

The Dialogue Divide Research Report



Introduction

When we started working on the The Dialogue Project, we wanted to know whether the dialogue divide, or the inability for people to have civil conversations with others who disagree with them, was a global phenomenon. With the help of Morning Consult, we conducted a global survey of 5,000 adults in five countries: Brazil, Germany, India, the U.K., and the U.S. This research report dives into the results of the survey. We investigate the severity of the problem, the conversation topics that are most difficult for people to address, how comfortable people are in having those conversations, the sources responsible for the difficulty in finding common ground, and how well people believe they are actually doing to bridge the gap.

We found that respondents in most countries did identify the dialogue divide as a “major” problem. Brazil, India, and the U.S. were more aligned with one another than Germany and the U.K., who saw the dialogue divide as a less severe problem. Certain current event topics like COVID-19 and the protests following the George Floyd murder made people both more able and less able to have civil conversations, depending on the country. What became clear to us based on the results is that listening and engaging civilly with others is challenging for certain topics. Culture also plays a significant role as well.

While the respondents indicated the outlook appears to be bleak in terms of whether they think their country could overcome divisiveness in the near future, respondents did identify solutions. These include electing civil leaders and encouraging people and family members to communicate with others. Supporting companies who help people find common ground was also noted—this is an area where businesses can shine and truly make a difference to close the dialogue divide and help build a more civil society.

Bob Feldman

Director
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TOP 12 KEY FINDINGS

1 Engaging in respectful dialogue with those who hold opposing views is a major problem.

The severity of the problem, though, depends on the country. The U.S. (57%) was more aligned with Brazil (64%), and India (49%) as seeing this as a greater problem than the U.K. and Germany; only a quarter of respondents in the UK (28%) and Germany (26%) agreed. American women think polarization is a significantly larger problem than men (63% vs. 51%).

2 Globally, politics is largely seen as one of the most contentious and difficult issues to have respectful conversations about.

Politics, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation were identified as the top three topics globally that people thought were most difficult for them to talk about with others who have different views. In the U.S., politics (80%), race (77%), and immigration (74%) are the three hardest subjects to have constructive conversations about with people who hold differing views.

3 The better-than-average effect, or the theory that people believe they are better at a task than others, was evident.

People believe in all areas, except politics, that they are more able to have conversations with those with opposing views than others in all countries except India. The topics that people believed others had more difficulty discussing included politics, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

4 Politics, race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation were the topics respondents overall said were most difficult to find common ground among those with differing beliefs.

Of the 10 topics listed, at least half of the respondents across countries said people in their countries have difficulty finding common ground with one another. The most difficult issues for people to find common ground in the U.S. were politics (76%), race/ethnicity (71%), and gun laws (70%). It's frequently said that there is more that unites us in this country than divides us. Today, only 53% of Americans agree with that sentiment.

TOP 12 KEY FINDINGS

5 | The impact of COVID-19 on the ability to engage in respectful dialogue was mixed.

Overall, respondents were nearly evenly divided among being “more able,” “less able,” or experiencing no change in the ability to have respectful dialogue with those who hold different views. Half of the UK respondents said COVID-19 had “no impact” on conversations. India respondents (62%) were typically “more able” than Americans (46%) who were more likely to be “less able.”

6 | Racial unrest has made it both easier and more difficult to have a dialogue with those who hold different beliefs, depending on the country

Respondents across countries were nearly equally “more able” and “less able” to have respectful dialogue with those who hold differing beliefs. In India, nearly two-thirds said they were “more able,” while in the U.S., 57% said they were “less able.”

7 | Politicians were deemed to be most responsible for finding common ground, along with social media and country leaders.

More than three-quarters of respondents across countries said politicians, social media, and country leaders were most responsible for difficulties finding common ground among those who hold opposing views. Broadcast/cable and national/international news were also noted as being responsible.

8 | Country leaders were the most responsible party for bridging the divide of those with opposing views.

National/international newspapers, social media, politicians, religious leaders, and broadcast/cable news were also identified as being responsible by nearly three-quarters of respondents across countries.

TOP 12 KEY FINDINGS

9 | Eight-out-of-10 respondents said people need to be more respectful when talking with people who do not agree with them.

10 | Even though respondents said people should be more respectful, only half across countries were willing to spend time with those who do not agree with them.

The U.S. (43%) and the U.K. (35%) respondents were less likely to be willing to listen to others who hold opposing views.

11 | Very few escaped conversations with those with hold differing perspectives on political and social views.

Brazil and India were more likely to have these conversations often compared to the other countries; only one-in-four in the U.S., the U.K., and Germany had conversations often.

12 | Electing leaders who inspire civility was the top choice for helping people find common ground with opposing political and social views.

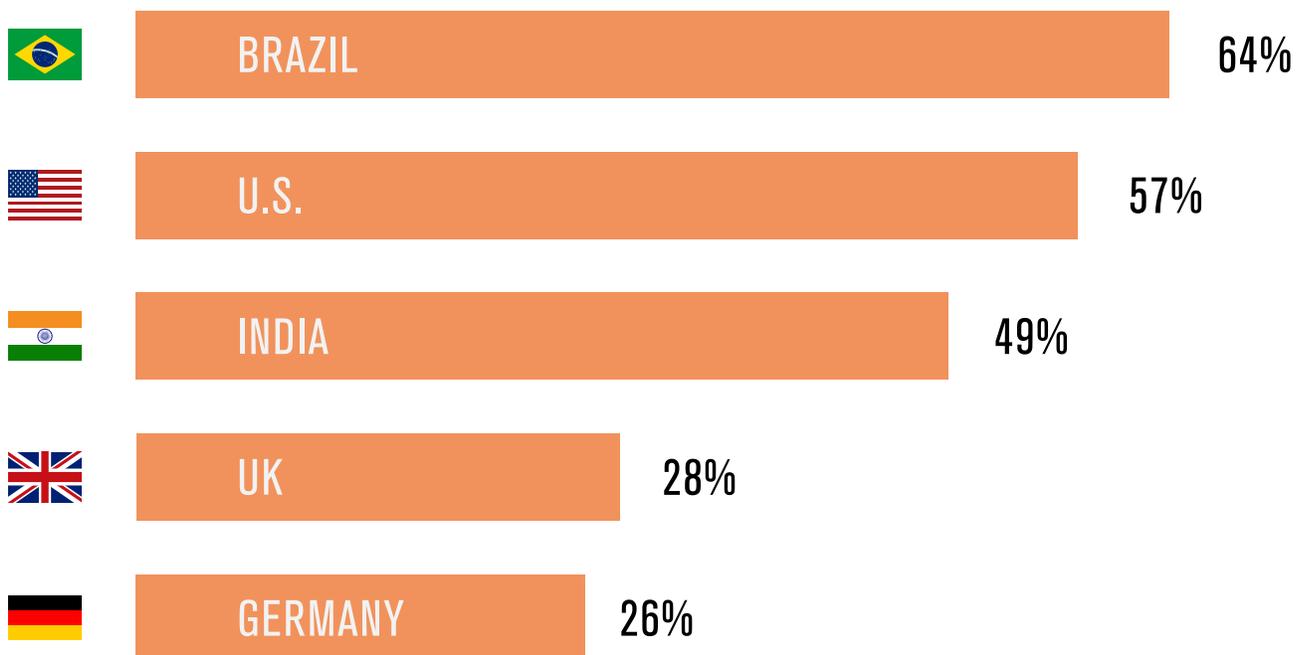
The five most commonly identified solutions endorsed by at least 70% of respondents include:

1. Elect leaders who inspire people to be more civil with each other
2. Encourage people to communicate more often with people who have opposing views
3. Encourage families and friends to communicate with people of opposing views
4. Reform elections by improving transparency in the campaign reporting process



How Significant of A Problem is the Dialogue Divide?

