

ASIAN  BAROMETER

A Comparative Survey of

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Working Paper Series: No. 119

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Liberals and Conservatives:
Understanding Political Polarization
in Southeast Asia

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The Asian Barometer (ABS) is an applied research program on public opinion on political values, democracy, and governance around the region. The regional network encompasses research teams from thirteen East Asian political systems (Japan, Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia), and five South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal). Together, this regional survey network covers virtually all major political systems in the region, systems that have experienced different trajectories of regime evolution and are currently at different stages of political transition.

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The topics covered in the Series range from country-specific assessment of values change and democratic development, region-wide comparative analysis of citizen participation, popular orientation toward democracy and evaluation of quality of governance, and discussion of survey methodology and data analysis strategies.

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Liberals and Conservatives: Understanding Political Polarization in Southeast Asia

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Research Questions



- 1) Are political values in Southeast Asia polarized? Examine distribution key ideological areas.
- 2) Who are the liberals and conservatives? Examine the profile of those on ideological poles
- 3) Does political values help us understand partisan political polarization in Southeast Asia?

Southeast Asian & Ideological Difference

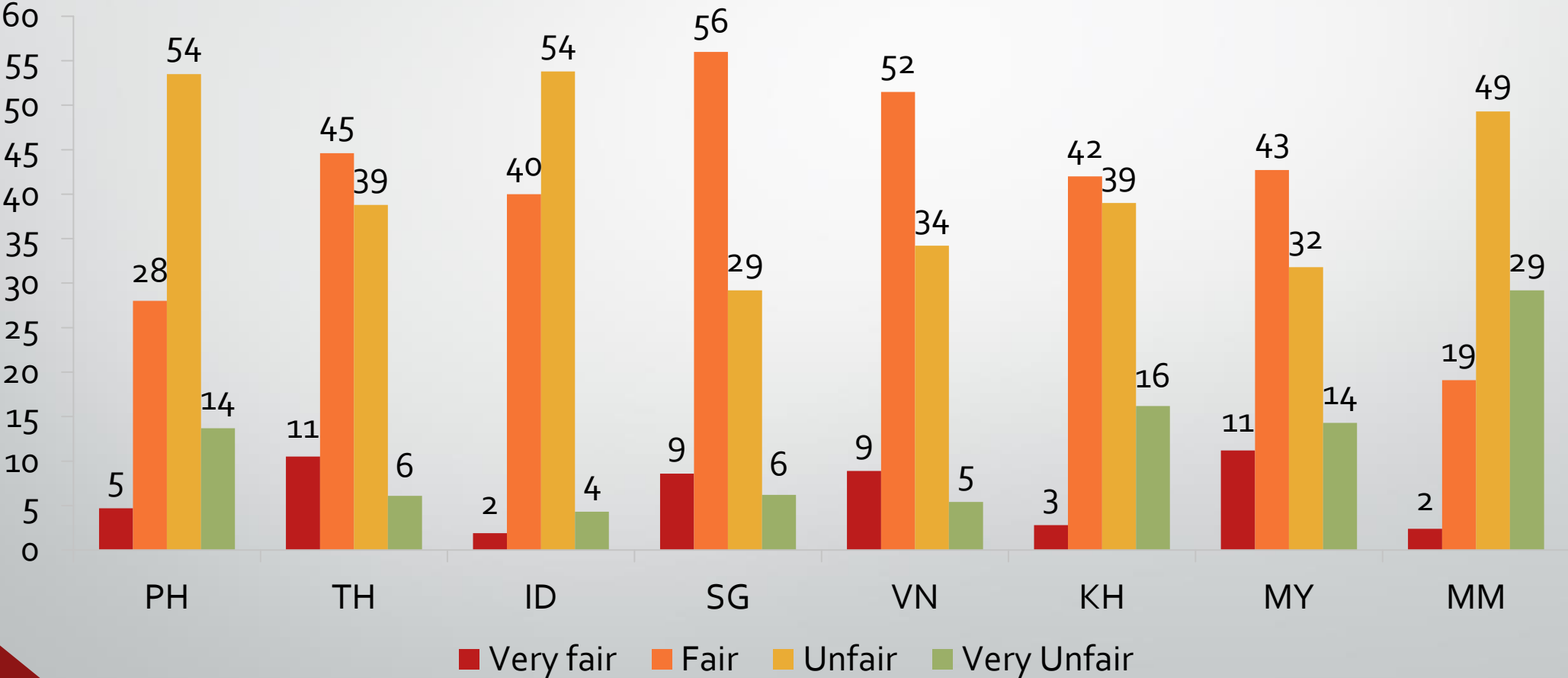
- 1. **Equality:** How fair do you think income distribution is in the country?
- 2. **Secularism:** The government should consult religious authorities when interpreting the laws
- 3. **Rule of law:** When the country is facing a difficult situation, it is ok for the government to disregard the law in order to deal with the situation'
- 4. **Corruption:** How widespread do you think corruption and bribe-taking are in the national government?
- 5. **Preference for democracy**
 - 5.1 Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government
 - 5.2 If you had to choose between democracy and economic development, which would you say is more important?
 - 5.3 If you had to choose between reducing economic inequality and protecting political freedom, which would you say is more important?
- 6. **Paternalism and Role of Government**
 - 6.1 Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions
 - 6.2 It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences between people with high income and those with low incomes
- 7. **Anti-Globalization (Protectionism):** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We should protect our farmers and workers by limiting the import of foreign goods"

Findings: An Ideological Divide?

- 1. **Equality:** Some splits, but not consistently across countries
- 2. **Secularism:** Shocking lopsided support for non-secular government across the region.
- 3. **Rule of law:** More polarization over rule of law
- 4. **Corruption:** Similar polarization over corruption
- 5. **Preference for democracy:** Weight toward preference for democracy, only in Singapore and Philippines more split
- 6. **Paternalism and Role of Government**
 - 6.1 Divisions in some countries, Philippines and Thailand, but not others Indonesia and Myanmar
 - 6.2 Majorities support government interventions
- 7. **Anti-Globalization (Protectionism):** Region is highly protectionist, anti-globalization

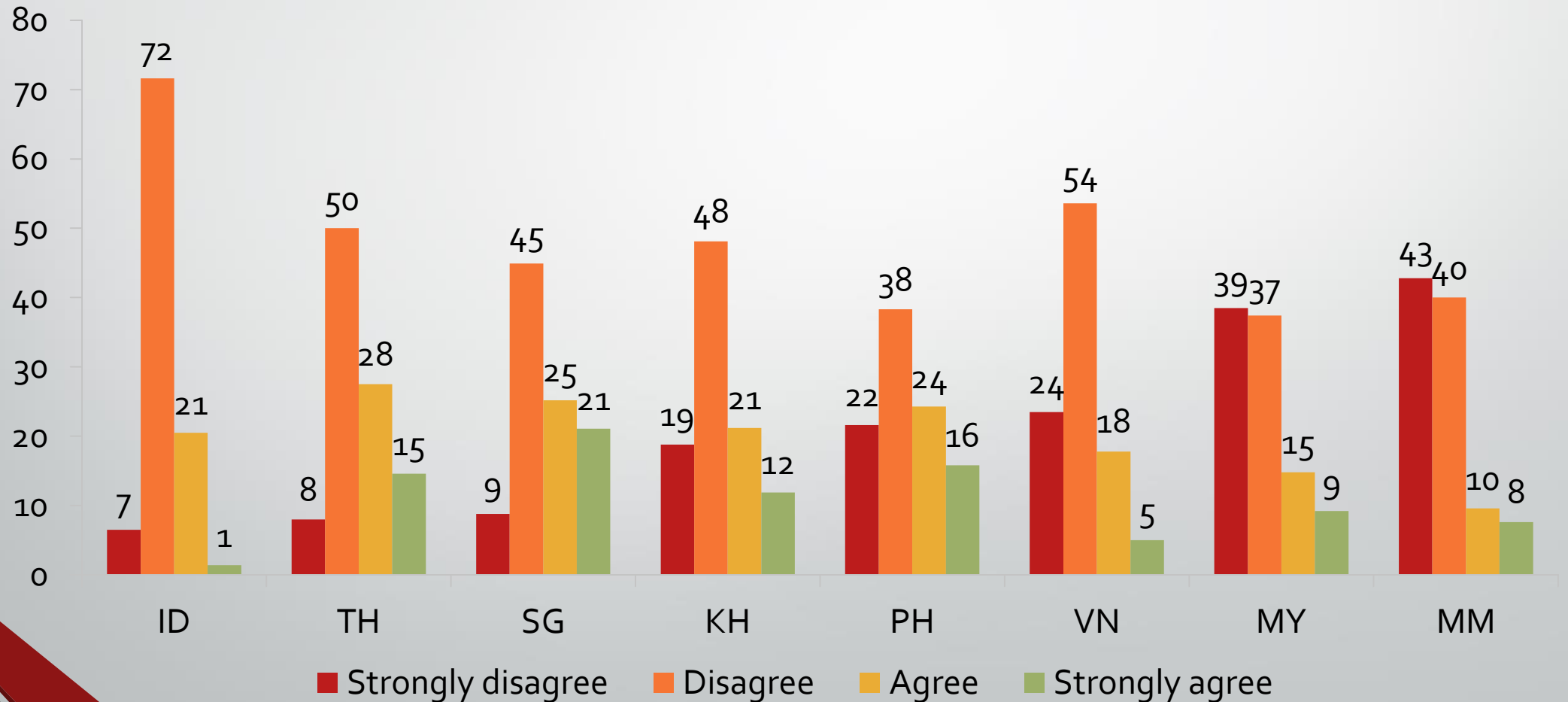
Some splits, but not consistently across countries

