



WORLD RISK POLL

Report 2026

**Alone together:
The hidden consensus
on climate change**

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I Foreword

The Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll provides a crucial platform for people around the world to voice concerns about their safety, gathering data on everyday risks and harms every two years. Through its global coverage and inclusive methodology the Poll reaches marginalized and unheard voices offering invaluable insights to guide interventions aimed at protecting those most at risk. Developed and conducted in partnership with Gallup and shaped through dialogue with international bodies, sector experts and frontline organisations, the Poll has been built collaboratively from the outset and is intended to be used the same way.

Starting in 2019 and now in its fourth edition, the Poll has spanned major periods of global and regional change and provides a unique insight into emerging trends in people's perceptions and experiences of risk in turbulent times. With more than 143,000 interviews conducted across 140 countries and territories in 2025, the latest Poll allows trends first identified in previous years to be tested and refined.

The Poll is the starting point for a global insight-to-impact pathway: uncovering where harm is concentrated and where action could make the most difference. These insights support action by policy makers and organisations around the world. And to date, Lloyd's Register Foundation has invested £4.5 million in practical interventions building on World Risk Poll insights.

Climate change is the only risk in the Poll explicitly framed as generational, with respondents asked to consider the threat to people in their country over the next 20 years. Findings from previous polls have shown that public opinion on climate change is shaped not only by scientific evidence but also by people's lived experience of risk in their daily lives, including weather events that may be made more likely or more severe by a changing climate.

Our latest Poll allows that relationship to be explored more fully than ever before. It introduces, in collaboration with the *Human Development Report Office* of the *United Nations Development Programme*, a new line of enquiry into how people believe others in their country perceive the threat. This 'second-order dimension' of public perception has been largely absent from international climate research to date, but it is important as it shapes social norms, policy support and collective action.

Two findings from this report are particularly notable. First, three in four adults globally now consider climate change to be a very or somewhat serious threat to their country, the highest level recorded by the Poll to date. The proportion of those expressing no opinion has fallen sharply since 2019. Public opinion, on this measure, is catching up with the science, removing one of the long-standing obstacles to climate action.

Second, in many high-income countries, individuals who personally see climate change as a 'very serious' threat substantially underestimate how many of their fellow citizens agree with them. In 10 countries, the gap between personal and perceived societal concern exceeds 30 percentage points. In other words, **concerned majorities are mistaking themselves for isolated minorities**. Research suggests that correcting these misperceptions can measurably increase support for progressive climate policy, making this an actionable finding rather than an analytical curiosity. It is an important lever for accelerating climate action in the countries with the greatest capacity to act.

We want this report, along with the underlying Poll data, to empower policymakers, communicators, businesses, civil society organisations and researchers to shape and target the policies, interventions and public conversations that effective climate action requires. The unique breadth and depth of the Poll allow for the identification of communities and contexts where action could matter most, providing a powerful tool to direct action and a strong foundation for collaboration.



Acknowledgements

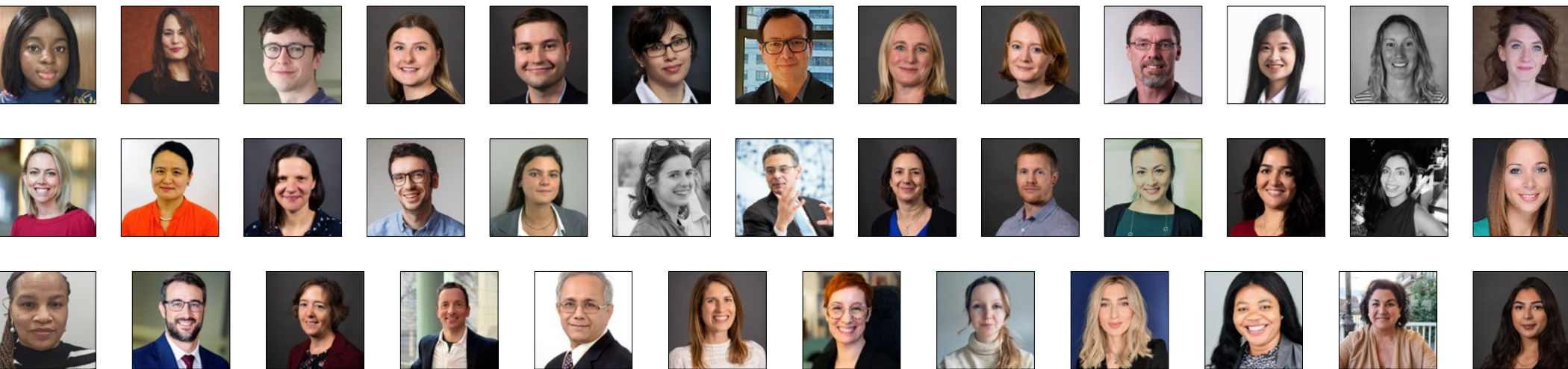
The World Risk Poll is a huge undertaking powered by multidisciplinary teams working across organisations. Lloyd’s Register Foundation is grateful to everyone who has contributed to this and previous versions of the World Risk Poll, and the collaborative spirit in which they work.

We are continually inspired by the enthusiasm of our strategic impact partners who have invested time in developing the questionnaire and are now embedding the data in their work, inspiring and galvanising people to take action. In particular, we would like to thank our partners from the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report Office; Josefin Pasanen, Yanchun Zhang, Heriberto Tapia, and Pedro Conceição.

The Technical Advisory Group for the World Risk Poll was first convened in early 2019, and we are indebted to the ongoing time and effort voluntarily invested by the members in the analysis, planning and reviewing of all our outputs.

Finally, our thanks are extended to the team at Gallup for their efforts in constructing and testing the Poll, and to the local staff in countries across the globe who undertook the fieldwork, often under difficult circumstances. We are particularly grateful to the World Risk Poll delivery and analytical team at Gallup for their ongoing contributions and support.

You can learn more about the Poll and the change it has supported through the Poll website at: wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk.



Additional information

About Lloyd’s Register Foundation

Lloyd’s Register Foundation is an independent global safety charity that supports research, innovation, and education to make the world a safer place. Its mission is to use the best evidence and insight, such as the World Risk Poll, to help the global community focus on tackling the world’s most pressing safety and risk challenges.

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To learn more about the World Risk Poll, please visit wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk.

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About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organisations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 90 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviours of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organisation in the world.

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Executive summary

The World Risk Poll is the first and only global, nationally representative study of worry about, and harm from, the risks people face to their safety. It draws on more than 143,000 interviews conducted by Gallup across 140 countries and territories throughout 2025, many of them places with little or no official data on safety and risk. This fourth edition offers a rare view of how people experience and perceive the risks in their lives, from the everyday hazards facing millions, such as unsafe food and water or danger on the roads, to the generational and existential risk of climate change.

This report turns to that last risk in depth. Climate change is the only threat the Poll frames as generational, asking people to weigh it not as it stands today but over the next 20 years. Alongside the long-running measure of personal concern, the 2025 edition introduces a new question, developed with the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report Office, on what people believe most others in their country think. The chapters that follow draw on both to ask not only how seriously people take the threat, but how accurately they judge the concern of those around them. As with every edition, the underlying data are freely available for governments, regulators, researchers and civil society to use in shaping the policies that effective climate action requires.

Three in four adults globally are personally concerned by climate change, the highest ever recorded by the Poll

- Three in four adults globally feel concerned about climate change and the impacts it will have on their country in the next two decades. Four in 10 adults (40%) say climate change is a ‘very serious threat’ to their country, while another 35% say it is a ‘somewhat serious threat’. This is the highest level of overall threat of climate change recorded across the four editions of the Poll.
- Middle-income countries lie behind the steady global increase in the perceived threat of climate change, driven in large part by China. In lower-middle-income countries, the proportion of those who see climate change as at least a somewhat serious threat has risen from 64% in 2019 to 71% in 2025. In upper-middle-income countries, it has increased from 65% to 79%, largely due to growth in the share describing it as somewhat serious.



High-income countries stand out for wide gaps between personal views of climate change and perceptions of what the rest of society thinks

- For the first time, in 2025, the Poll asked about second-order beliefs in relation to climate change: what people think most others in their country believe. Globally, levels of concern are on par (75% either very or somewhat serious threat) between personal and perceived societal beliefs, but more people feel personally ‘very threatened’ (40%) than think most others feel the same (31%).
- This gap can be explained by high-income countries, which are a significant outlier on these measures. While 49% personally feel climate change is a very serious threat — higher than in any other World Bank country income group — only 20% believe the rest of their country feels the same, lower than in any other income group. All other country income groups are much more aligned in their views of climate change between personal and second-order beliefs.
- Among the 10 countries with the widest gaps between personal and perceived societal views on the threat of climate change, the U.S. and Portugal both have gaps of at least 40 points.
- People whose personal concern and perception of societal climate concern are aligned, or who believe others are more concerned than they are, report higher institutional trust than those who feel personally more threatened by climate change than they believe others are.

Policy implications

- **The consensus should be communicated, not only the science.** Where personal concern runs well ahead of what people believe others feel – as it does across much of the high-income world – conveying the true breadth of public concern may matter as much as further evidence of the threat.
- **Messaging should be focused where the misalignment is widest.** This misalignment is concentrated in an identifiable set of high-income countries; which are where efforts to modulate second-order beliefs should begin.
- **Climate change should be tied to risks people feel day to day.** It ranks high as a national threat but low as a top-of-mind daily concern, behind road accidents and violent crime; framing it alongside health, jobs, infrastructure and economic stability could raise its everyday salience.
- **Shallow-but-aligned concern should be treated differently from deep-but-isolated concern.** In countries such as China and India, where concern is socially aligned but less intense, the risk is complacency rather than misperception, as individuals assume others will drive the action; here the task is to raise urgency, not to correct an underestimate.
- **The link between misalignment and institutional trust warrants attention.** Those who feel more threatened than they believe others to be report lower trust in national institutions; restoring an accurate sense of shared concern may carry benefits beyond climate, though the direction of that relationship is not yet established.
- **Evidence on what lasts is needed.** Correcting second-order beliefs raises policy support in the short term, but the durability of any resulting behaviour change remains under-tested; sustained-effect research should follow.



