



Green and Global Britain

Navigating public opinion on
climate foreign policy

November 2024

Foreword

This Parliament will determine Britain's trajectory towards meeting or missing our climate targets in 2030 and beyond. While much of the political debate on climate has rightly focused on the domestic transition here in Britain, this research - the largest of its kind on climate and foreign policy - lifts the lid on what the public think about how we should work with other countries to tackle the global challenge of climate change.

Drawing on polling of more than 14,000 Britons and focus group conversations with more than 120 people, we are able to identify what the public expect from the Government and how they want to see the Government tackle climate change on the world stage.

The polling and focus group research highlights both the opportunity for – and the expectation of – leadership on tackling climate change on a global scale. The public view such action as a priority for UK foreign policy - one of their top five priorities. They want a greater focus on delivering tangible benefits from climate related foreign policy as well as greater security, including national security and energy security. They would value a reset in our relationship with countries around the world. There is no public mandate for backtracking on our international obligations on tackling climate change.

Designing and delivering a climate foreign policy that is not in tune with the views of the public risks undermining public support for climate action and public support for financial aid to tackle climate action at home and abroad.

This report charts a course for how to avoid that happening, while making sure the public's values, viewpoints and expectations are met, as the new Government sets out its approach to tackling climate change on the world stage.

Public's starting points on climate foreign policy

Expectation of strong British leadership and frustration with current weakness

The British public expects the UK to be one of the leaders on the global stage, including on climate change.

They view climate foreign policy as an opportunity for Britain to restore national pride and deliver tangible benefits at home and abroad and wants global climate action to be a higher priority for the Government.

Tackling climate change is a priority and important for Britain's security

Britons consider tackling climate change a top five foreign policy priority. The public believes climate change impacts their sense of security and considers climate action should be embedded in UK foreign policy.

Backtracking on climate commitments would be seen negatively by most. Withdrawing from the Paris Climate Change Agreement is viewed almost as negatively as withdrawing from NATO.

Support for a clear and multilateral approach to tackling emissions

Current policies on climate change are seen as inconsistent and ineffective. The public instead wants to see a long-term plan.

Britons consider a multilateral approach to climate change more effective as it ensures everyone does their bit. They favour working with all countries on climate action, believing global problems require global solutions.

Meeting public's expectation on climate foreign policy

More in Common's polling and focus group research has identified nine key expectations for the Government's approach to climate foreign policy. This slide summarises these expectations and they are further explored in the subsequent section.

Help make Britain feel safer: rising global instability heavily shapes the public views on foreign policy. A key test for any climate foreign policy approach is how does it help make Britain safer in a more uncertain world.

Deliver for both nature and people: a climate foreign policy approach which prioritises protecting animals and nature is one that commands broad public support. Equally, most reject a binary choice between nature and people, expecting the Government to address the needs of both.

Connect the national to the global: while the public are more concerned about the national challenges posed by climate change, linking international challenges to salient domestic challenges (such as flooding) boosts support for international climate action and for climate foreign policy.

Deliver tangible benefits: the more that climate foreign policy can be framed in a way that delivers tangible benefits for Britons, the more likely it will be to command public support. One of the most compelling ways of doing this is tying climate foreign policy to savings on energy bills at home.

Technology is key: the public is supportive of investment in technological innovation to tackle climate issues and think it is something the UK should be doing more of both domestically and around the world.

Forward-looking on accountability: the public largely rejects assigning historic blame for today's climate issues, they favour a forward-looking approach to accountability and supporting governments and large corporations to tackle climate change in the future rather than a backward-looking blame game.

A fair approach: the public want an approach to climate change where polluters pay for the damage they have done and those with the broadest shoulders bear the costs of the transition accordingly.

Work in partnership with business: the public wants government and business to collaboratively tackle climate change, favouring supporting British green businesses to become "climate problem solvers" more so than holding business accountable for damage caused in the past.

Prioritise climate adaptation: the public leans towards favouring adaptation measures that improve resilience to specific risks, like flooding and drought, rather than mitigation approaches - partly because adaptation approaches seem both more urgent and more tangible.

Climate and Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

The challenge and opportunity-making the case for ODA

Most Britons support the principle of providing aid to poorer countries. While the aid budget has been cut in recent years, more think it has increased than been cut. Almost half also think the UK should spend less on foreign aid.

To command public support for increasing or reprofiling overseas development aid, a broader story has to be told - one which deals with both why Britain should give aid and crucially the ways in which we give overseas aid that can pass the public's tests on reciprocity, self-sufficiency and effectiveness.

Applying these tests, climate initiatives can boost overall support for overseas development aid.

