

BRUNSWICK

GLOBAL STATE OF PHILANTHROPY

Public Attitudes Toward
Billionaire Philanthropy

JANUARY 2026

In 2023 Brunswick launched its inaugural global survey of public attitudes toward billionaire philanthropy.

This second 2025 wave finds that **public support for billionaire philanthropy has proven unexpectedly resilient** at a global level despite declining institutional trust, heightened scrutiny of donors in the media and politics, and economic pressures. At the same time, that support is **increasingly conditional**, grounded in expectations of transparency and accountability, and focused on broadly shared priorities.

Global State of Philanthropy

Chapter 1: Philanthropy's Standing Today

- Overall perceptions of billionaire philanthropy
- Perceived effectiveness of philanthropy in solving issues compared to other types of organizations
- The strongest arguments for and against billionaire philanthropy

Chapter 2: Expectations of Philanthropy

- Views of AI's future impact on giving decisions
- Support for policy advocacy overall and by foreign entities
- The highest priority issues for billionaire philanthropy to address

Chapter 3: Signals from Key Public Constituencies

- How attitudes differ across markets, political affiliations, and age groups

For the purposes of this survey, billionaire philanthropy was defined as: the world's wealthiest individuals giving away money to charitable or philanthropic causes.

Survey of a nationally representative sample of general public adults in eight markets:

Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC)

			
India n=1,000	China n=1,007	South Africa n=505	Nigeria n=1,004

High-Income Countries (HIC)

			
Germany n=1,009	France n=1,008	United Kingdom n=1,016	United States n=1,010

Fieldwork Dates: November 7 – 20, 2025

KEY FINDINGS

1

Philanthropy has a resilient but uneven reputation

Support for billionaire philanthropy **has remained relatively strong** among the public despite declining institutional trust and increased media scrutiny. However, **perceptions diverge significantly by geography**. Effectiveness ratings exceed 75% in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs) but are in the 40% range in high-income countries (HICs).

Credibility is shaped more by local context than by a shared global view.

2

Motivations and power are under scrutiny, especially in HICs but also increasingly in LMICs

Even as people acknowledge the benefits of philanthropy, such as philanthropists' ability to drive innovation, **concerns about influence and tax avoidance remain high in HICs and have risen by five points in LMICs**. Nearly half of respondents in HICs believe philanthropy mainly serves donors' priorities, and that view has risen by five points in LMICs.

3

AI and policy engagement are becoming new stress tests for trust

The impact of using AI to inform philanthropy decisions divides audiences sharply: optimism dominates across LMICs while HIC publics are net negative.

Support for efforts to influence policy shows similar divisions, with most LMICs welcoming intervention from foreign philanthropists while HICs prefer direct services.

The more philanthropy adopts new tools or enters political spaces, the more closely its intentions are scrutinized.

4

The public want philanthropists to prioritize basic human needs

Health, education, and economic growth anchor public expectations of what philanthropy should fund. Support for focusing on **climate change is losing ground**. The public is signaling a preference for solutions they can see and feel, such as schools, health systems, and livelihoods, over broader systemic agendas.

5

Younger audiences are more skeptical of motives, yet see greater potential for philanthropy

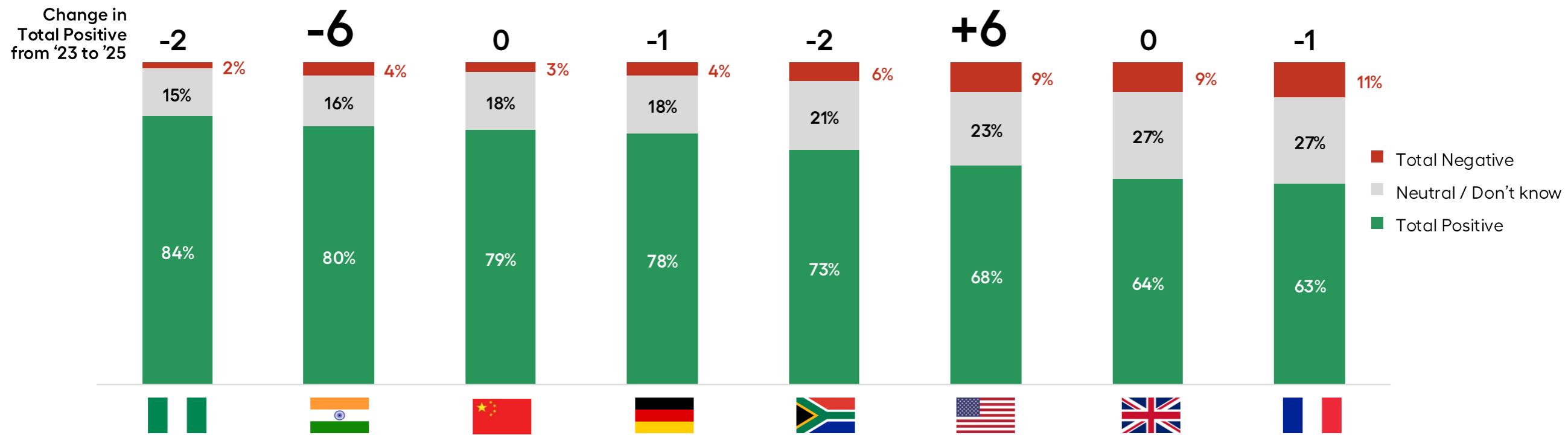
Younger adults are more critical of billionaire philanthropy's intentions, but they remain more open to its potential, as they **show higher belief in effectiveness and stronger support for AI and policy engagement**.

