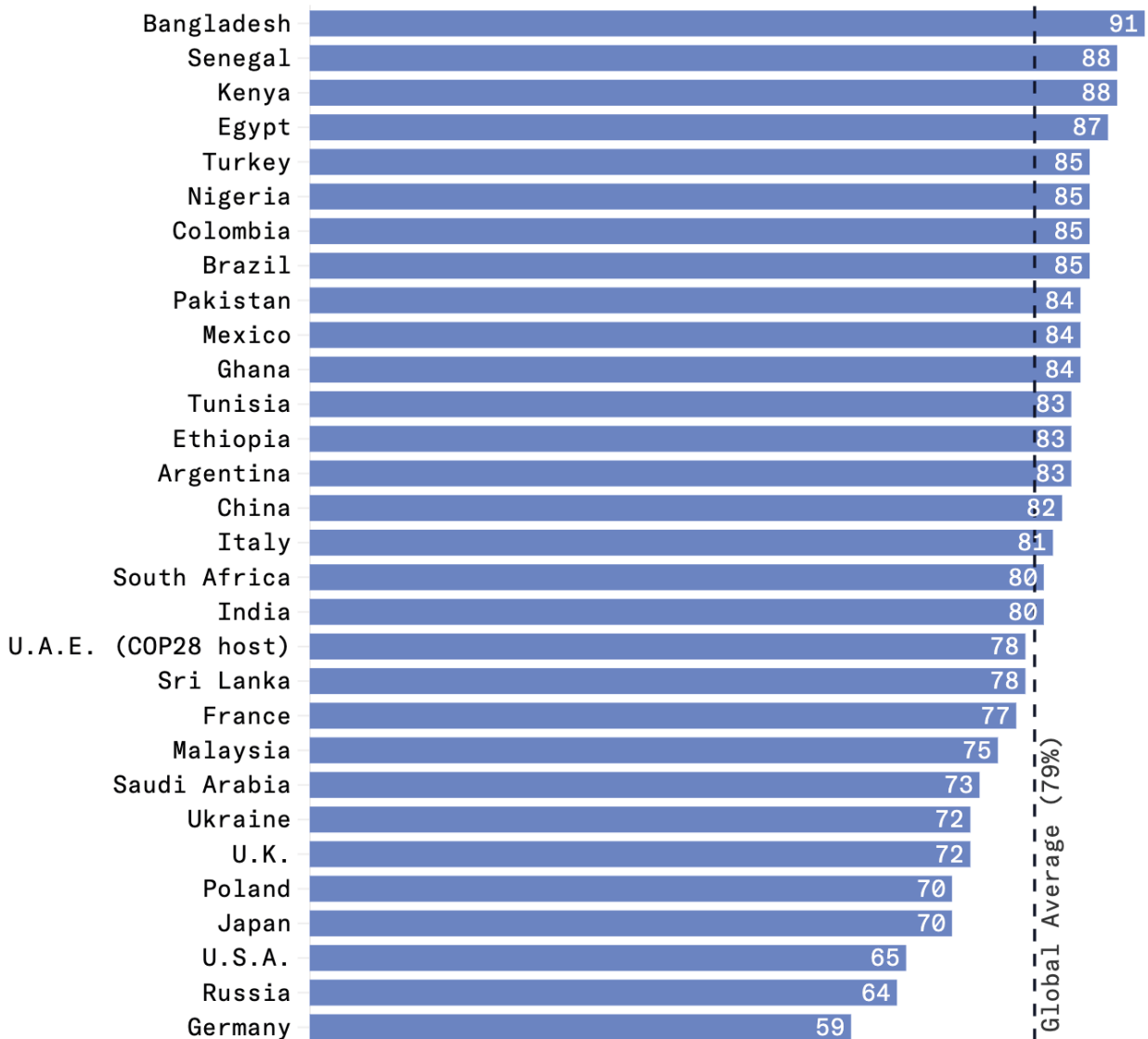
- Cancel their debts   ■ Renegotiate so less has to be paid back
- Renegotiate so debts are paid back over a longer term
- Not change the terms of their debts   ■ Don't know

Global average



## HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES LEADING ON REDUCING EMISSIONS

Percentage of respondents per country who agree high-income countries should take the lead on reducing global greenhouse gas emissions

