



RISING TIDES

GLOBAL OPINIONS ON ACTIONS
TO STOP PLASTIC POLLUTION
IN 28 COUNTRIES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Publisher:

WWF International and the Plastic Free Foundation

Date: February 2022

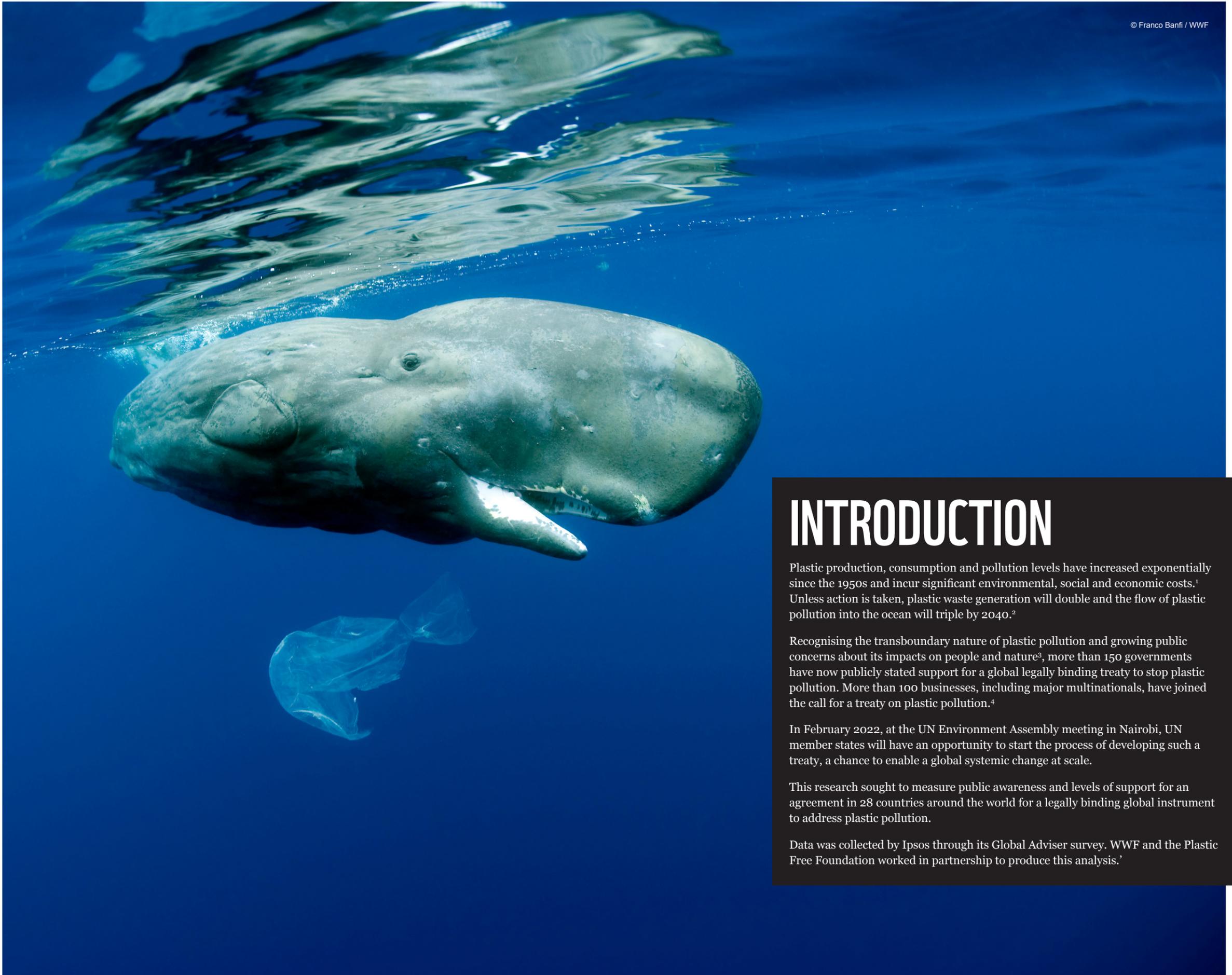
WWF is an independent conservation organization, with over 30 million followers and a global network active in nearly 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

The Plastic Free Foundation is a not-for-profit global social movement of over 100 million people that stops around 300 million kgs of plastic polluting the world each year. Through advocacy and initiatives like our Plastic Free July challenge, we share plastic free solutions with people and organizations so that we can all take action to end plastic waste and enjoy a healthy world.

Design: Ender Ergün-Hakan Lokanoğlu

Cover Photo: Composite image based on the photo of a bleached coral by Tom Vierus / WWF. Plastic fish are digitally added to the photo.

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INTRODUCTION

Plastic production, consumption and pollution levels have increased exponentially since the 1950s and incur significant environmental, social and economic costs.¹ Unless action is taken, plastic waste generation will double and the flow of plastic pollution into the ocean will triple by 2040.²

Recognising the transboundary nature of plastic pollution and growing public concerns about its impacts on people and nature³, more than 150 governments have now publicly stated support for a global legally binding treaty to stop plastic pollution. More than 100 businesses, including major multinationals, have joined the call for a treaty on plastic pollution.⁴

In February 2022, at the UN Environment Assembly meeting in Nairobi, UN member states will have an opportunity to start the process of developing such a treaty, a chance to enable a global systemic change at scale.

This research sought to measure public awareness and levels of support for an agreement in 28 countries around the world for a legally binding global instrument to address plastic pollution.