The inability for people to engage in respectful dialogue with those who have opposing views depends on the country. Overall, 45% of respondents said the ability for people in their country to engage in respectful dialogue with those who hold opposing views was a major problem. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) in Brazil agreed as well as did more than half (57%) of the U.S.; nearly half (49%) in India agreed. Approximately one-fourth of respondents in the U.K. (28%) and Germany (26%) say that the ability to engage in respectful dialogue with those with opposing views was a major problem. However, at least 70% of respondents in every country said this was, to some degree, a problem.



How Difficult Is It For People to Engage in Dialogue and Find Common Ground

Difficulty for Respondents

Across countries, the top three most difficult issues for people themselves to engage in respectful dialogue include: politics (57%), race/ethnicity (49%), and sexual orientation (49%). Politics was a difficult issue for people themselves to have discussions about in every country, while race/ethnicity was identified in every country except Brazil. Sexual orientation appeared in the top five for every country except Germany; sexual orientation (36%) was their least difficult issue to discuss. Climate change only appeared in the top five in Germany and gender only appeared in Brazil. Both Brazil and India identified the economy as a topic that created difficult conversations. Across the five countries, conversations about COVID-19 were not difficult to have compared to other topics.

Difficulty for Others

Regarding how difficult people think it is for others to have respectful dialogues with those who do not agree with them, some interesting findings appeared. The better-than-average effect, which suggests that people believe they are better at a task than others, in this case engaging in respectful dialogue with those with opposing views, applied to all countries except India. In the U.S., the difference was particularly stark. Every topic had at least a 20-percentage point gap in the perceived ability of themselves to engage in respectful dialogue compared to others. The gap for Brazil ranged from 13-percentage to 22-percentage points. Across countries, the topics people had difficulty talking about themselves compared to others were similar.

Most Difficult Topics for People Themselves and for Others to Engage in With Those With Differing Perspectives

Overall

You

1. Politics (57%)
2. Race/Ethnicity (49%)
3. Sexual Orientation (49%)
4. Immigration (48%)
5. Religion (47%)

Others

1. Politics (68%)
2. Race/Ethnicity (64%)
3. Sexual Orientation (64%)
4. Immigration (62%)
5. Religion (62%)



U.S.*

You

1. Politics (59%)
2. Race/Ethnicity (52%)
3. Immigration (47%)
4. Gun Laws (47%)
5. Sexual Orientation (46%)

Others

1. Politics (80%)
2. Race/Ethnicity (77%)
3. Immigration (74%)
4. Gun Laws (73%)
5. Sexual Orientation (73%)

* Note: Gun laws was offered as an option only in the U.S.



U.K.

You

1. Immigration (42%)
2. Politics (38%)
3. Race/Ethnicity (38%)
4. Sexual Orientation (35%)
5. Religion (31%)

Others

1. Immigration (59%)
2. Race/Ethnicity (55%)
3. Politics (52%)
4. Religion (49%)
5. Sexual Orientation (49%)



India

You

1. Sexual orientation (71%)
2. Politics (69%)
3. Religion (67%)
4. The Economy (63%)
5. Race/Ethnicity (62%)

Others

1. Sexual Orientation (71%)
2. Politics (68%)
3. Religion (67%)
4. Race/Ethnicity (62%)
5. The Economy (59%)



Brazil

You

1. Politics (69%)
2. Sexual Orientation (58%)
3. Religion (53%)
4. Gender (51%)
5. The Economy (47%)

Others

1. Politics (82%)
2. Sexual Orientation (78%)
3. Religion (72%)
4. Gender (70%)
5. The Economy (67%)



Germany

You

1. Immigration (57%)
2. Politics (53%)
3. Race/Ethnicity (48%)
4. Religion (46%)
5. Climate Change (45%)

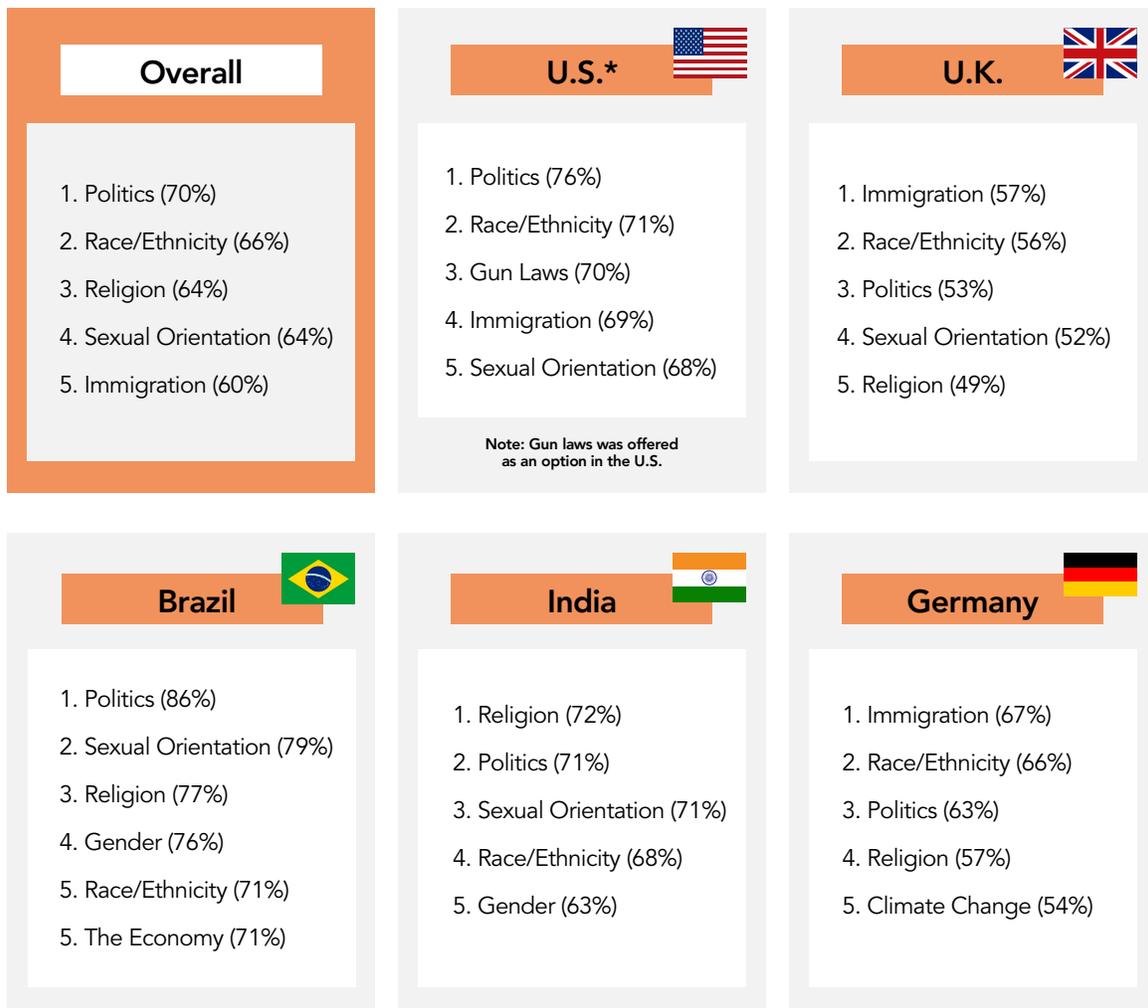
Others

1. Immigration (66%)
2. Race/Ethnicity (60%)
3. Politics (58%)
4. Religion (51%)
5. Climate Change (50%)
5. Sexual Orientation (50%)

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

Most often, politics and race/ethnicity were the two topics that respondents said were most difficult to find common ground across countries. Except for the U.K., each country's top topic was identified as a difficult topic by more than two-thirds of respondents in each of those countries. Immigration landed the top spot in the UK (57%) and Germany (67%). Politics was the most difficult topic in the U.S. (76%) and Brazil (86%), while religion was the most difficult in India (72%). Of the 10 topics offered, at least 50% of respondents across countries said people in their countries had difficulty finding common ground.