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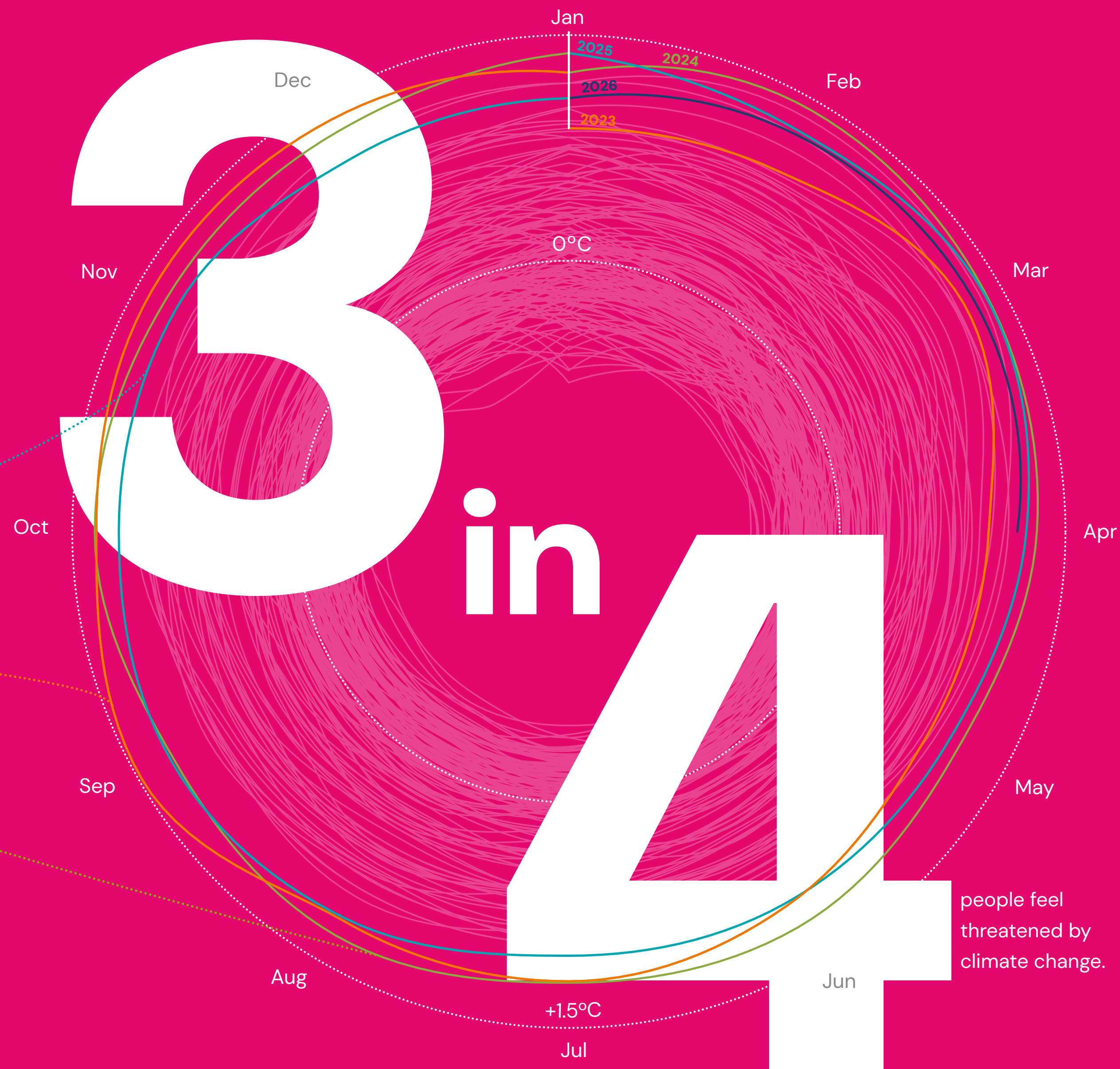
CHAPTER 1

Concern about climate change is a global issue

The scientific case for concern is no longer seriously contested. 2025 was the third-warmest year on record, behind only 2024 and 2023, and the past three years are the first sustained run to average more than 1°C above pre-industrial levels, the threshold around which the Paris Agreement was built. Rising temperatures bring more frequent and more severe extreme weather, mounting pressure on health systems and coastal communities, biodiversity loss and broad economic disruption. The physical reality of a warming planet is, by now, well established.

What this chapter examines is not the science but its reception: how seriously people judge the threat to their own country, and how that judgement has shifted across the four waves of the World Risk Poll since 2019. Climate change is the only risk the Poll frames as generational, asking respondents to weigh the danger not as it stands today but as it may stand over the next 20 years. That long horizon makes the measure as much a statement of expectation as of present fear, and a useful gauge of whether public opinion is keeping pace with a warming planet.

Perceived threat is not a simple readout of scientific exposure. It is shaped by what people see and experience close to home, by the weather events a changing climate makes more likely, and by the institutions and media through which the risk is filtered. That helps explain why concern does not track neatly with how much a country has contributed to the problem, or how much it stands to lose. The sections that follow trace the global picture first, then break it down by national income, where the trend turns out to be anything but uniform.



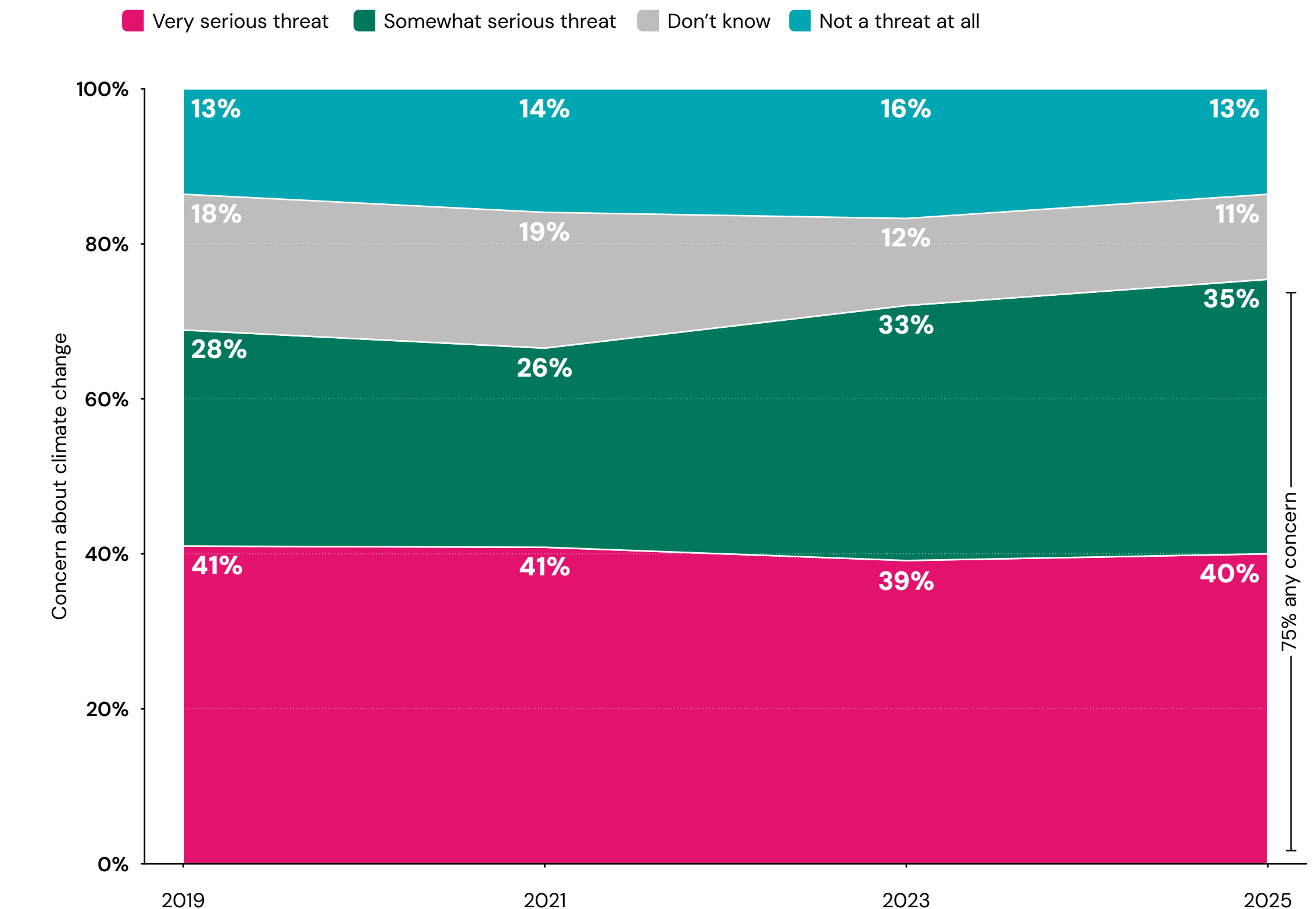
Three in four adults globally feel threatened by climate change

Since 2019, the World Risk Poll has asked adults whether climate change is a ‘very serious threat’, a ‘somewhat serious threat’ or ‘not a threat at all’ to people in their country over the next 20 years. In 2025, 40% of adults globally said climate change is a very serious threat. This is broadly consistent with previous waves. However, the proportion describing it as a somewhat serious threat has increased since 2021, rising from 26% to 35%. As a result, three-quarters (75%) of adults globally now consider climate change to be at least a somewhat serious threat, the highest level recorded across the four waves of the World Risk Poll.

Much of this increase reflects a decline in uncertainty. The proportion who say they ‘don’t know’ whether climate change poses a threat has fallen to 11%, compared with nearly one in five in earlier waves (18% in 2019, 19% in 2021). Meanwhile, 13% say climate change poses no threat at all, similar to previous waves. Overall, climate change continues to be widely recognised as a national risk, and fewer people now express uncertainty about its impact.

Chart 1.1. Perceived threat of climate change, 2019–2025 (global %)

Perceived threat reaches its highest level across four waves, as the share of adults with no opinion falls to 11%.



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Note: The composition of countries included across the four editions of the World Risk Poll varies somewhat, particularly in 2021, when slightly fewer countries were surveyed due to COVID-19.