CHAPTER 1

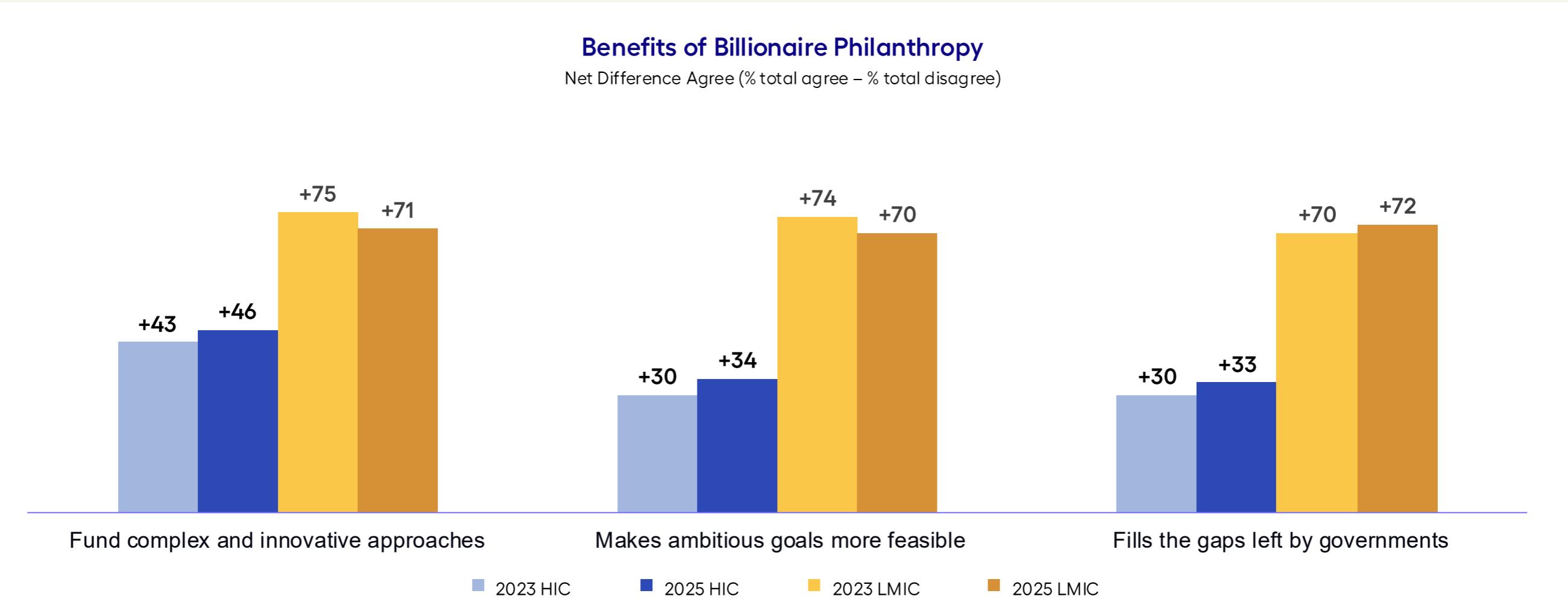
PHILANTHROPY'S STANDING TODAY

POSITIVE SENTIMENT HOLDS STEADY, WITH THE U.S. SHOWING THE BIGGEST GAINS

Views of the World's Wealthiest Individuals Giving Away Money to Charitable or Philanthropic Causes



PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF BILLIONAIRE PHILANTHROPY ARE CONSISTENT OVER TIME AND MUCH HIGHER IN LMICS



THOSE WHO HOLD A POSITIVE VIEW OF THE WEALTHIEST GIVING AWAY THEIR MONEY BELIEVE:

Wealthy individuals are **altruistic** and guided by **a sense of obligation to give back**. Across all countries, giving is widely described as **generous**, **moral**, and a **proper** use of surplus wealth.

Donations meaningfully **help those in need** and **improve quality of life**, reflecting a global belief in philanthropy's tangible impact.

There is an **expectation** that the wealthy give back, especially among the public in the US, France, Germany, and South Africa.

Philanthropy sets a **positive example** and **inspires others**. Admiration for donors and the idea of "setting an example" appeared strongly in France and the US.

Giving supports broader **community and societal progress**. Adults in Nigeria, Germany, and China highlighted community uplift, poverty reduction, and social improvement.

Notwithstanding incentives to give (i.e., tax breaks), philanthropy is a net social good. Across markets, respondents said that **any benefits to donors matter less than the positive impact on society**.

“
They have more money than they can possibly spend so it makes sense to help others.

UK

“
It shows that they do care for other human beings.

South Africa

“
It sets an example for other wealthy people.

France

“
If they have money, they should help those who are living below the poverty line. This can make India proud.

India

“
Giving away money is very positive because it helps reduce poverty and supports people in need.

Nigeria

“
They have the resources to make things easily accessible and available to people of the lower class who can't help themselves.

US

“
This is how society should be.

China

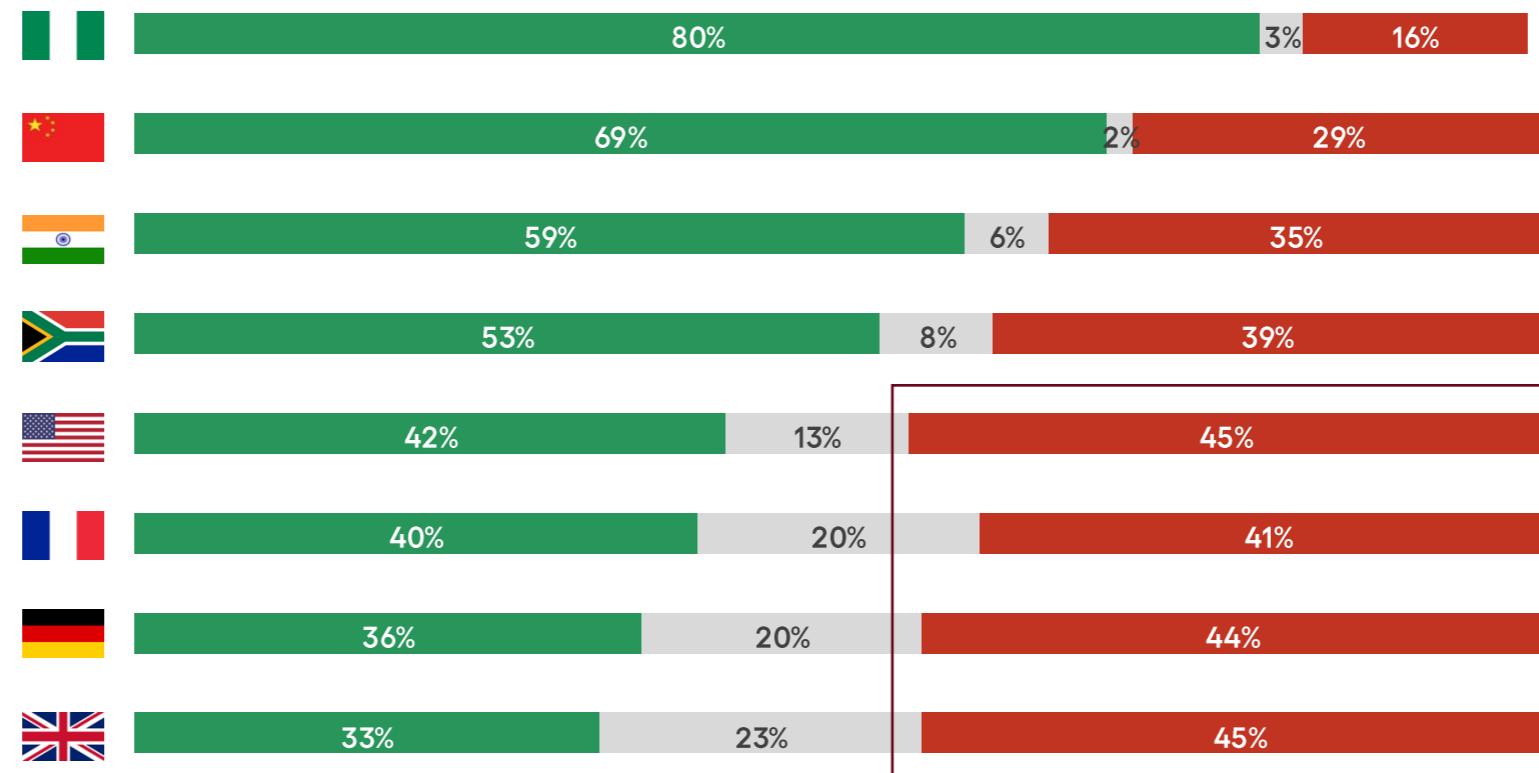
“
I think it's good when these people donate... Poor people are supported, and that is a good thing.