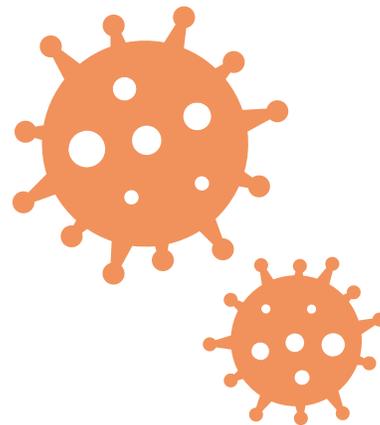
Top Five Issues People Said are Difficult for People in Their Country to Find Common Ground



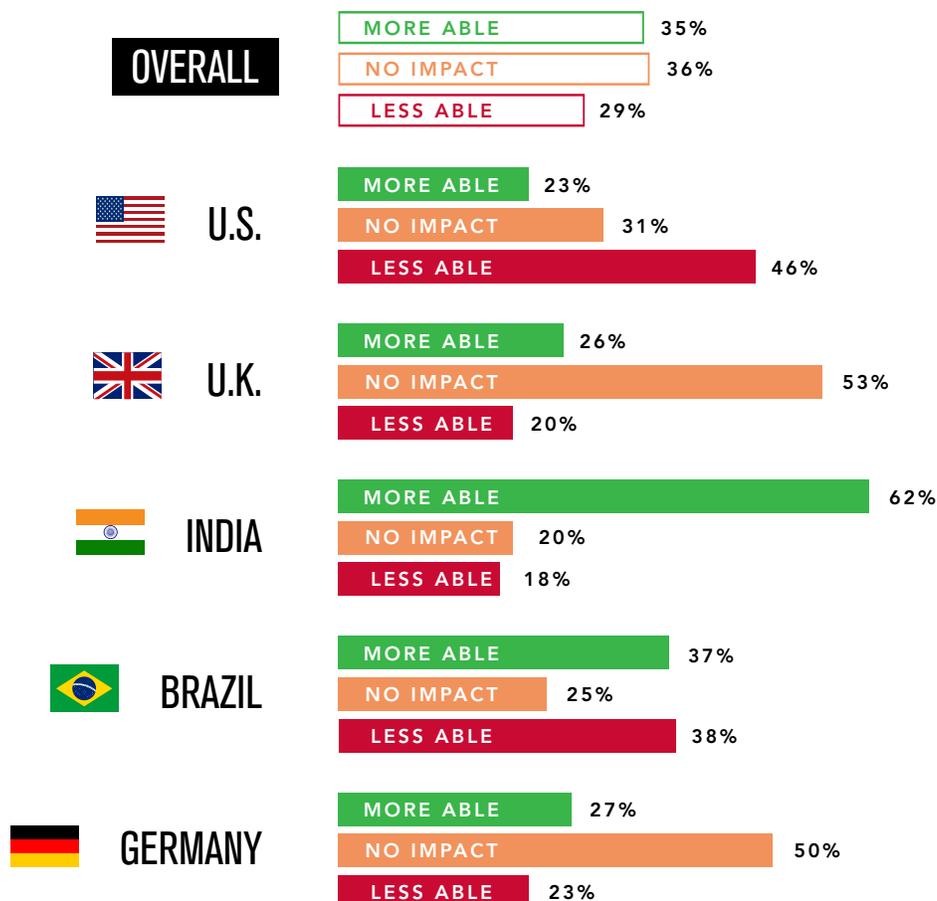
How have current events had an impact on the ability to engage in respectful dialogue?

COVID-19

Overall, respondents were split on the impact that COVID-19 had on their ability to have respectful dialogue with those who hold differing beliefs; they were evenly divided among being “more able,” “less able,” and having “no impact.” Both the U.K. and Germany saw half their respondents say COVID-19 had “no impact.” Nearly two-thirds (62%) in India said they were “more able” to have respectful dialogue while in the U.S., nearly half (46%) said they were “less able.”



COVID-19's Effect on the Ability for Respectful Dialogue



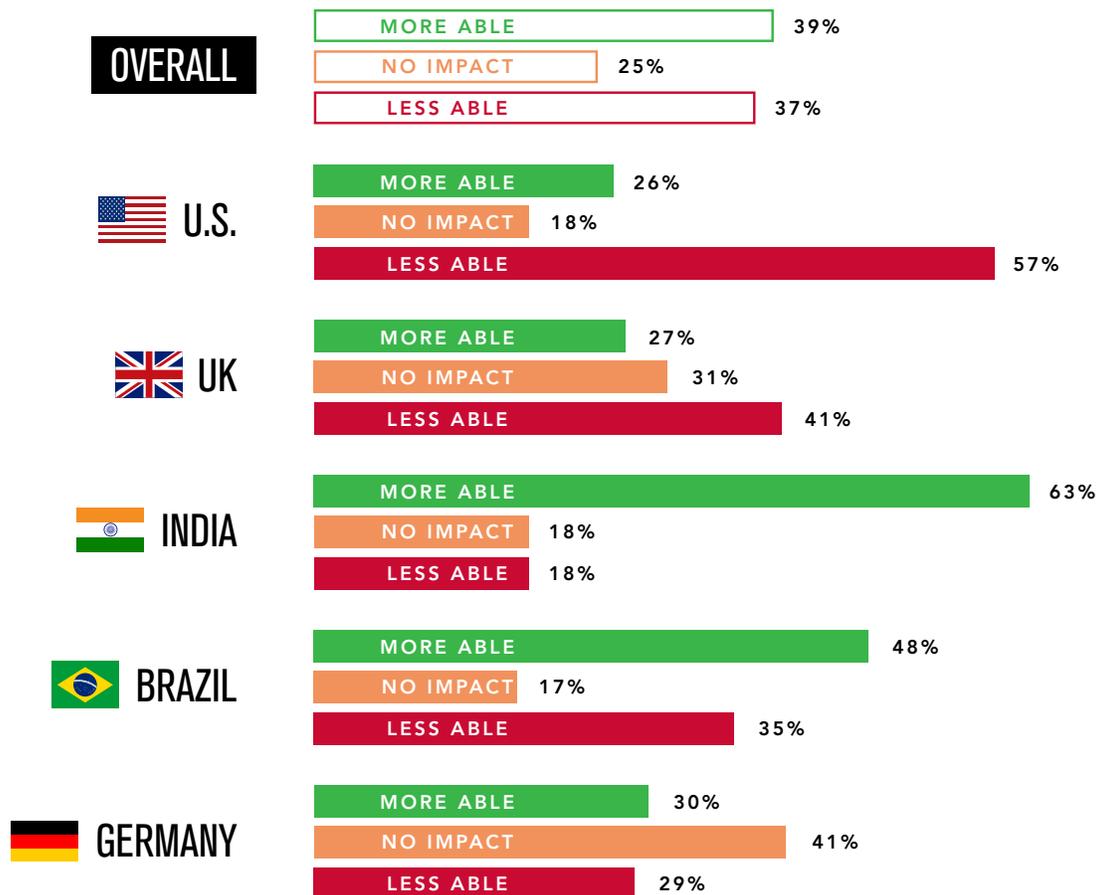
Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

Racial Issues

Across countries, 39% of respondents said racial unrest allowed them to be “more able” to have respectful dialogue with those who have different beliefs; similarly, 37% said they were “less able.” Interestingly, in the center of the racial unrest in the U.S., more than half (57%) said they were “less able;” only one-quarter said they were “more able.” The U.K. respondents (41%) were also more likely to be “less able.” In India, nearly two-thirds (63%) said they were “more able.”



Impact of Unrest Surrounding Racial Issues in The U.S. and Abroad



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

Who is Responsible for Difficulties in Finding Common Ground and Who Should Bridge the Divide?

Responsible for Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

Politicians were identified by 81% across countries as being the most responsible for difficulties in finding common ground between people who hold opposing political and social views. Others responsible include social media (80%); country leaders (79%); broadcast/cable news (75%); and national/international newspapers (75%). For most countries, politicians and country leaders were most responsible for these difficulties. Social media was at the top of the list in the U.K., and broadcast/ cable news was most responsible in India. Of the eight sources provided, all were deemed responsible by at least half the respondents in that country; most countries saw nearly two-thirds of respondents identifying each source as being responsible.