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Increase in personal perceived threat concentrated in middle-income countries

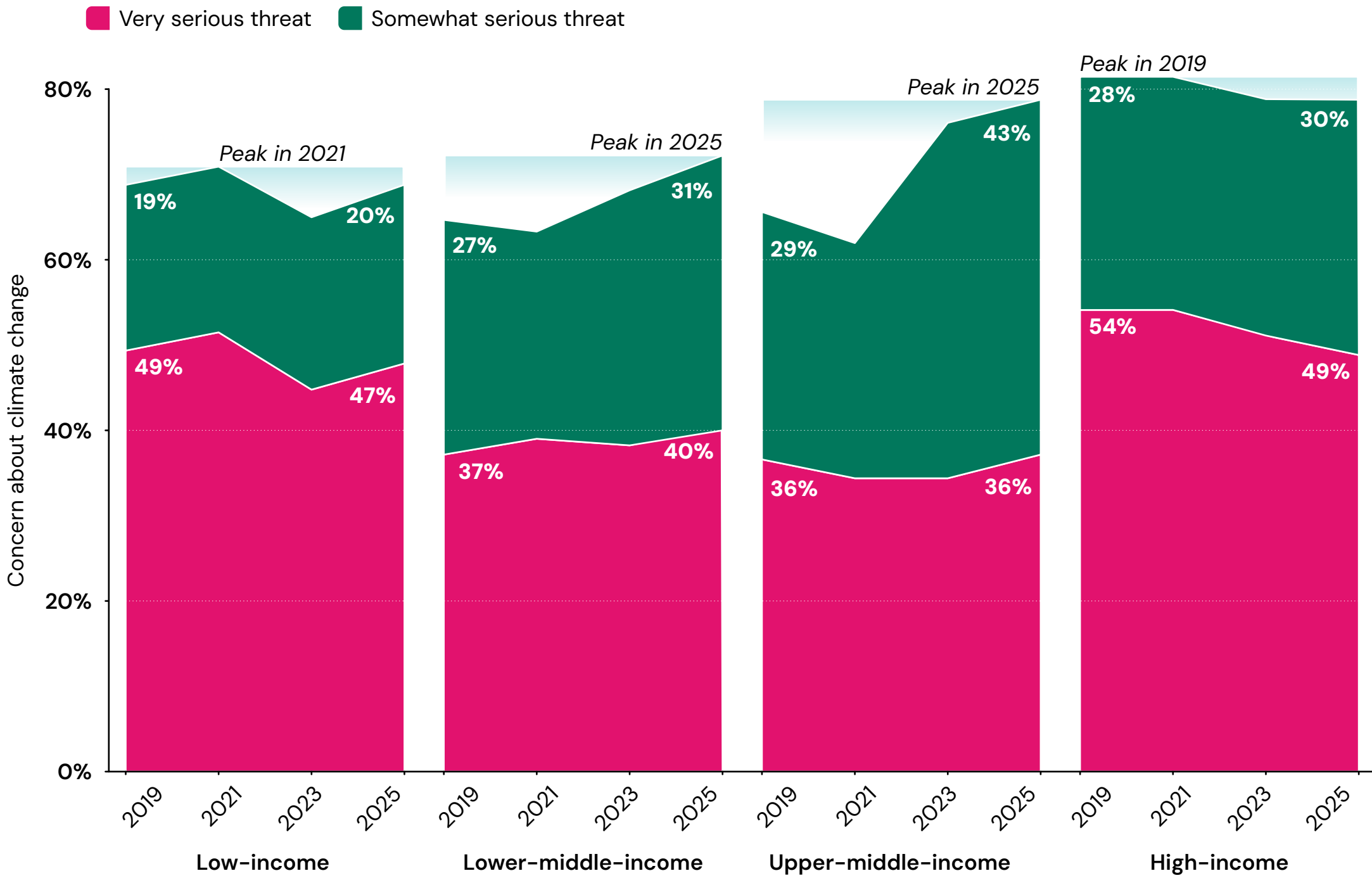
Middle-income countries lie behind the steady global increase in the perceived threat of climate change, driven in large part by Chinaⁱ. In lower-middle-income countries, the proportion of people who see climate change as at least a somewhat serious threat has risen from 64% in 2019 to 71% in 2025. In upper-middle-income countries, it increased from 65% to 79%, largely due to growth in the share describing it as somewhat serious.

In low-income countries, overall threat perceptions have remained broadly stable over time. High-income countries are the only group where the proportion describing climate change as a very serious threat declined. In 2025, 49% of adults in high-income countries said climate change is a very serious threat, the first time this has fallen below a majority. This is a notable finding, as high-income countries contribute most to climate change and have the most agency and resources to combat it. Overall levels of perceived threat (very or somewhat serious combined) are now on par in high-income and upper-middle-income countries, at 79% each.

ⁱ China was measured via computer-assisted web interviewing in 2023 and 2025, which should be taken into account when analysing the long-term trend.

Chart 1.2. Perceived threat of climate change by World Bank country income group, 2019–2025 (%)

Concern has climbed across middle-income countries, while in high-income countries, ‘very serious’ concern has slipped below half for the first time.



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Due to rounding, percentages may sum to ±1.

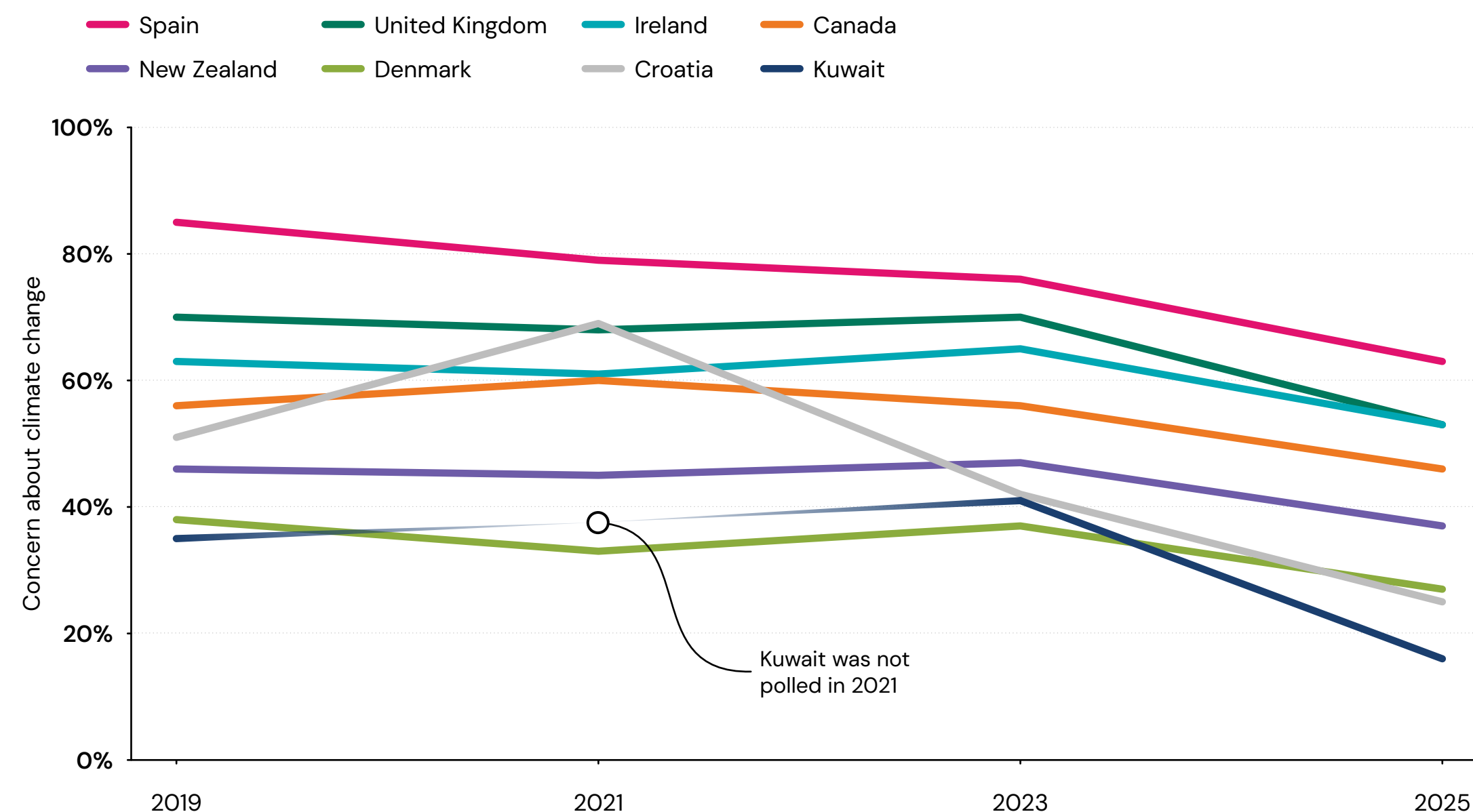
Most evidence points to lower-income countries bearing the greatest impact of climate change due to their hotter climates, exposure to extreme weather, weaker institutions and infrastructure, and more vulnerable economies and populations. The Center for Global Development estimates that average welfare losses from climate change are already around five times higher in low-income countries than in high-income countries, even though low-income countries have contributed relatively little to historical global emissions².

Declines in perceived threat of climate change in high-income countries

As Chart 1.2 shows, perceptions of climate change as a very serious threat have nudged down over time in high-income countries. Compared with 2023, eight high-income countries have seen declines of at least 10 points in the percentage saying they personally think climate change is a very serious threat. These include Kuwait, the United Kingdom, Croatia, Spain, Ireland, Denmark, Canada and New Zealand. In some cases, public opinion has moved more towards seeing climate change as a somewhat serious threat, but in others, views have shifted to say it is not a threat at all.

Chart 1.3. Changes in the perceived threat of climate change among select high-income countries, 2019–2025 (% very serious)

Eight high-income countries, among them the United Kingdom, Spain and Canada, have seen 'very serious' concern fall by at least 10 points since 2023.