Germany

MORE SKEPTICISM IN HICS THAT PHILANTHROPISTS ARE FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING SOCIETY'S PRIORITIES

Views of Billionaire Philanthropy's Purpose

■ Address society's priorities ■ Don't know ■ Pursue their own interests



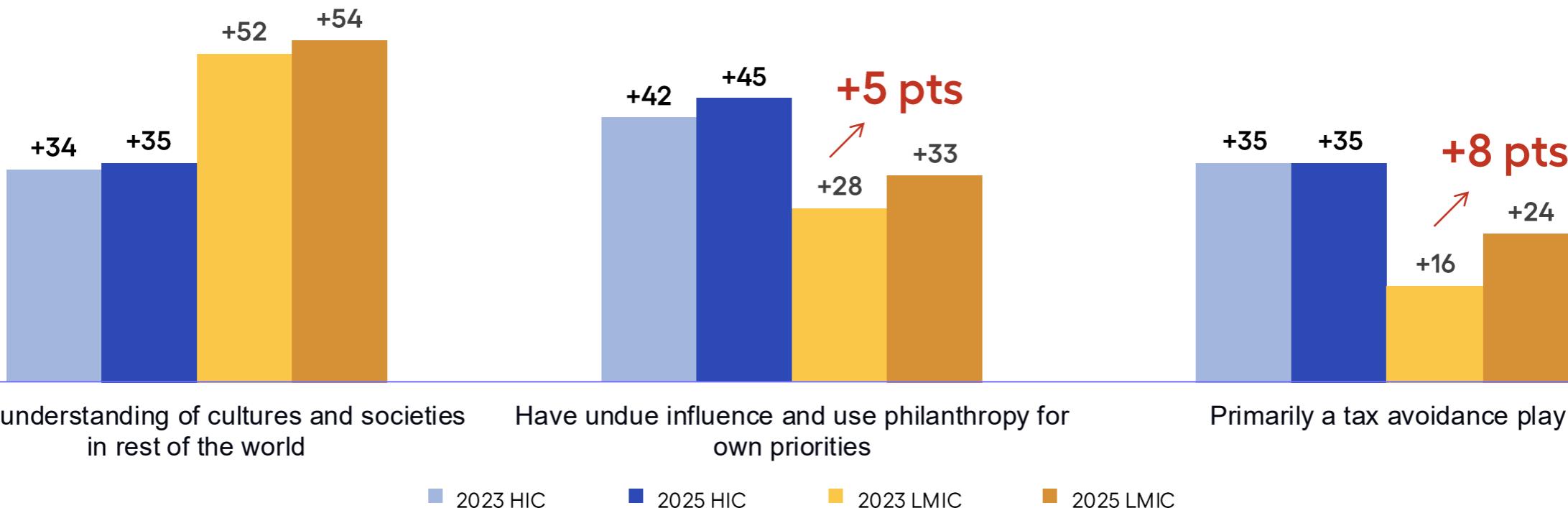
Philanthropy is mainly a way for wealthy people to contribute their resources to **address society's priorities**.

Philanthropy is mainly a way for wealthy people to **pursue their own interests** and priorities.

INDICATIONS THAT CRITICISMS OF PHILANTHROPISTS ARE GROWING IN LMICS

Criticisms About Billionaire Philanthropy

Net Difference Agree (% total agree – % total disagree)



THOSE WHO HOLD A NEGATIVE* VIEW OF THE WEALTHIEST GIVING AWAY THEIR MONEY BELIEVE:

Wealthy individuals are acting out of **self-interest**, seeking image boosts, tax benefits, or influence.

Motives are **not transparent**, leading to broad distrust. They question donor intentions, citing a lack of accountability and unclear decision-making across markets.

Philanthropy is **ineffective** or **symbolic**, failing to address real structural problems. Concerns about scale and impact surfaced repeatedly.

*Those who have a negative view account for 6% of respondents.

“
Most of their donations are for show – a vanity project rather than real concern for charity.

China

“
I think many do it for their image, not to genuinely help.

France

“
Some individuals are very generous... but they should be paying their share of taxes despite having significant wealth.

UK

“
I think there's always something in it for some of them.

Nigeria

“
Most wealthy people don't actually give; they just pretend to.

India

“
They have the means to help, but many only donate for tax advantages.

US

“
Some of the wealthiest people are only doing it for their image... They want to be seen as doing something, and after that those charities go back to struggling.

South Africa

“
They don't do it for good reasons, but simply because they have too much money.

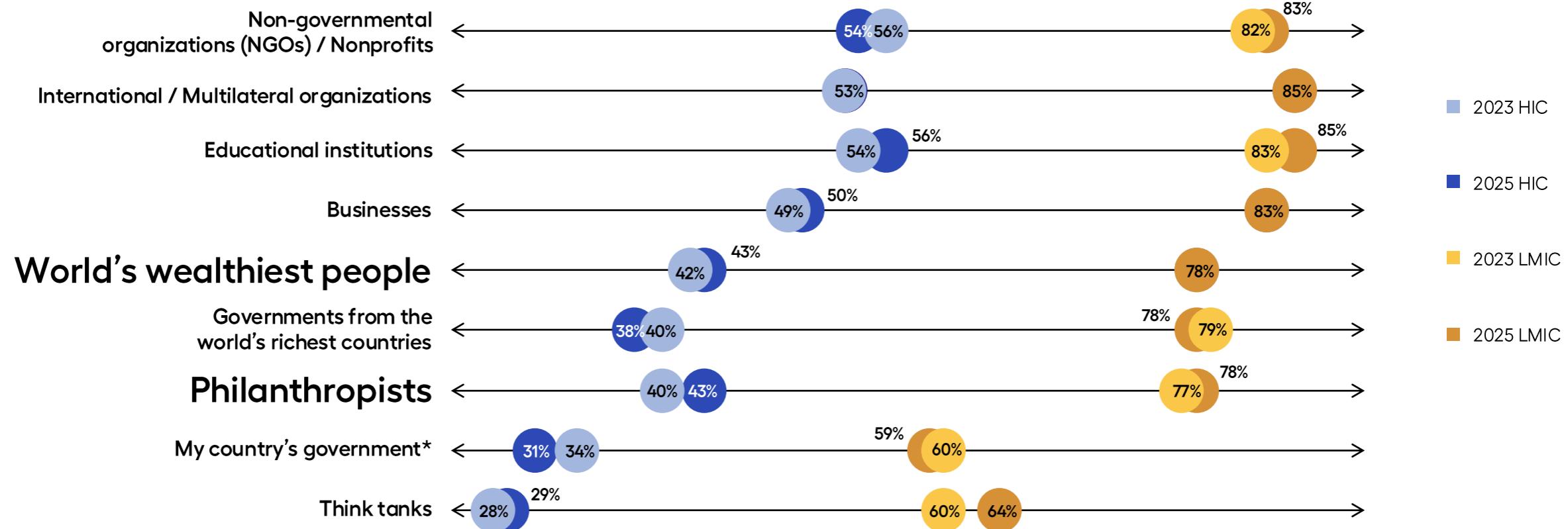
Germany

PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF PHILANTHROPISTS HAS NOT CHANGED SINCE 2023

