

## Why are people so often wrong about their own countries?

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. What do you know about the country you are in now?

In this country, ...

... \_\_\_\_\_% of young adults aged 25-34 live with their parents.

... \_\_\_\_\_% of people have internet access.

... \_\_\_\_\_% of the population were born in another country.

... \_\_\_\_\_% of politicians are women.

b. Now, compare your answers with other students. Are your answers quite similar or very different?

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions below. Then, find them in the article to read them in context.

unoccupied	affiliate	grab for	misperceptions	practise	generalize
respondents	grossly	clueless	innumeracy	affluent	polled

1. asked a lot of people their opinions about something \_\_\_\_\_
2. knowing nothing \_\_\_\_\_
3. have a connection with a larger organization or group \_\_\_\_\_
4. people who answer questions, especially on a questionnaire or survey \_\_\_\_\_
5. perform the activities and duties of your religion \_\_\_\_\_
6. make an attempt to obtain something by acting quickly \_\_\_\_\_
7. with no one living there \_\_\_\_\_
8. rich enough to buy things for pleasure \_\_\_\_\_
9. very or extremely \_\_\_\_\_
10. apply a particular fact or example to a larger number of facts or examples \_\_\_\_\_
11. the lack of the ability to do basic mathematics \_\_\_\_\_
12. incorrect ways of thinking about or understanding something \_\_\_\_\_

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*People in 33 nations polled by the latest Ipsos MORI survey often seem clueless on wealth, immigration and other aspects*

**Bobby Duffy, Managing Director of the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute**

**2 December, 2015**

- 1 Our new international survey across 33 countries shows just how wrong the world is about a range of key social realities.
- 2 British people think the top 1% wealthiest households own 59% of their country's wealth, when they actually "only" own 23%. Americans think that 33% of their population are immigrants, when in fact it is only 14%.
- 3 Brazilians think the average age in their country is 56, when it is only 31. Russians think that 31% of their politicians are women, when it is only 14%.
- 4 In Britain, people think that an extraordinary 43% of young adults aged 25-34 still live at home with their parents, rather than the actual 14%. In India, the online population think 60% of the whole country also has internet access, when in fact only 19% do.
- 5 Why are people across the world so often so clueless about these realities?
- 6 It is partly that we just struggle with basic maths and some of us clearly misunderstand the questions or interpret them differently. For example, most countries hugely overestimate how many people do not affiliate themselves with a religion: across the 33 countries, 37% do not, according to respondents, but the average is actually just 18%. This will be partly because we will be thinking of how many people *practise* their religion, rather than what they put on census forms.
- 7 People also take mental shortcuts, where they grab for easily available information even if it doesn't quite fit the question. Our huge overestimates of the rural populations in most countries will be affected by how much of the physical landmass rural areas make up, rather than a careful calculation of how unoccupied it generally is. In Daniel Kahneman's terms, answers to these sorts of questions are classic examples of "fast" thinking, rather than "slow".
- 8 We are tied to our own perspective and struggle to imagine the variety in our countries, as highlighted by our Indian sample's massively overestimating their population's access to the internet. Our study was mostly carried out through an online survey – and, in developing countries, this will be representative of a more affluent, connected group rather than the population as a whole. In some ways, we may have expected this more educated sample to get closer to reality – those with higher education levels tend to be more accurate on these types of questions. But what we find, throughout the study, is that people grossly generalize from their own situations, forgetting how unrepresentative they are.
- 9 We suffer from what social psychologists call "emotional innumeracy" when estimating realities: this means we are sending a message about what is worrying us as much as trying to get the right answers. Cause and effect run both ways, with our concern leading to our misperceptions as much as our misperceptions creating our concern.
- 10 For Britain, this is likely to be part of the explanation for people's huge overestimates of how much the wealthiest own, how many young people are still living at home and what proportion of the population are immigrants (the guess is 25%, when it is really only 13%, according to official estimates). People are worried about the concentration of wealth, the housing pressures facing young people and immigration levels, and this is reflected in them overstating the scale of the issues.
- 11 But, the survey suggests there are also some issues where people are not as worried as they should be. For example, most countries hugely underestimate how much of their population is overweight or obese. The worst case is Saudi Arabia, where people think only 28% are, when 71% are. Britons think it is 44%, when it is actually nearly half as much again – 62% are either overweight or obese.
- 12 And, in many ways, it is not our misperceptions but these realities across different countries that are the most interesting and important aspects of the study. The top 1% in Russia own 70% of the nation's wealth, while the top 1% in New Zealand only own 18%. Half of Italians aged 25-34 still live with their parents, when it is only 4% in Norway.