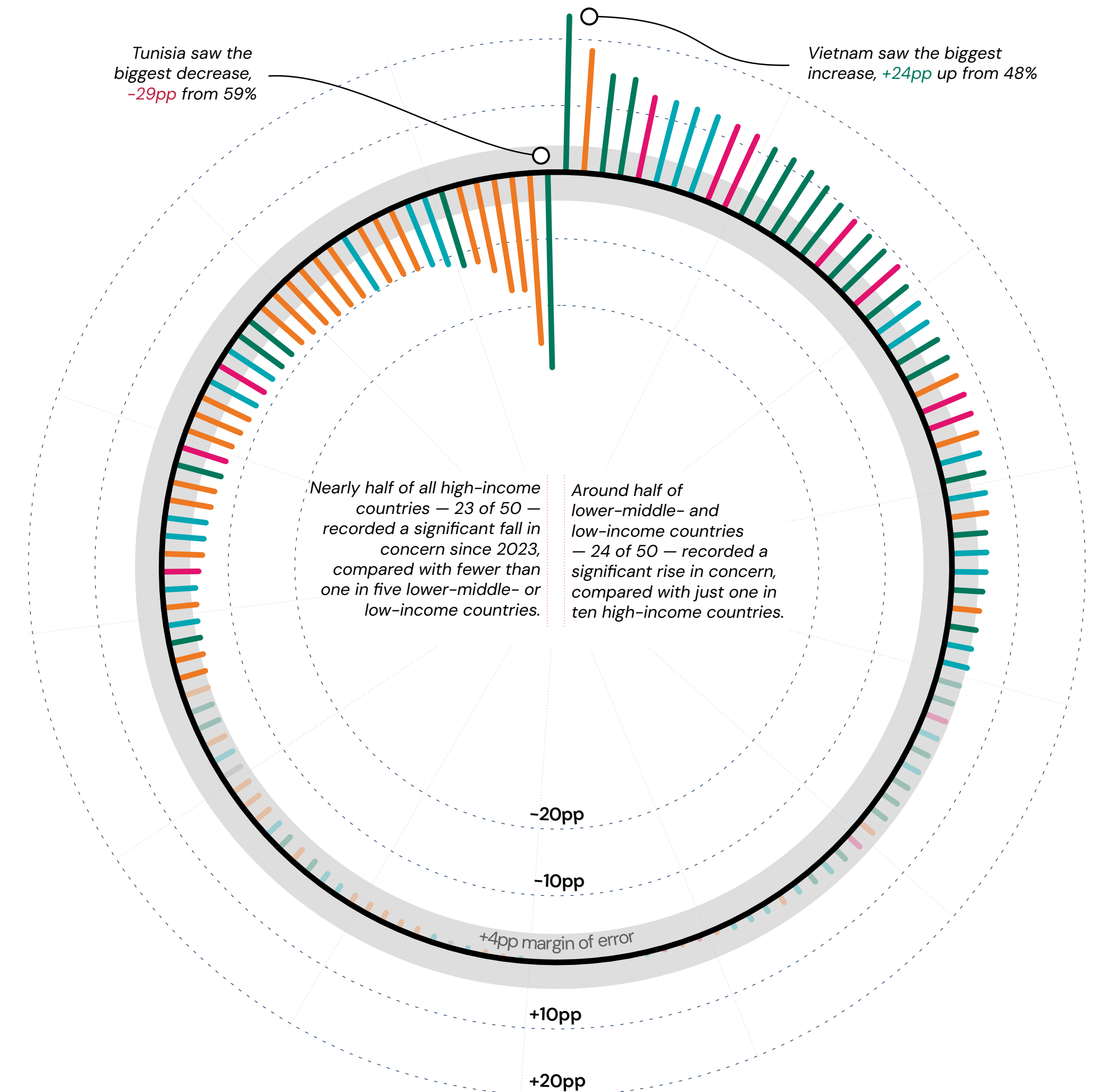


Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Chart 1.4. Changes in the perceived threat of climate change, 2023–2025 (% very serious)

People in wealthier countries are losing concern about climate change; those in less wealthy ones are gaining it.

Low-income Lower-middle-income Upper-middle-income High-income Not classified



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

CHAPTER 2

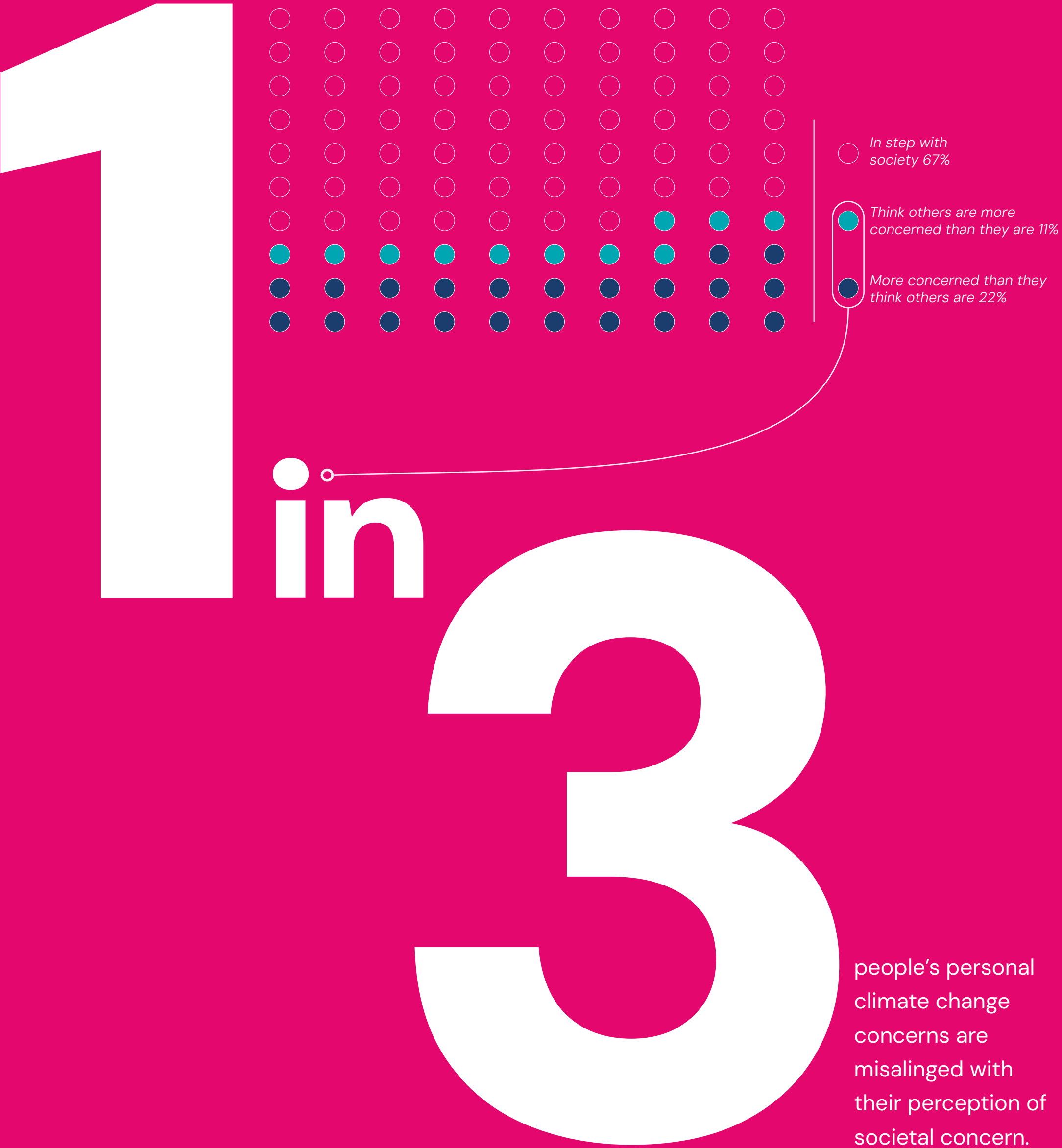
Second-order beliefs: What people believe others think

The first chapter measured what people think about climate change. This one turns to a subtler question: what they think everyone else thinks.

In 2025, the World Risk Poll introduced a new question on second-order beliefs regarding climate change — that is, how people believe others view climate change. This new question was developed in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Second-order beliefs can play an important role in shaping social norms, policy support and collective action. As the UNDP’s Human Development Report Office (HDRO)³ argues:

“All too often people make biased assumptions about other people, including people on the other side of political divides. Often, people agree with one another more than they think... incorrect beliefs about others hamstrings cooperation that, if recognised and corrected, could help build collective action on climate”.

Research in social psychology has shown that individuals can underestimate the prevalence of widely held concerns, particularly on political or socially salient issues⁴. However, detailed research and data on second-order beliefs remain rare in the social sciences, particularly in relation to climate change⁵.

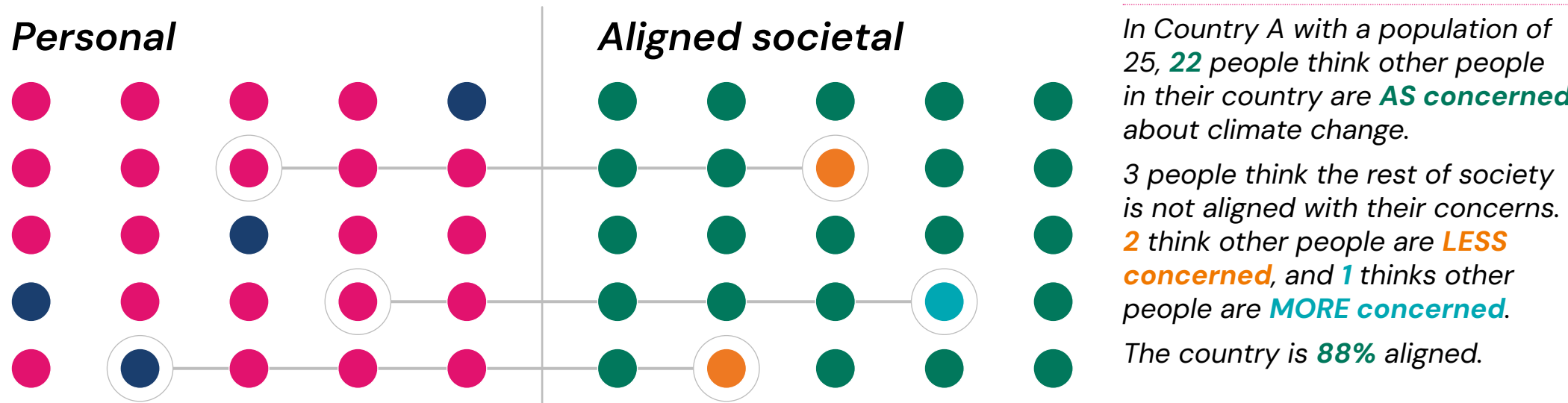


Efforts to mitigate climate change require coordination both within countries to build support for national policies and across countries to ensure the collective efficacy of national efforts. These efforts often involve trade-offs for individuals, whether through reduced spending on other national priorities or local disruptions in their environments. Willingness to accept such costs may depend, in part, on how people think others in their community, country or the wider world view the issue.