Responsibility for Bridging the Divide

For those responsible for bridging the divide between people that hold opposing views, country leaders were the most responsible in all countries except India and Brazil. Interestingly, the least responsible source in Brazil were politicians (56%) while they placed the most responsibility on family/friends. India said national/international newspapers (85%) were most responsible. Across all countries except Brazil, businesses scored the lowest in being responsible for bridging the divide.

In terms of bridging the gap between those responsible for difficulties in finding ground and those for bridging the divide, the largest scores were seen in Brazil. In that country, politicians experienced a 26-percentage point gap and country leaders a 20-percentage point gap between those responsible for difficulties in finding common ground and those responsible for bridging the gap. Most other countries saw narrower gaps, indicating that those responsible for the difficulties and those bridging the gap are similar.

Sources Responsible for the Difficulty in Finding Common Ground and Those Responsible for Bridging the Divide

Overall

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

1. Politicians (81%)
2. Social Media (80%)
3. Country Leaders (79%)
4. Broadcast News (75%)
5. Newspapers (75%)

Bridging the Divide

1. Country Leaders (76%)
2. Newspapers (75%)
3. Social Media (74%)
4. Politicians (73%)
5. Religious Leaders (73%)
5. Broadcast News (73%)



U.S.

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

1. Politicians (83%)
2. Country Leaders (81%)
3. Social Media (80%)
4. Broadcast News (75%)
5. Newspapers (72%)

Bridging the Divide

1. Country Leaders (78%)
2. Politicians (77%)
3. Newspapers (72%)
4. Broadcast News (72%)
5. Religious Leaders (70%)



U.K.

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

1. Social Media (79%)
2. Newspapers (78%)
3. Politicians (76%)
4. Broadcast News (74%)
5. Country Leaders (73%)

Bridging the Divide

1. Country Leaders (75%)
2. Newspapers (74%)
3. Politicians (74%)
4. Broadcast News (72%)
5. Religious Leaders (72%)



India

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

1. Broadcast News (85%)
2. Social Media (85%)
3. Newspapers (83%)
4. Politicians (83%)
5. Country Leaders (83%)
5. Religious Leaders (83%)

Bridging the Divide

1. Newspapers (85%)
2. Social Media (85%)
3. Broadcast News (83%)
4. Country Leaders (83%)
5. Religious Leaders (82%)



Brazil

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

1. Country Leaders (83%)
2. Politicians (82%)
3. Social Media (82%)
4. Newspapers (82%)
5. Broadcast News (77%)

Bridging the Divide

1. Friends/Family (80%)
2. Social Media (73%)
3. Religious Leaders (69%)
4. Broadcast News (67%)
5. Newspapers (66%)



Germany

Difficulty in Finding Common Ground

1. Politicians (77%)
2. Country Leaders (76%)
3. Social Media (73%)
4. Newspapers (69%)
5. Religious Leaders (69%)

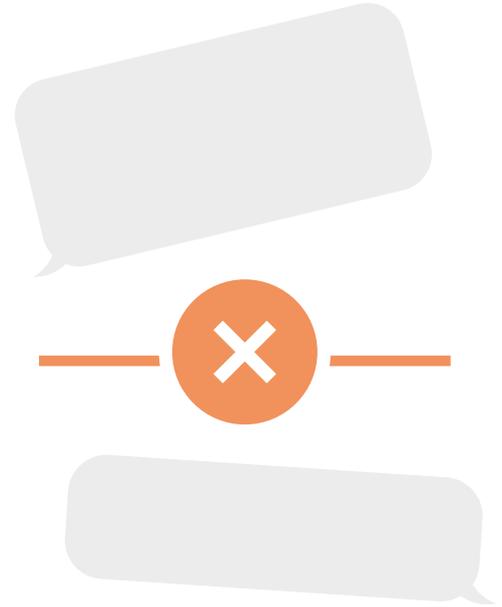
Bridging the Divide

1. Country Leaders (81%)
2. Politicians (80%)
3. Social Media (75%)
4. Newspapers (74%)
5. Broadcast News (72%)
5. Religious Leaders (72%)

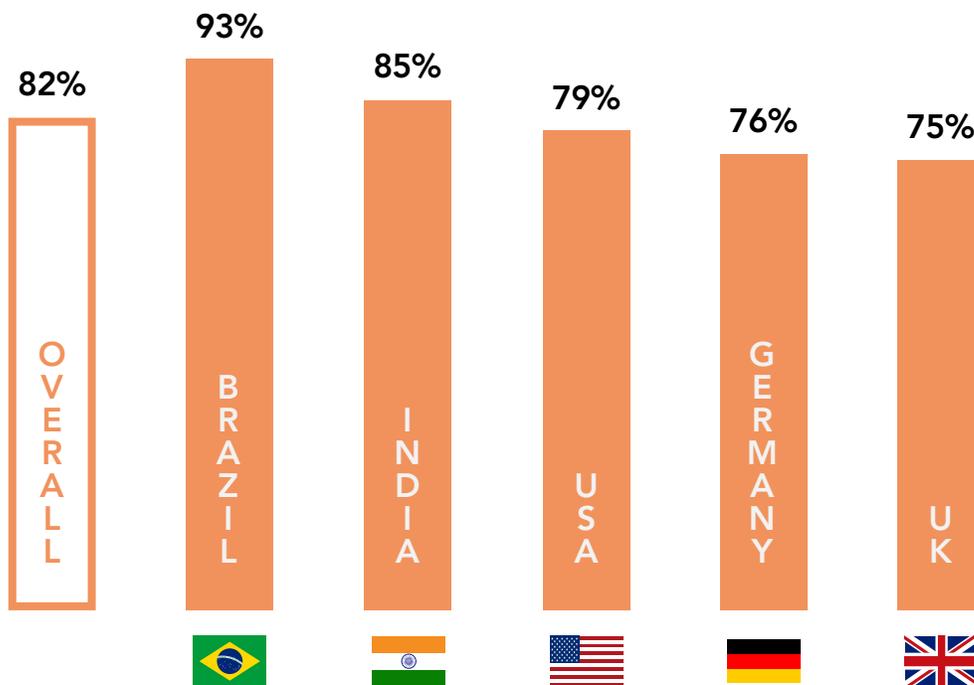
How Do People Feel About the Dialogue Divide?

People Need to be More Respectful in Conversations

Overall, 82% of people agree that people need to be more respectful. In Brazil, 93% people agreed with that statement.



“People need to be more respectful when talking to people who do not agree with them”



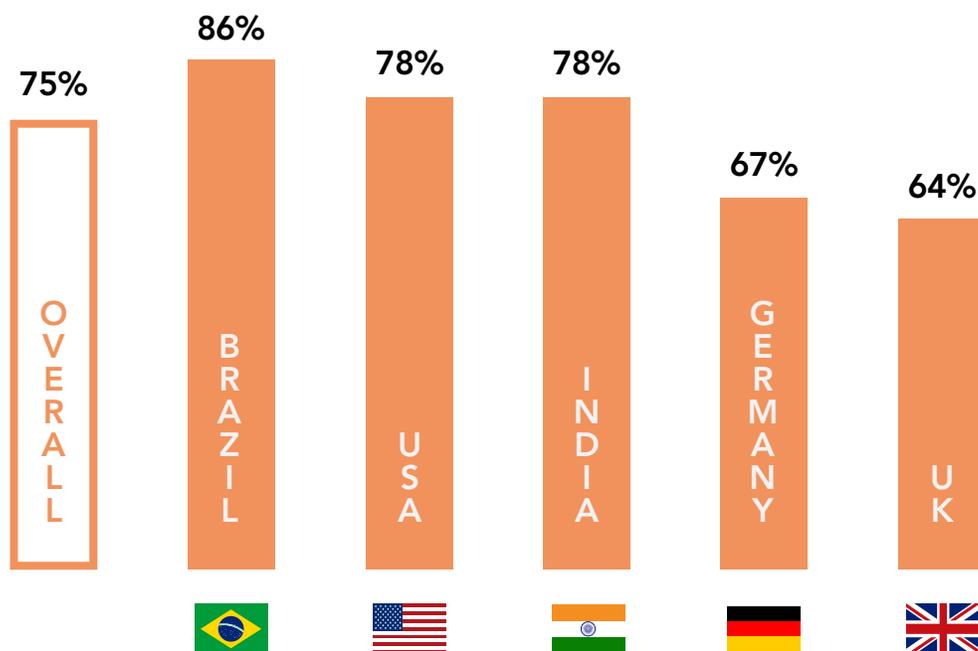
% of those who agree with the following statement

Differing Beliefs Make Conversation More Difficult

Three-quarters of respondents across countries said people with differing beliefs find it difficult to listen to people who disagree with them. The spread ranged from 64% in the U.K. to 86% in Brazil.