Philanthropists are seen as less effective than NGOs, education, or business, but more effective than governments or think tanks

Effectiveness in Solving Society's Most Pressing Issues

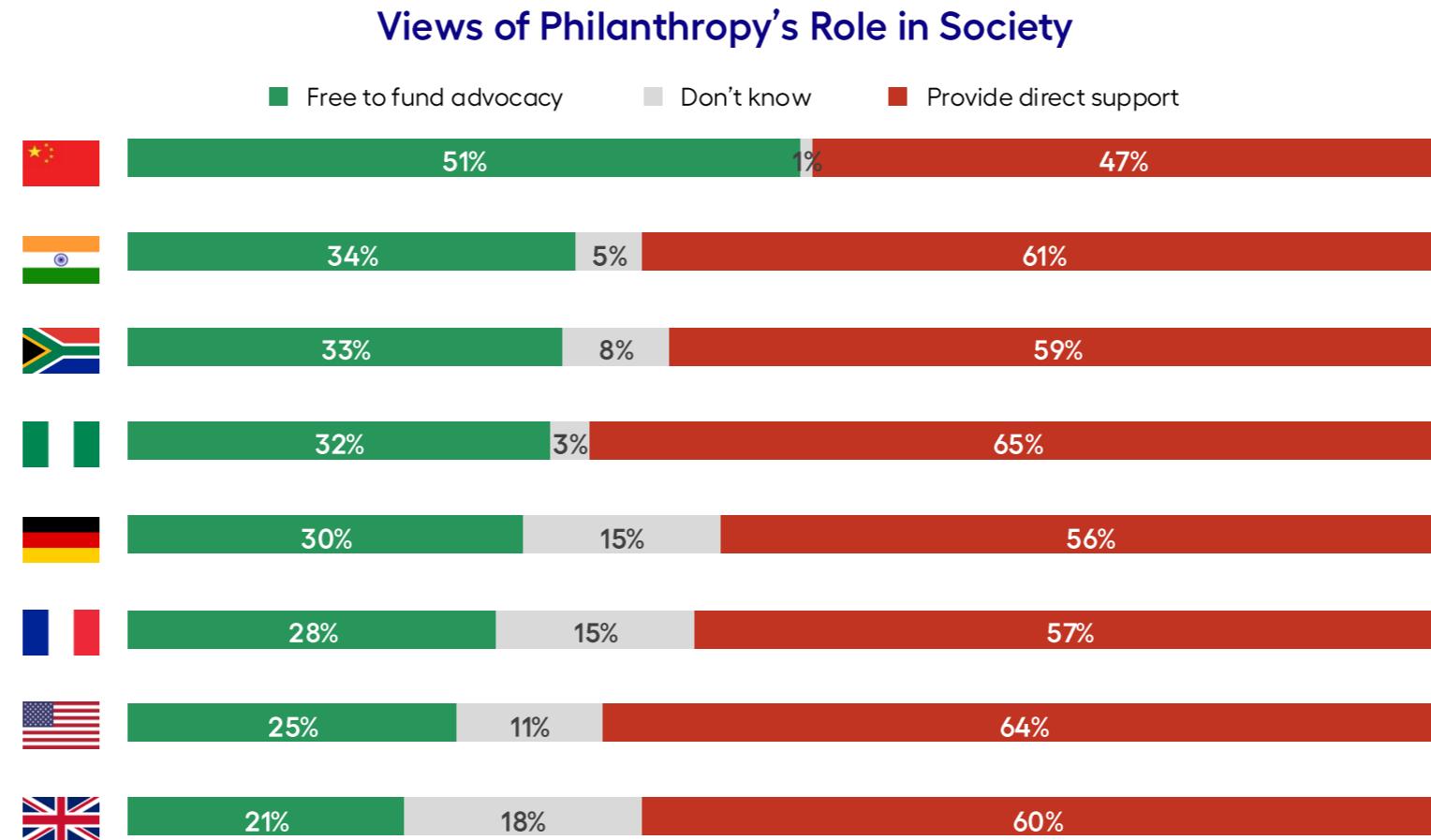
% Total Effective



CHAPTER 2

EXPECTATIONS OF PHILANTHROPY

MAJORITIES IN ALL MARKETS (EXCEPT CHINA) GENERALLY THINK PHILANTHROPISTS SHOULD AVOID POLICY ADVOCACY



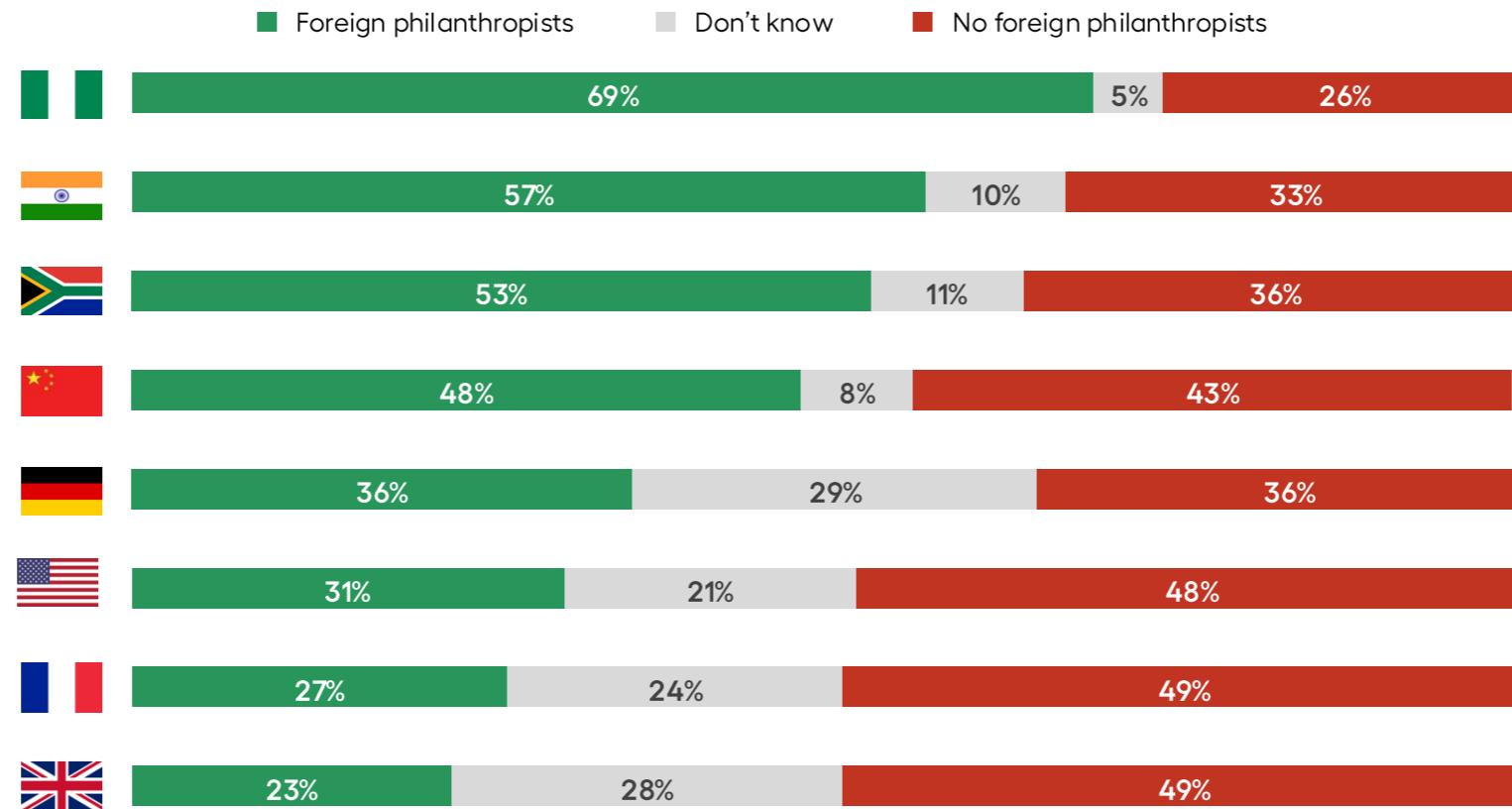
Philanthropies should be **free to fund advocacy and public campaigns that aim to change laws or policies** in addition to providing direct support for causes such as health, education, or food security.