Data was collected by Ipsos through its Global Adviser survey. WWF and the Plastic Free Foundation worked in partnership to produce this analysis.⁵

RESEARCH PURPOSE & DESIGN

This study uses quantitative data to answer questions about support for an international treaty to stop plastic pollution, and attitudes towards plastic consumption and producer responsibility

(see Appendix 1 for the full list of questions).

Quantitative data provides robust results that can be used to understand levels of support for action on plastic consumption, waste and pollution globally, across several regions, and in countries where the sample is nationally representative.

The Plastic Free Foundation partnered with global research company Ipsos to undertake this survey. WWF supported these organisations in producing this summary.



UNITED KINGDOM
N=1000

EUROPEAN UNION
N=500-1000

TURKEY
N=500

SAUDI ARABIA
N=500

INDIA
N=1002

CHINA
N=1001

MALAYSIA
N=500

AUSTRALIA
N=1000

SOUTH AFRICA
N=500

RUSSIA
N=500

SOUTH KOREA
N=502

JAPAN
N=1001

SAMPLING

The survey was conducted by Ipsos online, with 20,513 respondents in 28 countries. Respondents were aged between 16 and 74 years. The research was conducted between 20 August and 3 September 2021.

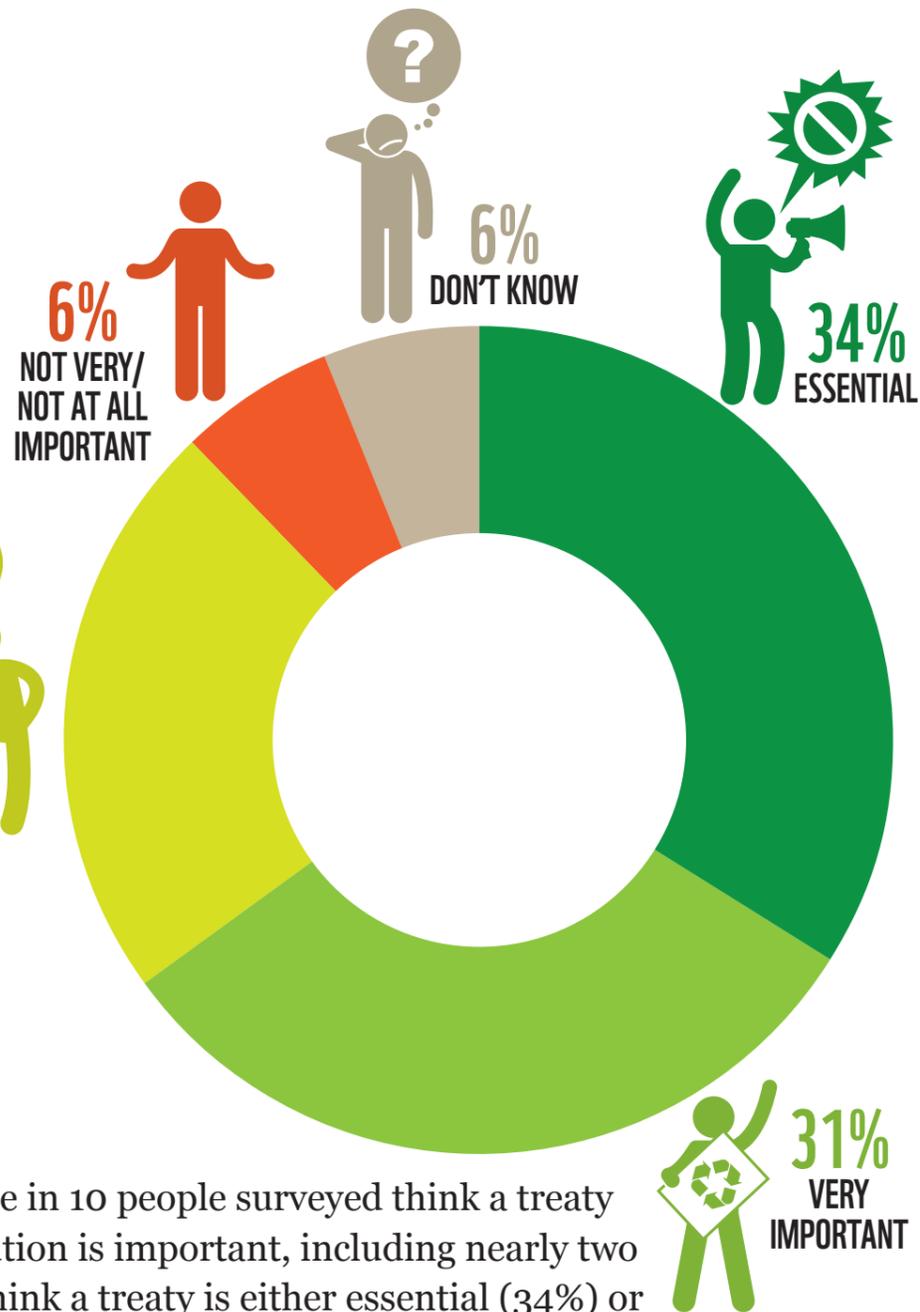
In 16 of the 28 countries surveyed, the online samples are nationally representative by age, gender and location for: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

More detail on the survey methodology is appended to this briefing and can be found on Ipsos' website.



<https://www.ipsos.com/en/attitudes-towards-single-use-plastics>

34%
OF PEOPLE
THINK A
PLASTIC
POLLUTION
TREATY
IS **ESSENTIAL**



GLOBAL INSIGHTS

On average, nearly nine in 10 people surveyed think a treaty to combat plastic pollution is important, including nearly two thirds of people who think a treaty is either essential (34%) or very important (31%). This shows an extremely high level of global public support for a legally binding global agreement to combat plastic pollution.