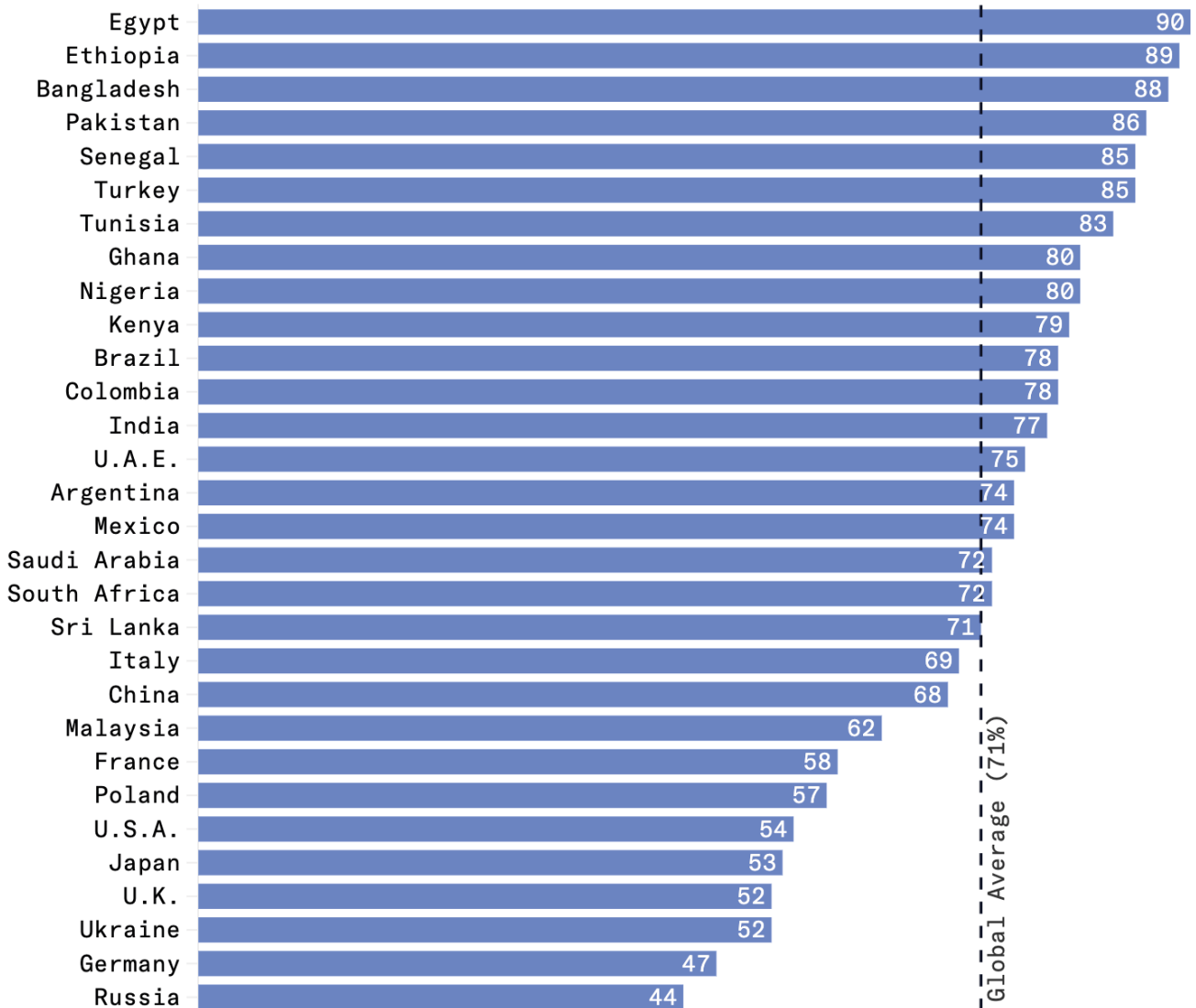


Support was highest in lower-income, climate-vulnerable countries such as Bangladesh (91 percent), but significant majorities in high-income countries also agreed: 73 percent in Saudi Arabia, 72 percent in the United Kingdom, 70 percent in Japan, and 65 percent in the United States. The lowest levels of agreement were seen in Germany, at 59 percent—still a clear majority.

A similar pattern emerged when respondents were asked if “high-income countries should take the lead on compensating low-income countries” for loss and damage due to climate change.

## HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES COMPENSATING LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES FOR CLIMATE LOSS AND DAMAGE

Percentage of respondents per country who agree that high-income countries should take the lead on compensating low-income countries for economic losses caused by climate change



Seventy-one percent of respondents agreed with the statement. There was more enthusiasm in lower-income countries, but majorities in the United Arab Emirates (75 percent), Italy (69 percent), the United States (54 percent), and the United Kingdom (52 percent) were also supportive.



## 3. PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES: IT'S PERSONAL

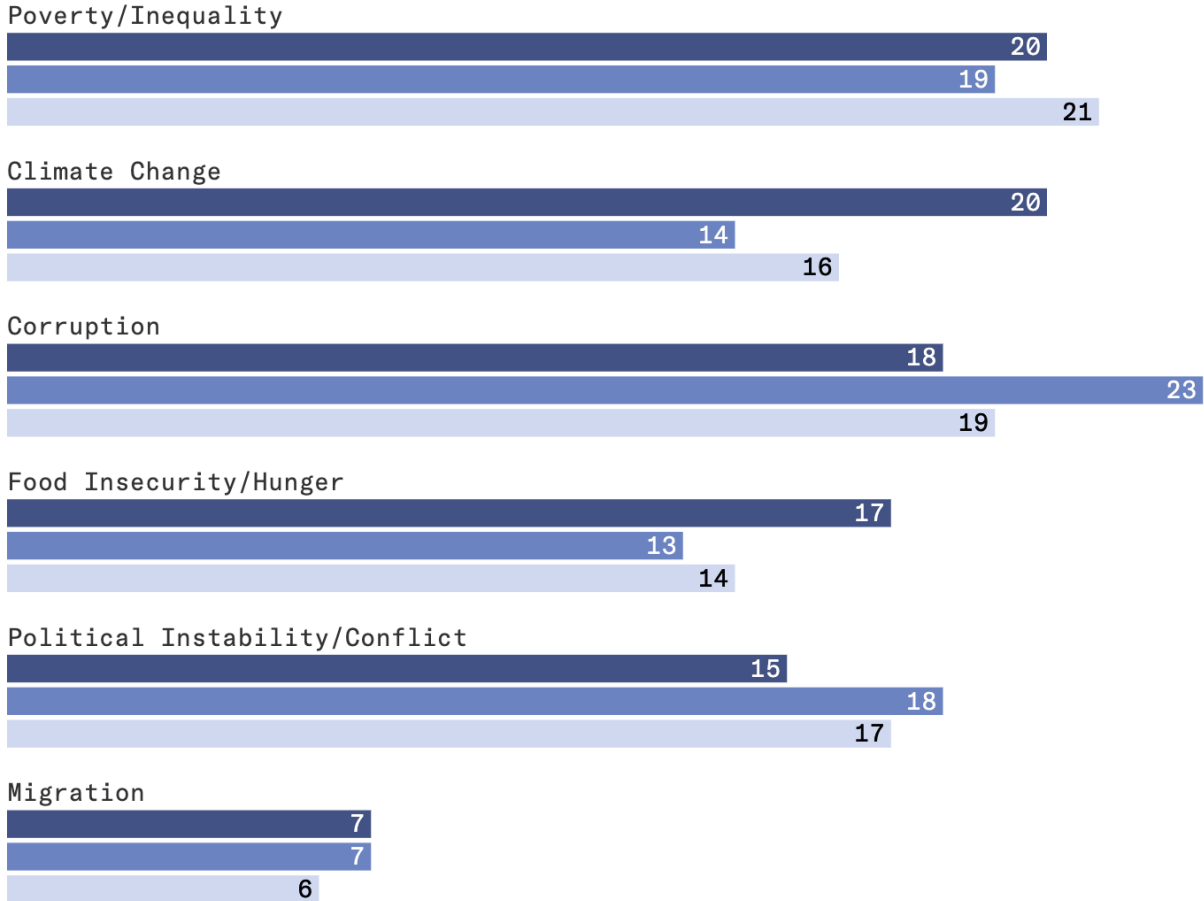
### 3.1 CLIMATE CHANGE IS A MAJOR CONCERN AND INCREASINGLY SEEN AS A PERSONAL ISSUE

When asked to rank challenges facing the world, one in five respondents chose climate change, putting it on par with poverty and inequality. While climate change often takes pole position in similar surveys, it has remained at the forefront of people's minds amidst the global cost-of-living crisis and an uptick in political instability and conflict.

## MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES FACING THE WORLD, COUNTRIES, AND INDIVIDUALS TODAY

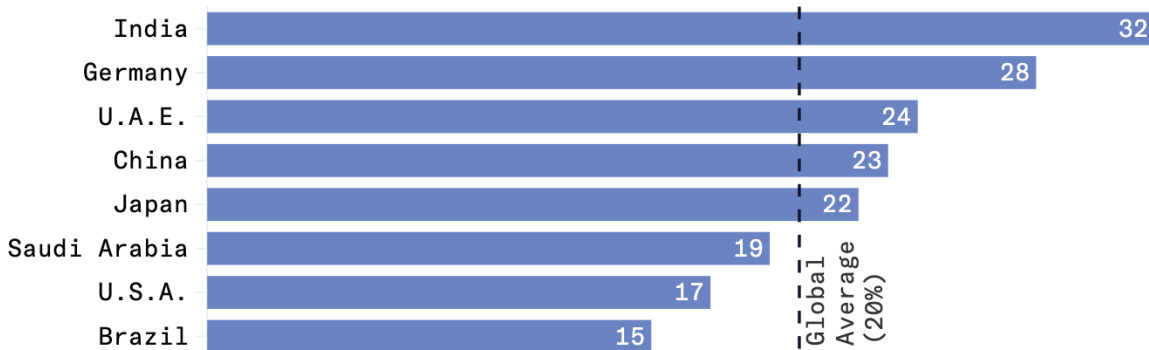
Percentage of global respondents who ranked the following challenges facing the world, their country, and individuals today