Equality (Perception of Income Equality)



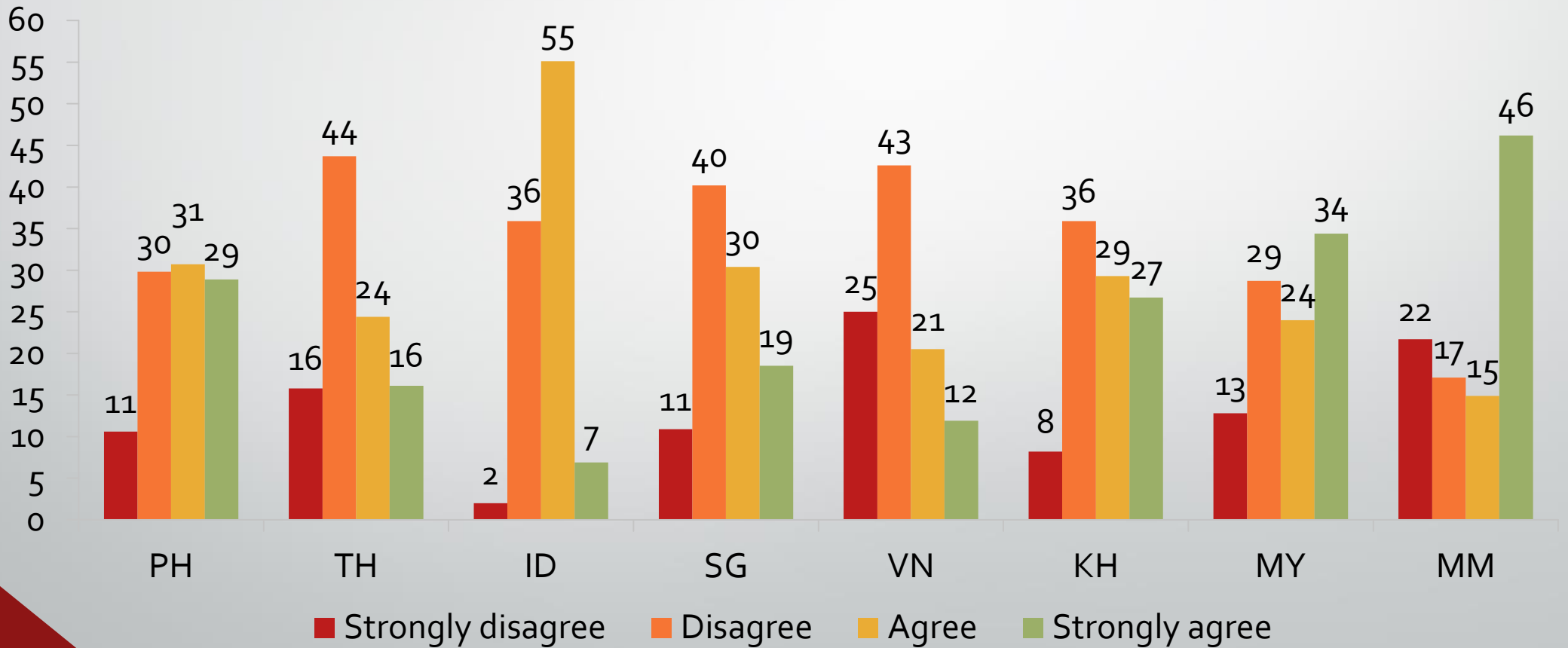
Worrying lopsided support for non-secular government across region