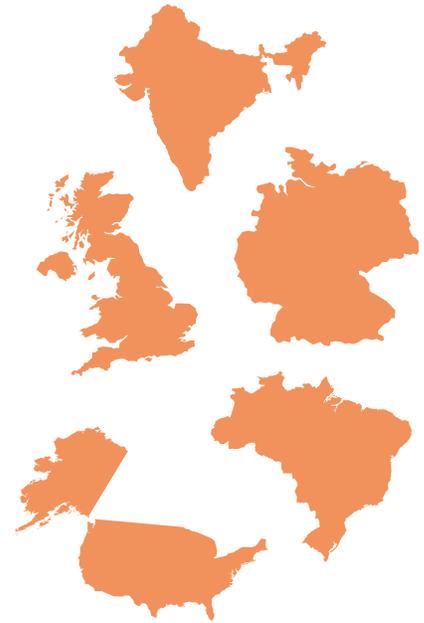
“People with differing beliefs find it difficult to listen to people who disagree with them”



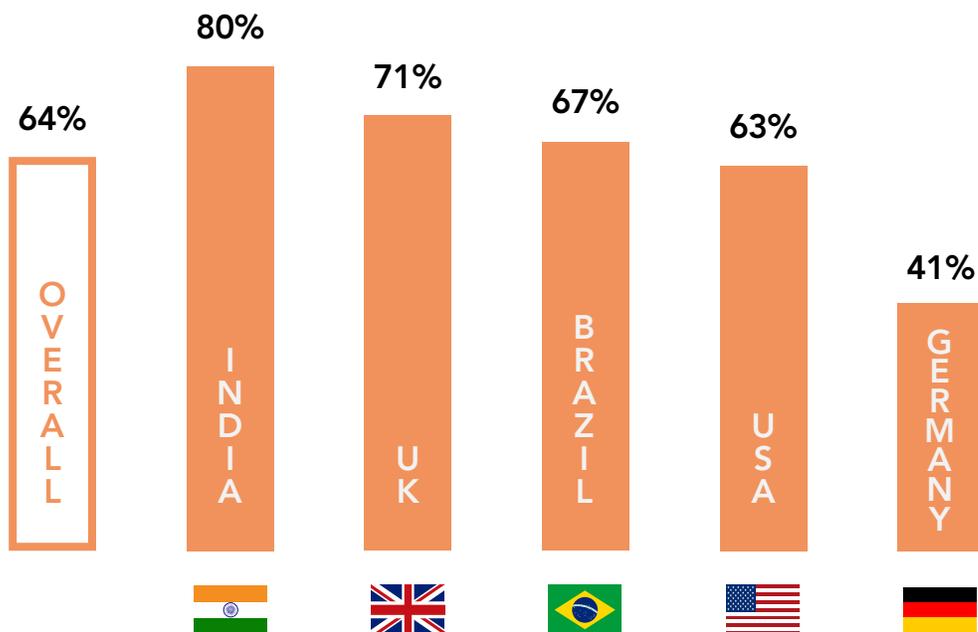
% of those who agree with the following statement

How Comfortable are You with Being Uncomfortable?

While nearly two-thirds of respondents said they are comfortable having conversations with other people who have different perspectives, this depended on the country. In Germany, less than half (41%) said they were comfortable while in India, more than three-quarters (80%) agreed; the UK landed at 71%. The U.S. (63%) and Brazil (67%) hovered closer to the average.



“I am comfortable having conversations with other people who have different perspectives”



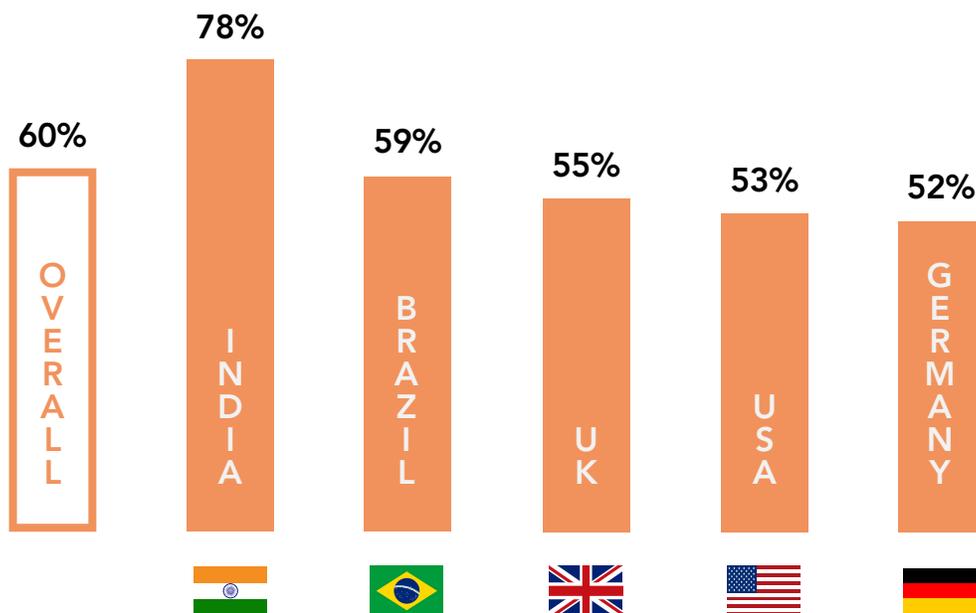
% of those who agree with the following statement

More Unites than Divides

Six-out-of-ten respondents across countries agreed that there is more in their country that unites them than divides them. That number was significantly higher (78%) in India, while the other countries hovered closer to the average with slightly more than half of their country agreeing.



“There is more in this country that unites us than divides us”



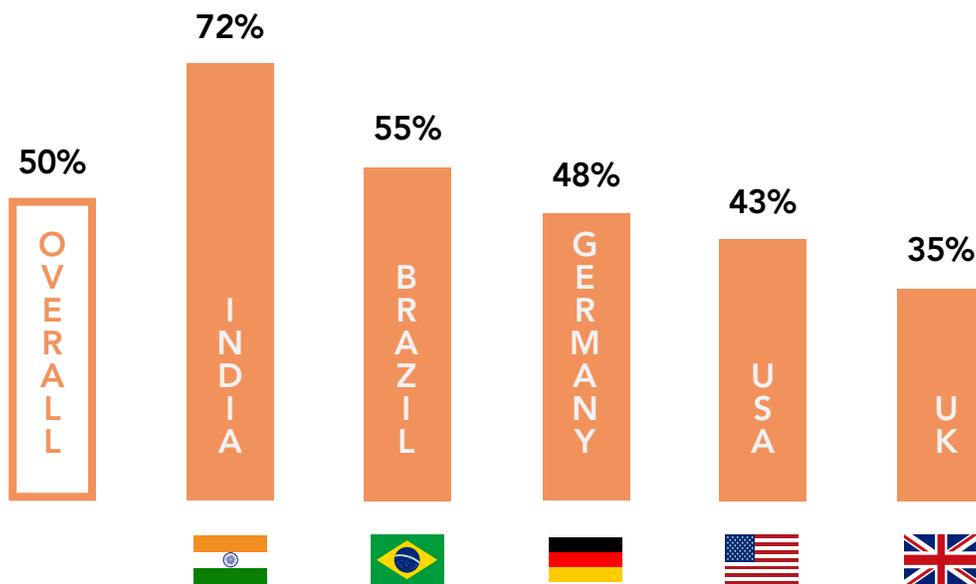
% of those who agree with the following statement

Only Half are Willing to Listen to Those Who Disagree

While most respondents agreed there was divisiveness, fewer were willing to spend time listening to those that do not agree with them, except in India. In India, 72% said they need to spend more time listening, while less than half in Germany (48%), the U.S. (43%), and the U.K. (35%) were willing to do so. Slightly more than half of respondents (55%) in Brazil were willing to listen to those they didn't agree with.