Support is particularly high across Latin America (93%) and BRIC⁵ (90%) countries surveyed. Five out of the top ten most supportive countries overall are Latin American countries. One third of respondents from Europe believe a treaty is essential, and one in four in the Asia Pacific region.

In terms of individual countries, the proportion of people who think a treaty is important is highest in Mexico (96%), followed by China (95%) and Peru (95%). Around half of people surveyed in Colombia (55%), Brazil (54%), Chile (47%), Italy (45%), Mexico (44%) and Spain (43%) think a treaty is essential.

Even in the countries where respondents were comparatively less supportive, a significant majority of people still believe

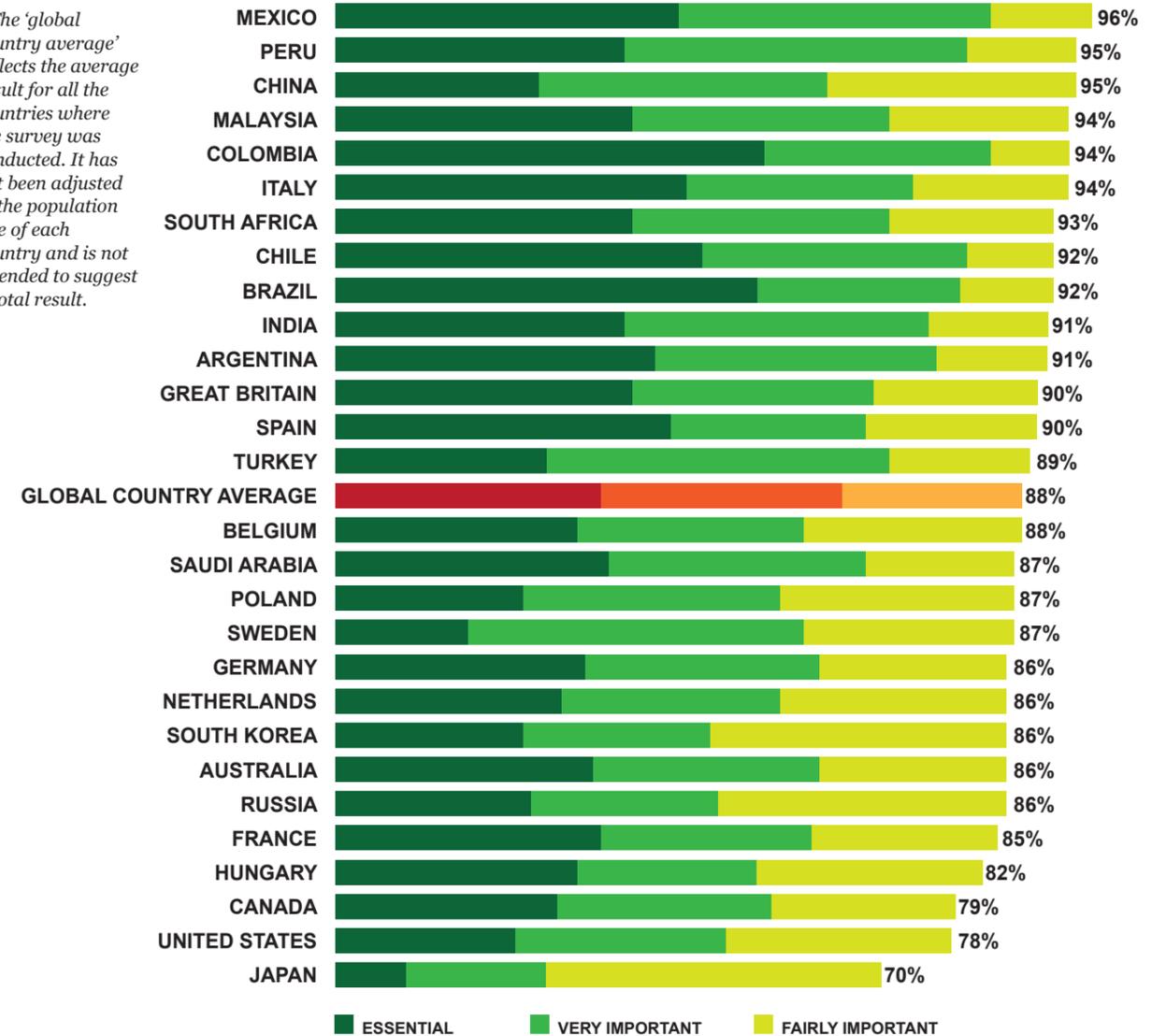
a plastic pollution treaty is important. Nearly eight in ten people surveyed in the United States (78%) and Canada (79%) say a treaty is important, and around one quarter of Americans and Canadians think a treaty is essential. Other studies have found comparable levels of concern about plastic consumption and pollution in North America.⁶

This data shows that public opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of a treaty across all regions. These findings are substantiated by very high levels of participation in the Plastic Free July campaign (an estimated 140 million in 2021)⁷ and by high levels of support for a WWF petition calling on governments to develop a treaty as soon as possible (with more than 2.1 million signatures, this is WWF's largest petition ever).



