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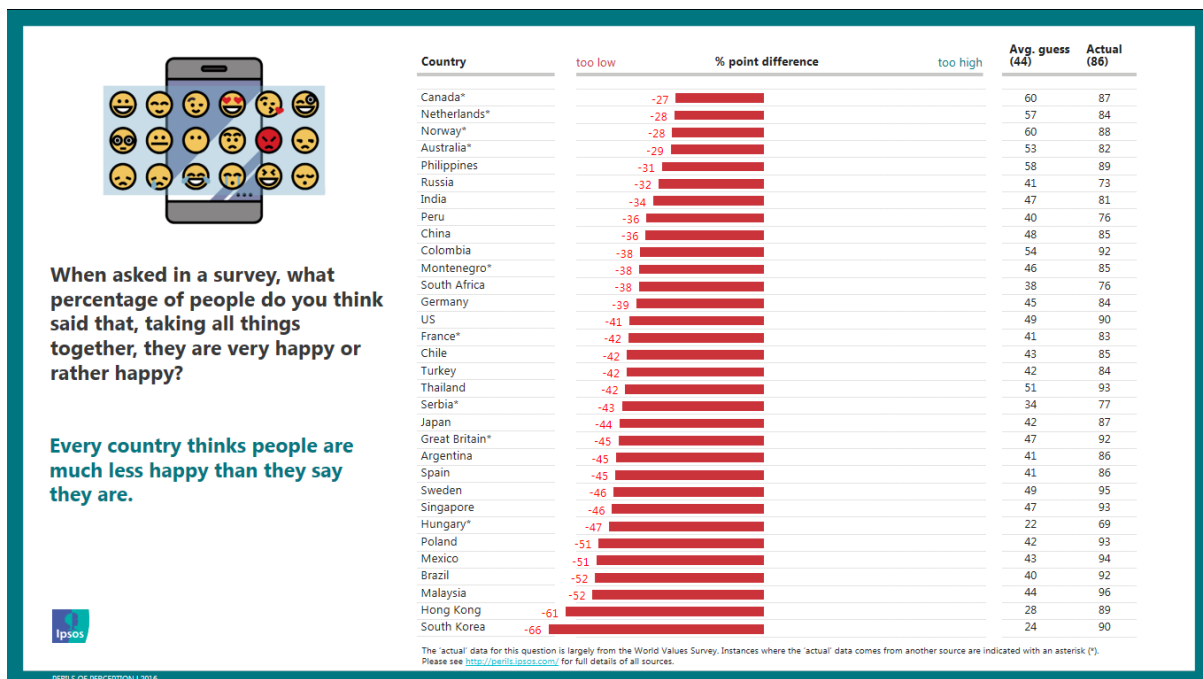
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Perceptions are *not* reality: what Malaysia and the world gets wrong

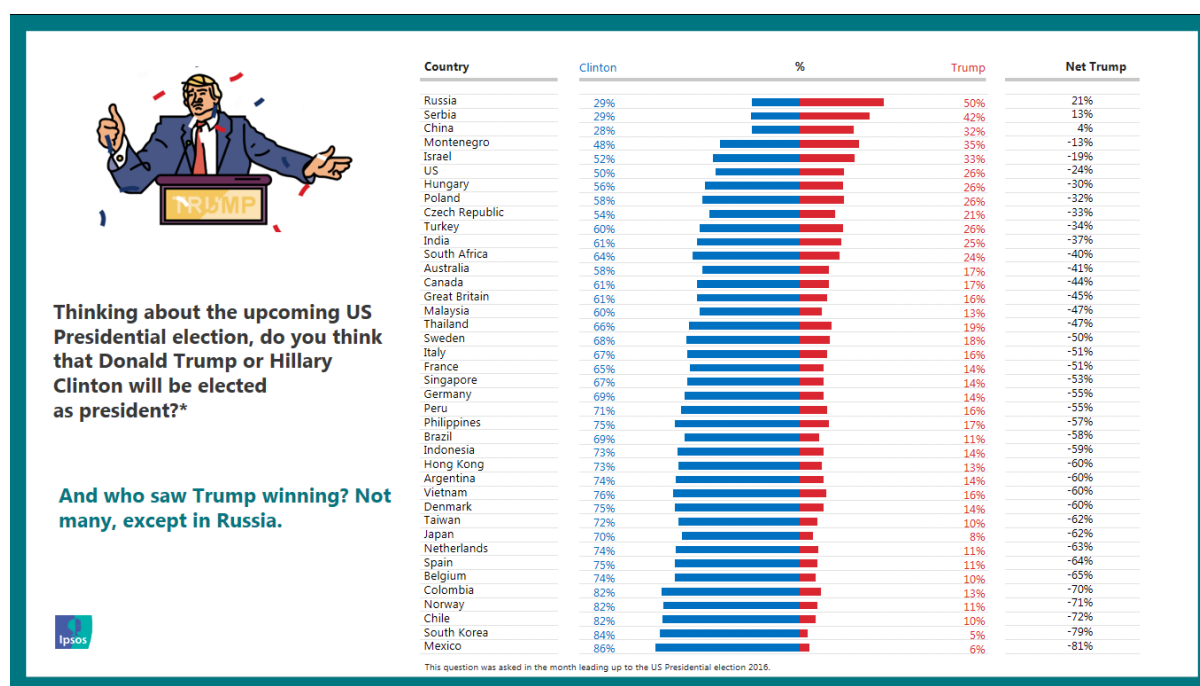
Ipsos' latest Perils of Perception survey highlights how wrong the public across 40 countries are about key global issues and features of the population in their country.