"I need to spend more time listening to the opinions of people I don't agree with"



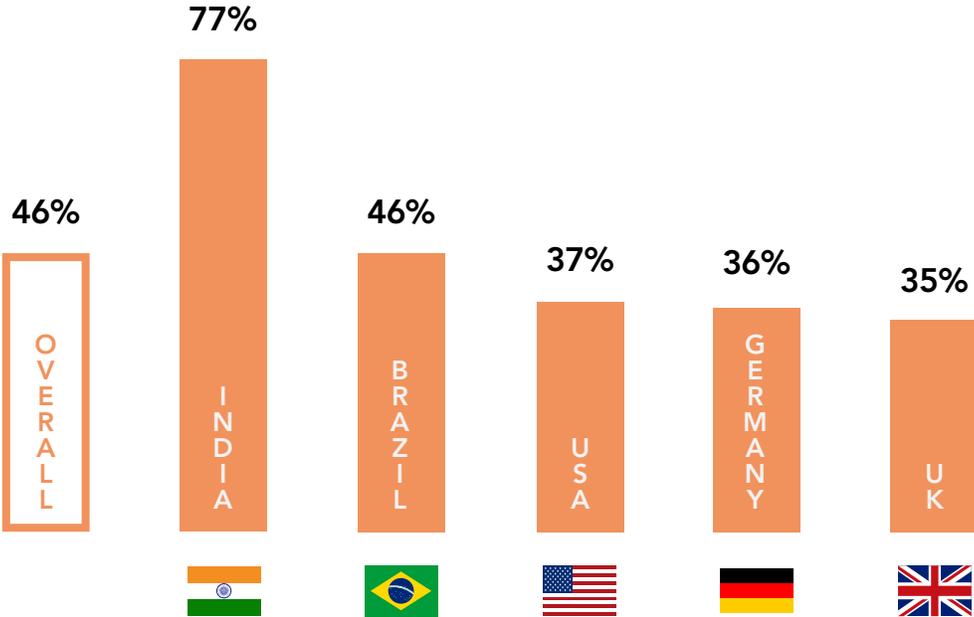
% of those who agree with the following statement

Lack of Confidence in Overcoming Divisiveness

Across countries, people were not as confident (46%) that their country would overcome their divisiveness anytime soon, except in India, where more than three-quarters (77%) were confident. The U.S., the U.K., and Germany hovered around one-third of respondents, while Brazil saw a slightly higher percentage at 46%.



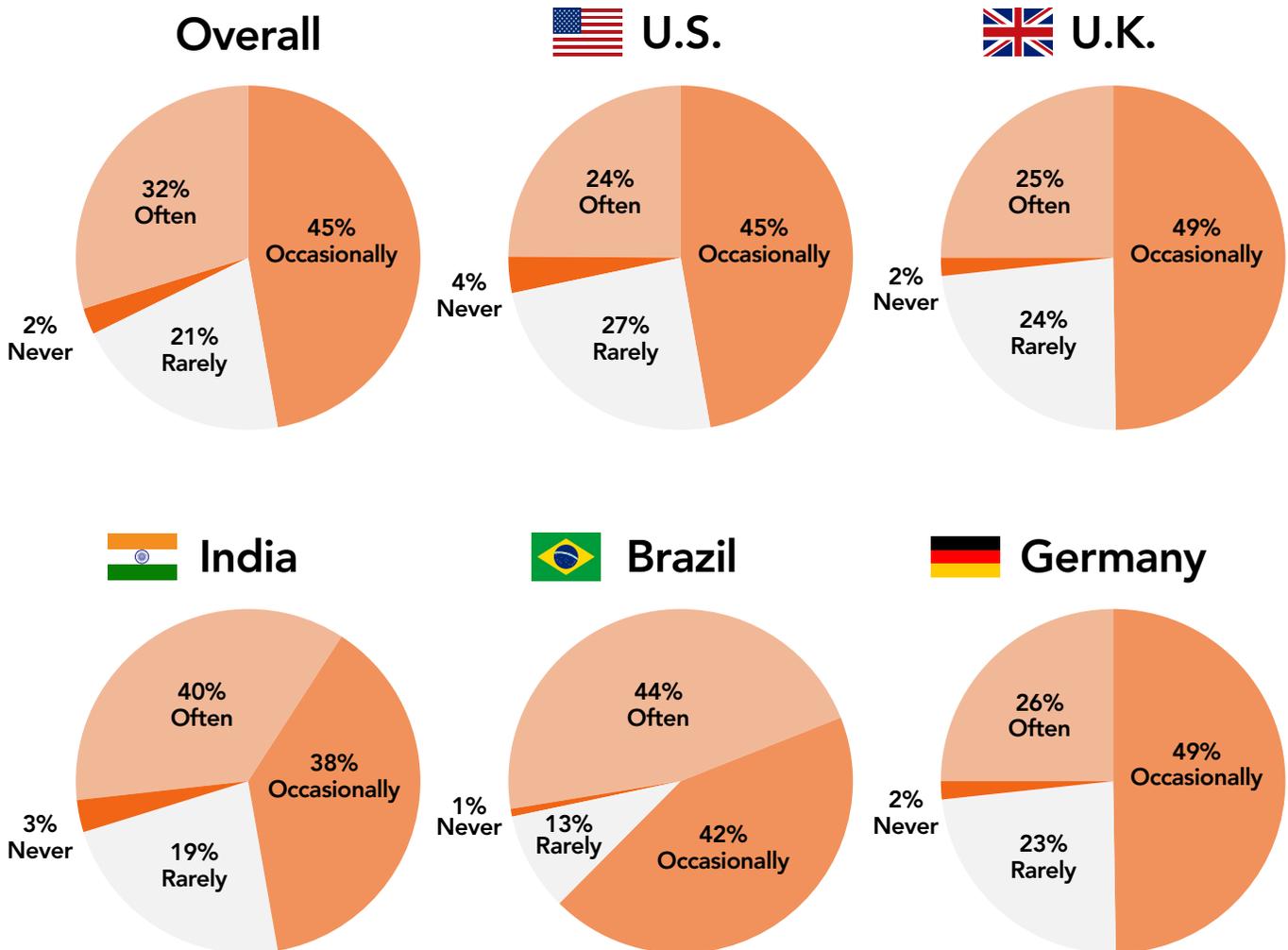
“I am optimistic that our country will overcome divisiveness soon”



% of those who agree with the following statement

How Often Do You Engage with Those Who Have Different Perspectives?

Across countries, very few respondents escaped conversations with those with differing perspectives. Respondents most often had occasional conversations with those with differing perspectives, except in India and Brazil. At least one-quarter of respondents (27%) in the U.S said they rarely have conversations, similar to the U.K. (24%) and Germany (23%). Brazil (44%) and India (40%) were the two countries where the respondents said they often have conversations with those with differing perspectives.