Secularism



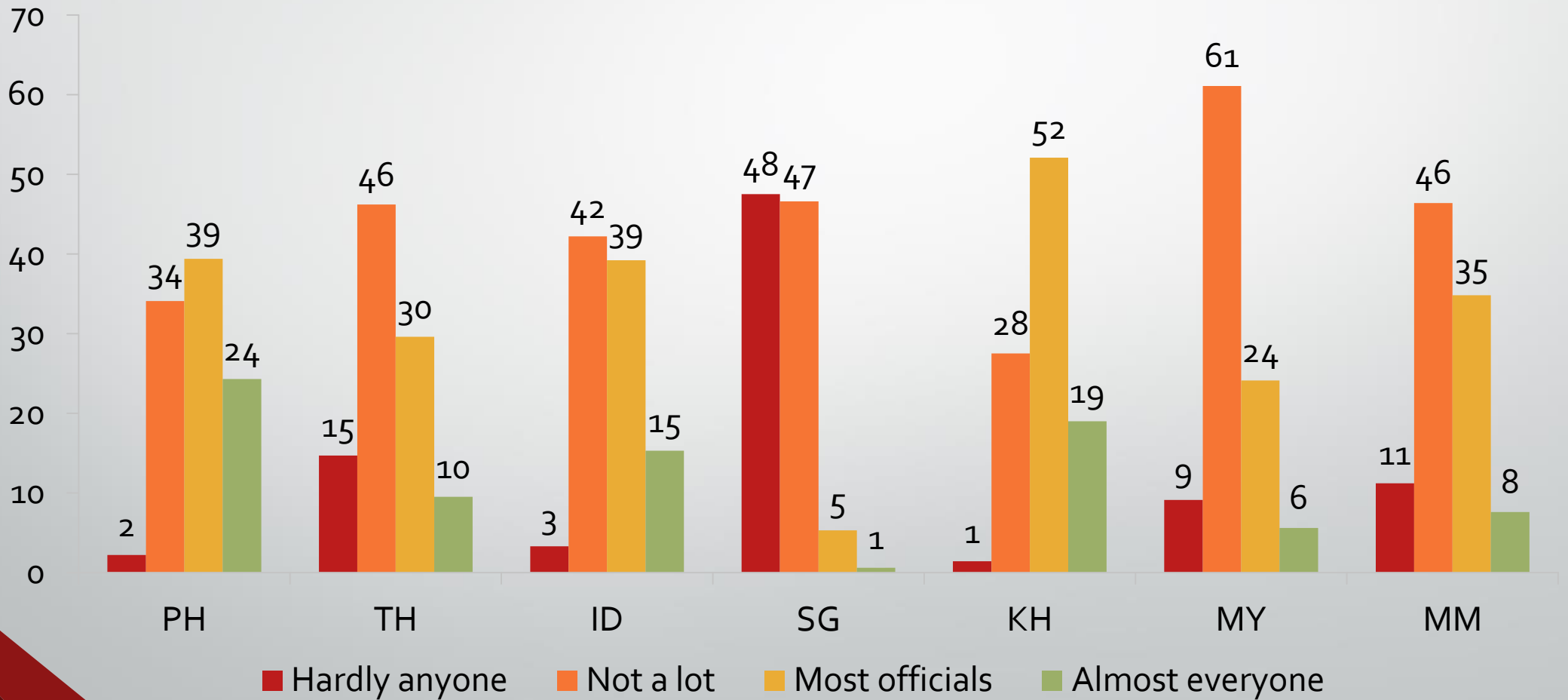
More polarization over rule of law

Rule of Law



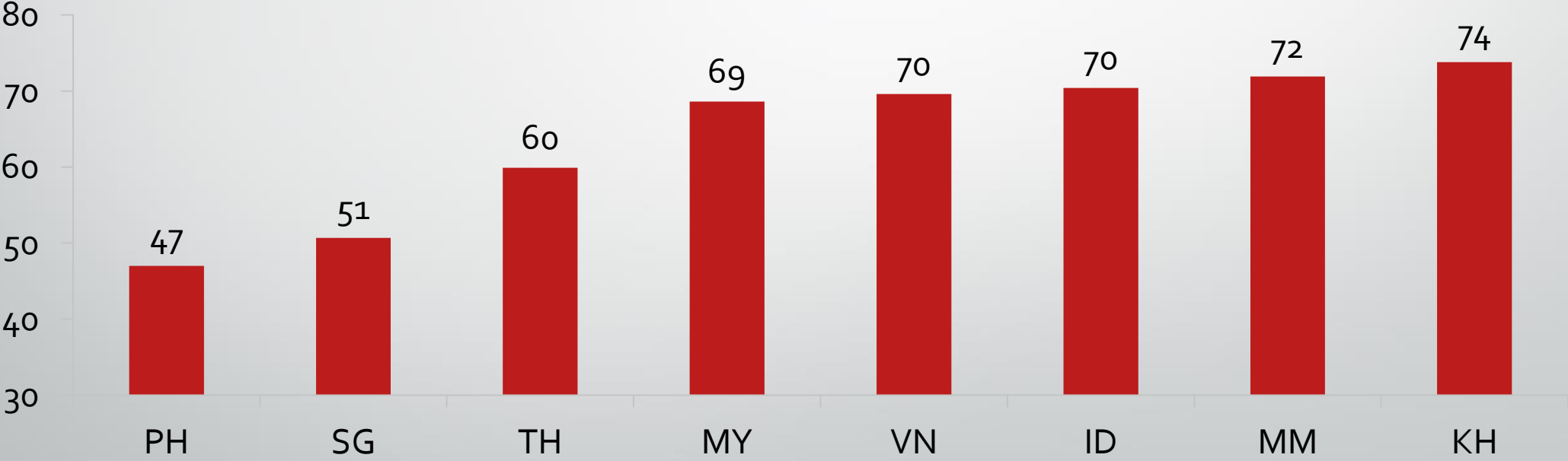
Similar polarization over corruption

Corruption in National Government



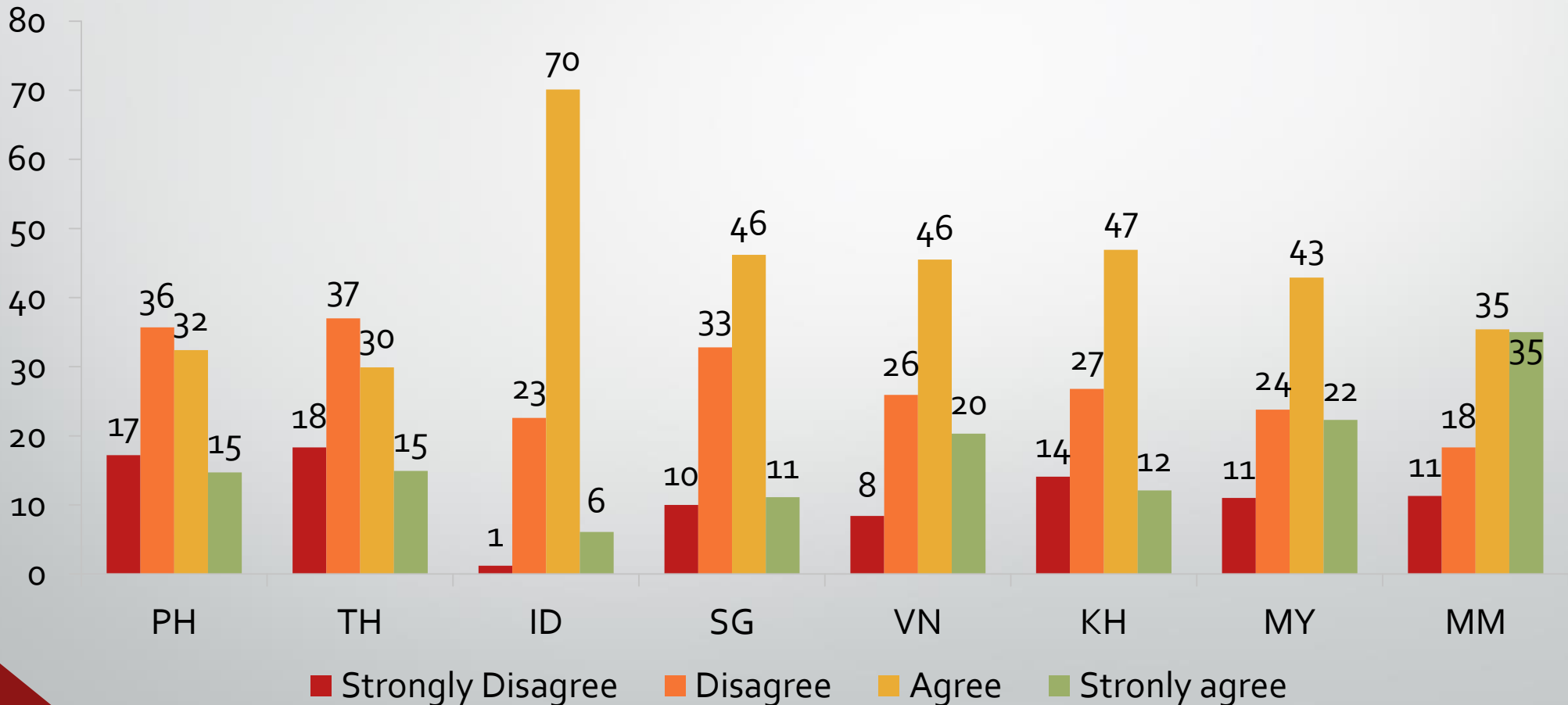
Weight toward preference for democracy, only in Singapore and Philippines more split

Preference for Democracy



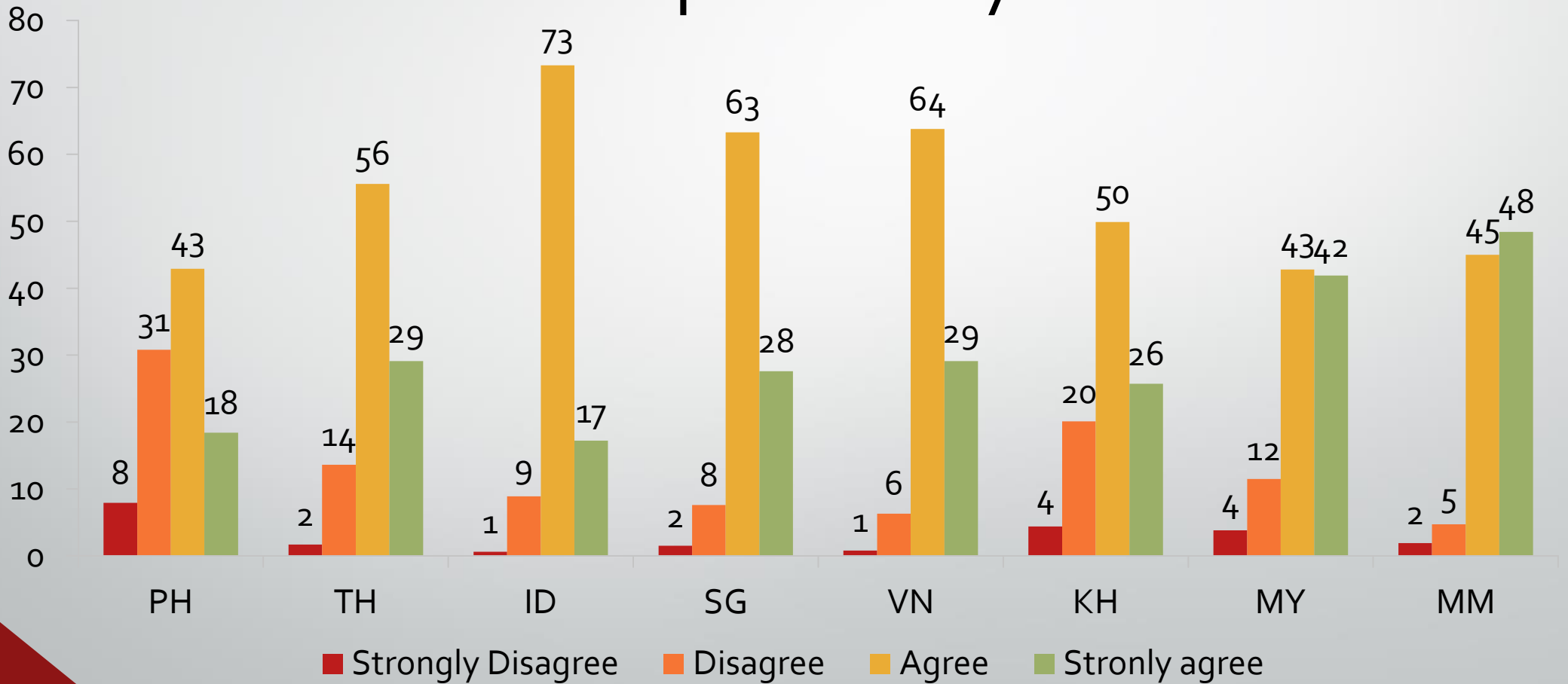
Divisions in some countries, Philippines and Thailand, but not others Indonesia and Myanmar

Paternalism (Leader as Head of Family)