In the latest Perils of Perception survey, all countries think their population is less happy than they actually say they are and all countries expect one think house ownership or buying a home is less than it actually is.



In Malaysia we got several things quite wrong ...

1. **Happiness:** we think our fellow Malaysians are much more miserable than surveys of happiness show. We guess that only 44% of Malaysians would say they are very or rather happy, when actually 96% say they are in a recent representative survey.
2. **Health spending:** we think we spend nine times as much as we actually do on our health. We think we spend 37% of our total GDP on health expenditure when in fact we only spend 4%. If our guess was right, this would be the equivalent of an extra RM350 billion spending on health.
3. **Home-owners:** By 'owned', we mean owning the home outright or buying it with the help of a mortgage or other loan. As much as we recognise the high cost of property and difficulty in security housing loans, 56% of Malaysians are actually home-owners. Our guess was that only 44% of Malaysians own their homes.
4. **Trump:** Fieldwork for the survey was conducted the month before the presidential election in the US – so we asked who people thought would win. And like the vast majority of countries – along with nearly all pundits – we were wrong: 60% thought Clinton would win and only 13% saw the Trump victory coming.



Malaysia is far from the worst in identifying realities and predicting the future – in fact we are the fifth most accurate country in our “Index of Ignorance”. Looking across the 40 countries included, many got it wrong. Let’s see how we scored:

1. **Happiness:** Globally, we’re very pessimistic about levels of happiness. Across the 40 countries in the study the average guess was that 44% of people say they are happy, when the actual figure is nearly double that at 86%. The average guesses in Hong Kong (28%) and South Korea (24%) are incredibly low, when actual happiness levels in recent surveys are 89% and 90% respectively.

2. **Home-owners:** Most countries tend to massively underestimate how many households own or are buying their own home. We think just 49% of people own or are buying their home, when in fact 68% are owner-occupiers across these countries. India is the most wrong, thinking that only 44% own/are buying their home, when in fact 87% are. This is likely to reflect the online nature of the sample in the study: there are significant and growing pressures on home ownership in the middle class urban centres in India, but ownership is very high outside of these.
3. **Health spending:** Generally, people think our national spending on health is much higher than it actually is. Across all the countries in the study, we think that 21% of our GDP goes on health spending, when actually only 8% does. The least accurate countries are Malaysia and Indonesia who each think that 30%+ is spent on health, when the actuals are low single figures, for example only 4% in Malaysia.
4. **Current population:** one of the few areas of the study where people were very accurate was guessing at their population size. In most cases people were within 5% of the actual figure and Germany exactly identified their actual population while Malaysia was just 1% under than the actual population of 30.33 million. Singapore and Hong Kong are both out by 10% with Hong Kong guessing 10% over and Singapore 10% under than the actual figures.
5. **Future population:** While respondents tended to be very accurate guessing current population figures, it was a different story for population projections for 2050. For example, Taiwan expects to have a significantly higher population in 2050 than they do now – but the UN expects the country's population to shrink: they therefore expect to be 32% bigger than the UN expects. The US on the other hand is one of the countries expected to grow more than Americans expect: the UN estimate is that there will be 389m in the US by 2050, but the average guess is they'll only have 351m residents, 38m fewer people, a 10% lower population. Britain and the Philippines are the only two countries to get projections spot on: for example, Britain expects its population to grow to 75m from its current base of around 63m, and the UN projection says the same.
6. **Trump:** Only three countries had more people saying that Donald Trump would win rather than Hillary Clinton: Russia, Serbia and China. And Russia stands out as particularly sure of a Trump victory: 50% said Trump and only 29% picked Clinton. The shock that greeted the result around the world is no surprise when you see how sure many countries were that Clinton would win: 80%+ thought Clinton would win in Mexico, Colombia, Chile, South Korea and Norway. The US itself was among the least sure – but even here people were twice as likely to pick Clinton (50%) than Trump (26%).

