

Worlds Apart?

A Global Survey for the BBC Crossing Divides season

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 (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**
- **Half of all people (50%) say that it is important to listen to people who are different to themselves, even if they disagree with the other person**
- **At the same time, and the same proportion (49%) agrees that people's political views are entrenched and those with opposing political views to them are unlikely to change their opinions regardless of the evidence presented**
- **And while the majority of people (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, over half (54%) believe that social media is making these debates much more divisive than they used to be**

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.
 - People in Poland (56%) and the United States (51%) are much more likely to think these differences are dangerous for society, whereas close to half in Mexico (49%) and Peru (47%) believe they are healthy.
 - Britons follow the global picture, with 85% agreeing that there are divisions in society. And despite Brexit, they are *more confident* that these divisions are healthy for society (41%), but three in ten (31%) still think they are dangerous.
- Two in five (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; this rises to over half (57%) in the United States (57%), Sweden (57%), South Africa (53%) and France (53%). However, three in ten (29%) say that divisions are about the same as they were twenty years ago, and more so in Japan (40%), Italy (39%), Belgium (38%) and Canada (37%). Only 14% believe that society is less in danger now than it was 20

years ago. This is higher in Chile (27%), but perhaps they were still recovering from the Pinochet dictatorship two decades ago.

Half believe that it's important to listen to people with different viewpoints, but only a third say they talk to others who have opposing views on a weekly basis

- Half of all people (50%) say that it is important to listen to people who are different to themselves, even if they disagree with the other person, they still want to understand them – this sentiment is significantly higher in South Africa (71%) and Turkey (68%). But the study shows that in Germany (43%), Malaysia (44%), Belgium (45%) and Brazil (45%) there is less of a willingness to listen to those with opposing views.
- However, despite saying it is important to listen to others just over a third (35%) of people say they have conversations with people who have opposing views to their own (on issues such as politics, climate change, immigration and feminism) on at least a weekly basis, although nearly three in five (58%) say they do on at least a monthly basis. Just one in ten (10%) say they never speak to people holding opposing views to them, while a similar proportion saying they don't know (11%).
- One in five (21%) say they talk to people with opposing views on a less than monthly basis, and is higher in Canada (33%), the United States (30%) and Russia (30%). Weekly conversations among people with different views happen more frequently in India (56%) and an array of Latin American countries – Peru (54%), Argentina (49%) and Colombia (49%). Meanwhile, respondents in Japan (40%) and South Korea (34%) are more likely to say they *never* have conversations with people holding opposing views to them.
- Around two in five say that over half of their friends have similar views or beliefs to them, in terms of religion (38%), immigration (38%), climate change (42%) and feminism (37%). However, when asked about political views, this drops to around three in ten (32%).

Politics is a thorny subject - only one in three say they're comfortable sharing their political views with other people

- Around a third (35%) of people globally say they feel comfortable sharing their political opinions with other people, including those they do not necessarily agree with them. Respondents in Turkey (50%) and Mexico (45%) are much more comfortable sharing opposing political views than average - but this is much less the case in South Korea (27%), Germany (28%), Italy (28%) and Malaysia (28%).
 - One in five globally (19%) say they do not feel comfortable sharing their political opinion with others at all, and this is higher in the United States (24%) and Peru (24%).
- Two in five globally (41%) say they feel more comfortable in groups of people of people who are similar to them, and this is significantly higher in China (68%) and Hungary (57%), while less so in Italy (30%) and Belgium (30%).

- Around half of all people say that over half of their friends share similar demographics to them, in terms of ethnicity (56%), age group (49%) and levels of education (46%). However, this drops to less than a third (30%) when discussing levels of income.

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). And this rises to three in five in Hungary (63%), the United States (62%) and South Africa (62%).
- 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. Respondents in Turkey (46%) and India (43%) are much more likely to think those with different views don't care about their country's future. However, people in the United States (39%) and Colombia (38%) are more likely to disagree that this is the case.
- Over a third (36%) believe that people with opposing political views to them have been misled (19% disagree). This is particularly the case in Hungary (55%), South Africa (54%), Turkey (51%) and Colombia (50%). On the other hand, people in South Korea (31%) and Mexico (25%) are most likely to disagree with this statement.
- Despite political differences, only a quarter globally (24%) think that people with opposing political views to them aren't worth trying to have a conversation with, although this is much higher in India (35%) and South Africa (33%). Two in five (37%) however disagree - with those in Poland (50%) and South Korea (48%) the most likely to disagree with this statement.
- A third of people globally (31%) agree that people with opposing political views do not care about people like them, with a quarter disagreeing (24%). Turkey (46%) and India (44%) were more likely to agree, while more disagreed in Colombia (31%) Mexico (30%) and Poland (30%).
- However, only one in ten (11%) say that all or almost all of their friends have the same political positions to them, and around three in ten (32%) say over half their friends share the same politics. One in five (20%) they were unsure of their friends' political views, which reaches over a third in France (36%) and Australia (36%).
 - Respondents in South Africa (20%), Russia (18%), Hungary (18%) and Peru (18%) are the most likely to say that all or almost all of their friends have the same political views as them while this is much lower in Japan (2%), South Korea (3%) and Australia (6%).
- These findings link into other recent polling by Ipsos MORI, which show that nearly two in three (65%) think that people across the world live in their own internet bubble, but only one in three admit they do themselves (34%). It also reveals that

three in five (60%) think that other people don't care about facts anymore, they just want to believe what they want.¹

- Two in five Brits (38%) say that over half of their friends share the same views as them on Brexit, while only 12% said less than half do. Close to three in ten (28%) say that do not know their friends' position on Brexit, which is notable given that Brexit is one of the key dividing lines in UK politics.

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.
- Belief that social media is empowering people who were previously not engaged is highest – over three in four – in South Africa (78%), Mexico (76%) and Colombia (75%). Comparatively, it drops to under half in Germany (45%), South Korea (48%) and Belgium (50%).
- Latin American countries are much more likely to agree that social media is breaking down barriers between the public and people in power – Colombia (67%), Peru (67%), Chile (61%) – and are joined by India (63%) and South Africa (63%). This sentiment is lowest in Hungary (24%) and Belgium (28%).
- Respondents in Colombia (67%), South Africa (65%), Mexico (64%) Turkey (64%) and India (64%) are most likely to say that social media is making debates much more divisive while respondents in Russia (32%), Poland (41%) and Germany (45%) are less likely to agree with this sentiment.

Globally, more think that immigration has had a negative impact on their country rather than positive impact but the British are most positive

- 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.
- People in the UK (48%), Saudi Arabia (48%) and Australia (46%) are the most positive, but seven in ten say that it has been negative in Colombia (71%) and Turkey (71%). These findings for Colombia and Turkey are likely to reflect the fact that both these countries have recently taken in large numbers of refugees.
- A number of European countries are more negative than average too – Italy (55%), Hungary (54%), France (53%), South Africa (53%), Belgium (52%) and Germany (51%).

¹ Data available at <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/fake-news-filter-bubbles-and-post-truth-are-other-peoples-problems>

- Immigration is an issue that divides people; globally just 16% say that all or almost all of their friends have the same view on immigration as them, this more than doubles in Hungary (35%) and is much lower across East Asia - Japan (2%), South Korea (3%) and China (8%). One in five (21%) report that they don't know their friends' views on immigration, which rises to over a third in Australia (36%), Canada (34%) and France (33%).

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.