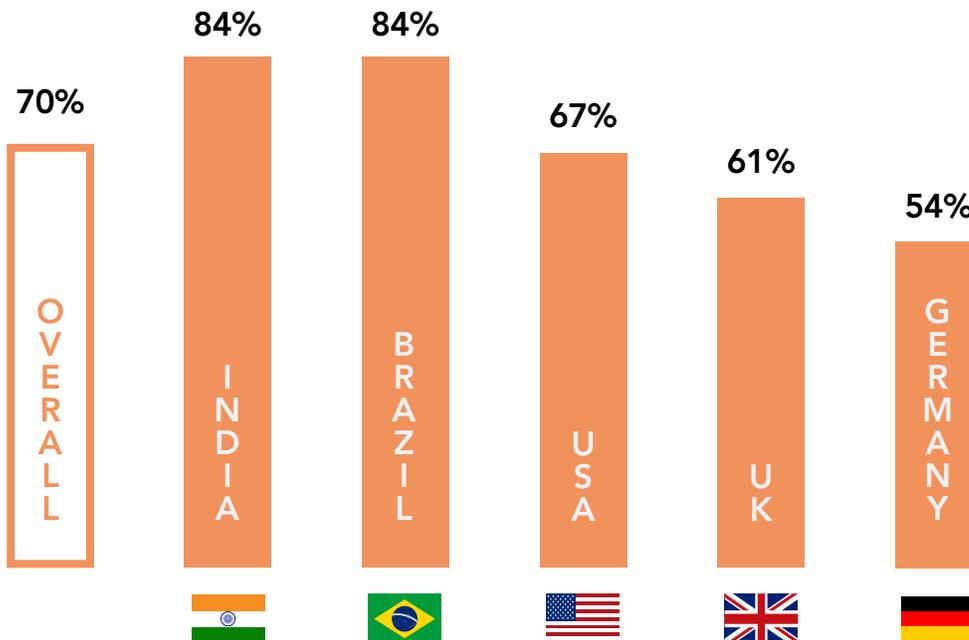


Improve Campaign Transparency

Reforming elections by improving transparency in the campaign reporting process was another popular recommendation endorsed by 70% of respondents. Eighty-four percent of respondents in Brazil and India agreed with this approach, compared to only 54% in Germany.

VOTE
CANDIDATE
2020

“Reform elections by improving transparency in the campaign reporting process”

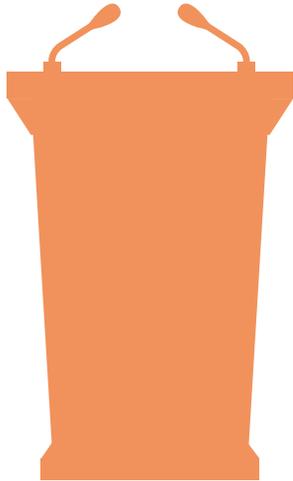


% of those who agree with the following statement

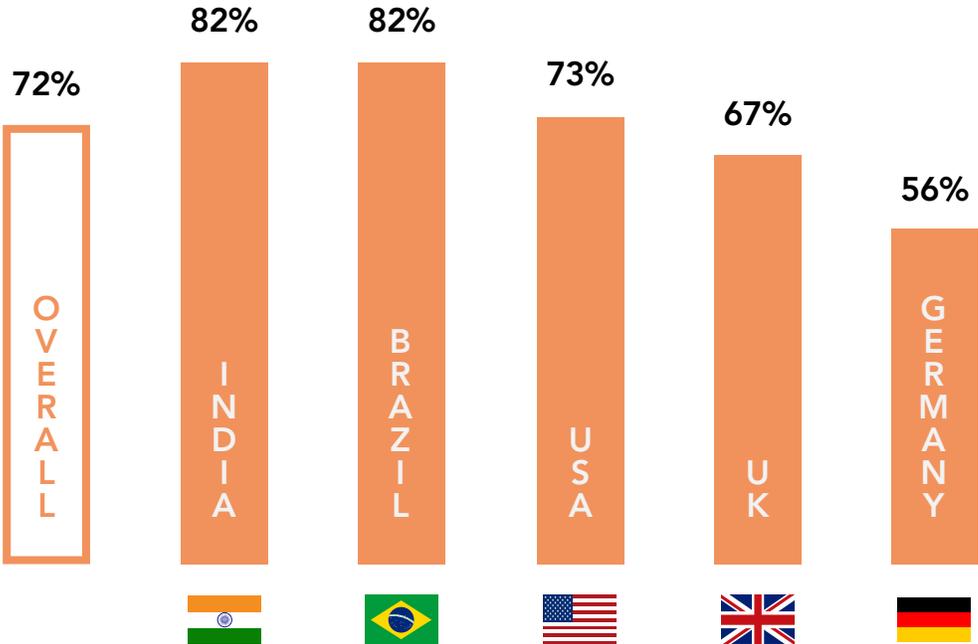
How to Better Find Common Ground with Others

Elect Leaders Who Inspire Civility

Overall, electing leaders who inspire people to be more civil to one another was the most identified solution. India (82%) and Brazil (82%) saw this as being a more effective solution than Germany (56%).



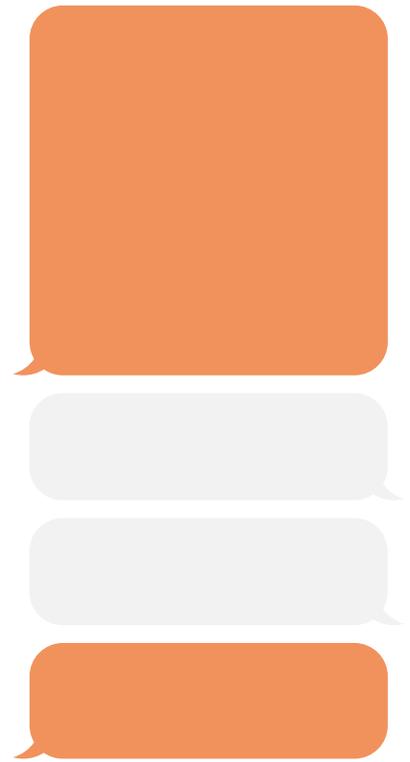
“Elect leaders who will inspire us to be more civil with each other”



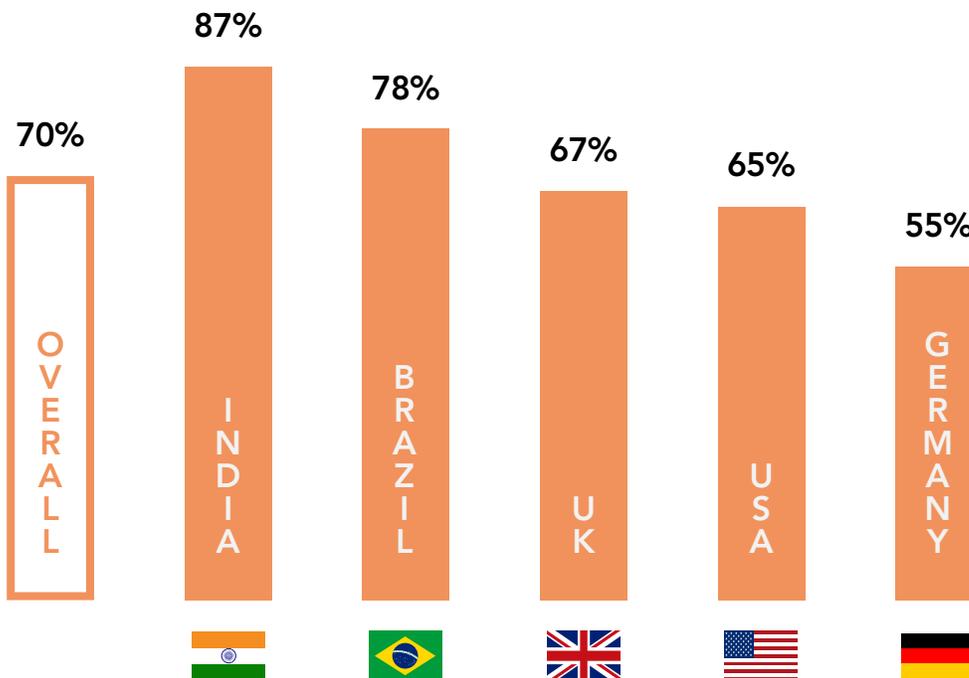
% of those who agree with the following statement

People of Differing Beliefs Should Communicate More

Across countries, 70% of respondents said people should be encouraged to communicate more often with those who hold opposing views. An overwhelming 87% in India agreed with this, while Germans (55%) were less likely.