■ World ■ Country ■ Daily Life



## CLIMATE CHANGE AS THE LEADING GLOBAL ISSUE

Percentage of respondents in major greenhouse gas emitting and fossil fuel producing countries who ranked climate change as the leading challenge facing the world



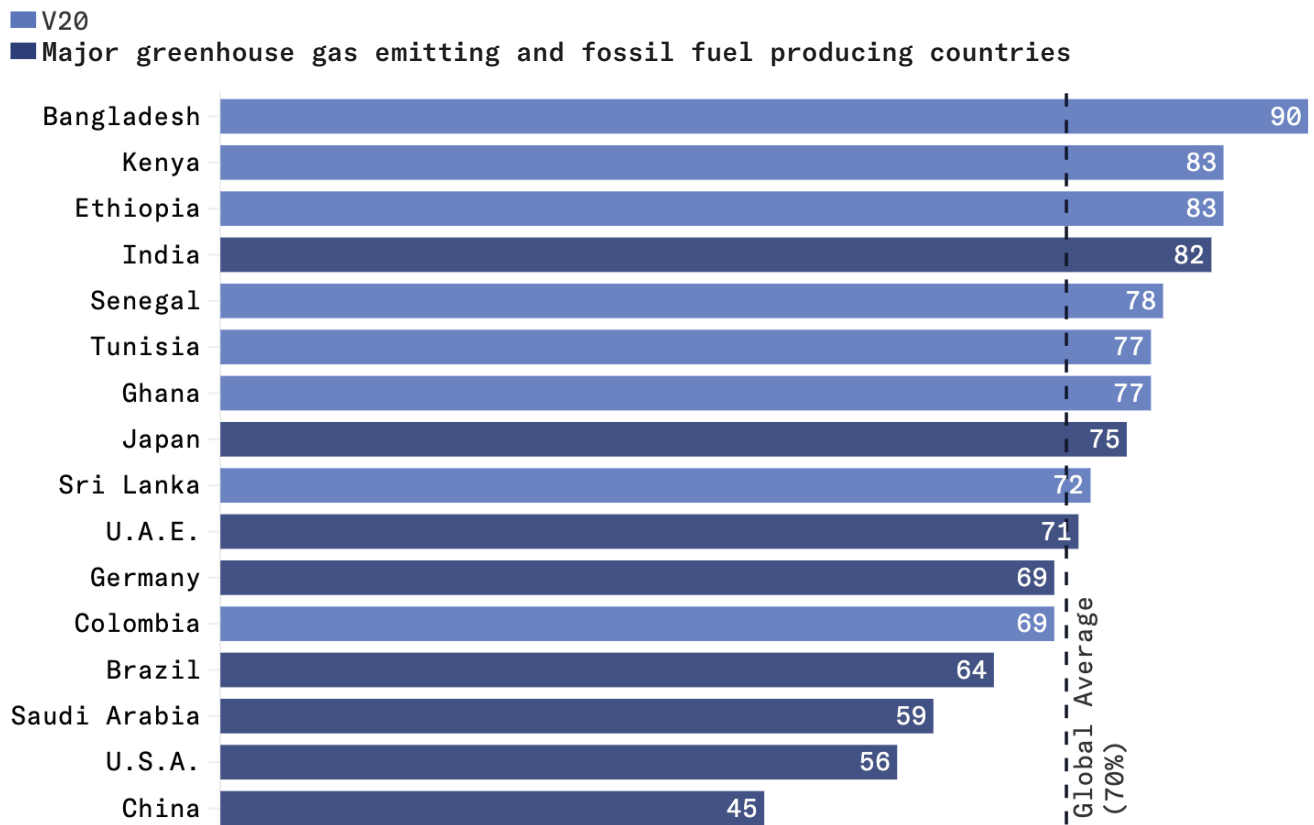
Perhaps more noteworthy is that climate change is now a major personal concern in all regions—a marked shift from last year’s survey. Seventy percent of respondents were anxious that climate change would affect them next year. Meanwhile, 16 percent chose climate change when asked which issue has the biggest impact on their life—almost as many as selected poverty and inequality (21 percent).

When asked in which ways they feared climate change would affect them personally, 50 percent said they worried about extreme weather events, with the same percentage saying they worried about increases in the cost of living.

Also high on the list were fears connected to physical health (39 percent) and access to food and water (34 percent).

### ANXIETY OVER IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON LIVELIHOODS

Percentage of respondents per country who are anxious that climate change could have a negative impact on them and their livelihoods in the next year (V20 and major fossil fuel emitting/producing countries only)





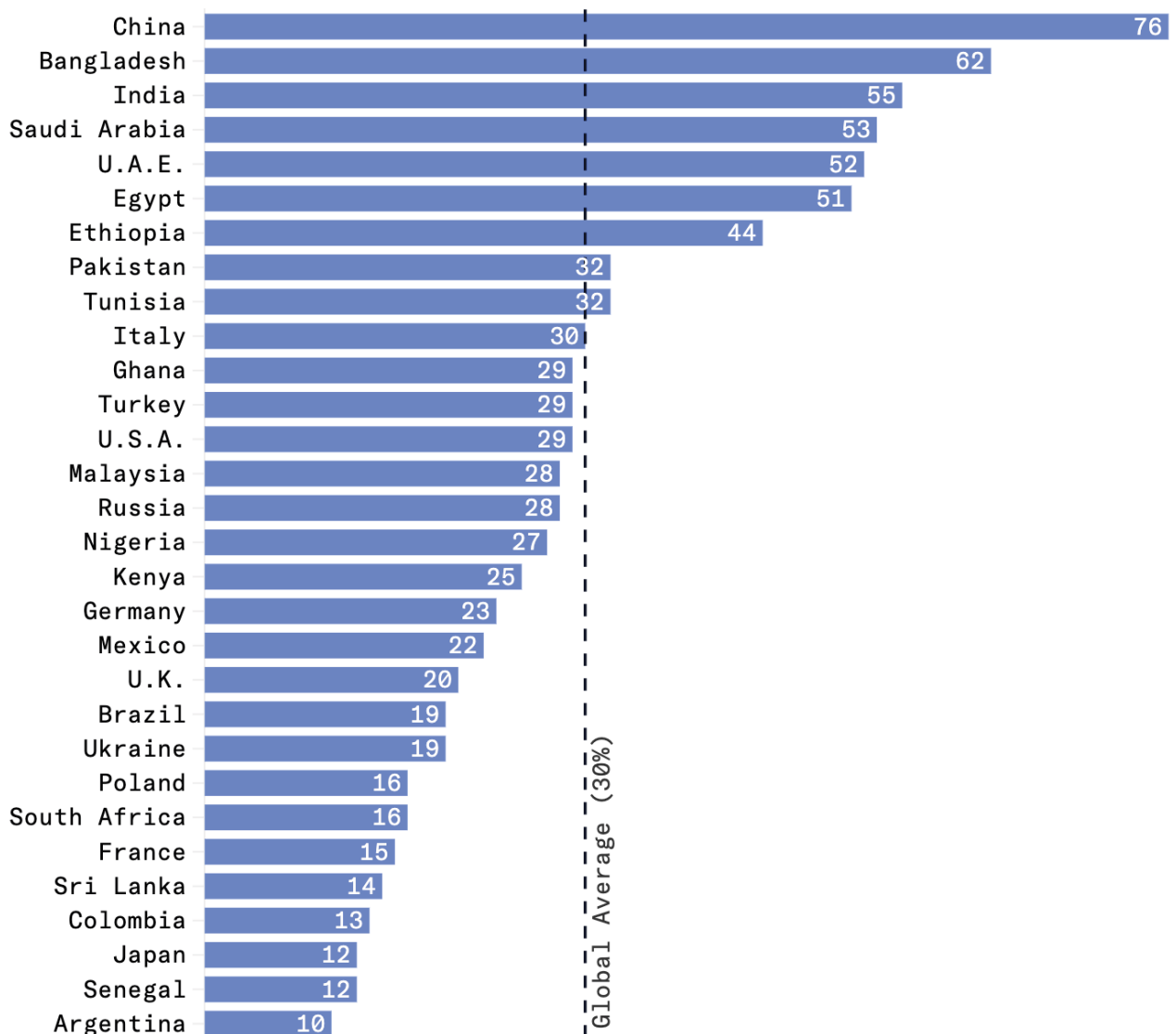
## 3.2 CORRUPTION IS SEEN AS THE BIGGEST NATIONAL PROBLEM