88% OF PEOPLE* THINK A GLOBAL
TREATY TO STOP PLASTIC POLLUTION IS
IMPORTANT ACROSS 28 COUNTRIES SURVEYED

** The 'global country average' reflects the average result for all the countries where the survey was conducted. It has not been adjusted to the population size of each country and is not intended to suggest a total result.*



Ipsos data from this and earlier global surveys also shows that global citizens' willingness to act on this issue, and the extent to which they want stronger action from brand owners and retailers, has grown in recent years.⁸ Questions asked in this survey focused on plastic consumption more broadly, as well as exploring attitudes towards a treaty. It found that 85% of people agree that manufacturers and retailers should be responsible for reducing, reusing and recycling plastic packaging (up from 80% in 2019); and 82% say they want to buy products with as little plastic packaging as possible (up from 75%). One quarter of people surveyed across all countries were aware of the Plastic Free July campaign and, of those, 13% participated.⁹

This survey shows that in addition to changing their own behaviour and having high expectations of brand owners, global citizens also want to see decisive and coordinated action from governments. As governments undertake negotiations leading up to the UN Environment Assembly meeting in Nairobi, and finalise their position on a possible treaty, WWF and the Plastic Free Foundation urge policy makers to respond to the overwhelming global public support for a new treaty evidenced by this survey, by starting negotiations on an ambitious and legally binding agreement as soon as possible.

CASE STUDY



COUNTRY PROFILE: AUSTRALIA

Australia has a substantial plastic footprint, and plastic pollution causes significant damage to Australia's marine life, ecosystems and economies.¹⁰ An estimated 130,000 tonnes of plastic leaks into the environment despite its relatively sophisticated waste management system.¹¹ And Australians consume more single-use plastics per person than any other country, except Singapore.¹²

Australia's government is taking steps towards reducing plastic consumption and pollution. Some recent positive developments include the phasing out of certain single-use plastics out across the country, backed by strong and growing public support for bans on single-use plastics.¹³

This survey shows very high levels of public support for a treaty (86%), despite Australia sitting in the lowest quartile of all countries surveyed. A substantial one in three Australians think a treaty is essential. This signifies a high level of public interest in plastic use and pollution, supported by similarly high levels of awareness and concern about the issue measured in previous Ipsos surveys.¹⁴

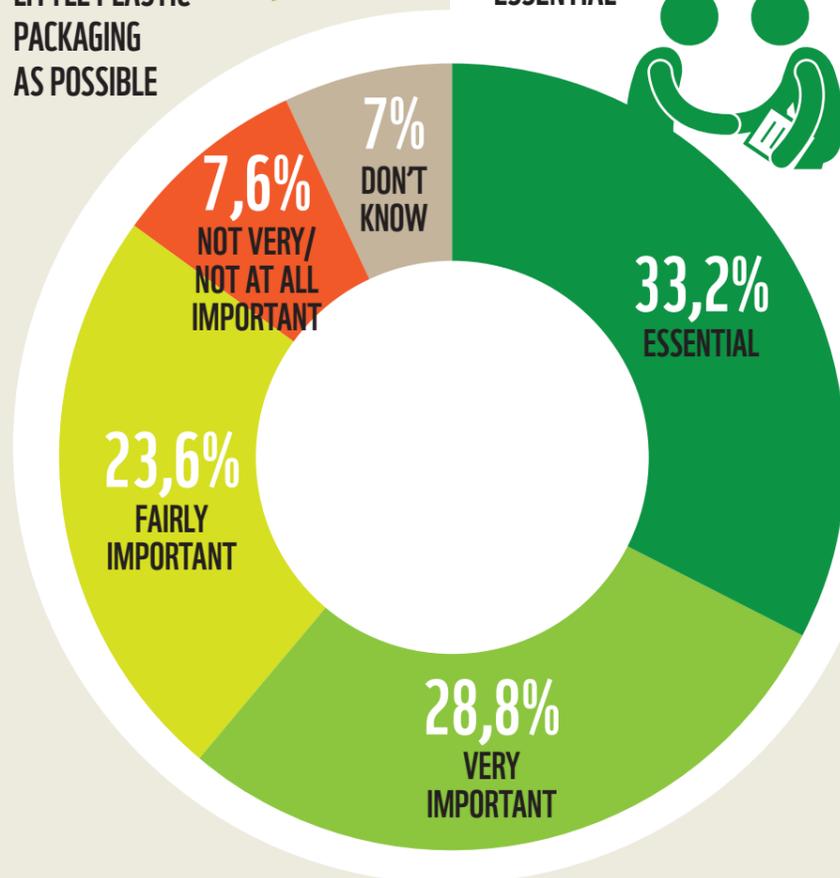
The Australian government supports efforts to develop a binding global agreement to combat ocean plastic pollution, but it has not yet co-sponsored a draft resolution that would formally start the treaty development process.

82%
OF PEOPLE WANT TO BUY PRODUCTS THAT USE AS LITTLE PLASTIC PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE



86%

OF AUSTRALIANS THINK A PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY IS IMPORTANT; ONE THIRD THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL



86%
OF PEOPLE THINK MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS SHOULD BE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC PACKAGING



77%
OF PEOPLE THINK SINGLE-USE PLASTICS SHOULD BE BANNED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE



CASE STUDY



COUNTRY PROFILE: USA

The United States has a substantial plastic footprint. United States citizens consume around 53 kg of single-use plastics per person per year, making the United States the ninth largest consumer per capita in the world.¹⁵ Research suggests the United States is the largest contributor of mismanaged plastic waste and plastic marine debris (MMT/year) among high income countries.¹⁶ The United States is a major plastic producer,¹⁷ and the industry is on track to overtake coal-fired power as the country's major source of GHG emissions by 2030.¹⁸

While single-use plastic production and use is not regulated at the federal level, some states have considered ambitious plastic waste and pollution reduction measures. A ground-breaking federal bill remains under consideration that could drive a more consistent and ambitious approach to plastic pollution prevention.