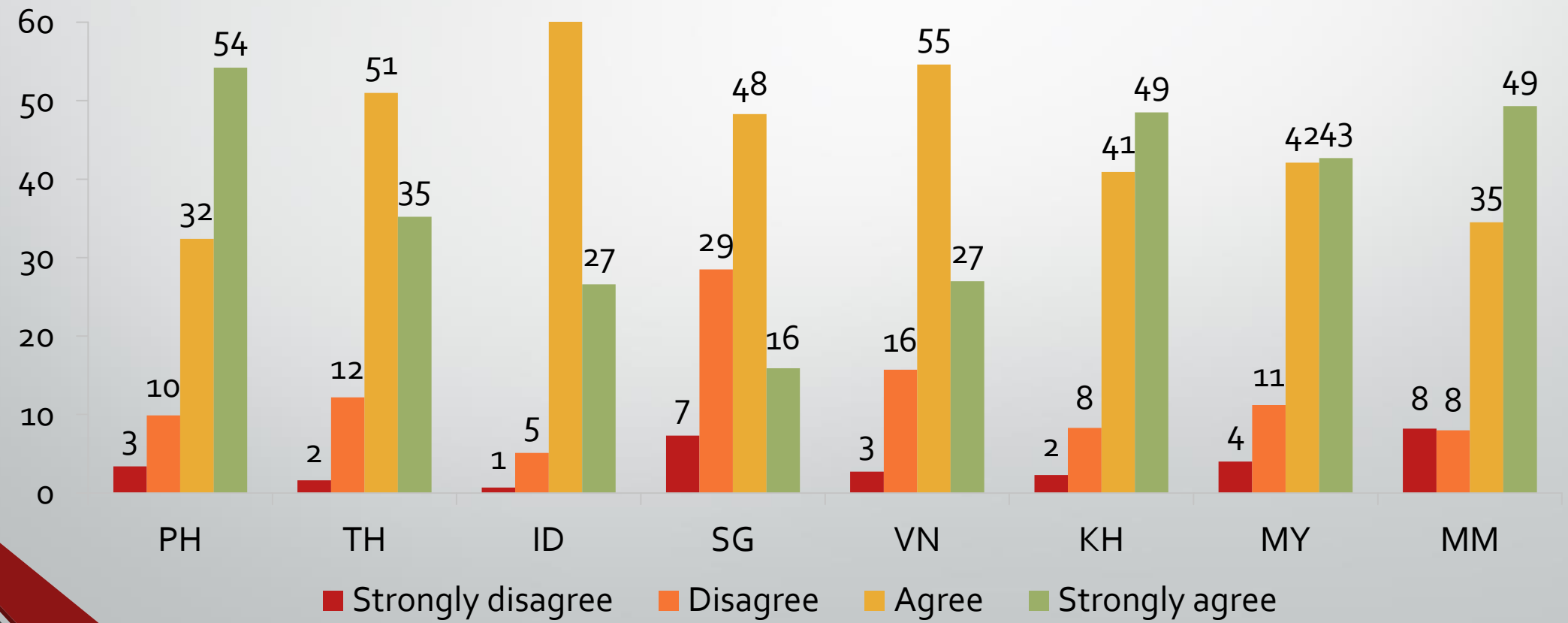
Majorities support government interventions

Reducing Inequality is Government's Responsibility



Region is highly protectionist, anti-globalization

Anti-Globalization (Protectionism)



Who are Liberals and Conservatives?



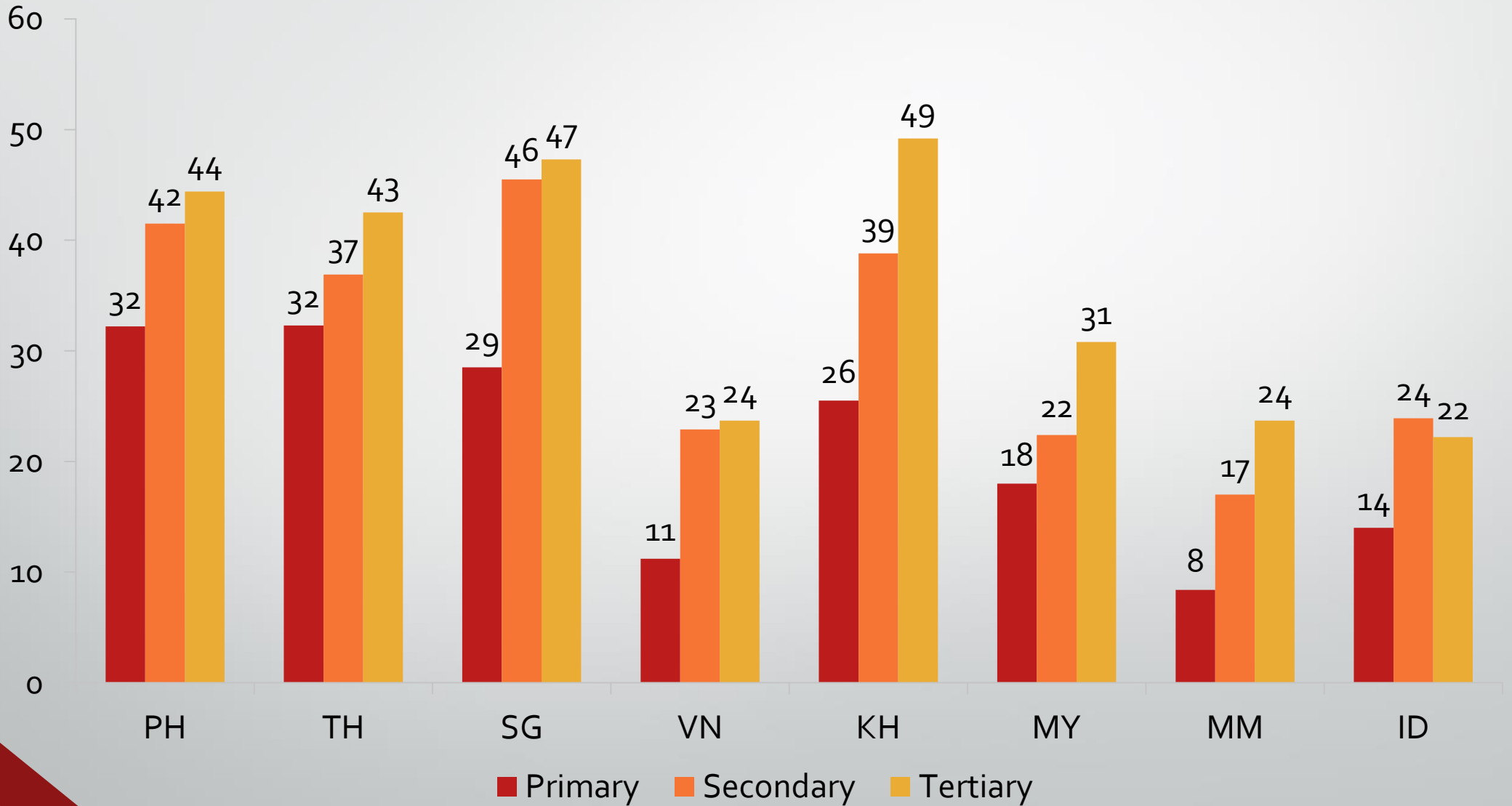
Analysis:

- Use of latent class analysis on ideological dimensions distinguishing traits of conservatives and liberals.

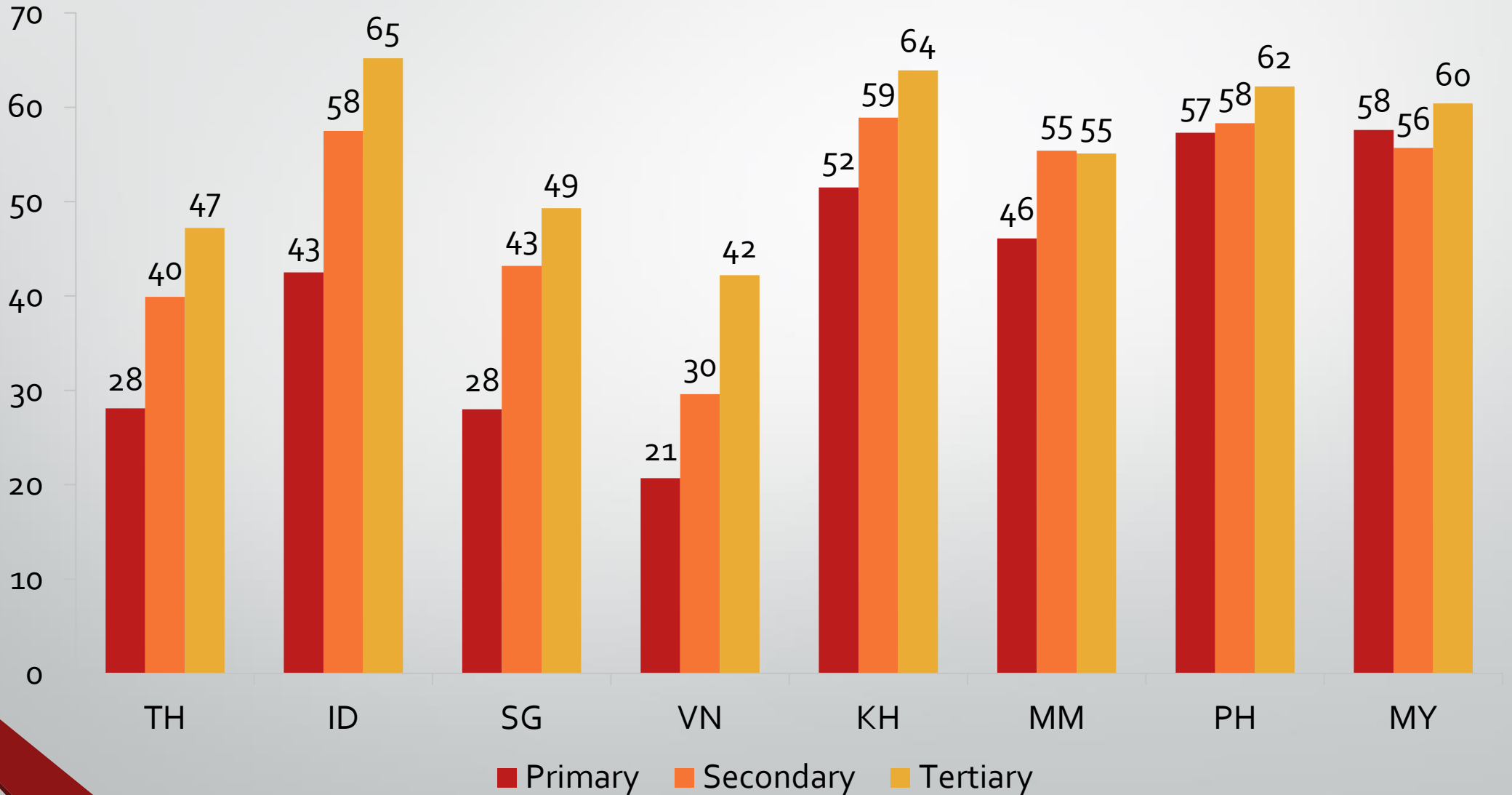
Findings.