Corruption beats climate change and poverty and inequality when respondents were asked about the most important challenge facing their country. Almost a quarter of people (23 percent) chose this answer and nearly a fifth (19 percent) said that corruption was the issue with the biggest impact on their life.

Corruption at a national level ranked highest as a priority in Africa and Latin America but was also prominent in Asia and Russia.

### TRUST IN NATIONAL POLITICIANS

Percentage of respondents globally who trust national politicians to work in their best interests



Unsurprisingly, people who believed corruption to be the most important challenge in their country were more likely to distrust national or local politicians. Notably, these people were also more likely to be younger.

But distrust is prominent across age groups and geographies. When compared to religious leaders, leaders of international institutions (e.g., the UN, the EU, the African Development Bank), journalists, business leaders, and charity leaders, most respondents believed local and national politicians were the least likely to work in their best interests.

Of the institutions represented, respondents most trust charity leaders (51 percent), followed by leaders of international institutions and religious leaders (both 45 percent).

People from low- and lower-middle income countries were the most likely to trust leaders of international institutions, with the highest levels of trust in Bangladesh (81 percent), Kenya (72 percent), Ethiopia (69 percent), India (68 percent), and Nigeria (67 percent).

Meanwhile, people in the United Kingdom (26 percent), France (24 percent), Germany (24 percent), Japan (21 percent), and Russia (15 percent) were the most distrustful.

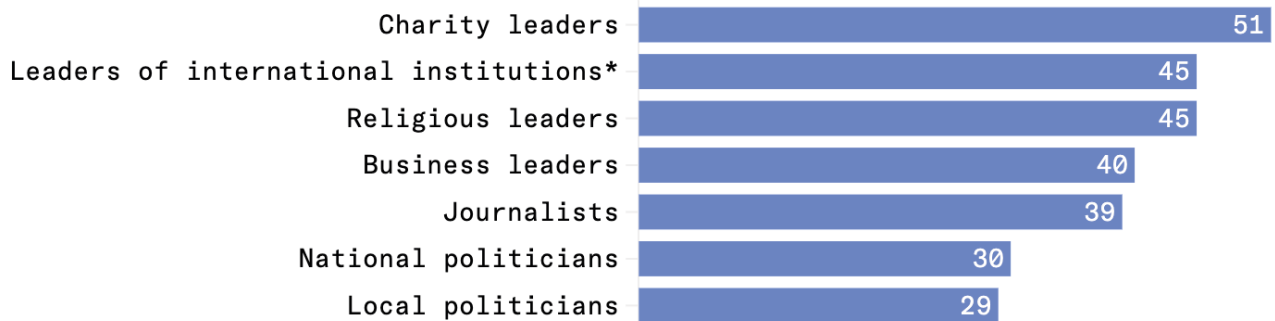
### 3.3 MIGRATION IS HIGHLY VISIBLE BUT OF LOW CONCERN

Migration is not a major concern for respondents. It came last in their ranking of national challenges, with just 7 percent of people globally choosing it as their chief concern. Two-thirds of respondents—66 percent—agreed that countries should open more safe and legal routes for refugees, while just 13 percent disagreed.

Our survey included six of the top 10 refugee-hosting states: Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan, and Turkey (the others are Jordan, Iran, Lebanon, and Sudan).

## TRUST IN LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS

Global averages of respondents who trust the following to work in their best interests:



\*e.g., UN, ASEAN, EU, African Development Bank

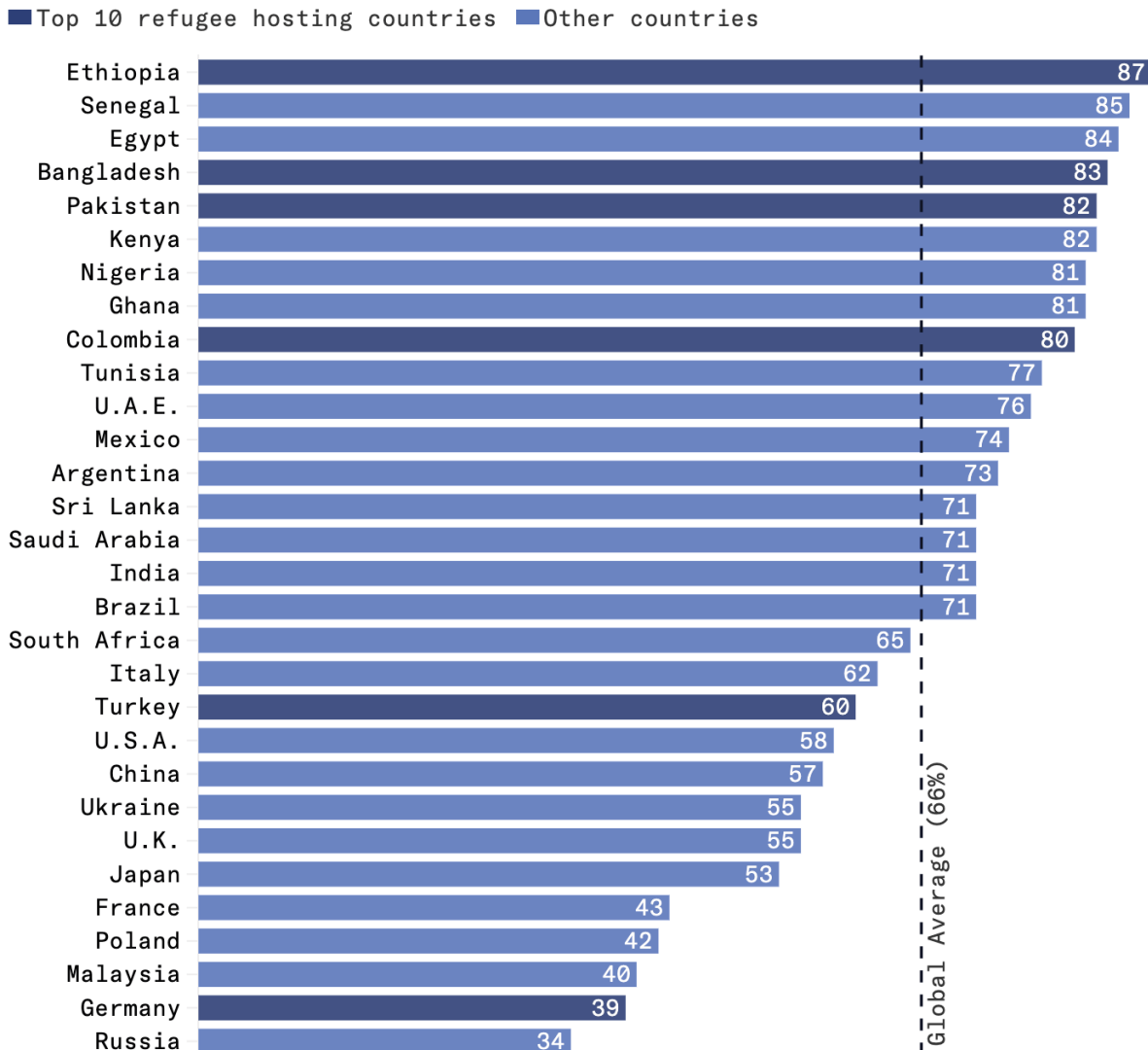
Only in Turkey, which hosts the most refugees according to the UN Refugee Agency's Global Trends Report, did migration emerge as the chief concern. Twenty-five percent of respondents ranked it as the most important challenge facing their country. But 60 percent supported safe and legal routes for refugees.