Philanthropies should focus on **providing direct support for causes** such as healthcare, education, or food security, and **avoid activities that seek to influence laws or government policy**.

IF POLICY INFLUENCE HAPPENS, LMIC PUBLICS ARE MORE OPEN TO FOREIGN PHILANTHROPIC INVOLVEMENT

Views of Philanthropist's Role in Funding Policy Change

Foreign philanthropists should be free to fund activities that may lead to policy change in [YOUR COUNTRY].



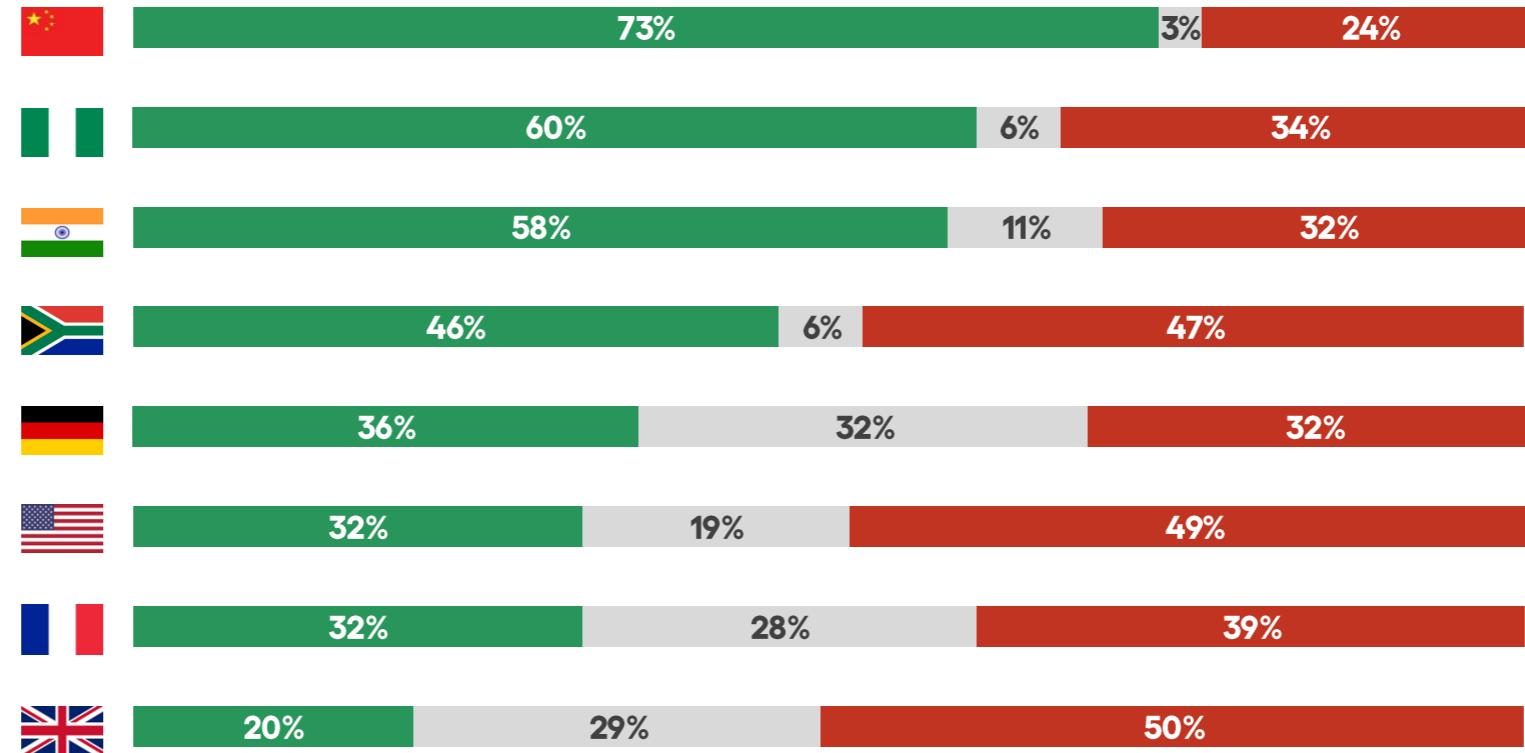
Only philanthropists in [YOUR COUNTRY] should be allowed to fund activities that may lead to policy change within my country.