Ipsos' survey data shows that public support for a legally binding treaty in the United States is high (78% think a treaty is important), despite the United States sitting in the lowest quartile of all countries surveyed.

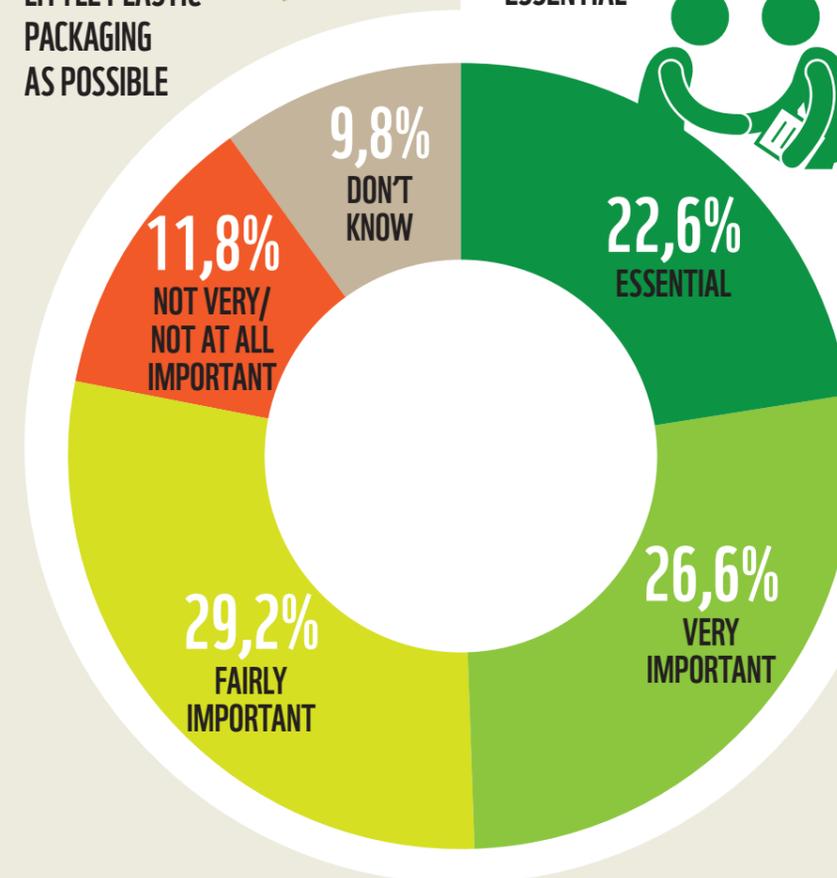
The United States federal government under the Biden Administration has publicly stated support for a global agreement to combat ocean plastic pollution, though it has not yet co-sponsored a draft resolution that would formally start the treaty development process.

71%
OF PEOPLE WANT TO BUY PRODUCTS THAT USE AS LITTLE PLASTIC PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE



78%

OF AMERICANS THINK A PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY IS IMPORTANT; ONE THIRD THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL



83%
OF PEOPLE THINK MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS SHOULD BE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC PACKAGING



55%
OF PEOPLE THINK SINGLE-USE PLASTICS SHOULD BE BANNED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE



CASE STUDY



COUNTRY PROFILE: ARGENTINA

Argentines produce an average amount of single-use plastic waste compared with international levels (15 kg per person, per year).¹⁹ However, the total volume of plastic waste produced is third highest among all Latin American countries, and an estimated one quarter of plastic waste is mismanaged.²⁰

While there are no comprehensive laws in place to address plastic consumption and management, Argentina was the first South American country to prohibit microbeads in 2020, and several sub-national regulations are in place prohibiting the use of certain single-use plastic products.²¹

This survey demonstrated very high levels of support from Argentines for action on plastics, which has increased significantly compared with Ipsos' survey asking similar questions in 2019.²² In terms of people who think a treaty is essential, Argentina was seventh highest of all 28 countries surveyed. Support for banning single-use plastics was particularly high among Argentines (84% compared with the global average of 75%).