People in Germany (18 percent), France (17 percent), the United Kingdom and Italy (both 15 percent) viewed migration as the most important issue facing their country. Germany, France, and the United Kingdom were also first, third, and seventh among all 30 countries in terms of their opposition to the opening of more safe and legal routes for refugees, at 32 percent, 27 percent, and 18 percent respectively.

Those surveyed in high-income European countries tended to view migration as a more important issue than those in lower-income countries. They were also less inclined to support safe and legal routes for refugees.

### SUPPORT FOR OPENING MORE SAFE AND LEGAL ROUTES FOR REFUGEES

Percentage of global respondents who believe countries should open up more safe and legal routes for refugees





## 4. POWER AND POLITICS: A PUSH FOR INCLUSION

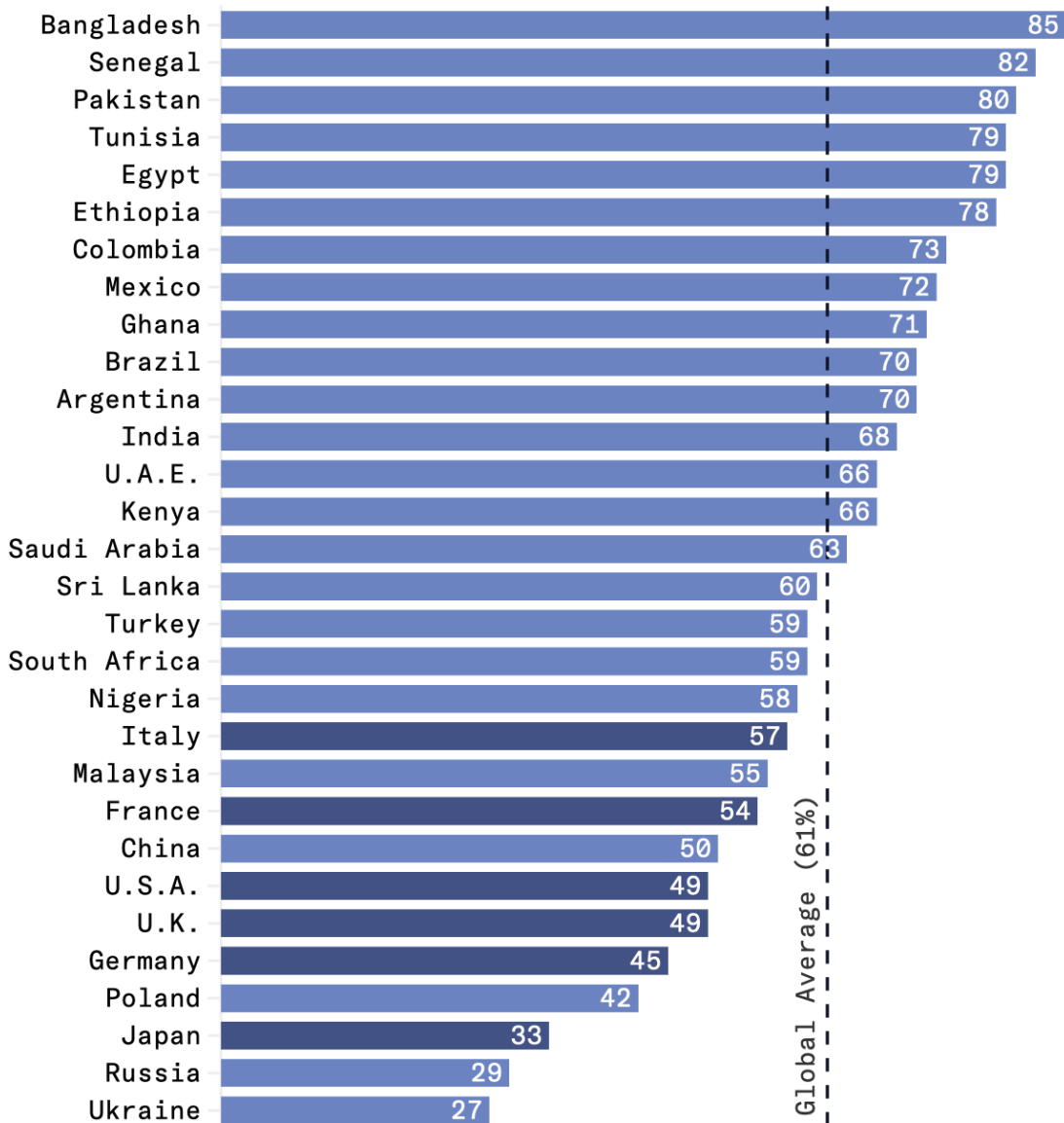
### 4.1 PEOPLE ARE GENEROUS BUT RELUCTANT TO CEDE POWER

Across all countries polled, respondents believed that high-income countries should provide material support to lower-income countries. Measures such as increasing overseas aid had majority support in almost all high-income countries.

## SUPPORT FOR LOWER-INCOME COUNTRIES HAVING A GREATER SAY IN DECISION-MAKING

Percentage of respondents globally who agree lower-income countries should have more of a say in global decision-making

■ G7 countries ■ Other countries



But people in these states—particularly the G7—were less enthusiastic about reforming international bodies to give lower-income countries more leverage. In Germany, respondents were skeptical of reform proposals as well as measures to provide material support.