Three tests - the opportunity on climate ODA

Public support for climate-related ODA is contingent on passing three tests:

Reciprocity - ODA should benefit both Britain and the recipient country

Self-sufficiency - ODA should help recipients become more self-reliant

Effectiveness - aid investments should demonstrably make a difference

Climate-related ODA, such as promoting green businesses globally or investing in climate technology, has the potential to meet these public expectations more easily than traditional forms of ODA.

The importance of framing

Framing is important to build public support. For example, investing in climate technology is viewed favourably as it is something which is tangible, mutually beneficial to both giver and receiver of ODA and something which supports self-sufficiency.

Emphasising the effectiveness and value-for-money benefits of empowering local communities is more convincing than moral arguments about redressing historic power imbalances or injustices. The public take a practical rather than a moralistic approach to ODA investments.

Methodology

More in Common was commissioned to carry out this mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) research by Global Optimism.

These public opinion insights form part of a broader piece of work to develop [policy insights](#) and [narrative recommendations](#).

More in Common is grateful for the help of the Global Optimism team and narrative researchers Jamie Clarke and Susie Wang for their guidance and advice on many parts of this work.

More in Common's researchers have retained editorial control throughout this project and the insights from this report are the authors' alone.

Quantitative Research Design

More in Common polled a nationally representative sample of 14,000 across three polls in 2024 - 2,000 people in January, 10,000 people in April-May and 2,000 people in October.

As part of our quantitative research, More in Common has conducted randomised control trial experiments for message testing alongside conjoint, MaxDiff and MRP analysis.

Qualitative Research design

More in Common conducted 14 focus groups as part of this project convening voters in Essex, Blyth, Stevenage, Swindon, Selby, Camden, Stoke, Surrey, Aldershot, Bristol and Hyndburn.

We also convened groups of Muslim voters, Black British voters, British Indian and British Chinese voters and SME business leaders from across the country in May 2024.

Seven of these groups took place in February 2024 and the additional seven groups took place in May 2024 following the decision to call the 2024 General Election.

A key lens for understanding public attitudes

Throughout this report, More in Common has used the lens of the British Seven segments to describe how different groups of the public - shaped by their values and core beliefs - converge and diverge on different issues.

Progressive Activists



...a group for whom politics is an important part of their identity and who seek to correct long-standing injustices.

Civic Pragmatists



...a group that cares about others, at home or abroad. They wish for less conflict and more compromise.

Disengaged Battlers



... a group that are just getting by. They blame the system for its unfairness, but not other people.

Established Liberals



...a group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo.

Loyal Nationals



...a patriotic group who worry that our way of life is threatened and also feel our society has become more unfair.

Disengaged Traditionalists



... a group that values a well-ordered society and takes pride in hard work. They want strong leadership that keeps people in line.

Backbone Conservatives

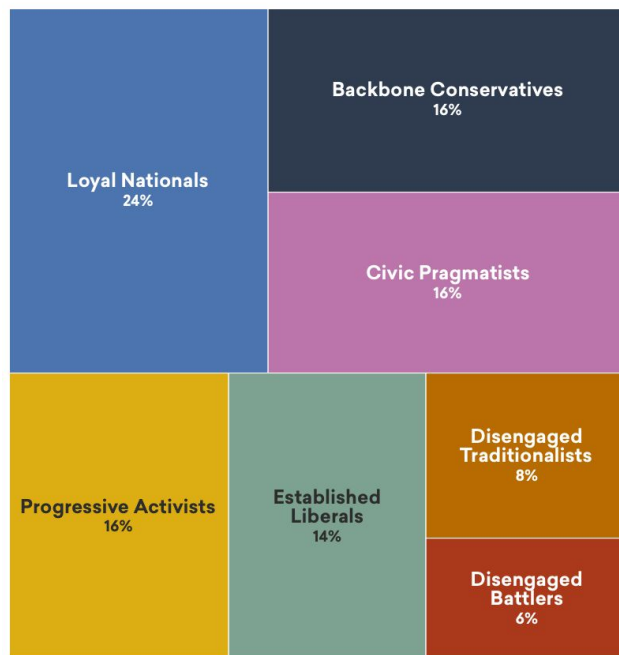


... a group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future, and who keenly follow the news.