To date, the climate change policy environment has failed to keep up with the rapid pace of global warming. Many hypotheses have been proposed, including international institutions being ill-suited to coordinate sustained action⁶, opposition from powerful business interests, competing domestic priorities and low issue salience overall. Chart 1.1 in the *‘The quiet hazards: How everyday risk shapes daily life’* report reflects this low salience: the environment and climate change are listed behind road/traffic accidents, crime and violence, personal health conditions and the economy as a top-of-mind risk to daily safety. However, misalignment in second-order beliefs has been mostly ignored as a contributing factor.

Note: the rest of this report will refer to second-order as ‘perceived societal’ beliefs, in other words, what individuals believe others in society think about climate change.

Country A, **ALIGNED** personal and perceived societal concern about climate change



Country B, **MISALIGNED** personal and perceived societal concern about climate change

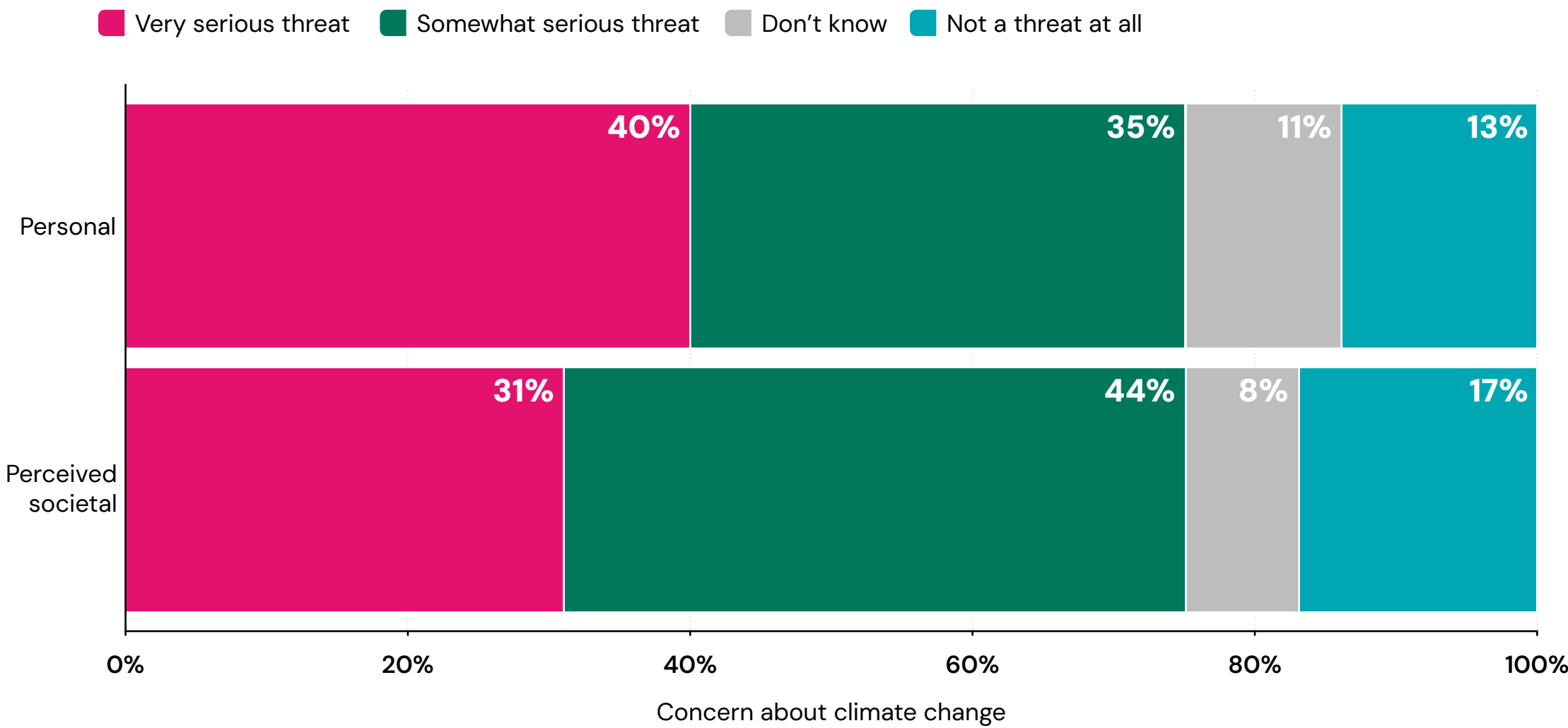


People underestimate other people’s concern about climate change

Globally, personal and perceived societal perceptions of climate change are broadly similar in aggregate terms (i.e., combining ‘very’ and ‘somewhat’ serious responses). While 40% say climate change is a very serious threat in their personal view, 31% believe most other people in their country see it as very serious. Overall, combined levels of ‘very’ and ‘somewhat’ serious responses are closer (75% each), but differences emerge at higher levels of perceived severity. Essentially, many people believe others feel less threatened by climate change than they actually do.

Chart 2.1. Personal and perceived societal beliefs about threat of climate change (%)

People are likelier to feel very threatened themselves (40%) than to think others do (31%).



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don’t know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don’t know, please just say so.

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

After excluding ‘don’t know’ responses, around two-thirds (66%) of adults globally perceive the threat of climate change in the same way in both personal and perceived societal measures. For example, a respondent may see climate change as a very serious threat personally and believe most other people feel the same.

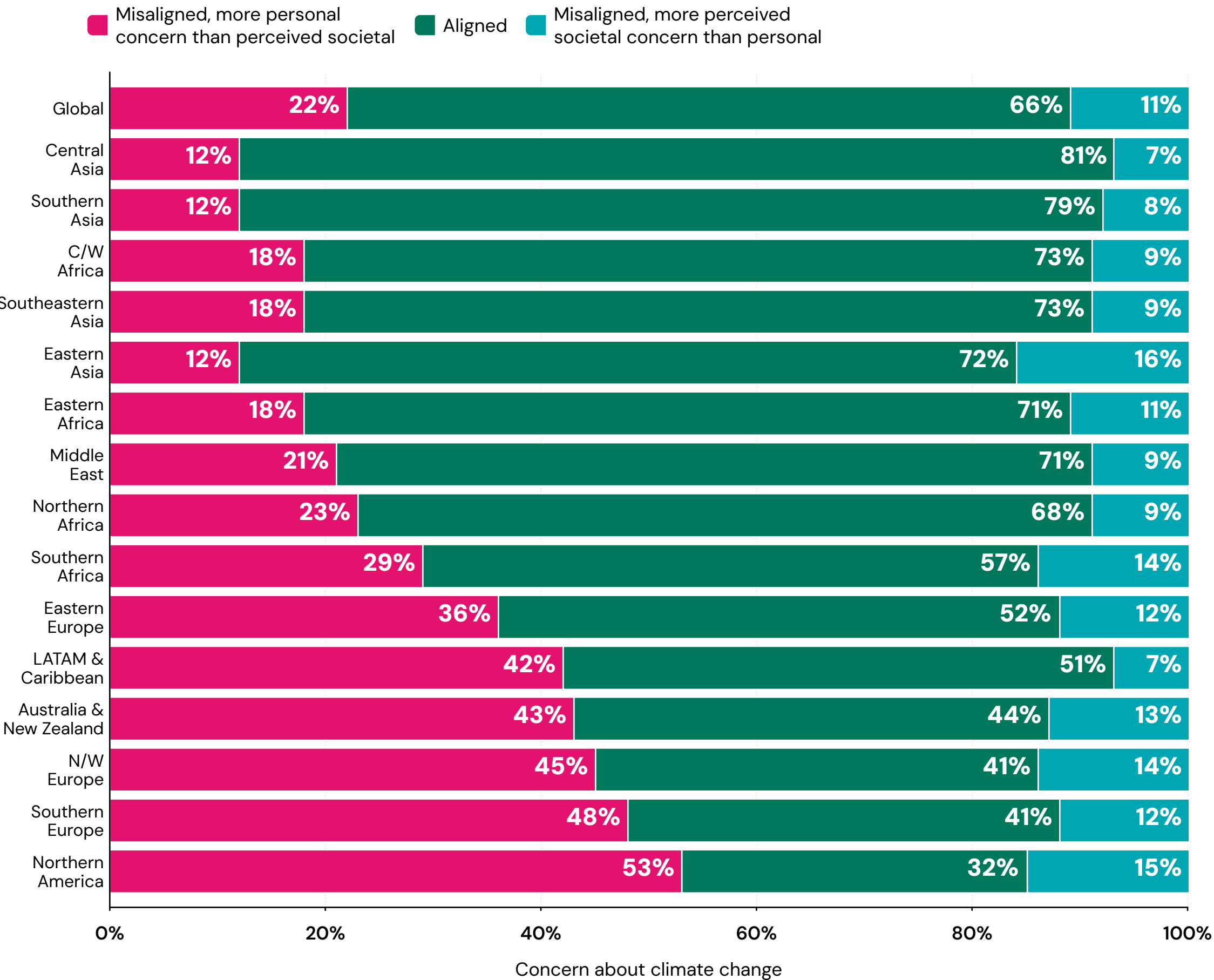
By contrast, 33% are misaligned in their views of climate change: 22% where personal concern is more serious than perceived societal concern, and 11% where societal concern is believed to be higher than personal concern. About one in seven people worldwide (13%) did not provide a substantive response to at least one of these two questions and were not included in this analysis.

Perceived alignment of views towards climate change varies markedly by region. Across much of Asia, significant proportions of people believe their fellow citizens feel the same about the threat of climate change as themselves: at least 70% of adults in Eastern, Southeastern, Southern and Central Asia gave the same answer regarding personal and societal perceptions of the threat.