Looking across the questions on factual realities, there are clear patterns in which countries have a more accurate view of their countries. To capture this, we've calculated the Ipsos "Index of Ignorance", as shown in the table below.

India receive the dubious honour of being the most inaccurate in their perceptions on these issues with China and the US also high up the list. The Netherlands are the most accurate, followed by Great Britain, with South Korea in third.

Ranking	Country	
1	India	Least accurate
2	China	
3	Taiwan	
4	South Africa	

5	US	
6	Brazil	
7	Thailand	
8	Singapore	
9	Turkey	
10	Indonesia	
11	Mexico	
12	Canada	
13	Montenegro	
14	Russia	
15	Serbia	
16	Philippines	
17	Hong Kong	
18	Israel	
19	Denmark	
20	Argentina	
21	France	
22	Vietnam	
23	Peru	
24	Spain	
25	Chile	
26	Hungary	
27	Japan	
28	Belgium	
29	Poland	
30	Colombia	
31	Sweden	
32	Norway	
33	Italy	
34	Germany	
35	Australia	
36	Malaysia	
37	Czech Republic	
38	South Korea	
39	Great Britain	
40	Netherlands	Most accurate

Bobby Duffy, Managing Director of Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, London, said:

“Across all 40 countries in the study, each population gets a lot wrong. We are often most incorrect on factors that are widely discussed in the media, such as expenditure on health. We know from previous studies that this is partly because we over-estimate what we worry about.

But in this new study we also show that we’re often unduly pessimistic about how happy people are. In many countries, particularly in the West, we have a picture of our population that is unduly miserable and intolerant. This is important: we know what people think of as the norm is important in affecting their own views and behaviours.

We also get facts wrong that will make us focus on some issues more than they perhaps deserve: for example, we tend to think our populations are much less likely to own their own home than they actually are. In many countries we have received the message loud and clear that pressure on

housing and affordability are serious issues, but we've underestimated how many still own their home.

There are multiple reasons for these errors – from our struggle with simple maths and proportions, to media coverage of issues, to social psychology explanations of our mental shortcuts or biases. It is also clear from our “Index of Ignorance” that the countries who tend to do worst have relatively low internet penetrations: given this is an online survey, this will reflect the fact that this more middle-class and connected population think the rest of their countries are more like them than they really are.”

ENDS

Technical note:

- These are the findings of the Ipsos Perils of Perception Survey 2016. 27,250 interviews were conducted between 22nd September – 6th November 2016.
- The survey is conducted in 40 countries around the world, via the Ipsos Online Panel system in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, USA, Vietnam. The following countries used either online or face-to-face methodologies: Czech Republic, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia.
- Approximately 1000 individuals aged 16-64 or 18-64 were surveyed in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Spain, USA, and approximately 800 individuals aged 18-64 were surveyed Czech Republic, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia. Approximately 500 individuals aged 16-64 or 18-64 were surveyed in the remaining countries.
- The “actual” data for each question is taken from a variety of verified sources including [The World Values Survey](#) and [Pew Research Center](#). A full list of sources/links to the actual data can be found [here](#).
- Attitudinal data (where existing sources were not available) was collected in separate surveys conducted between September and November 2016. Data was collected using a combination of online, telephone or face-to-face methodologies.
- Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of don't knows or not stated responses.
- Data are weighted to match the profile of the population.

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