“Encourage people to communicate more often with people who have opposing views”



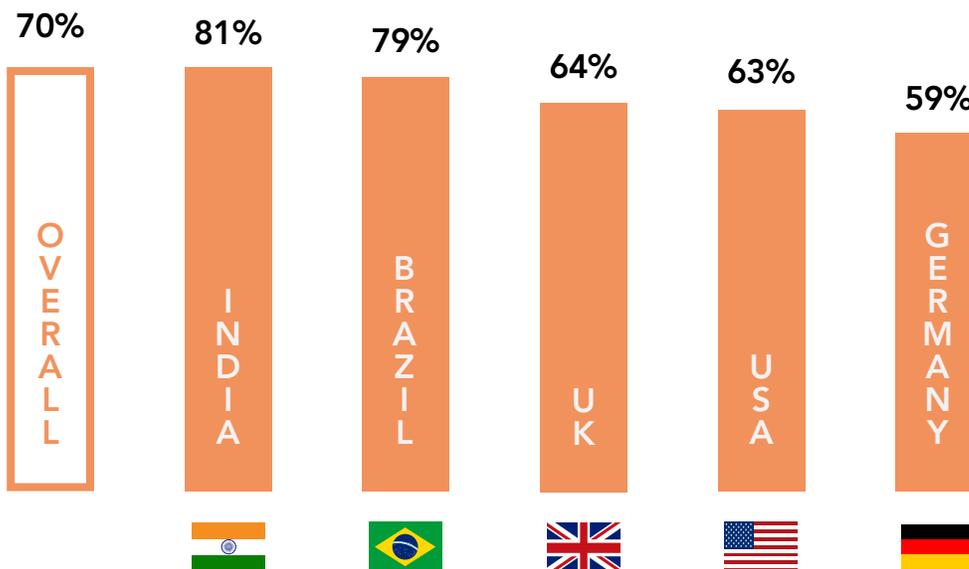
% of those who agree with the following statement

Family and Friends May Hold the Key

Seventy percent of respondents suggested encouraging family and friends to communicate with those of opposing views may be a solution.



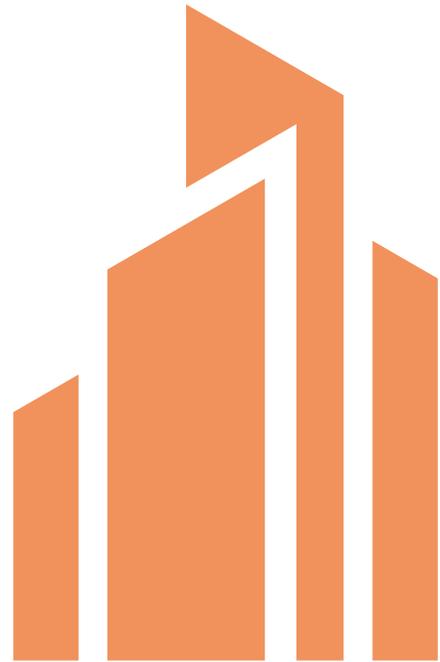
“Encourage our families and friends to communicate with people of opposing views”



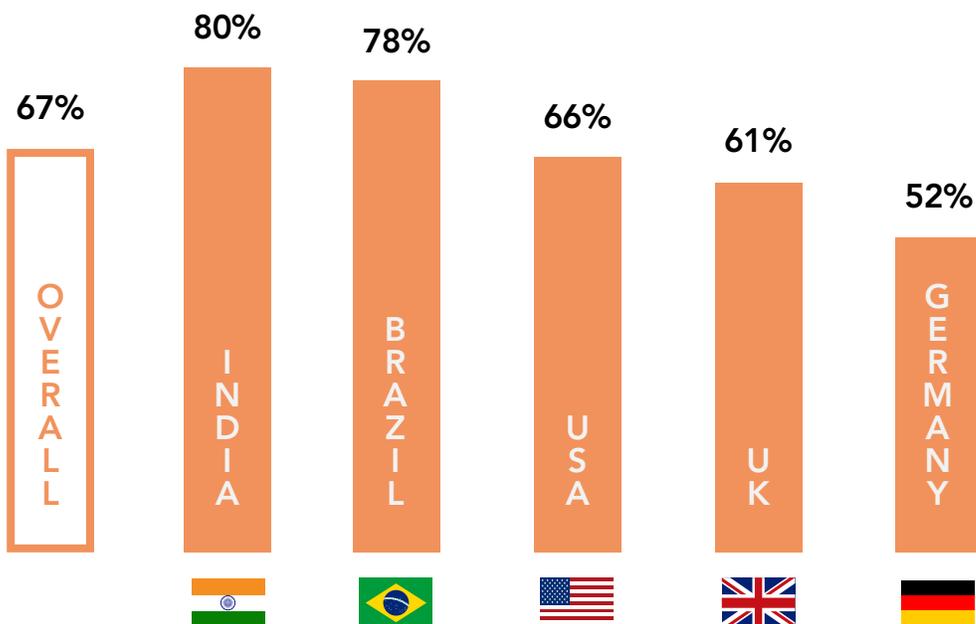
% of those who agree with the following statement

Embrace Companies Trying to Help

Two-thirds of respondents recommended embracing efforts by companies focused on helping people find common ground. India (80%) and Brazil (78%) were more likely to agree with this compared to Germany (52%). Two-thirds of U.S respondents supported companies helping people.



“Embrace efforts by companies that are focused on helping people find common ground”



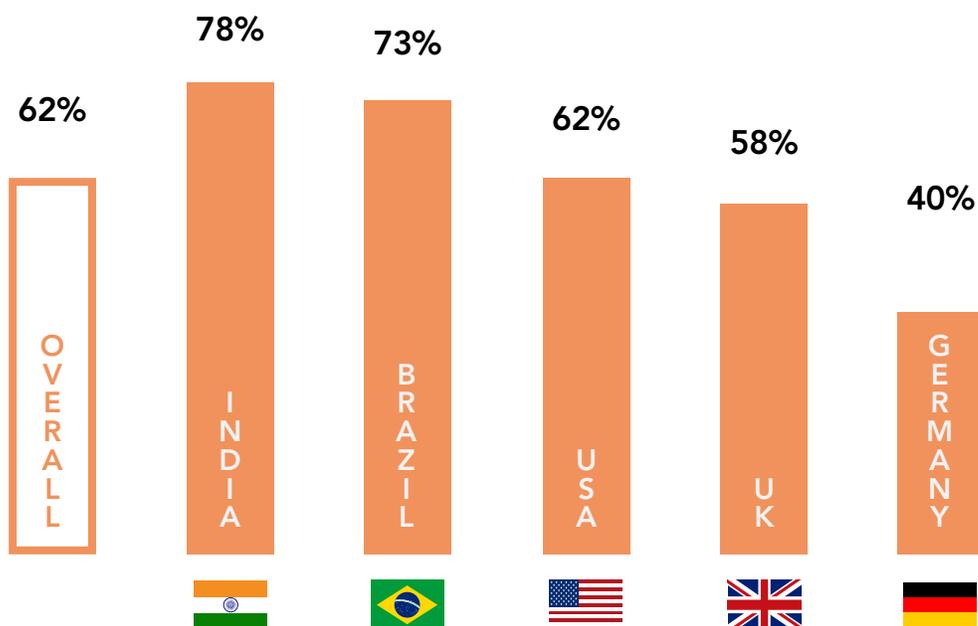
% of those who agree with the following statement

Legislation May Help

Compared to the other recommendations, fewer people supported electing leaders who will pass legislation to address divisiveness. Only 40% of German respondents agreed with this, while India (78%) and Brazil (73%) saw higher levels of support.



“Elect leaders who will pass legislation that addresses the issue of divisiveness”



% of those who agree with the following statement

The Dialogue Project



Methodology

Morning Consult conducted this survey between July 5-July 6, 2020 among a national sample of 1,000 Adults per country in the US, UK, India, Brazil, and Germany. They conducted the interviews online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of adults in each country based on age, gender, educational attainment, race, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point, and each country has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1%.

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If you would like access to the crosstabs and topline results, please contact Tina McCorkindale at tina@instituteforpr.org

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