- Education: More educated are liberals, except Indonesia
- Age: Youth are not necessarily more liberal. More liberal youth only in Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore
- Region: Urbanites, in general, more liberal, except Indonesia and Myanmar
- Income: Less affluent more liberal, exception in Vietnam and Philippines

Secularism by Education Level



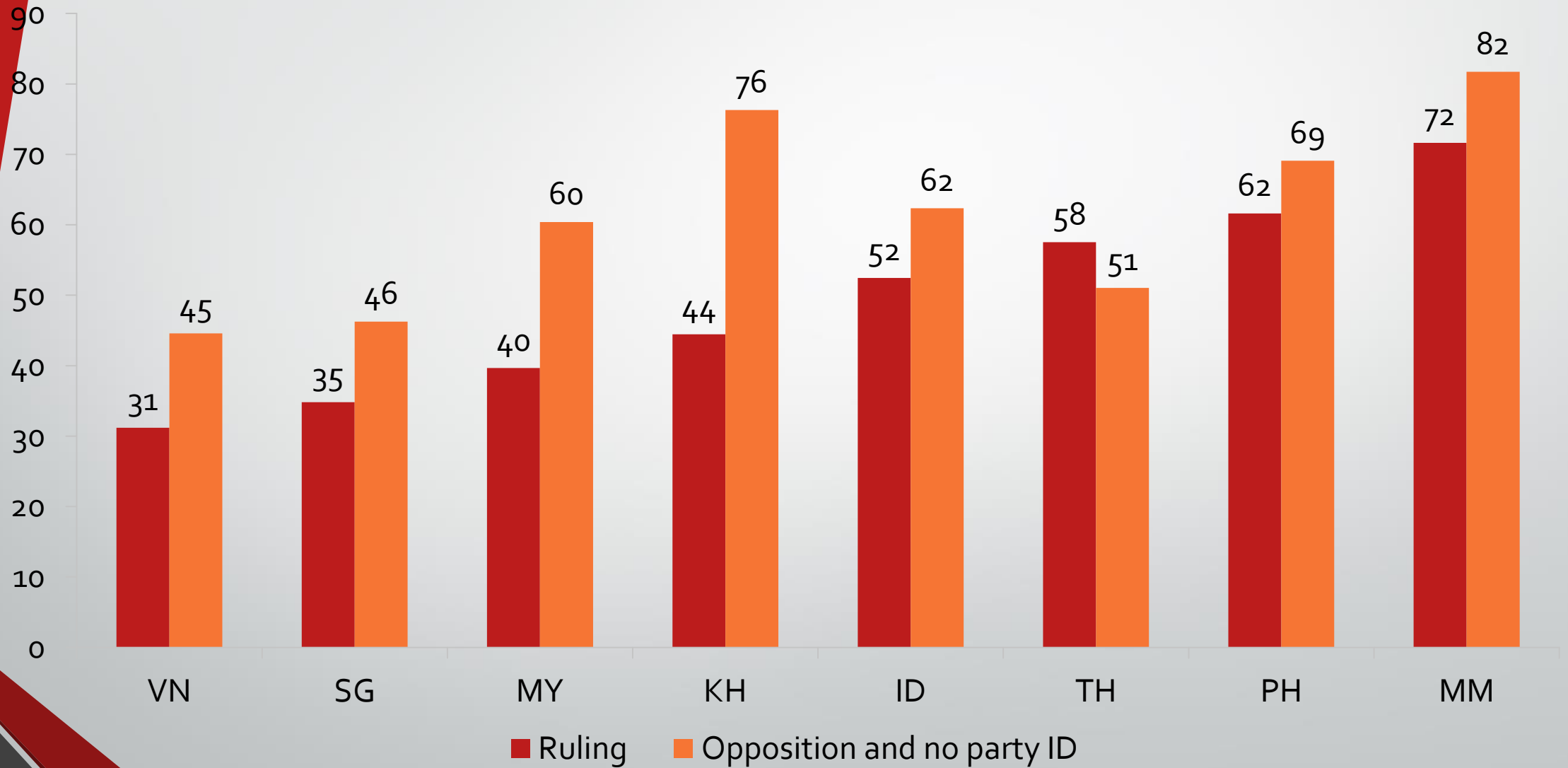
Rule of Law by Education



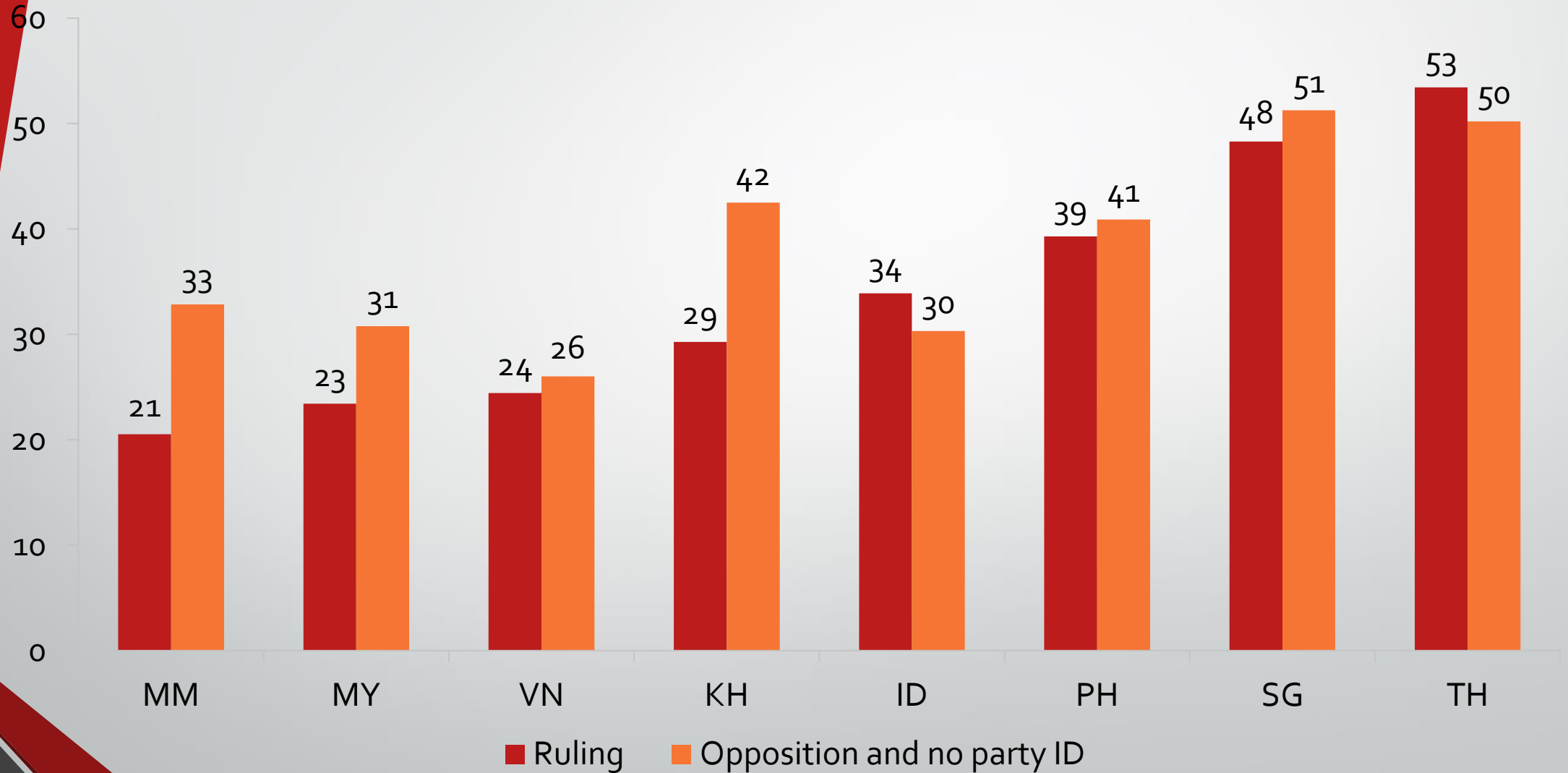
Political Ideology and Partisan Political Polarization

- ***Expected Findings: Ideology Supporting the Partisan Divide***
- Income Distribution: Opposition and those without party ID are more likely to perceive income distribution unfair, except in Thailand.
- Secularism: Supporters of the opposition and those without party ID are more likely to be pro-secularism, except Indonesia and Thailand.
- Rule of Law: Supporters of the opposition and those without party ID are more likely to support rule of law, except Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia.
- Corruption: Supporters of the opposition and those without party ID are more likely to think most government officials at the national level are corrupt, except Indonesia where there is no difference.
- Paternalism Identifiers of the ruling parties are more likely to support paternalism, except Thailand and the Philippines. Identifiers of the ruling parties are more likely to support government intervention, except Cambodia and the Philippines, where there is no difference.
- Anti-globalization: Identifiers of the ruling parties are more likely to support protectionism, except Singapore and the Philippines.
- ***Interesting findings: Evaluating the Questions in Their Contexts***
- Preference for Democracy: There are no significant differences between people with different party IDs, except the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, where the supporters of the ruling parties are more likely to prefer democracy. But: Supporters of the opposition and those without party ID are more likely to prefer democracy to economic development, except Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