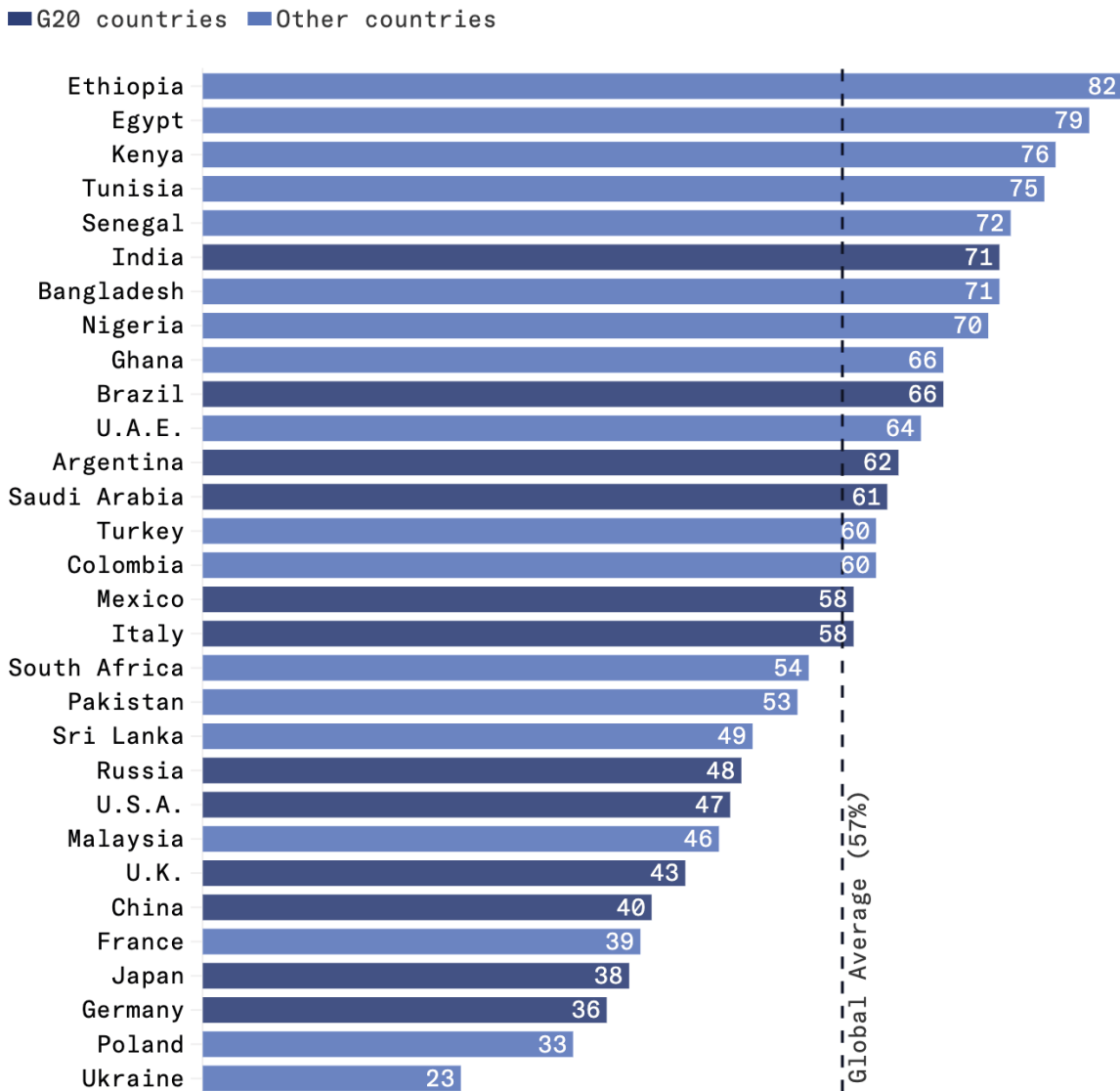
Sixty-five percent of respondents globally believe low-income countries should have a greater say in decisions about international finance.

Support for this was highest in Bangladesh and Pakistan (both 84 percent), Senegal (82 percent), Colombia and Egypt (both 81 percent), Ethiopia (78 percent), and Brazil (77 percent).

In the United States and the United Kingdom, about half of respondents are supportive, while figures drop in Germany (42 percent) Russia (38 percent), and Japan (37 percent).

### SUPPORT FOR THE AFRICAN UNION JOINING THE G20

Percentage of respondents who agree that the African Union should join the G20



Europeans were also skeptical about the African Union being admitted to the G20 (the European Union is already a member), with 39 percent in France, 36 percent in Germany, and 33 percent in Poland being supportive. Respondents in Japan were lukewarm too (38 percent).

Globally, support stood at 57 percent, with high figures across Africa: Ethiopia (82 percent), Egypt (79 percent), Kenya (76 percent), Tunisia (75 percent), and Senegal (72 percent).

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## PREFERENCES ON FINANCING FROM INTERNATIONAL LENDERS

Percentage of respondents globally who would prefer their country borrow money from the following:

International lenders\*

29

Banks in my region\*\*

15

U.S.A.

11

EU

11

China

10

Private creditors

6

\*International lenders: e.g., International Monetary Fund, World Bank

\*\*Banks in my region: e.g., African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank, Inter-American Development Bank

## 4.2 INFLUENCE IS DIVERSIFYING BUT SLOWLY

The permanent membership of the UN Security Council is perhaps the most exclusive international club. When asked which countries in their region, apart from their own, should join the current permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), respondents largely gravitated to established regional powers.

Coming out on top in their respective regions were Saudi Arabia (37 percent), Japan and South Africa (both 27 percent), and Brazil and Germany (each at 21 percent).

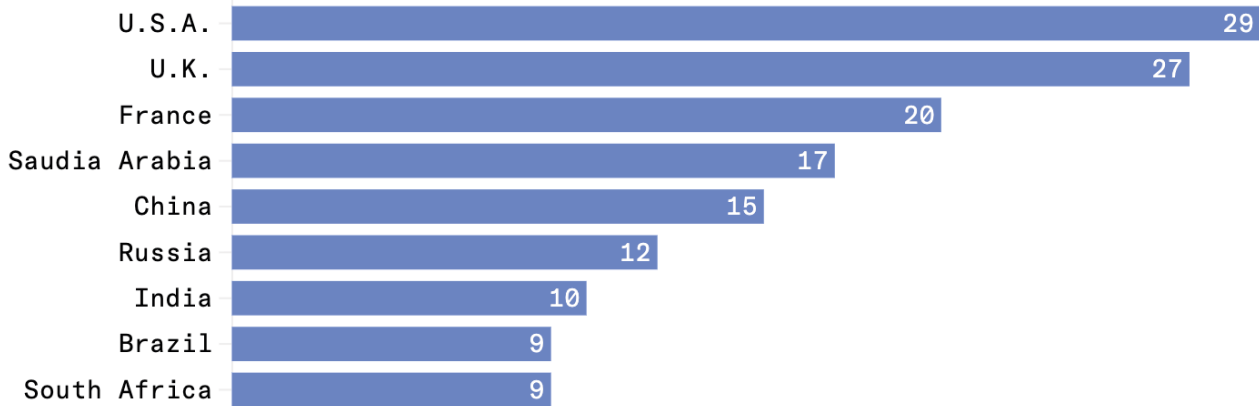
Similarly, while much has been made of China’s role as a lender and the rise of private creditors, people continue to show a strong preference for traditional institutions. Twenty-nine percent of respondents felt their governments should borrow from the IMF and the World Bank.

Just 10 percent would choose China. Even fewer respondents (6 percent) would opt for private creditors.

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### COUNTRIES THAT MOST ALIGN WITH RESPONDENTS’ VALUES

Percentage of respondents globally who believe that the following countries align with their values



On a personal level, respondents most favored the United States (29 percent) and the United Kingdom (27 percent) as the countries that align with their values. Support for the other countries listed—

France (20 percent), Saudi Arabia (17 percent), China (15 percent), Russia (12 percent), India (10 percent), Brazil (9 percent), and South Africa (9 percent)—lagged by some measure.