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The average age in India is 27; it is 47 in Japan. Only 10% of politicians are women in Brazil, Hungary and Japan, when 44% are in Sweden.

13 When the reality is so strange and varied, it is no wonder we're so wrong.

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### 3 Collocations

Match the words to make collocations from the article. Then, talk about what they mean.

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. social      | a. pressures     |
| 2. census      | b. populations   |
| 3. mental      | c. landmass      |
| 4. rural       | d. levels        |
| 5. physical    | e. realities     |
| 6. housing     | f. underestimate |
| 7. immigration | g. shortcuts     |
| 8. hugely      | h. forms         |

### 4 Facts and findings

Complete the table with information from the article.

country	the issue	what people estimate	the reality
Britain	% of people that are overweight or obese	44%	62%
India	% of population with internet access		
Brazil	average age		
Britain	% of population that are immigrants		
America	% of population that are immigrants		
Russia	% of politicians that are women		
Britain	amount of the country's wealth owned by the top 1%		
Saudi Arabia	% of people that are overweight or obese		
Britain	% of young adults (25-34) who live with their parents		

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#### 5 Prefixes

a. Write the missing prefixes to complete the words that were used in the article. The words are in the order that they appear in the article.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ understand
2. \_\_\_\_\_ estimate
3. \_\_\_\_\_ occupied
4. \_\_\_\_\_ representative
5. \_\_\_\_\_ numeracy
6. \_\_\_\_\_ perceptions
7. \_\_\_\_\_ state
8. \_\_\_\_\_ estimate

b. There are four further words in paragraph 7 whose meaning can be changed by adding a prefix. Decide which prefixes it is possible to add to these words.

	possible prefix(es)	word
1.		available
2.		information
3.		affected
4.		calculation

#### 6 Questions

Write eight comprehension questions on the article for other students to answer.

1. What percentage of ...
2. How ...
3. Which ...
4. Why ...
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

#### 6 Webquest

Do the online quiz for your country or a country you know well. Discuss your answers.

[www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2015/dec/02/how-well-do-you-really-know-your-country-take-our-quiz](http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2015/dec/02/how-well-do-you-really-know-your-country-take-our-quiz)

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## KEY

### 1 Warmer

**Teacher's tip:** Tell students that they will not be checking their answers at this stage. They will be able to take the online quiz (where they will get answers) later in the lesson or at home.

### 2 Key words

1. polled
2. clueless
3. affiliate
4. respondents
5. practise
6. grab for
7. unoccupied
8. affluent
9. grossly
10. generalize
11. innumeracy
12. misperceptions

### 3 Collocations

1. e
2. h
3. g
4. b
5. c
6. a
7. d
8. f

### 4 Facts and findings

country	the issue	what people estimate	the reality
Britain	% of people that are overweight or obese	44%	62%
India	% of population with internet access	60%	19%
Brazil	average age	56	31

country	the issue	what people estimate	the reality
Britain	% of population that are immigrants	25%	13%
America	% of population that are immigrants	33%	14%
Russia	% of politicians that are women	31%	14%
Britain	amount of the country's wealth owned by the top 1%	59%	23%
Saudi Arabia	% of people that are overweight or obese	28%	71%
Britain	% of young adults (25-34) who live with their parents	43%	14%

### 5 Prefixes

- a.**
1. mis
  2. over
  3. un
  4. un
  5. in
  6. mis
  7. over
  8. under
- b.**
1. un
  2. mis
  3. un; dis
  4. mis

### 6 Questions

**Teacher's tip:** If possible, get students to do this task in pairs and pass their questions to another pair to answer. Encourage them to use some of the words from the previous tasks in their questions. The first words of some of the questions are given to ensure that students write a variety of question types.