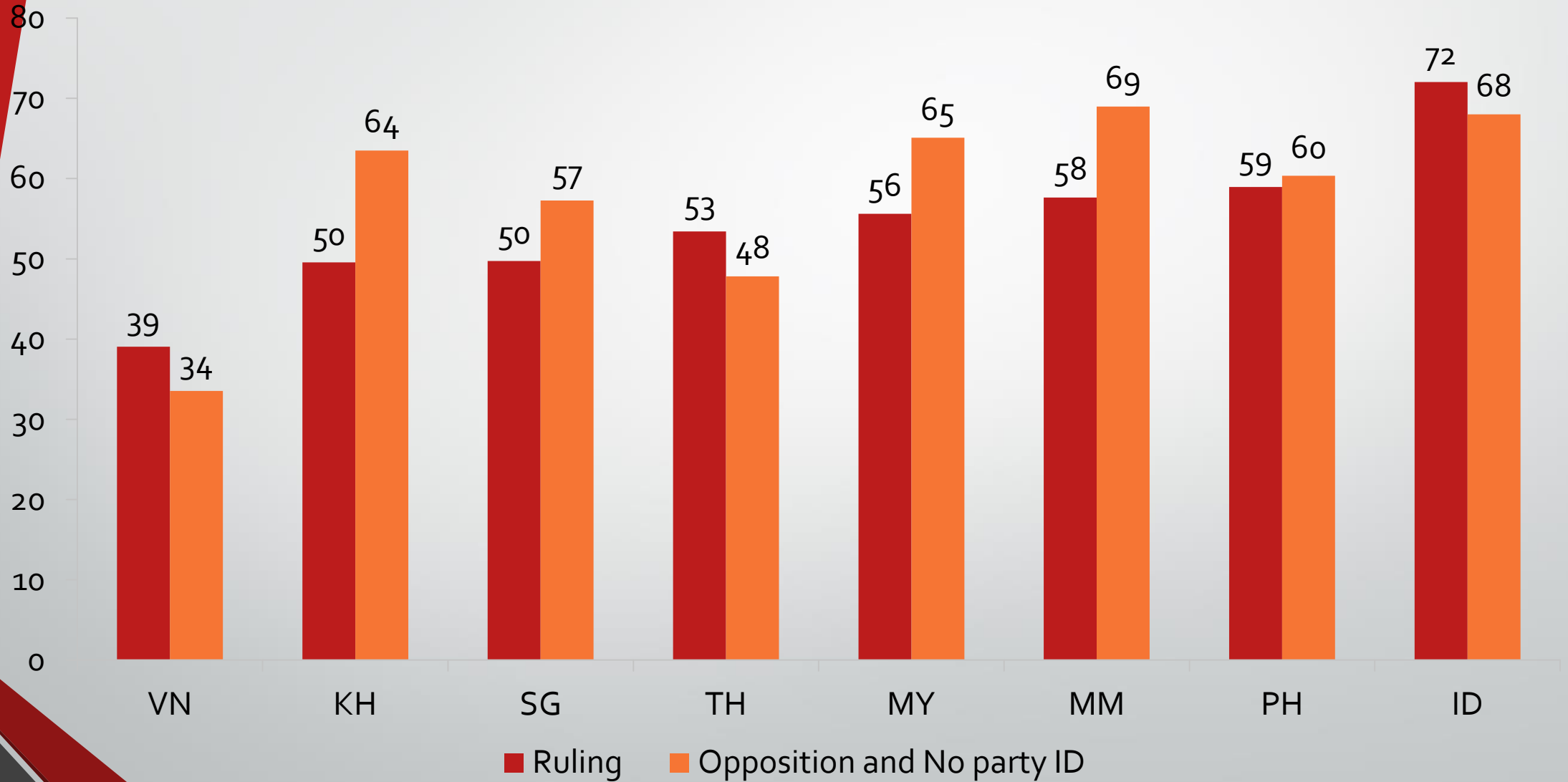
Perceived Unfairness Income Distribution by Party ID



