



# Global Study Highlights Misperceptions of Crime, Sex, Climate Change, and Other Key Issues

The Perils of Perception study highlights how we are wired to think in certain ways and how our environment influences our (mis)perceptions

Washington, D.C., December 5, 2018 — Ipsos' Perils of Perception is a global study that has been exploring the gap between people's perceptions and reality since 2012. This unique analysis of misperceptions examines why people around the world are so wrong about basic facts about their population and covers a broad range of facts ranging from crime and terrorism to climate change to the economy.

## Crime

In the U.S. people are spot on about the scale of knife-related deaths (14%), but are wrong about the scale of gun-related deaths – they actually guessed about 9% too low. The U.S. is not alone, however, as several countries around the world are also **wrong about the composition of interpersonal violence deaths** in their country. Although in 13 countries the majority correctly guess which is the biggest killer out of firearms, sharp objects such as knives or other physical violence, in other countries people's perceptions don't always match what the crime statistics say.

Other countries overestimate the proportion of gun deaths, notably South Africa (where knives cause the most deaths), Netherlands and Sweden. And even some countries where the scale of certain types of violence dwarf others, large minorities do not realize this. For example, in the US – where firearms account for almost 70% of all deaths through interpersonal violence, only six in ten (59%) correctly identify guns as the biggest killer, and a similar pattern is seen in Colombia.

People in most countries think **prisons are even more crowded than they actually are**. On average, people in the U.S. think prisons are 37% over full capacity (137%) when they are 4% over capacity (104%), compared to global averages which are 30% and 9%, respectively. Having said that, the countries with the highest levels of overcrowding do tend to be the countries with the highest guesses.

## Sexual Harassment

In 13 countries for which there is data, ten of them substantially underestimate women's experience of sexual harassment in their nation, including the U.S. On average, people think 39% of women have experienced harassment, but actually on

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average 60% have. In the United States there is a 30-point gap with people thinking 51% of women have experienced harassment, but in reality, 81% have experienced harassment. Mexico is the only country to actually overestimate its extent.

In each country, men give a lower estimate of sexual harassment than women. On average, men guess 36% of women in their country have experienced sexual harassment, but women's guess is 44% (although still an underestimate).

### Climate Change

Every country in the study underestimates the **global temperature rise** over the past 18 years, even though 17 of the past 18 years have been the hottest since records began. The average estimate across the study was 9 years, though in the U.S. it was 10. The majority of countries overestimate the amount of **energy used that comes from renewable sources** in their country. The average guess is 26% when it's actually only 19%. Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, China and Singapore were the furthest out; some countries, though, actually underestimate how much progress they have made with renewables, such as Sweden and Montenegro.

### Sex

Nineteen countries in the study include estimates for the **amount of sex they think 18-29 year olds are having, and most of them get it very wrong**, including the U.S. On average in the U.S., **people think young women have sex 15 times every 4 weeks** and the guess **for men is slightly higher at 17 times**. In fact, when asked in the survey, 18-29-year-old women and men both report they have had sex 4 times every 4 weeks.

Across the study, there is little consistent difference in guesses by women and men, and young people themselves are only slightly less likely to overestimate how much sex their peers are having than older people (on average, under 30s guess that other 18-29 year olds are having sex 20 times a month, among over 30s the average guess is 21).

### Vaccinations

All countries in the survey underestimate the near universal **level of infant vaccinations** in their country. The average guess in the U.S. (73%) is in line with the average global guess (73%) while the actual figures are 95% and 94%, respectively, according to World Health Organization (WHO) figures. Furthest out are India, Mexico and China.

### Economy

Every country in the study heavily **overestimates the proportion of people unemployed and seeking work** in their country. The average guess across the study was 5 times greater than the actual (34% when in reality it is closer to 7%). In the U.S., the average guess was 22% while the actual number is 4%.

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People also tend to **underestimate the size of their country's economy relative to others**. The majority of people placed their country's GDP rank lower than the reality, and the U.S. was no exception as people guessed the U.S GDP ranked #5, which in reality it is #1. Emerging economies such as Argentina, South Africa, and Romania tend to rank the most disproportionately low compared to reality.

### Population Facts

Every country massively overestimates the levels of **growth of their elderly population**. Across the countries on average, people think 54% of the population will be 65+ in 2050 when in reality the projection is less than half that (25%). In the U.S., the overestimate is slightly lower, as people think 49% of the population will be 65+, when in reality, the projection is 22%, according to the World Bank.

The majority of countries hugely overestimate **levels of immigration**; a pattern we have seen in [previous studies](#). The average guess across 37 countries is that 28% are immigrants when the actual figure is less than half that (12%). In the U.S. the average guess is that 29% are immigrants when the actual figure is 15%.

Nearly every country included in the study also over-estimates their **Muslim population** by a large margin. The average guess was nearly double the actual figure (20% vs 8%). The U.S. was very far off, estimating a Muslim population of 14% when in reality it is 1%.

### Methodology

These are the findings of the Ipsos Perils of Perception Survey 2018, comprised of 28,115 interviews conducted between September 28 – October 16, 2018.

The survey is conducted in 37 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 (SAR, China), Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey and the USA. The following countries used either online or face-to-face methodologies: Montenegro, Serbia.

Approximately 1000 individuals aged 16-64 or 18-64 were surveyed in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Mexico, Montenegro, Serbia, Singapore, Spain and the USA. Approximately 2000 individuals aged 16-64 were surveyed in Japan. Approximately 500 individuals aged 16-64 were surveyed in Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Hungary, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey.

21 of the 37 countries surveyed online generate nationally representative samples in their countries (Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong (SAR, China), Hungary, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United States).

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Brazil, Colombia, China, Chile, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, South Africa, Thailand and Turkey produce a national sample that is more urban & educated, and with higher incomes than their fellow citizens. We refer to these respondents as “Upper Deck Consumer Citizens”. They are not nationally representative of their country.

The “actual” data for each question is taken from a variety of verified sources. The most recent available data has been used which in most cases is from the past two years. Figures for sexual harassment are largely from a 2012 study for the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and some country data for the Muslim population is from pre-2015. A full list of sources/links to the actual data can be found [here](#).

Where results do not sum to 100 or the ‘difference’ appears to be +1 more/less than the actual, this may be due to 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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