LMICS ARE MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THE IMPACT OF AI ON PHILANTHROPY; GREATER UNCERTAINTY IN HICS

The UK, US, and South Africa are particularly concerned about AI's impacts

Views of AI's Impact on Philanthropy

■ AI will do more good than harm ■ Don't know ■ AI will do more harm than good



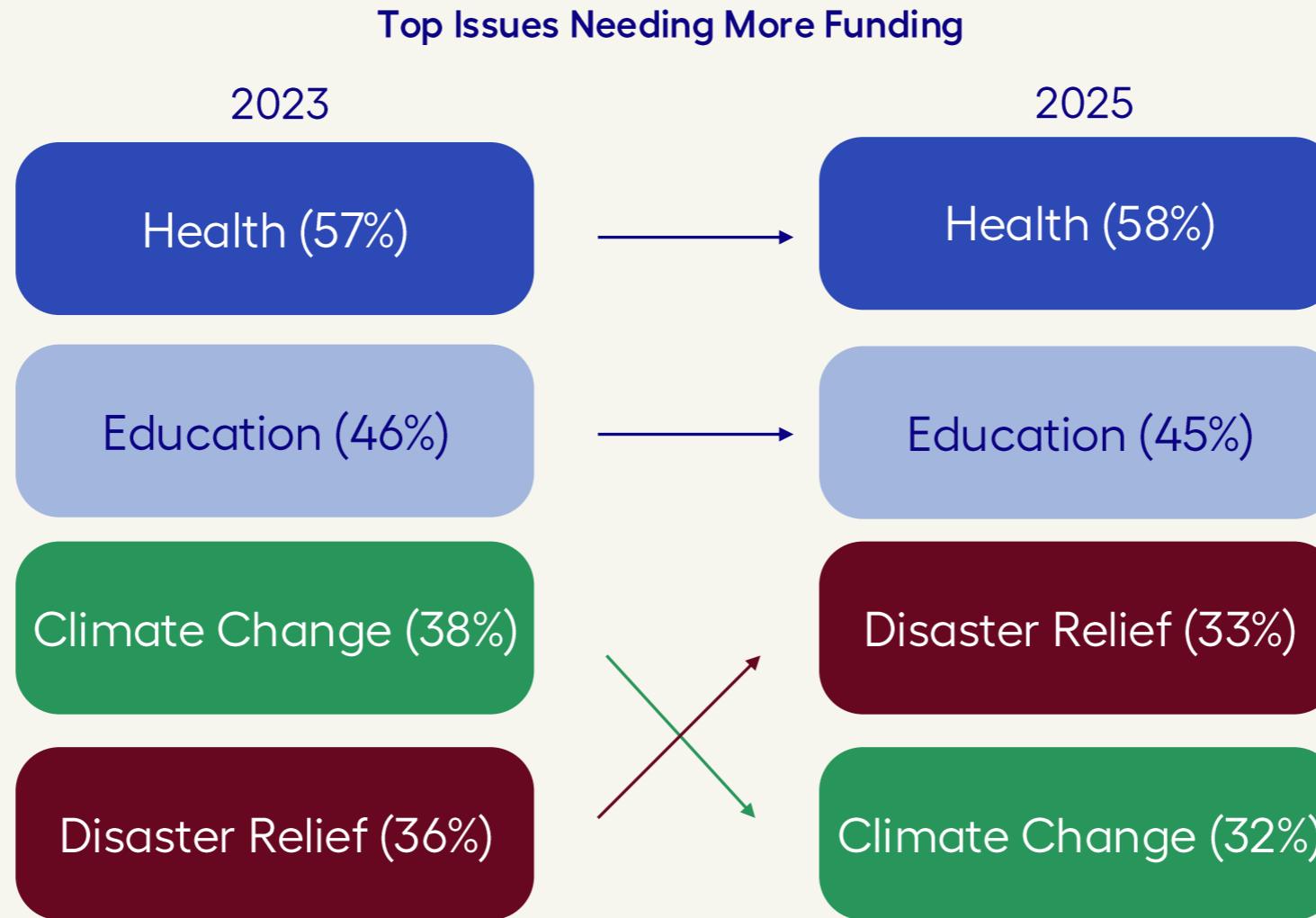
AI will do more good than harm for philanthropy.

It can help identify effective programs and allocate funds more efficiently, using data to make decisions faster and more fairly than **humans alone**.

AI will do more harm than good for philanthropy.

It could replace human judgment and empathy in giving, introduce bias in funding decisions because it is based on historical grantmaking data, and allow wealthy donors to use technology to advance their own interests rather than the public good.

HEALTH REMAINS THE TOP PRIORITY FOR FUNDING, WHILE CLIMATE IS DEPRIORITYIZED GLOBALLY



CHAPTER 3

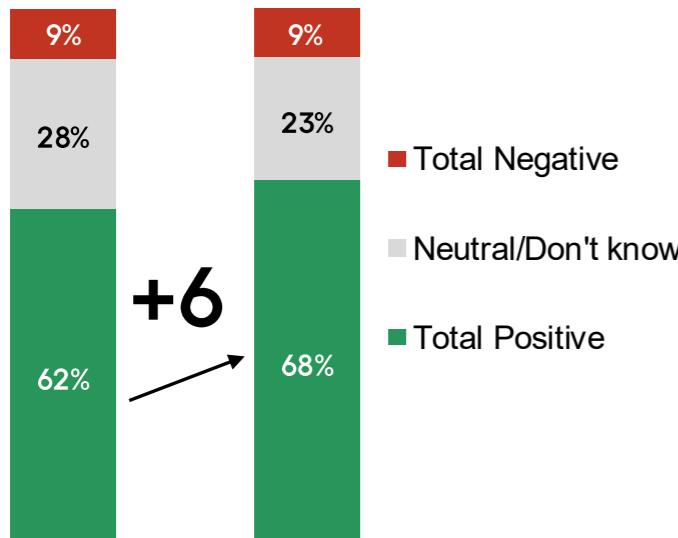
SIGNALS FROM KEY PUBLIC CONSTITUENCIES



WHO IS DRIVING CHANGE IN US PERCEPTIONS?

In the US, rising support is being driven by groups that see philanthropy as increasingly relevant and effective in the current uncertain environment, even as scrutiny of motives and power persist

Positive perceptions
of billionaire
philanthropy have
increased since 2023



HHI \$100K+ (+12)



Women (+10)



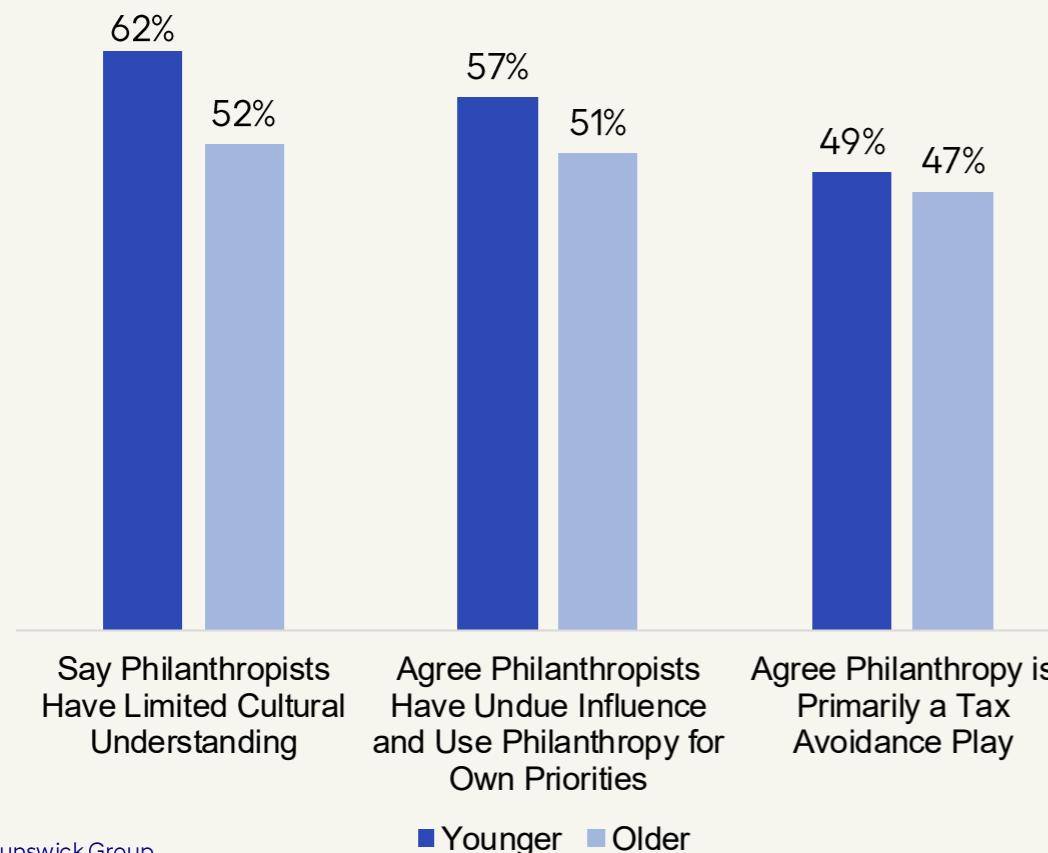
Younger Adults (+9)



