



PRESS RELEASE

Americans Underestimate How Hot the Planet Has Become, How Much Plastic Waste Is in the Environment, and the Impact of Flying

Washington, DC, December 2, 2019 — Misperceptions about climate change and the natural environment are widespread in the United States, a new study by Ipsos to support the publication of *Why We're Wrong About Nearly Everything* reveals:

- We **underestimate how record-breaking global temperatures now are**: we guess 14 of the last 22 years are among the hottest 20 on record since 1850 when **all 20 hottest years have been in the last 22 years**. Only 15% of Americans correctly guess all 20 years.
- We **overestimate how much plastic has been recycled**: we think a quarter of all plastic waste (26%) is recycled when it's actually just 9%; in fact, 79% of all plastic is still in the environment when we think it's around half (54%).
- **Only a quarter (24%) of Americans surveyed correctly guess that animal populations have declined by 60%** since 1970.
- We **overestimate the impact of air travel on global greenhouse gases**: we think air travel contributes 16% of global greenhouse gases when it's 2%.
- But we **don't realize how much skipping just one transatlantic flight would save in greenhouse gases**: only 10% correctly pick it out as one of the top three actions they can take as individuals.
- Nevertheless, most people (60%) reject Donald Trump's past statement that global warming is an expensive hoax, and most (62%) agree that we're facing a "climate change emergency". However, there are huge differences between Republicans and Democrats:
 - **70% of Democrats strongly disagree that global warming is an expensive hoax, compared with just 17% of Republicans;**
 - **48% of Republicans disagree that we're facing a climate change emergency, compared with just 6% of Democrats.**

The study, which supports today's publication of *Why We're Wrong About Nearly Everything* by Professor **Bobby Duffy** of the Policy Institute, King's College London, also reveals that most of us recognize the seriousness of the threat to the global climate.

Professor **Bobby Duffy** said:



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“It is vital to understand public misperceptions about climate change and the natural environment – but not just so that we can bombard people with more information. My book on ‘Why We’re Wrong About Nearly Everything’ shows that we can’t just provide facts and expect people to hear them and act, regardless of how extraordinary those facts are.

“Our attitudes to big issues like climate change are tied up with our own identity, including our attachment to political parties. As this study shows, there are often not large differences between Republicans and Democrats in how they see the facts about climate change – but there are hugely different views on how real or serious the threat is.

“This doesn’t mean we should give up on the facts: a little more understanding of the scale of the issues and the most effective actions we can take would help all Americans across the political spectrum.”



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About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between September 25-27, 2019. For this survey, a sample of 1,150 adults aged 16-75 was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all respondents been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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About Ipsos

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Our passionately curious research professionals, analysts and scientists have built unique multi-specialist capabilities that provide true understanding and powerful insights into the actions, opinions and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers or employees. We serve more than 5000 clients across the world with 75 business solutions.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is listed on the Euronext Paris since July 1st, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120 and the Mid-60 index and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD).

ISIN code FR0000073298, Reuters ISOS.PA, Bloomberg IPS:FP

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