However, in four regions — Australia and New Zealand, Northern/Western Europe, Southern Europe and Northern America — more than half of adults are misaligned between how they perceive climate change and how they believe others view it. In the latter three regions, a larger share of adults hold the misaligned view that they personally see climate change as a bigger threat than the rest of society does, compared with those who hold consistent views across both measures.

Chart 2.2. Alignment and misalignment in climate change views (personal vs. perceived societal) by region (%)

Most adults across Asia read their compatriots’ concern accurately, whilst more than half in Europe, Northern America, and Australia and New Zealand do not.



Among respondents who offered a substantive opinion to both questions

Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don’t know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don’t know, please just say so.

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Misalignment is largest in high-income countries

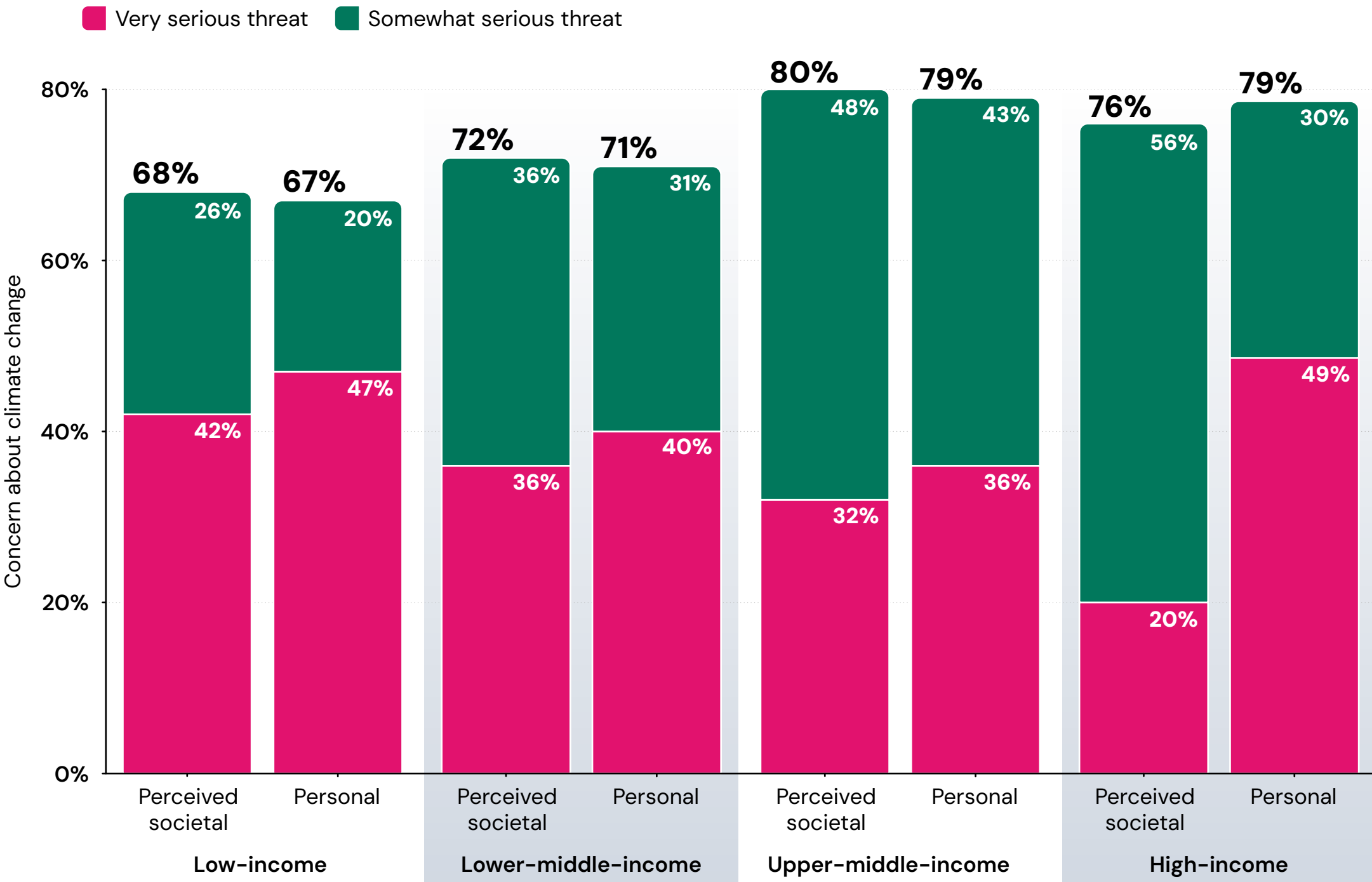
Misalignment between personal and perceived societal perceptions of climate change appears to be predominantly a high-income country issue. In general, personal and perceived societal perceptions of the threat of climate change are relatively similar across country income groupings. Broadly speaking, the wealthier a country is, the more threatened its people feel by climate change. For example, in high- and upper-middle-income countries, an average of 79% feel somewhat or very threatened by climate change, significantly higher than lower-middle-income (71%) or low-income (67%) countries.

However, perceived societal perceptions typically match closely at the aggregate level. While people in high-income countries are, on average, three points less likely to think others in their country feel as threatened by climate change than they do themselves (76% vs. 79%, respectively), the gaps between personal and perceived societal perceptions in all other income groups are within one point.

The picture becomes more complex when analysing only those who see climate change as a very serious threat. Across low-, lower-middle- and upper-middle-income countries, the gap between those who personally see climate change as a very serious threat and those who think the rest of their country feels the same is within five percentage points. But in high-income countries, the gap widens significantly. While 49% personally feel climate change is a very serious threat — higher than in any other World Bank country income group — only 20% believe the rest of their country feels the same, lower than in any other income group.

Chart 2.3. Perceptions of the threat (very, somewhat serious) of climate change by personal, perceived societal measures and World Bank country income group

Personal and perceived societal concern align closely across income groups, with high-income countries the clear exception.



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

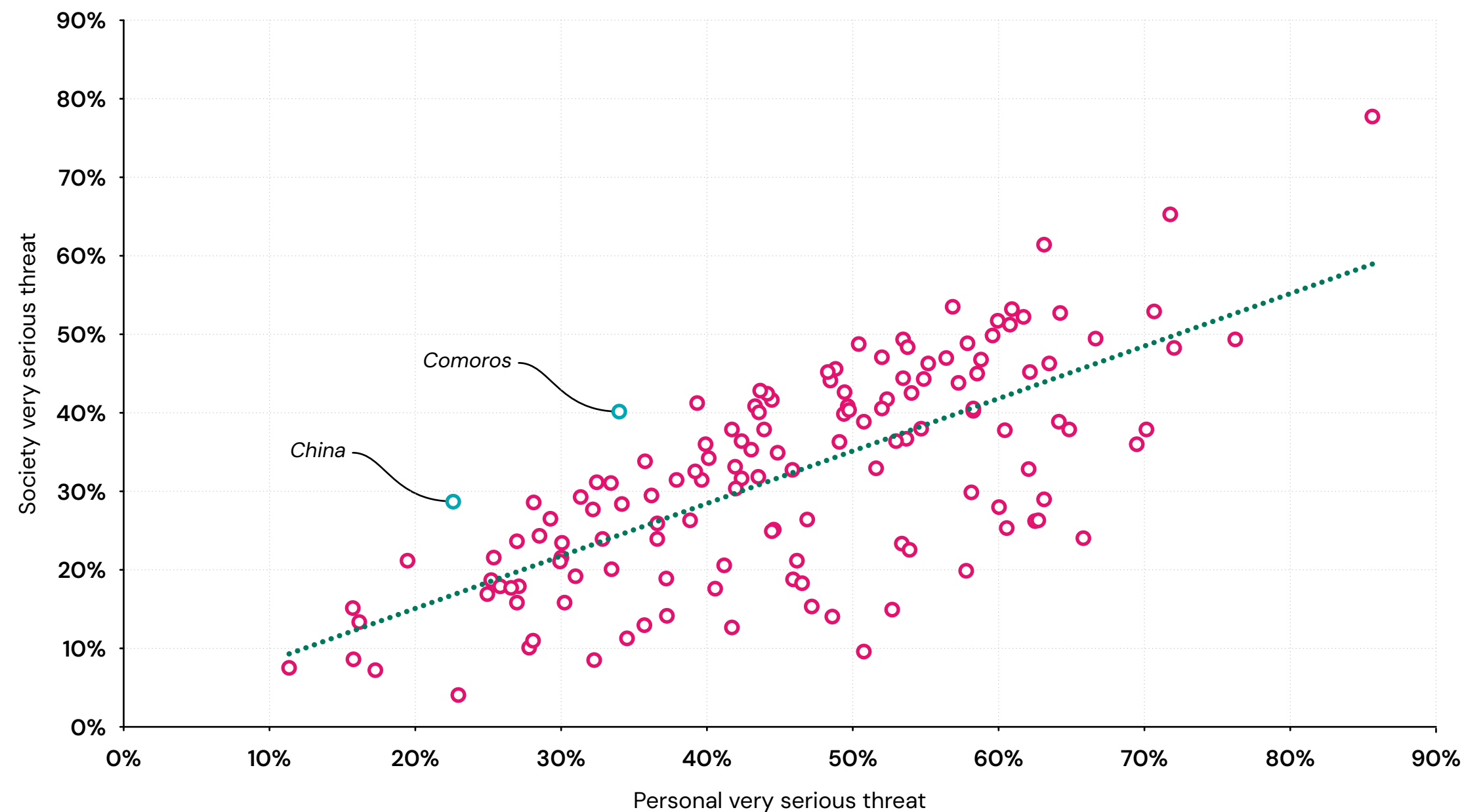
Note: Due to rounding, percentages may sum to ±1.

Large perceived divides in concern at the national level

At the national level, 110 out of 140 countries have a gap of at least five percentage points between personal and perceived societal perceptions of climate change as a very serious threat. In most cases, individuals believe others are less concerned than they are personally. Only two countries — China and Comoros — show gaps of a similar magnitude in the other direction, where more people say society views climate change as a more serious threat than they do.

Chart 2.4. Relationship between personal and perceived societal threat (very serious) of climate change

In 110 of 140 countries, people underestimate how concerned their compatriots are; only China and Comoros lean the other way.