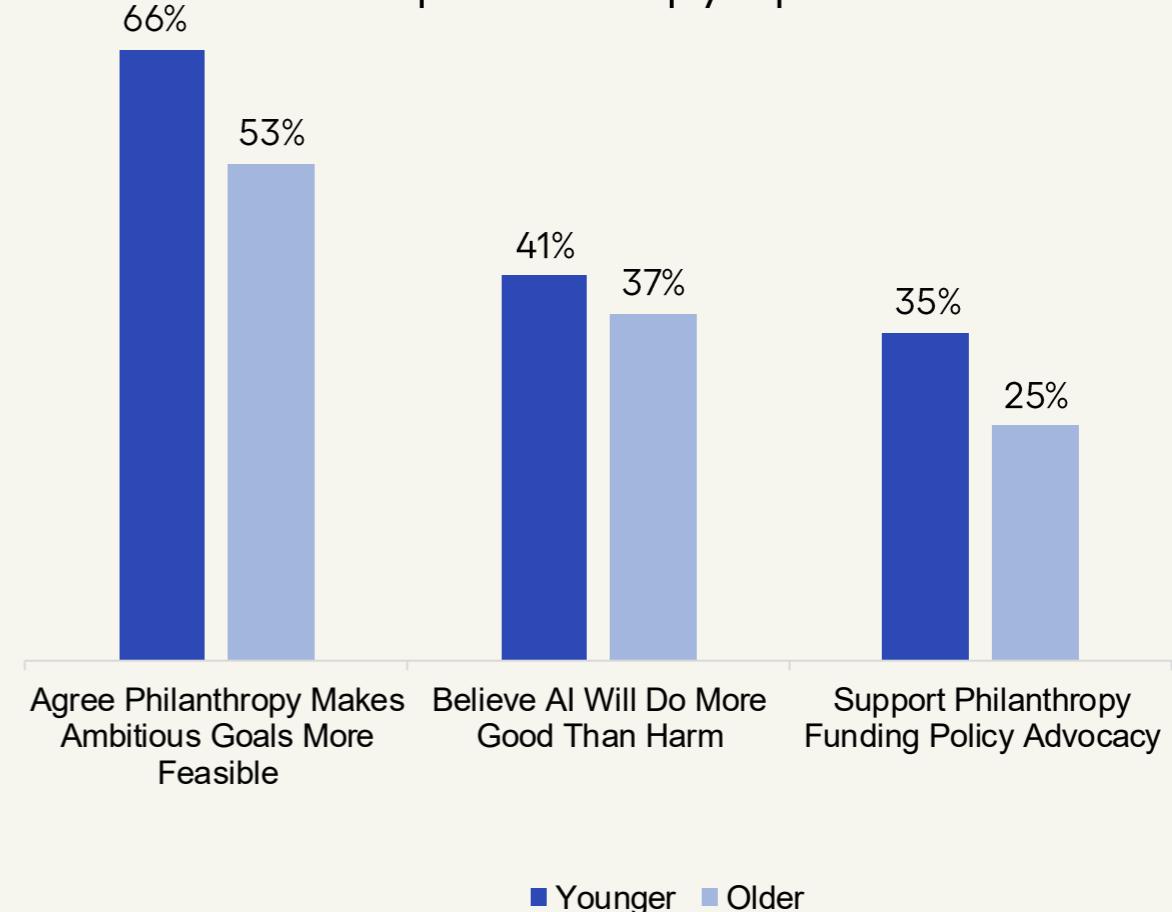
Left-Leaning (+8)

YOUNGER ADULTS SHOW GREATER OVERALL SCRUTINY YET OPENNESS TO PHILANTHROPY'S POTENTIAL

Younger people are more likely than older people to agree with critiques of billionaire giving...