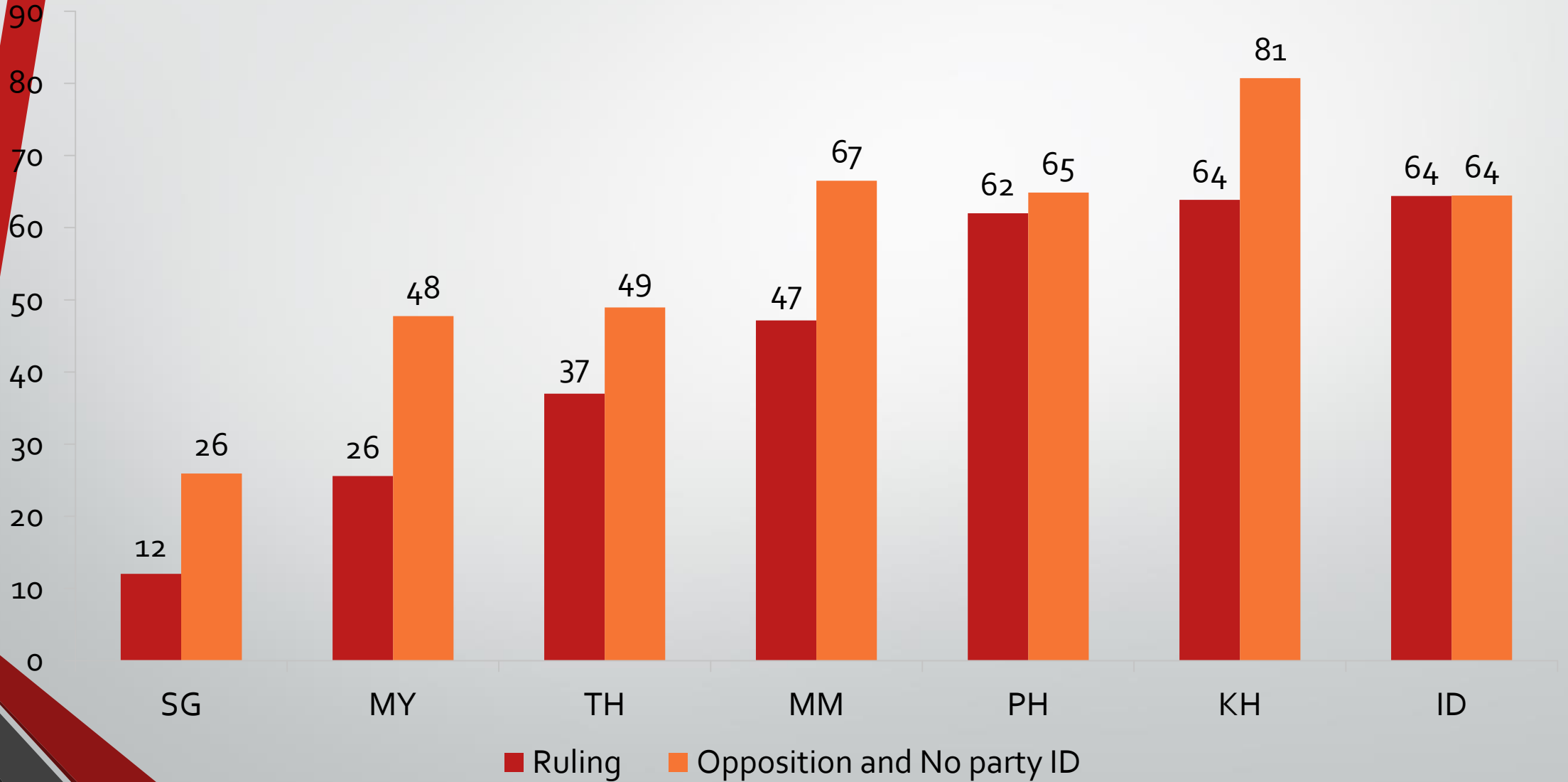
Secularism by Party ID



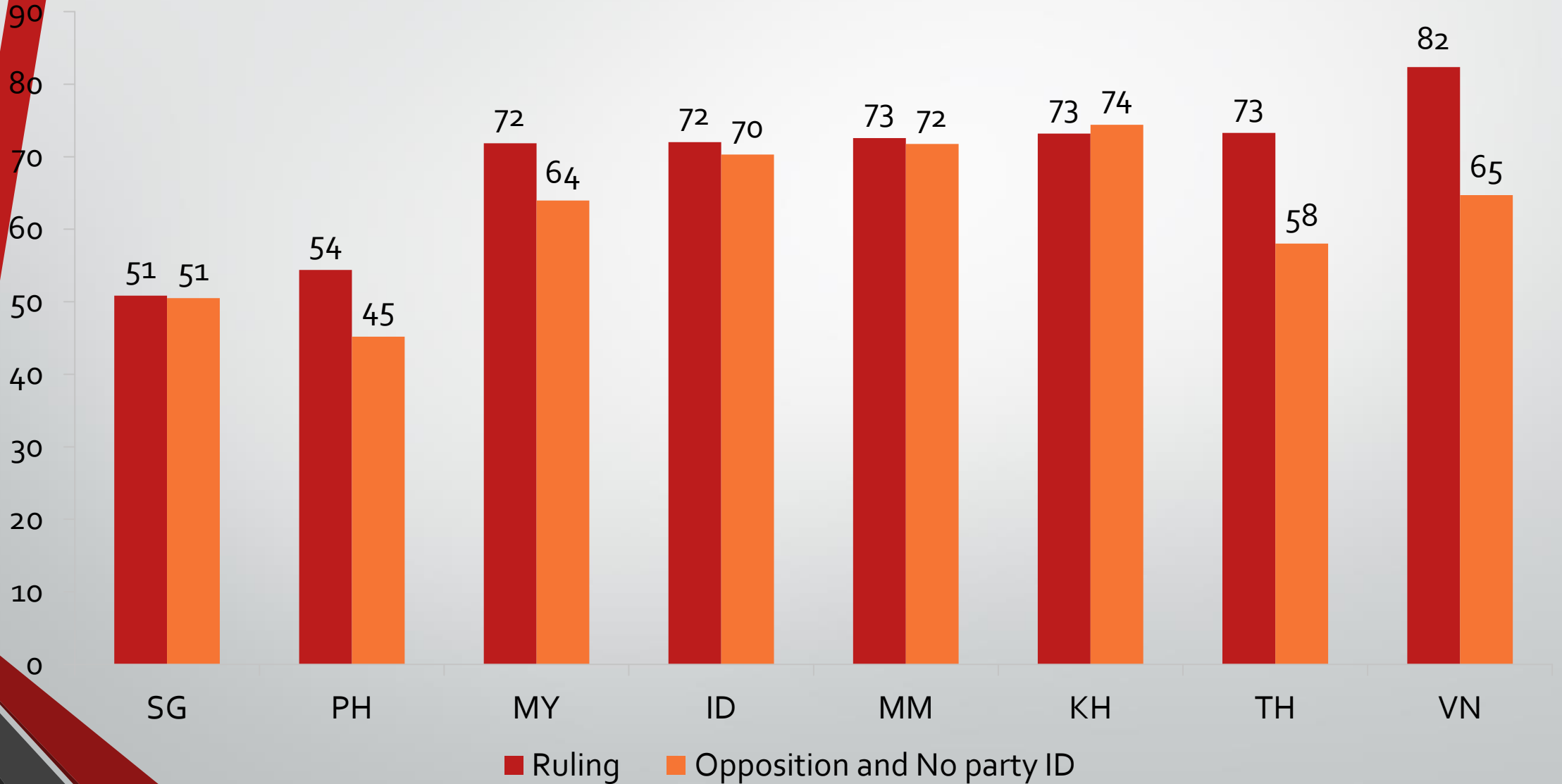
Rule of Law by Party ID



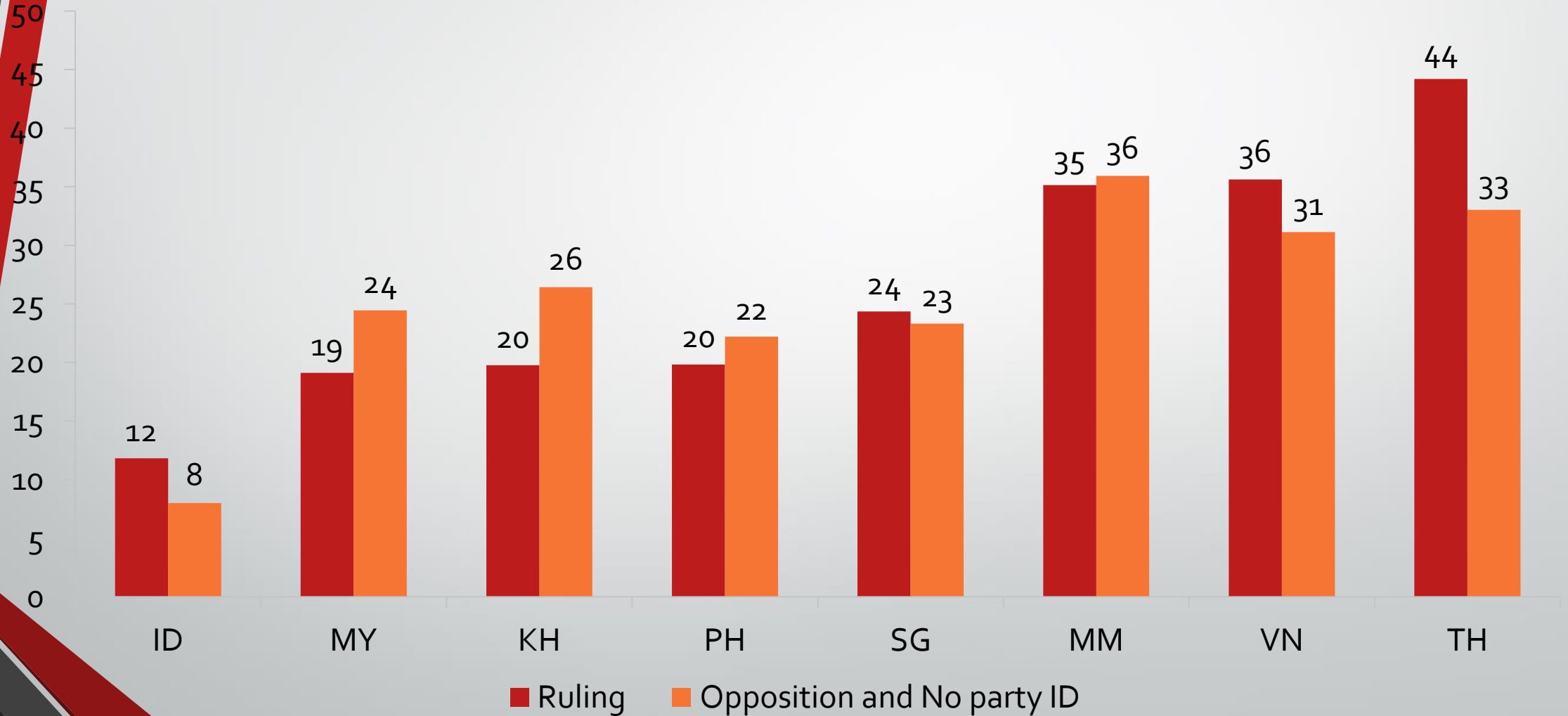
Corruption by Party ID



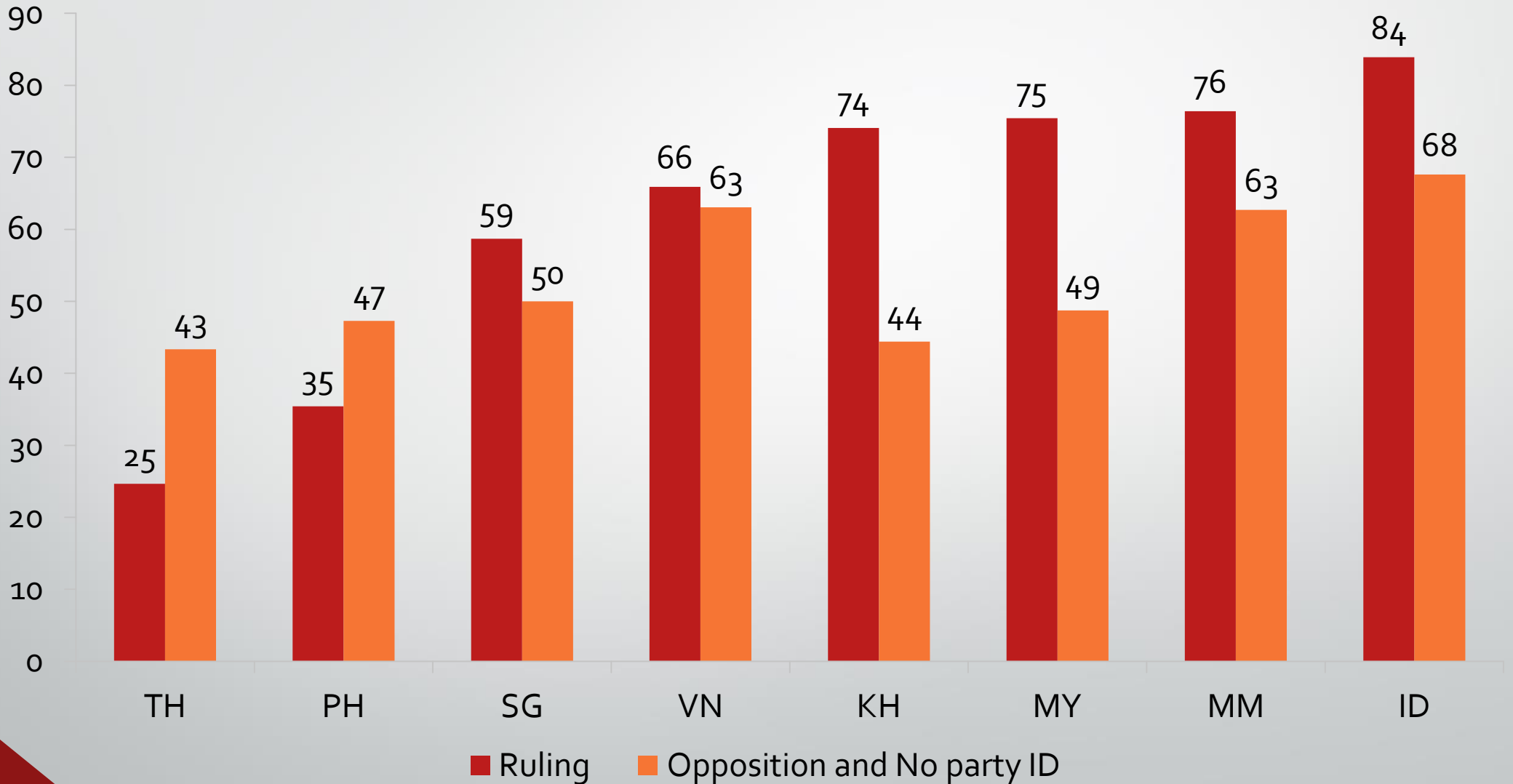
Preference for Democracy by Party ID



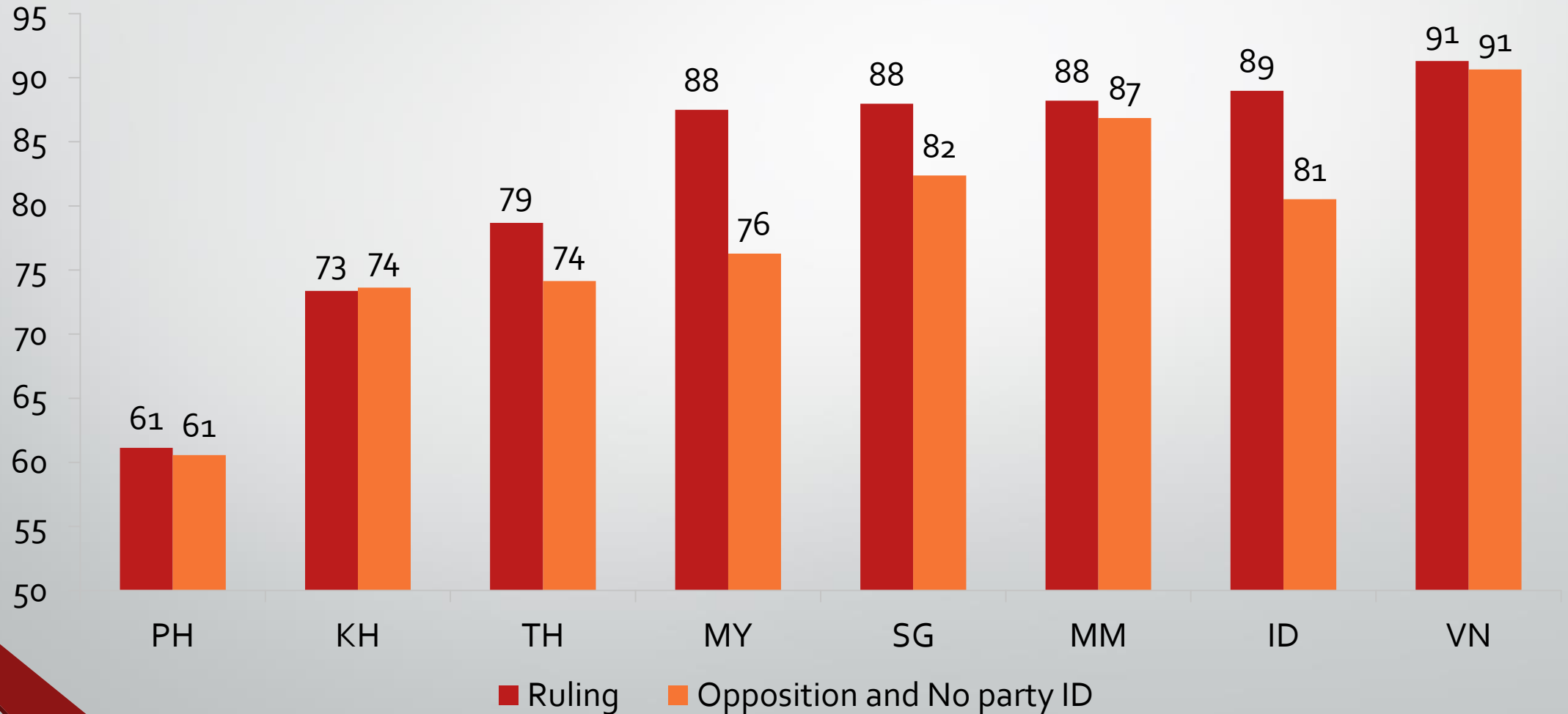
Prefer Democracy to Economic Development by Party ID



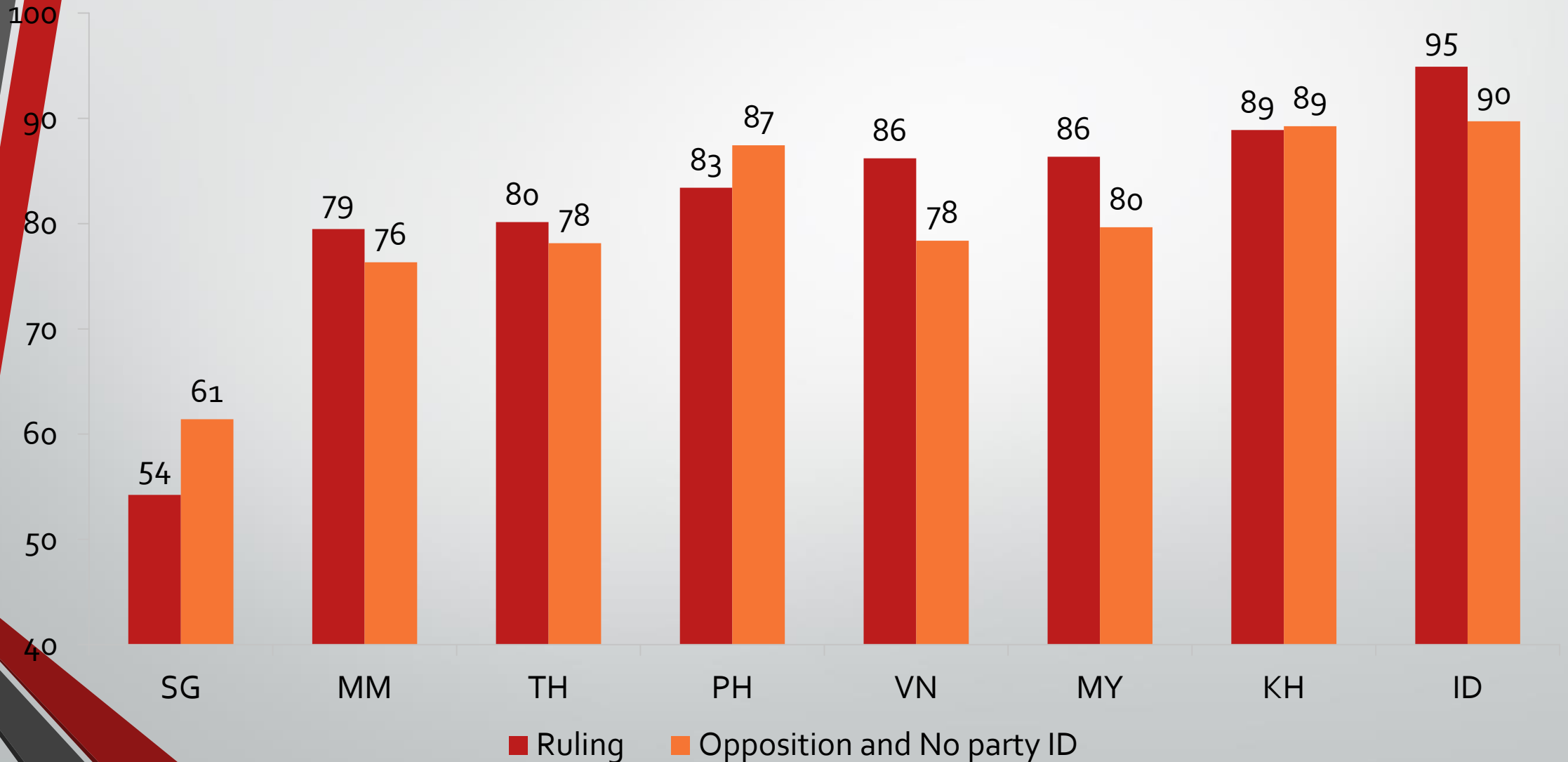
Leader as Head of Family by Party ID



Reducing Inequality as Govt's Responsibility by Party ID



Protectionism by Party ID



Conclusion



- Ideological Polarization in some areas, but not all. Region-wide splits over corruption and rule of law. Inconsistent splits equality and preference to democracy.
- Conservative majorities over secularism, government intervention/paternalism, protectionism
- Liberals are tied to education and urbanization, to a less extent to age and income.
- Considerable reinforcement of party divides in areas such as equality, corruption, paternalism, anti-globalization. Different findings for preference for democracy.
- Values are indeed shaping political polarization in multiple, some unexpected, ways.