## 4.3 CHINA LEADS THE PACK

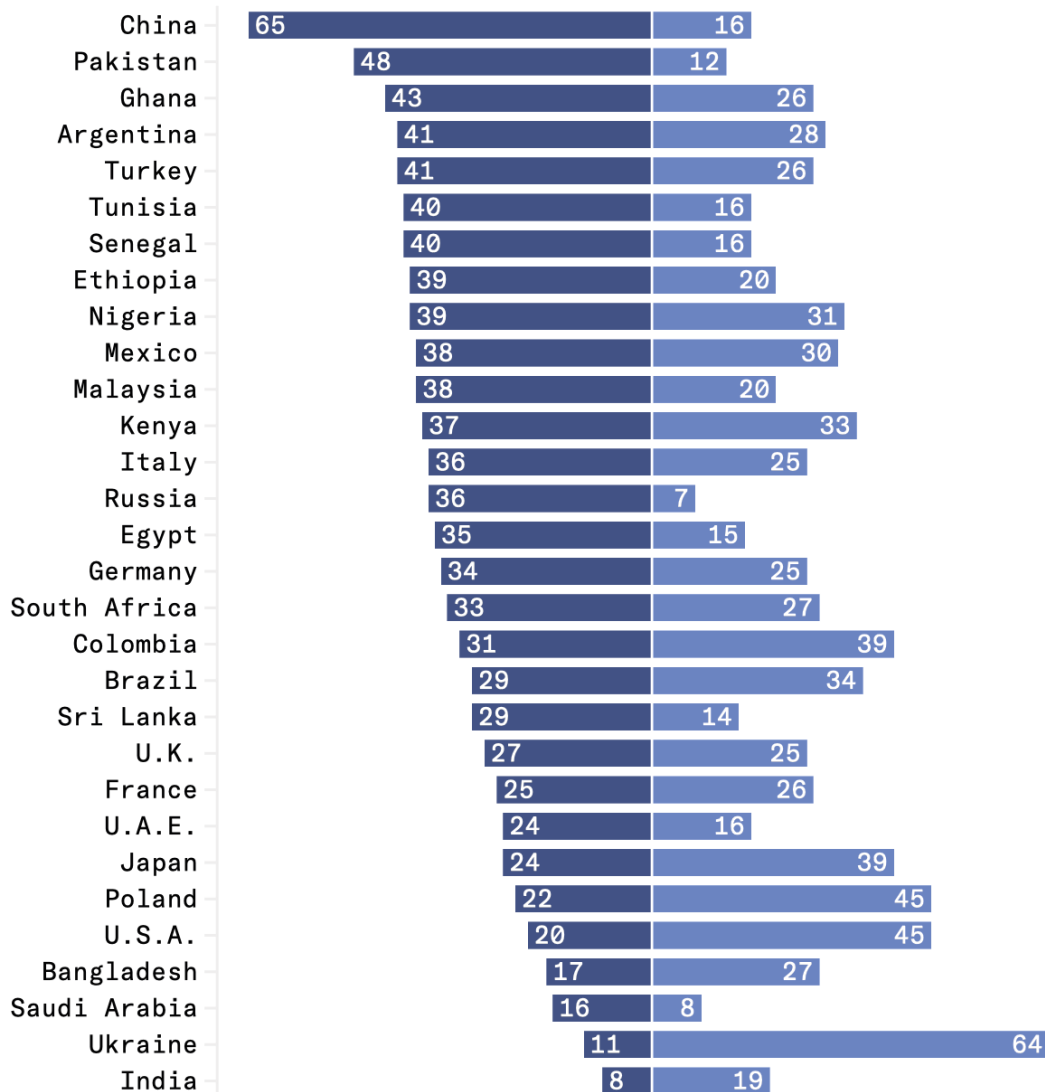
Asked which of these countries will be the most influential by 2030, China and the United States were far ahead with 32 and 26 percent, respectively.

The highest figures for China were in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The United States, meanwhile, was bolstered by large percentages from Eastern Europe (64 percent in Ukraine and 45 percent in Poland).

### CHINA OR THE U.S.A.—WHICH COUNTRY WILL HAVE THE MOST INFLUENCE BY 2030?

Presented with options encompassing Brazil, China, France, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the U.K., the U.S.A., and "do not know," percentage of global respondents who selected China or the U.S.A. as having the most global influence by 2030

■ China ■ U.S.A.



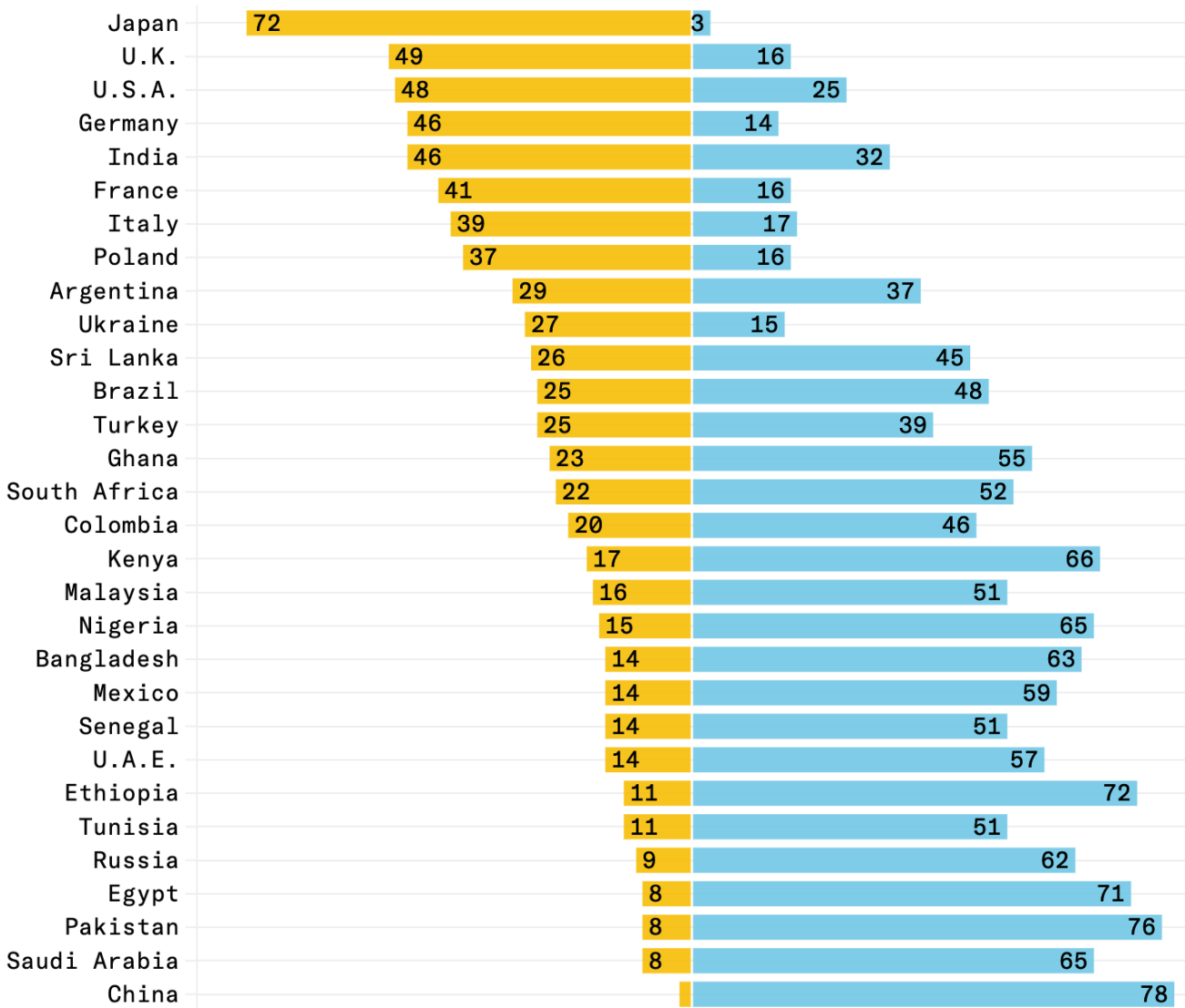
Across all 30 countries, 45 percent of respondents thought China’s rise would have a positive impact on their country, compared to 25 percent who thought it would be negative.