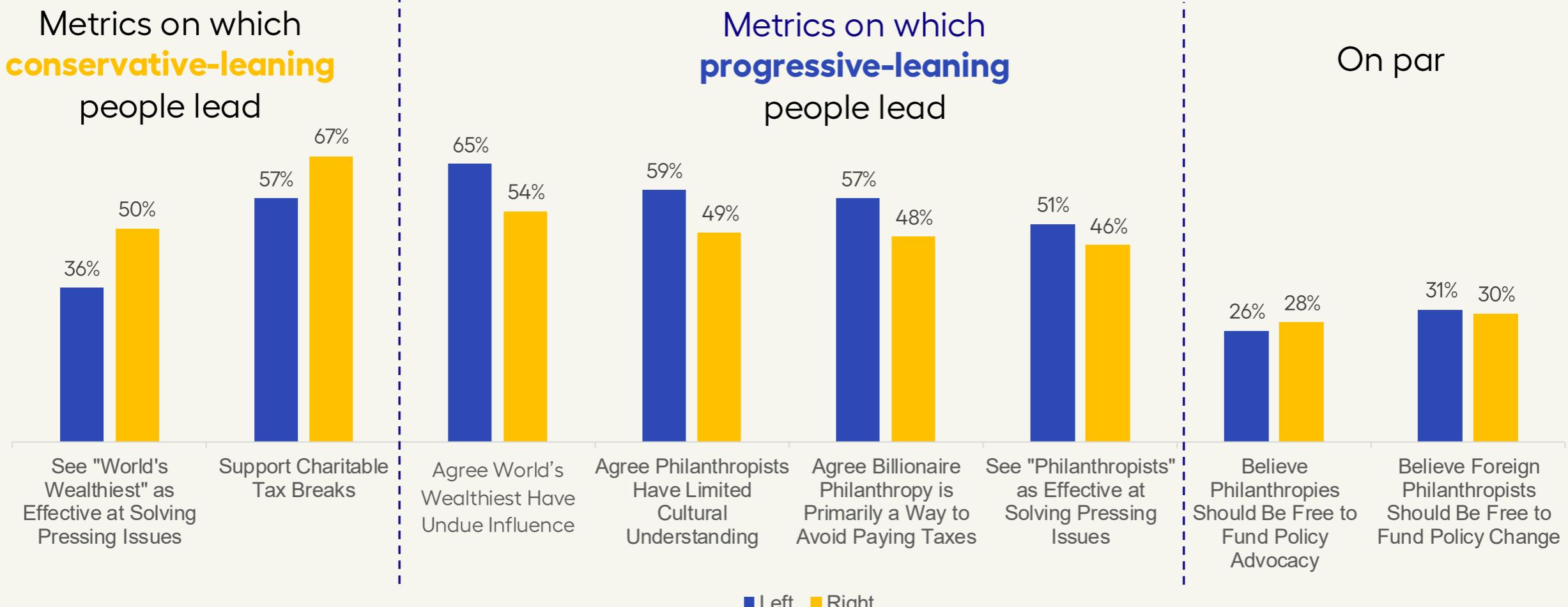


...But they are also more open to philanthropy's potential



POLITICAL LEANING DIFFERENCES (HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES)

EXPECTED PARTISAN DIFFERENCES EXIST, BUT BOTH SIDES DRAW THE SAME LIMITS ON PHILANTHROPIC INFLUENCE



IMPLICATIONS FOR GIVING

1 Legitimacy comes from <i>how and why</i> you give, not <i>that</i> you give (or how much)	<p>Public support for philanthropy remains remarkably robust, but it is conditional. Trust is earned through clear intent, alignment with shared priorities, and visible impact rather than generosity alone.</p>
2 Anchor ambition in problems people recognize as real and urgent	<p>Health and education continue to anchor legitimacy across markets, signaling that even ambitious or innovative giving must connect clearly to tangible, everyday human outcomes.</p>
3 Acknowledge the boundaries of philanthropy's role and its responsibilities within the national ecosystem	<p>Most publics, particularly in high-income countries, support philanthropy as a complement to society but remain wary of donor-led policy influence without clear boundaries and local grounding.</p>
4 Technology and AI heighten, rather than solve, trust questions	<p>Public uncertainty around AI reflects concerns about distance and accountability, reinforcing expectations for human oversight, explainability, and clear responsibility in philanthropic decision-making.</p>
5 Younger audiences are not anti-philanthropy - they are skeptical of its power but open to its potential	<p>Younger adults pair sharper critiques of billionaire giving with openness to philanthropy's potential, setting higher expectations for transparency, participation, and fairness over time.</p>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Brunswick advises philanthropic funders, educational institutions, multilateral organizations, and NGOs on communications and stakeholder engagement, bringing together global expertise in policy, geopolitics, research, and campaigns to help solve complex problems at scale.



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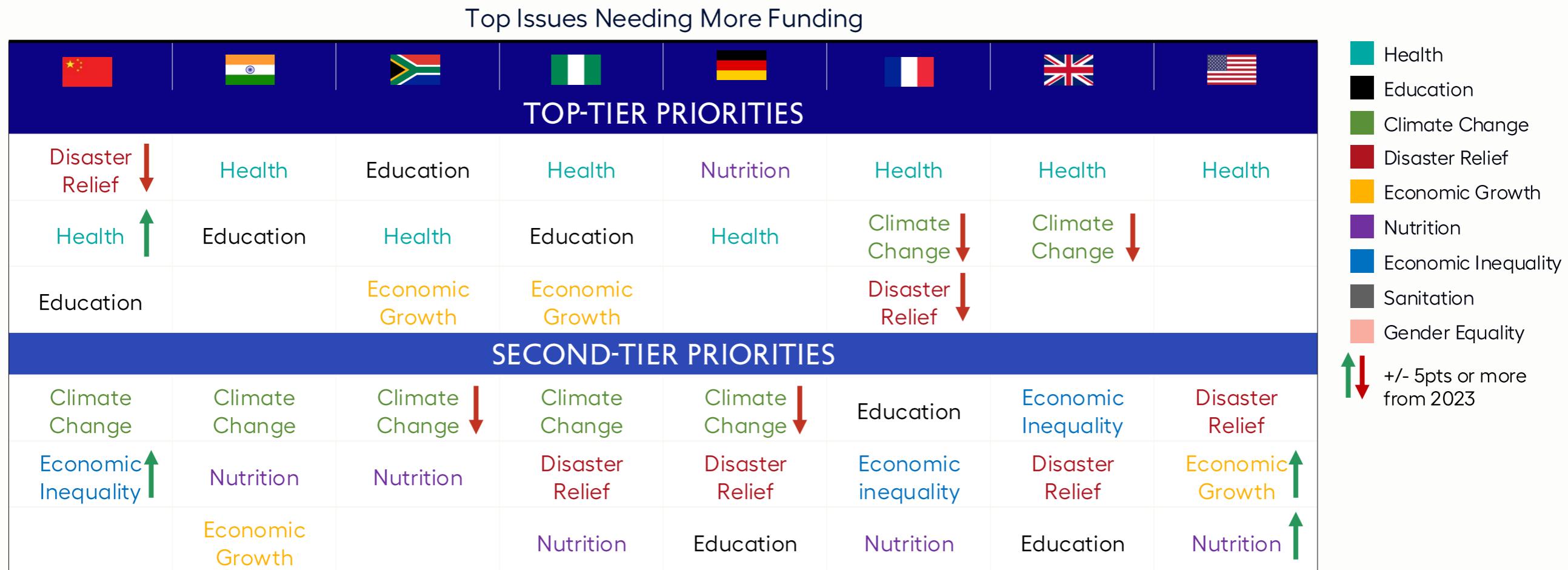
APPENDIX

FULL TEXT OF STATEMENTS TESTED

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about philanthropy?

Fund complex and innovative approaches	The world's wealthiest philanthropists have a unique ability to fund complex and innovative approaches to solving the world's problems.
Makes ambitious goals more feasible	The influence of the world's wealthiest philanthropists makes ambitious goals like ending global poverty and strengthening education and health systems more feasible.
Fills the gaps left by governments	Private philanthropy shares common goals with largest multinational organizations, like the World Health Organization and the Red Cross. As countries decrease their contributions to these organizations, philanthropy fills the gaps left by governments.
Little understanding of cultures and societies in rest of the world	The world's wealthiest philanthropists mostly come from developed countries. They have little understanding of cultures and societies in rest of the world, which limits their ability to fix many global problems.
Have undue influence and use philanthropy for own priorities	The world's wealthiest individuals have undue influence. They use philanthropy for their own priorities.
Primarily a tax avoidance play	Philanthropy is primarily a way for the world's wealthiest individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

ACROSS GEOGRAPHIES, HEALTH AND EDUCATION ARE THE TOP ISSUES TO FUND; CLIMATE CHANGE IS DOWN



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