



## Press Release

# Global Study: Majority Believe Political Divisions are Dangerous for Society

**Americans are particularly worried about political divisions, but less than a third regularly converse with people who have opposing views**

**Washington, DC, March 5, 2019** — A new global study by Ipsos for the BBC Crossing Divides season, carried out online among adults under 65 across 27 countries, highlights that people are split over whether differences in political opinions in their country are healthy or dangerous for society. The study also finds that:

- **Two in five globally (41%) think their country's society is more at danger because of divisions between people with different political views than it was twenty years ago. Three in five Americans think the same (57%).**
- **The U.S. comes in second as the most likely country to think peoples' political differences are dangerous for society (51%) - exceeding the global average of 32%.**
- **Despite widespread acknowledgement of the dangers of political divisiveness, Americans are not inclined to converse with people who have opposing opinions; only a quarter do so on a weekly basis.**
- **Americans have rather heterogenous friend groups compared to the rest of the world. However, they fall close to the global average when it comes to having friends with similar political views.**

### MAIN FINDINGS

**While people around the world agree there are political divisions in their country, they are split over whether these divisions are healthy or dangerous for society.**

- Globally, while the majority of people (81%) say there are differences in people's political views in their country, a third (33%) think these divisions are healthy for society but a similar proportion (32%) thinks they are so divisive that they are dangerous for society. Only 16% think that these differences have no major impact on their society.
- The U.S. is the second most likely out of 27 countries to think that the differences in people's political views are so divisive that it is dangerous for society. More than half believe this (51%), compared to only a third globally (32%).
- The U.S. is also tied with Sweden in the highest proportion of people who believe society is more or less at danger because of divisions between people with different political views than it was 20 years ago (57%) – much higher than the global average (41%).

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**Despite widespread acknowledgement of the dangers of political divisiveness, Americans are not particularly accepting of or comfortable with those who hold opposing views, and only a quarter converse with such people on a weekly basis.**

- Half of all people (50%) say that it is important to listen to people who are different to themselves, and even if they disagree with the other person, they still want to understand them.
- The U.S. fall in line with global average when it comes to comfort in sharing political opinions with people who may have opposing views. Globally and in the U.S., over a third say they describe themselves as someone who is comfortable sharing their political opinions with other people, even if they do not necessarily agree (35% globally, 37% in the U.S.).
- The U.S. also falls right in the middle of all surveyed countries in the amount of people who say they are someone who feels more comfortable in groups of people who are similar to them (40%).
- Compared to a third globally (35%), only a fifth of Americans say they have conversations with people who have opposing views to their own on a weekly basis (24%).

**Political views are fairly entrenched; half of all people think that people with opposing views are unlikely to change their opinions regardless of the evidence presented**

- Around half of all people globally (49%) agree that those with opposing political views to them are unlikely to change their opinions regardless of the evidence presented (just 14% disagree).
- People are split on whether people with different political views care about the future of the country or not. Close to three in ten (28%) think that people with opposing political views to their own don't care about the future of their country but a similar proportion (31%) disagrees.

**Even though they believe it is still worth having a conversation with people who have opposing political views, Americans are more likely than most surveyed countries to believe in the stubbornness of those across the political aisle.**

- Three-fifths of Americans (62%) agree that people in their country with opposing political views are unlikely to change their opinion, regardless of the evidence presented – more than ten percentage points above the global average (49%).
- Despite this, only 22% of Americans say it is not worth trying to have a conversation with people with opposing political views.

**Social media – boon or curse? Views are mixed; it has enabled more people to join in on social debates but it has made society more divisive.**

- Across the world, three in five (61%) agree that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are giving a voice to people who would not normally take part in debates about social issues, and 44% agree that they are breaking down barriers between the public and people in power. However, over half (54%) believe that social media platforms are making these debates much more divisive than they used to be – only one in ten (11%) disagree.
- Americans are less likely to believe social media serves to break down barriers between the public and people in power (38%), and more likely to believe it makes debates about social issues more divisive than they used to be (63%).

**Globally, more think that immigration has had a negative impact on their country rather than positive impact. The number of those who believe this is almost twice as high in the U.S.**

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- Around a quarter (24%) think that immigration has had a positive impact on their country compared with two in five (39%) who believe that it has been negative.
- This number is almost doubled in the U.S. (42%), and has shown a positive and steady growth since 2011.
- A number of European countries are more negative than average – Italy (55%), Hungary (54%), France (53%), South Africa (53%), Belgium (52%) and Germany (51%).
- Immigration is an issue that divides people; globally 16% say that all or almost all of their friends have the same view on immigration as them. Among American, just 14% say the same.

### **Americans are more likely than most other countries to have friends who are different from themselves, except when it comes to political views.**

- Globally, a majority of people say more than half of their friends are similar in ethnicity (56%) and age (49%). Smaller proportions say more than half of their friends have a similar level of education (45%) and income (30%).
- Less than half globally say most of their friends share the same views on climate change (41%), immigration (38%), religion (38%), feminism (37%), and politics (32%).
- Statistics in the U.S. are much lower than the global average in all demographic areas: ethnicity (51%), age (42%), education (39%), and income (21%). However, the U.S. mirrors the global average when it comes to political views, with 33% saying more than half of their friends share the same political views as them.
- Within the U.S., some regional discrepancies are apparent. Those in the South are the most likely among all other regions to say that over half of their friends share the same religious faith or belief as themselves (27% nationally; 26% in Northeast; 26% in Midwest; 20% in Midwest; and 32% in South). Those in the Northeast are the most likely to same that over half of their friends have a similar level of education to them (39% nationally; 47% in Northeast; 41% in Midwest; 36% in West; 36% in South).

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### Technical Note

- This survey is an international sample of 19,782, adults aged 18-64 in the US and Canada, and age 16-64 in all other countries, were interviewed. The Fieldwork was conducted from 26 November - 7 December 2018. Approximately 1000+ individuals participated on a country by country basis via the Ipsos Online Panel with the exception of Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Hungary, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey, where each have a sample approximately 500+. In the United Kingdom interviews were boosted in nations to give 206 in Scotland, 202 in Wales, 208 in Northern Ireland. In England 874 were conducted. Data are weighted to reflect correct proportions in the four nations.
- 15 of the 27 countries surveyed online generate nationally representative samples in their countries (Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and United States).
- Brazil, China, Chile, Colombia, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa 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. Not all questions were fielded in China and Saudi Arabia.

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