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Of the 10 countries with the widest gaps between personal and perceived societal views as to whether climate change is a very serious threat, nine are high-income countries, along with Argentina (upper-middle). Portugal (42 points) and the U.S. (41 points) are the only two countries with a gap of at least 40 points between personal and perceived societal perceptions. In Italy, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, Spain, Argentina, France, Germany and Chile, there is a gap of at least 33 points.

Chart 2.5. Biggest gaps between personal and perceived societal views of climate change as 'very serious' threat by country

Portugal and the United States lead the list, each underestimating societal concern by more than 40 percentage points.

COUNTRY	PERSONAL	PERCEIVED SOCIETAL	PERCENTAGE POINT GAP
Portugal	66%	24%	42
United States	51%	10%	41
Italy	58%	20%	38
United Kingdom	53%	15%	38
Uruguay	63%	26%	37
Spain	63%	26%	37
Argentina	61%	25%	36
France	49%	14%	35
Germany	63%	29%	34
Chile	69%	36%	33

Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Public opinion among the countries contributing most to climate change

The largest contributors to climate change⁷ — the U.S. and China, India and the European Union (EU) — have very different perceptions of the threat of climate change to their country. While more adults in China personally see climate change as a threat (84% very or somewhat serious) than in the U.S. (71%), roughly twice as many U.S. adults say the threat is very serious (51% vs. 23% in China).

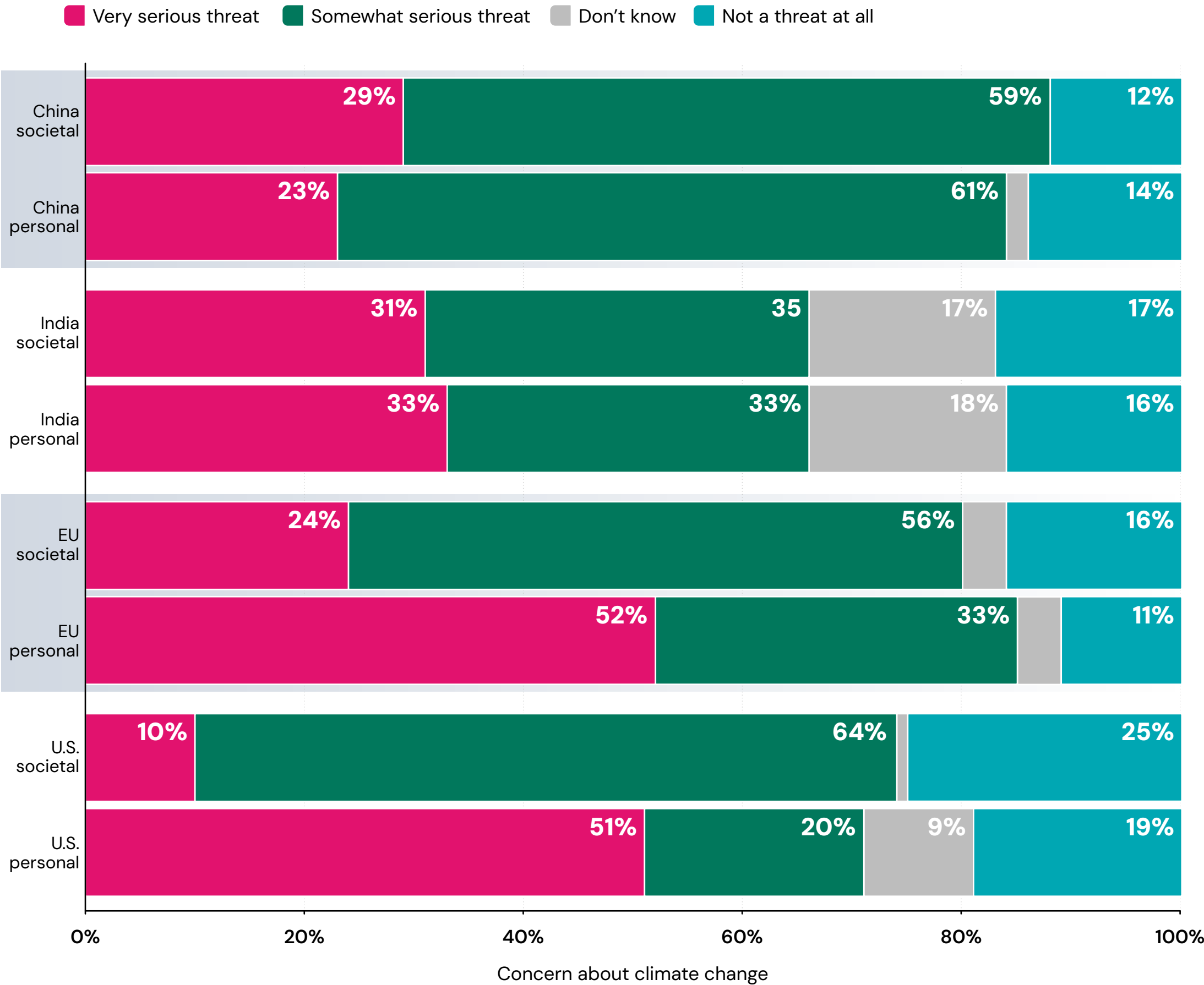
When it comes to second-order beliefs, far fewer adults in the U.S. believe others see climate change as a very serious threat — dropping 41 points to just 10%, compared with 51% who hold this view personally. In China, by contrast, the percentage who think most others see climate change as a very serious threat is 6 points higher than the personal threat figure.

Public opinion in India takes on a different shape. Perceptions of climate change as a very serious threat — whether personal or second-order — are more similar to China, though the overall level of perceived threat is significantly lower, as nearly one in five Indian adults say they ‘don’t know’ across both questions. Public opinion in the EU is similar to that in the U.S.: 52% see climate change as a very serious threat, but only 24% say most people in their country feel the same.

These differences could have important implications for international climate agreements, which depend on political will. Where personal concern is high but undermined by doubts about the concern of others, like in the U.S. and EU, governments may face pressure to act but struggle to do so with conviction. In countries such as India and China, where concern is shallower but more socially aligned, top-down policy approaches may face less resistance, but individuals may feel less urgency to push for action personally, assuming others will drive it. This social complacency effect could dampen public pressure for faster action, even where underlying concern exists.

Chart 2.6. Personal vs. perceived societal concern about climate change across China, India, the U.S. and the EU (%)

High personal concern sits alongside far lower perceived societal concern in the United States and EU, but not in China or India.



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%. Percentages under 5% are not displayed.

National vulnerability closely related to perceived societal, not personal, climate perceptions

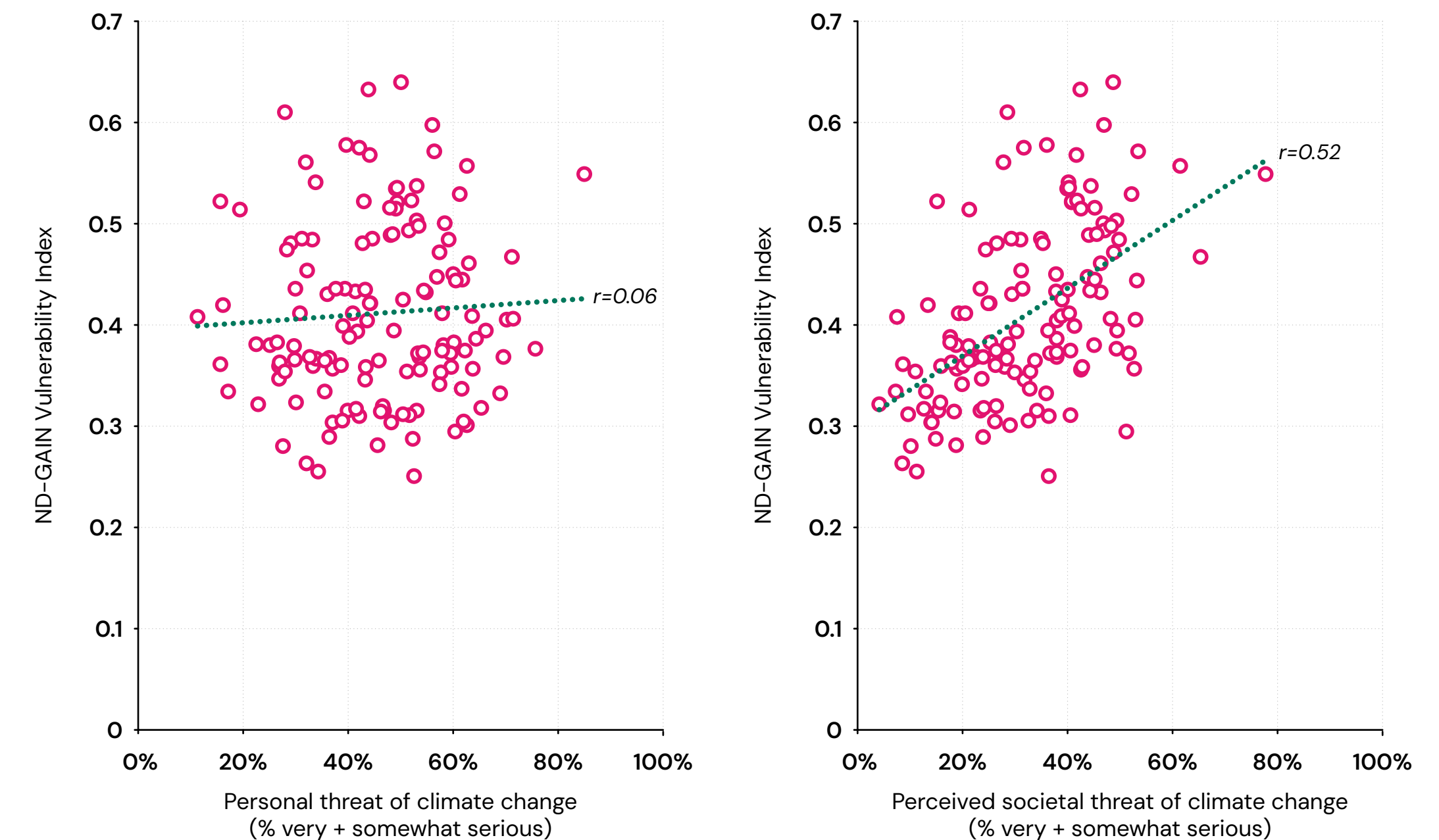
Every country in the world is vulnerable to climate change, although levels of risk may vary due to a range of geographical, socioeconomic and historical factors. The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Index⁸ assesses countries' vulnerability to climate change and readiness to improve resilience. Its vulnerability elementⁱⁱ assesses the propensity for countries to be negatively affected by climate hazards, with higher scores reflecting lower vulnerability and stronger institutional, economic and governance capacity. The World Risk Poll's analysis of this measure finds a clear relationship with some climate attitudes, but not others.

