



Global Attitudes Toward Transgender People

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As part of Ipsos' ongoing commitment to bringing voice to people through data, Ipsos undertook a survey on the topic of transgender people on our monthly global survey vehicle Global Advisor. The data was collected online between October 24th and November 7th, 2017 and included the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Ecuador, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States of America.

For the purposes of this summary write-up, however, Ipsos has chosen to focus on findings from the 16 countries where internet penetration is sufficiently high to feel confident that the data is truly nationally representative (and it is weighted as such therein): Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. Full methodological details can be found at the end of this document.

Majority Want their Country to Do More to Protect and Support Transgender People

A strong majority of people around the world would like their country to do more to support and protect transgender people (60%), with those in Spain (70%) and Argentina (67%) most likely to agree. Poland (39%), Hungary, and Japan (both 41%) are least likely to agree. A slim majority of respondents in the United States (51%) and France (52%) would like to see their country do more to protect and support transgender individuals. People around the world are more likely to say they believe their government needs to protect transgender people from discrimination (70%), with a majority of every country in the nationally representative markets agreeing (Argentina (84%) is most likely to agree, Poland (51%) is least likely to agree).

Use of Correct Pronouns in English Speaking Countries

In order to better understand the extent to which global citizens are aware of the correct pronoun usages for transgender people, Ipsos developed two questions to ask about this specific issue. The questions were only administered in the study countries where English is the primary language (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States) given the language's gender binary, although we hope to develop similar custom questions language-by-language in the future.

In these countries, approximately two in five report referring to transgender men as 'he' and transgender women as 'she', rather than using the pronoun used at their birth. Approximately one in five would use the neutral pronoun of 'they'. Americans are most likely to report that they would use the pronoun of the transgender person's birth, with 22% reporting they would refer to a transgender woman as 'he' and 21% reporting referring to a transgender man as 'she'. Australia (13% and 14%, respectively), Canada (14% for each), and Great Britain (12% and 13%, respectively) were less likely to report using the pronoun of a transgender person's birth.

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Countries Around the World Believe They Are Becoming More Tolerant of Transgender People

Six in ten people interviewed around the world (59%) believe that their country is becoming more tolerant of transgender people. This perception is strongest in Argentina (78%), Canada (78%), and Great Britain (75%). People in Sweden (73%), Australia (71%), and the United States (71%) also believe their countries are becoming more tolerant of transgender people. People in Hungary (31%), Poland (41%), and Japan (43%) are least likely to report that their country is becoming more tolerant of transgender people. In addition to a growing tolerance, a majority of people (60%) in these countries believe that transgender people are brave. People in Spain (74%), Argentina (70%), and Great Britain (69%) are most likely to agree with the sentiment that transgender people are brave, while those in Japan (38%) and Hungary (48%) are least likely to agree with this statement. A majority of people in the United States also believe that transgender people are brave (57%).

Most Believe Transgender People Are “A Natural Occurrence,” But Many Still Believe It Is A Mental Illness or Sin

Given the range of (mis)perceptions that exist about transgender people, Ipsos and BuzzFeed, in discussion with the Williams Institute, developed a series of questions in 2016 designed to better understand how people perceive and understand the concept and emergence of transgender individuals.

A majority of people in countries surveyed (52%) believe that transgender people are a natural occurrence. This belief is most commonly held in Spain (64%) and Germany (60%). People in Hungary (44%), Italy (45%), and Japan (48%) are the least likely to believe that transgender people are a natural occurrence. Although people in Italy and Hungary agree at similar rates that transgender people are a natural occurrence, just 11% of people in Italy believe transgender people have a form of mental illness, compared to 43% in Hungary. People in Italy (11%), Spain (9%), Argentina (13%), and France (13%) are least likely to believe that transgender people have a form of mental illness. This compares to two in five people in Serbia (44%), Hungary (43%), and Poland (41%). Among western countries, the United States is most likely to believe that transgender people have a mental illness (32%) and the most likely out of all countries surveyed to believe that transgendered people are committing a sin (32%). Americans are the most likely to say that society has gone too far in allowing people to dress and live as one sex even though they were born another (36%), while people in Japan are least likely to agree with this sentiment (9%).

Research Considerations and Proximity to Transgender People

It must be acknowledged here that there are myriad challenges to undertaking research on this potentially sensitive and low-information topic. Most pressing was the challenge of the word “transgender” itself, which is fairly widely used in English (alongside other, older, and occasionally incorrect terms like transsexual, intersex, and hermaphrodite) – but does not have a perfect translation in all languages.