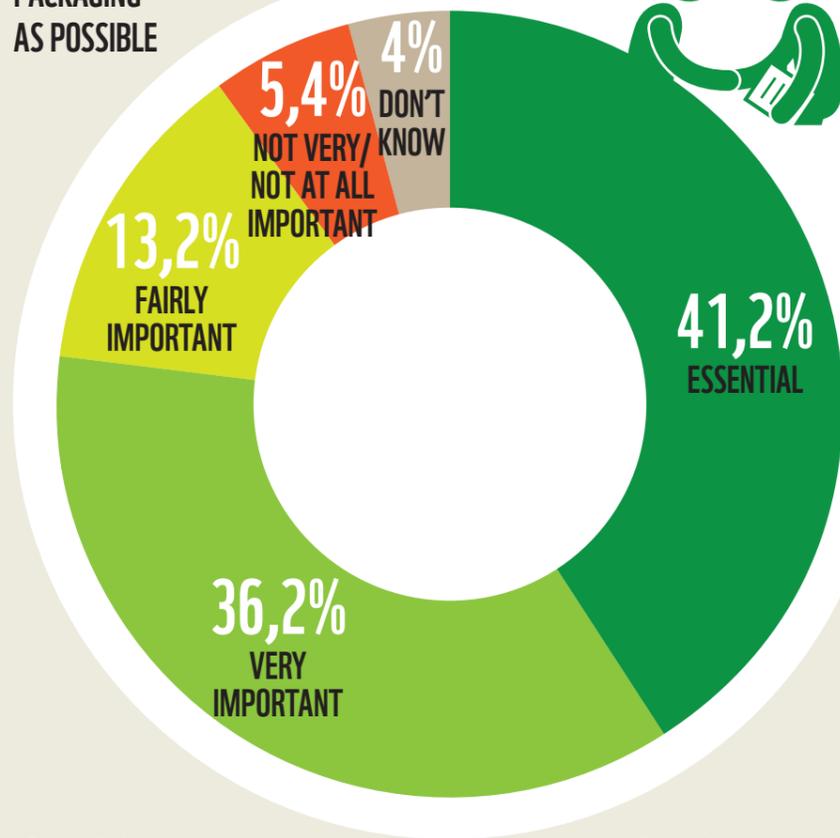
Argentina's government supports the start of the negotiations for a future global agreement to address the global plastic pollution crisis. It has not yet committed to supporting a draft resolution that would formally start this process.

84%
OF PEOPLE WANT TO BUY PRODUCTS THAT USE AS LITTLE PLASTIC PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE



91%

OF ARGENTINES THINK A PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY IS IMPORTANT; ONE THIRD THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL



85%
OF PEOPLE THINK MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS SHOULD BE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC PACKAGING



84%
OF PEOPLE THINK SINGLE-USE PLASTICS SHOULD BE BANNED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE



CASE STUDY



COUNTRY PROFILE: SOUTH AFRICA

South Africans consume an average amount of 13 kg single-use plastics per person annually (compared with a global average of 15 kg),²³ and single-use plastics comprise the bulk of all plastics consumed.²⁴ The country's waste management systems struggle to process growing levels of waste and plastic leakage is high. Out of an estimated 3,500 tonnes of plastic waste produced in South Africa daily, half is mismanaged (including non-compliant landfills and open dumps).²⁵

The South African government strengthened existing legislation on single-use plastics in 2021, introducing recycled content requirements for plastic carrier bags, and enacted mandatory extended producer responsibility for companies that place plastic packaging on the market. This represents progress, though a more comprehensive suite of initiatives to transition towards a more sustainable and circular plastics system, supported by improved policy coherence across government departments, is needed.²⁶

Support for action to reduce plastic consumption and pollution was very strong among South African participants in this survey. South Africa was in the top ten countries in terms of support for a treaty, support for extended producer responsibility, and individuals' intentions to reduce plastic waste. While the sample for this survey was not nationally representative, these findings indicate very high levels of awareness and concern among survey participants (who were more likely to live in cities and have higher levels of formal education compared with the general population).

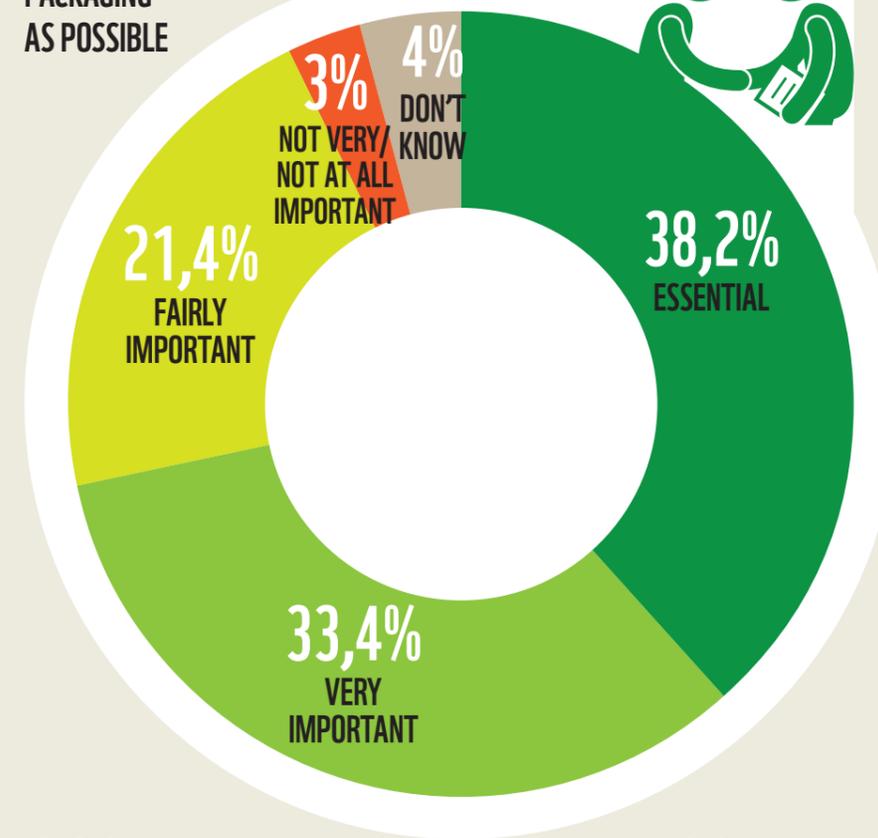
South Africa is represented amongst the African Environment Ministers publicly calling for the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop a global legally binding agreement to combat marine litter and plastic pollution.²⁷