At the global level, there is no meaningful association between how vulnerable a country is to climate change and how personally threatened its people feel (very or somewhat serious threat). At the national level, the correlation between these two indicators is $r=0.06$, indicating no meaningful association. However, comparing vulnerability to second-order beliefs provided a very different finding. There is a relatively strong association between vulnerability and how people think others feel about climate change ($r=0.52$).

ii. The Vulnerability Index comprises six elements: health, food, ecosystems, habitat, water and infrastructure.

Chart 2.7. Relationship between personal, perceived societal views on climate change and National Vulnerability Index

National vulnerability tracks what people think others believe ($r=0.52$), but not their own sense of threat ($r=0.06$).



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

In countries most at risk from the impacts of climate change, people are more likely to recognise that others in their country see it as a serious threat. In less vulnerable countries, this perception is weaker. Overall, national vulnerability is reflected more clearly in what people think others believe than in their personal sense of risk. This suggests that climate risk is socially visible, even if it is not always internalised as a personal fear.

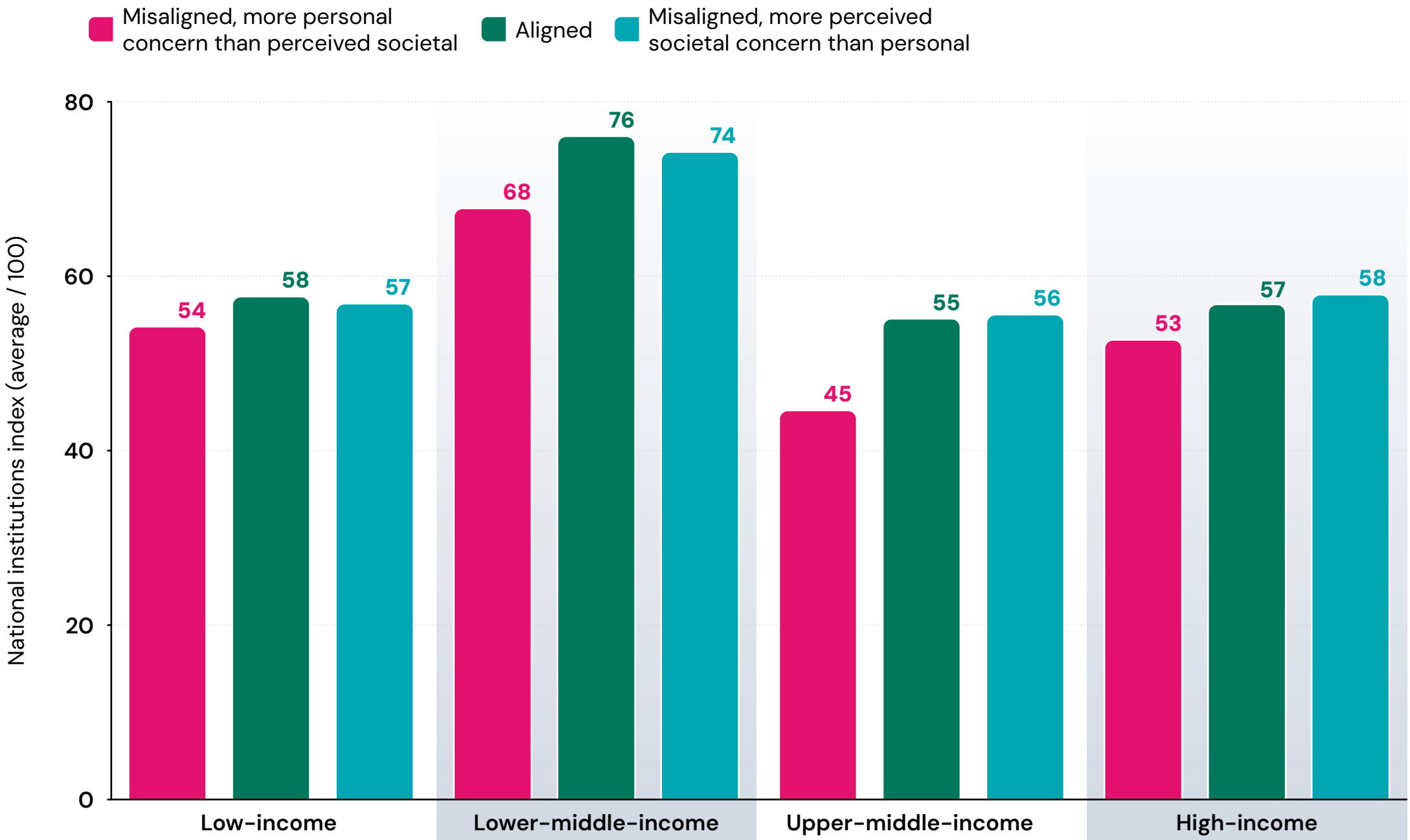
Misalignment in climate change perceptions linked to lack of trust in institutions

Attitudes towards climate change — both personal and second-order — are linked to trust in national institutions such as government, the military and the judiciary, and electoral integrity. Across country income groups, people whose personal concern and perception of societal climate concern align, or who believe others are more concerned than they are, report higher institutional trust than those who feel personally more threatened by climate change than they believe others do.

While low levels of concern about climate change are sometimes linked to low trust in institutions, this finding adds nuance. What matters is not just what people think about climate change, but how they perceive the views of others. The direction of this relationship is unclear: feeling like part of a worried minority may be alienating and erode faith in the system, or people who already distrust institutions could be more likely to feel that the mainstream is complacent about a risk they take seriously. At a minimum, the finding suggests that perceptions of other people’s views on climate change are as important as personal beliefs and deserve more attention in both research and policy.

Chart 2.8. Average trust in institutions by views on climate change and World Bank country income group (Gallup National Institutions Index)

People who feel more worried than they believe others to be report the lowest trust in national institutions.



Question text: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

Now thinking about MOST OTHER people in this country, if you had to guess, do you think MOST PEOPLE in [country] view climate change as a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about: national government, honesty of elections, the military, judicial system and courts?

Note: Reported statistics are averages of Gallup's National Institutions Index, which is a composite measure of the confidence a country's residents have in the four national institutions asked about.

I Insight to action

As the world continues to warm, evidence from the past seven years shows that public opinion about the severity of the threat posed by climate change is keeping up with changing climate patterns. Uncertainty about the threat continues to inch down, as for the first time recorded by the World Risk Poll, three in four adults think it is a threat to their country in the next two decades.

In much of the world, people's personal views about the threat of climate change often mirror how they think the rest of their society views the issue. But in high-income nations, which typically contribute most towards climate change, many people believe that others in their country deprioritise the threat compared to their own views. This wide gap between personal beliefs and perceived social norms is an obstacle to overcome in countries that will play a significant role in determining how far global average temperatures exceed pre-industrial levels.

Ambitious climate-related policy reform requires public opinion to be on its side. Support for policies that carry costs, whether financial or behavioural, depends partly on whether individuals believe others will also act and share the costs. High levels of misalignment on the issue of climate change can fuel polarisation and lead to self-fulfilling prophecies⁹. In countries where many people see climate change as a serious threat but think most others do not, underappreciated support for climate mitigation policies can undermine support for necessary solutions and hinder progress.

Public communication that accurately reflects the true breadth of societal concern may strengthen collective efficacy and support for more ambitious climate policy. In high-income countries, highlighting the extent of broad-based public concern could be as important as communicating about climate science. This echoes other academic research, which finds that people's support for climate-friendly policies increases when they update their second-order beliefs, making them a core factor shaping climate policy inaction¹⁰. Correcting people's misperceptions in this way is likely to have some positive effect, but there is much more scope to conduct further research on how it may lead to sustained behaviour change¹¹.

Climate change ranks highly as a national threat, yet it features less prominently as a top-of-mind daily safety concern, outranked by risks like traffic accidents and violent crime — in part because it is an inherently long-term and abstract concept. Integrating climate policy with issues people experience directly, such as health, infrastructure, jobs and economic stability, could strengthen its relevance to people's daily lives.

I Conclusion

Two findings sit at the centre of this report, and they pull in opposite directions. The first is encouraging: three in four adults globally now regard climate change as at least a somewhat serious threat to their country, the highest level the World Risk Poll has recorded, with the share expressing no opinion falling from nearly one in five in 2019 to roughly one in nine today. On the question that has long preoccupied climate communicators — whether public opinion is catching up with the science — the answer is increasingly yes.

The second finding complicates the first. In many of the high-income countries best placed to act, people who personally regard climate change as a very serious threat badly underestimate how many of their compatriots agree. Across high-income countries, 49% hold that view personally whilst only 20% believe most others do, a 29-percentage-point gap; in Portugal and the United States, the gap exceeds 40 points. Concern, in other words, is no longer the limiting factor it once was; the misreading of that concern may now matter more. A worried majority that believes itself a minority is a majority unlikely to demand the action it would, on its own terms, support.

The hopeful reading is that this is a more tractable problem than persuading sceptics. Correcting a factual misperception about what others believe is a different, and easier, task than changing a deeply held view, and existing research suggests that doing so measurably raises support for progressive climate policy. Where the capacity to act is greatest, a more useful task may be correcting that misperception alongside restating the threat:

- Communicate the consensus, not only the science. In high-income countries, conveying the true breadth of public concern may build support for climate policy as effectively as further evidence of the threat itself.
- Target the misalignment where it is widest. The gap between personal and perceived societal concern is concentrated in an identifiable group of high-income countries; corrective messaging should be directed there first.
- Anchor climate policy to everyday concerns. Climate change ranks high as a national threat but low as a top-of-mind daily risk; framing it alongside health, jobs, infrastructure and economic stability could close that gap in salience.
- Build the evidence on what endures. Correcting second-order beliefs shows early promise, but the durability of any resulting behaviour change remains under-tested; further research should establish whether the effect persists.

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