The country most likely to see China’s rise negatively was Japan at 72 percent. In all other countries, less than half the respondents believed the impact would be negative.

## PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA’S RISE

Percentage of global respondents who believe China's rise will have a positive impact on their country

■ Negative ■ Positive



Besides China itself (78 percent), the most enthusiastic support came from Pakistan (76 percent), Ethiopia (72 percent), and Egypt (71 percent). Those least positive were Japan (3 percent), Germany (14 percent), Ukraine (15 percent), the United Kingdom, Poland and France (16 percent), and Italy (17 percent).

About a third of respondents in India (32 percent) thought China’s rise would have a positive effect compared to nearly half (46 percent) who thought it would have a negative effect. Meanwhile, a quarter of the United States (25 percent) registered positive figures compared to nearly half (48 percent) who were negative.

# TAKEAWAYS

**“Democracy as an ideal continues to exert widespread appeal. But it has to be shown to deliver better concrete outcomes.”**

As our president notes in his foreword, this central finding of our survey underpins our work to strengthen democratic governance; make progress on climate, equity and justice; and build a multilateral system that works for all.

There was significant support from respondents for ideas to advance the above, in particular:

- Across the 30 countries polled, 84 percent of respondents said lenders should do more to help indebted countries, for example, by giving them longer to repay their debts; reducing their debts; or canceling debts completely.
- 79 percent believe that high-income countries should take the lead on reducing emissions, and 71 percent think high-income countries should compensate low-income countries for loss and damage due to climate change.
- 75 percent believe that high-income countries should increase their overseas aid. There are clear majorities for doing so in all but one G7 member country.
- 68 percent think high-income countries should give more money to the World Bank to support developing countries.
- 66 percent said countries should open more safe and legal routes for refugees.
- 61 percent want low-income countries to have a greater say in global decision-making, with 65 percent calling for inclusion in financial institutions and 57 percent for African Union membership of the G20.

Open Society is working with partners across the world to translate these ideas into actionable proposals and take them forward in key meetings and forums over the next 12 months—including the UN General Assembly, the World Bank and IMF Annual and Spring Meetings, COP28 in the United Arab Emirates, the G7 in Italy, and the G20 in Brazil.

**Find out more at: [osf.to/OpenSocietyBarometer](https://osf.to/OpenSocietyBarometer)**

# METHODOLOGY

The Open Society Foundations surveyed 36,344 respondents across 30 countries between May 18, and July 21, 2023. The countries were:

**ARGENTINA**  
**BANGLADESH**  
**BRAZIL**  
**CHINA**  
**COLOMBIA**  
**EGYPT**  
**ETHIOPIA**  
**FRANCE**  
**GERMANY**  
**GHANA**

**INDIA**  
**ITALY**  
**JAPAN**  
**KENYA**  
**MALAYSIA**  
**MEXICO**  
**NIGERIA**  
**PAKISTAN**  
**POLAND**  
**RUSSIA**

**SAUDI ARABIA**  
**SENEGAL**  
**SOUTH AFRICA**  
**SRI LANKA**  
**TUNISIA**  
**TURKEY**  
**UKRAINE**  
**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**  
**UNITED KINGDOM**  
**UNITED STATES**

These countries were chosen to reflect the following considerations:

- A mix of country income levels with the majority in the lower middle-income category.
- Balanced geographic spread.
- A mix of countries in important international institutional groupings. e.g., the G20, BRICS, as well as “non-aligned” countries, including groupings such as the Vulnerable 20 (V20) countries.

There were some limitations on country selection based on:

- Where it was possible to reach a nationally or urban center representative sample, good online coverage, and a possible sample size of 1,000 people.
- Where our fieldwork partners had local providers on the ground able to conduct robust research.

In each country, we aimed to survey a statistically representative sample of 1,000 people aged 18 and older. Some countries, due to polling limitations or smaller population size, had a lower sample size. Six countries were chosen as “deep dive” countries (Brazil, Egypt, France, India, South Africa, the United States) for a more in-depth analysis, with a sample size of ~2,000—except Egypt (1,011) where this was not possible.

Apart from in Ukraine, the program of fieldwork was managed by Savanta, using a mix of Savanta’s own online panels and local vendors. Local vendors were quality assured by Savanta’s research team using industry best practices. All analysis and reporting was conducted by 89up and the Open Society Foundations.

Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the polling partner used to generate an n=1,550 sample was Gradus Research. Like Savanta, the survey was conducted online, with the support of a mobile application.

In Ukraine, the target population was people aged 18 and older in all oblasts, except for the occupied territories of Crimea as well as Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson oblasts. The results were weighted using the current data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine.

Most countries received identical versions of the survey, translated into local languages in a culturally sensitive way. However, in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, some politically sensitive questions were removed due to operational constraints or to maintain trust between the interviewer and respondent. In Ukraine, some questions were reworded to match local realities.

We asked respondents 45 questions—43 of which were asked globally and two of which were specific to the region where the respondent was from. The questions asked in the survey were based on themes including international finance and debt, human rights, international solidarity, governance, and global challenges.

In some instances, the questions were tailored to nationally specific contexts—for example, if the respondent lived in a country with a parliament or a congress, the wording of the question reflected that. The survey also included definitions of key words such as democracy and authoritarianism, which were translated in a culturally nuanced way to convey an accurate meaning.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABOUT THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

The Open Society Foundations, founded by George Soros, are the world's largest private funder of independent groups working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights. We approach this mission through the illuminating principles of justice, equity, and expression—defining characteristics of any truly open society.

For more information, please visit [opensocietyfoundations.org](https://opensocietyfoundations.org)

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People queue to vote in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on October 2, 2022. © Andre Borges/AFP/Getty

Sudanese youth call for justice for those killed during the 2021 military coup in Khartoum, Sudan, on November 17, 2022. © AFP/Getty

Protesters calling for presidential elections face riot police during a march in Lima, Peru, on July 19, 2023. © Guadalupe Pardo/AP

Residents are rescued during a flood caused by heavy rains in Kurume, Japan, on July 10, 2023. © JJI Press/AFP/Getty

Nesting dolls with images of political leaders on display at a souvenir stand in Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 04, 2022. © Chris McGrath/Getty

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