84%
OF PEOPLE WANT TO BUY PRODUCTS THAT USE AS LITTLE PLASTIC PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE



93%

OF SOUTH AFRICANS THINK A PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY IS IMPORTANT; ONE THIRD THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL



88%
OF PEOPLE THINK MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS SHOULD BE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC PACKAGING



72%
OF PEOPLE THINK SINGLE-USE PLASTICS SHOULD BE BANNED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

CASE STUDY

COUNTRY PROFILE: NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands is one of the most populated countries in the world, Rotterdam is one of the biggest ports globally, and major European rivers flow through the Dutch Delta to reach the North Sea. Added to these geographic factors, the Dutch are among the largest consumers of single-use plastic in the world,²⁸ and levels of plastic as a percentage of its waste stream are among the highest in the world.²⁹

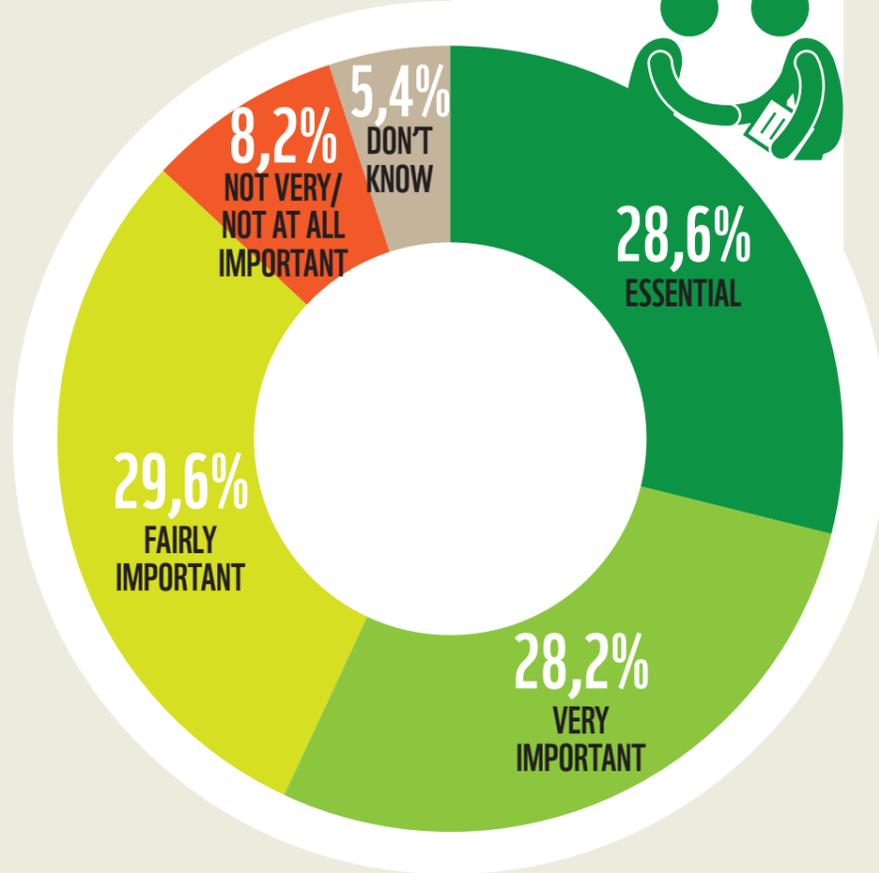
While the Netherlands is compliant with various European rules and regulations, such as the EU's directive on single-use plastics, current Dutch policies are mainly focused on recycling and voluntary schemes, and have proved inadequate in reducing plastic production, consumption and pollution.³⁰ There is significant scope for more effective regulation and investment to drive the Netherlands' circular economy for plastics.³¹

This survey indicates very substantial public support for a global treaty. Support for specific actions on plastics, for example extended producer responsibility and single-use plastic bans, have remained solid in the Netherlands compared with previous surveys.³²

The EU and its member states have co-sponsored a draft resolution proposed by Peru and Rwanda, that would start the negotiation process on a treaty if passed at UNEA-5.2. The Netherlands is one of more than 50 governments to co-sponsor the draft resolution.

86%

OF DUTCH THINK A PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY IS IMPORTANT; ONE THIRD THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL



84%

OF PEOPLE THINK MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS SHOULD BE MADE RESPONSIBLE FOR REDUCING, REUSING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC PACKAGING



71%

OF PEOPLE THINK SINGLE-USE PLASTICS SHOULD BE BANNED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE



APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This study collected quantitative data from global citizens to understand attitudes on single-use plastic, extended producer responsibility, and level of importance given to a legally binding global plastics treaty. All respondents were asked the following questions:

Q1: Before today, had you heard about a challenge called Plastic Free July, which encourages people to refuse and reduce single use plastics?

Q2a: If Q1= Yes: Did you take part in Plastic Free July in 2021? (Yes or no);

Q2b: Did you take part in Plastic Free July prior to 2021?

Q3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Strongly agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree or don't know):

Q3a: I want to buy products which use as little plastic packaging as possible

Q3b: Manufacturers and retailers should be responsible for reducing, reusing and recycling plastic packaging

Q3c: Single use plastics should be banned as soon as possible

Q4: How important or unimportant do you believe it is to have an internationally binding treaty to combat plastic pollution? (Essential, very important, fairly important, not very important, not at all important or don't know)

This round of the Global Advisor survey was conducted in 28 countries between August and September 2021 via the Ipsos Online Panel system among 20,513 adults aged 18-74 in Canada, Israel, Malaysia, South Africa, Turkey and the United States, and 16-74 in all 21 other countries.