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Indeed, words that mean transgender in other languages can have overtly pejorative overtones, or can refer to a specific gender, e.g. Hijra in India which refers almost universally to transgender females born with male genitalia.

To ensure as much clarity as possible, Ipsos (in discussion with The Williams Institute and BuzzFeed News, in 2016) developed questions using the phrase “people who dress and live as one sex even though they were born another” which is used throughout the survey instead of the word “transgender” or any translation thereof. This is not the only challenge associated with this kind of survey research, however, and attempting to understand public awareness of and proximity to transgender individuals is equally challenging.

For example, only tiny percentages in each country (0% to 2%, with two exceptions) have individuals who self-identify as transgender (or say that they themselves “dress and live as one sex even though they were born another”) – but even this range alone is very wide when considering such a low-incidence population. Furthermore, the figure reported is higher in the United States (5%) and in India (4%), both of which seem far higher than reality. Indeed, the incidence of individuals identifying as transgender themselves in many countries, or as personally close to a transgender individual seem higher than we might expect given existing incidence data. However, there are a range of possible explanations for this finding, detailed below:

- Simple error ranges associated with survey work, typically referred to as “Margins of Error,” “Credibility Intervals,” or “Confidence Intervals”. For online surveys with the sample sizes included here, the associated error range is between 3 and 5 points.
- Confusion over the phrase “dress and live as one sex even though they were born another” in the place of “transgender” – when “transgender” is a common term used in the United States, and other terms (Hijra, Intersex, Aravani, etc.) are far more common elsewhere. Alternately, people in the US and India may – for reasons we don’t yet understand – agree that they “dress and live as one sex even though they were born another” but not be transgender individuals in the way the research intended the word to be interpreted. That is to say, the language we needed to use to avoid cross-cultural confusion in translation may have had a different inadvertent effect on how individuals in some countries understood the question.
- Misreading of or speeding through the survey question, which is a more common occurrence – for a plethora or complex reasons centering around volume of online panel work – in the United States

Finally, and perhaps most substantively, we cannot shy away from the fact that the methodology itself could be contributing to this issue. Online methodology is the most cost-effective and efficient way to survey large populations simultaneously in many countries; indeed, a phone survey of the same size would cost – by Ipsos’ estimates – at least ten times more than the online survey Ipsos ran (for which we absorbed the cost ourselves).

However, the non-universal access to the internet – especially in countries like India where access is very much correlated with urbanity, education, and wealth – means that the survey’s representivity is

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imperfect for many of these 27 countries. As stated at the outset, as a result of this dynamic we have chosen to focus our analysis on the 16 countries where online penetration is so high as to feel confident that an online survey is genuinely representative of the country's population. But any social scientist will agree that even in these places, online surveys are not designed to measure point-estimate population incidences such as the proportion of the population that is transgender. We pursue this question and others with the tools that are available to us, and so feel that the findings from this study are greatly relevant and important to public engagement on attitudes towards and understanding of transgender individuals – and in the interest of full transparency we are of course publishing the data from all 27 countries so that it can be reviewed and utilized as appropriate.

The full methodological details of the study are below, and Ipsos is happy to supply datafiles (SPSS or Excel tables) for interested parties on request.

Methodology

These are the findings of an Ipsos survey conducted between October 24th and November 7th, 2017. The survey instrument is conducted monthly in 27 countries around the world via the Ipsos Online Panel system. The countries surveyed Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Ecuador, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States of America.

For the results of the survey presented herein, the total sample included 19,747 adults aged 18-64 in the US and Canada, and age 16-64 in all other countries, were interviewed. To the extent possible, the sample in each country is representative of the adult population. Approximately 1,000+ individuals participated on a country by country basis via the Ipsos Online Panel with the exception of Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Ecuador, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Serbia, Sweden and Turkey, where each have a sample approximately 500+. The precision of Ipsos online polls are calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.1 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 4.5 percentage points. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website.

In countries where internet penetration is approximately 60% or higher the data output is comparable the general population. Of the 27 countries surveyed, 16 yield results that are balanced to reflect the general population: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and United States. The remaining countries surveyed –Brazil, Chile, China, Ecuador, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, South Africa, and Turkey—produce a national sample that is more urban and educated, and with higher incomes than their fellow citizens. While these countries are not included in detailed slides, their data is represented in 'All Countries.' We refer to these respondents as "Upper Deck Consumer Citizens;" they are not nationally representative of their country.

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