The sample consists of approximately 1000+ individuals in each of Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, and the US, and approximately 500+ individuals in each of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey.

Samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the US can be taken as representative of these countries' general adult population under the age of 75.

Samples in all other countries are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent compared with the general population. These results are not nationally representative, but reflect the views of the more "connected" segment of these populations.

Weighting has been applied to all samples to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to the most recent census data.

The "Global Country Average" reflects the average result for all 28 countries in which the survey was conducted. This average has not been adjusted to the population size of each country and is not intended to suggest a total result.

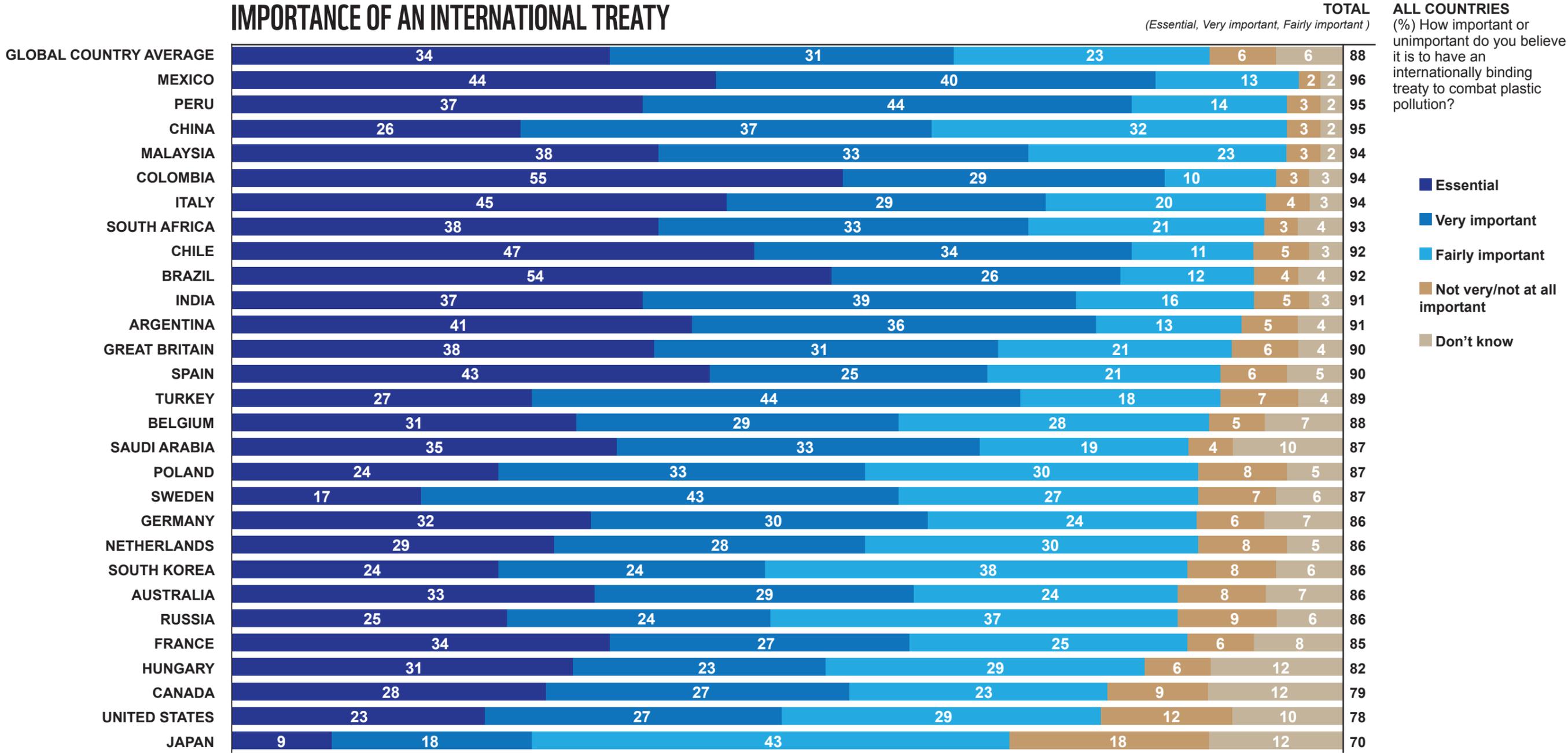
The precision of Ipsos online polls are calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 5.0 percentage points. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website.

APPENDIX 2: SUPPORT FOR AN INTERNATIONAL PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY ACROSS ALL 28 COUNTRIES SURVEYED

For data by region, and responses to the full set of questions included in Appendix 1, see Ipsos' report 'Attitudes towards single use plastics', available on the Ipsos website.

ON AVERAGE, ACROSS **28** COUNTRIES SURVEYED, **88%** OF ADULTS BELIEVE THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL, VERY IMPORTANT OR FAIRLY IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL TREATY TO COMBAT PLASTIC POLLUTION.

IMPORTANCE OF AN INTERNATIONAL TREATY



ENDNOTES

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- 2 Pew & Systemiq, 2020. Breaking the Plastic Wave.
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- 25 [Jambeck, J.R.](#), Andrady, A., Geyer, R., Narayan, R., Perryman, M., Siegler, T., Wilcox, C., [Lavender Law, K.](#), (2015). [Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean](#), *Science*, 347, p. 768-771.
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SUPPORT FOR A GLOBAL LEGALLY
BINDING TREATY TO STOP PLASTIC
POLLUTION.**



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