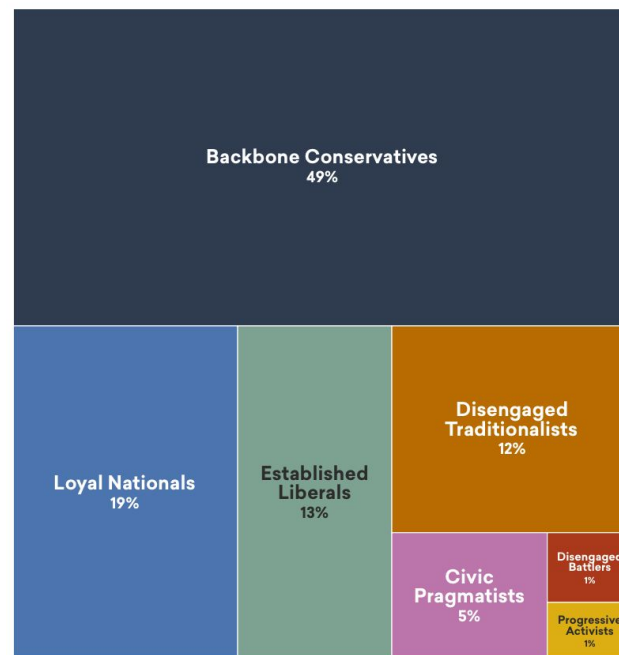
The new voting coalitions

In 2019 Labour's voter coalition was limited to its socially liberal base. Labour's new coalition is far more ideologically diverse. In fact the largest segment within the coalition (as within the country) is the socially conservative Loyal Nationals, but with significant chunks of conservative minded Backbone Conservatives and Established Liberals. The Conservative coalition on the other hand has shrunk to its base, with almost half of the party's remaining voters concentrated in a single segment. To deliver on climate change and foreign policy, the Government will need to understand the concerns of, and build support across, these varied segments.

Segment of 2024 Labour Voters



Segment of 2024 Conservative Voters



Section 1

**Public's starting points on
climate foreign policy**

Public expectation for British leadership on the world stage

Britons' views on climate and foreign policy are informed by an expectation that Britain should lead on the world stage. Most (51 per cent) say the UK should do more to lead the way on global issues, compared to the third who say the UK should not be taking a leading role on internationally.

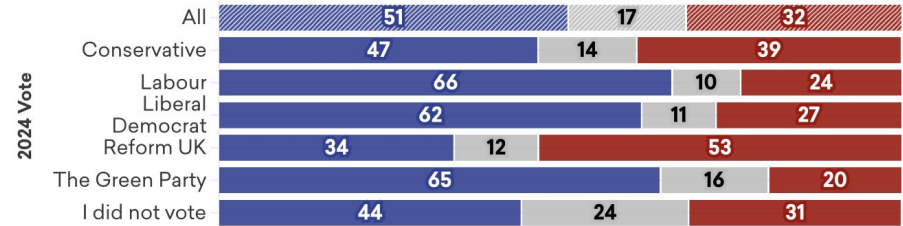
The public are enthusiastic about Britain's potential for international leadership - and are particularly proud of the role that Britain has played in supporting Ukraine. Most Britons see this leadership on the world stage through the frame of 'one of the leading countries' on any particular issue rather than a sole 'lead country'. This is the starting point from which to think about climate and foreign policy.

In focus groups, participants cautioned that Britain should be realistic about the much greater reach of other nations such as the US and China - including on issues such as climate. This is shaped by the broad sense that Britain has - with the exception of Ukraine - 'lost its way' on international affairs in recent years. This contributes to the view that Britain should be 'a leader' on the world stage, rather than the only leader.

"We were one of the countries that helped Ukraine out. When it comes to making deals in five years for how much we're going to pay for grain or wheat or whatever, we should get a favourable price. Not that they have to give it us for free or anything, but I think it would be quite fair that we've helped them, so they help us." - Simon, Tadcaster

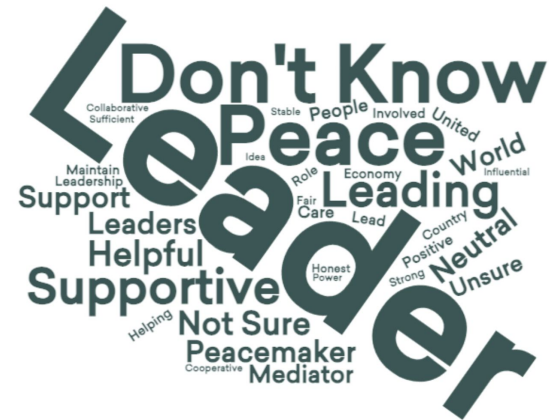
Thinking about the UK taking a stance on global issues, which statement comes closer to your view?

- The UK should do more to lead the way on global issues
- Don't know
- The UK should not try to lead the way on global issues



Source: More in Common, October 2024

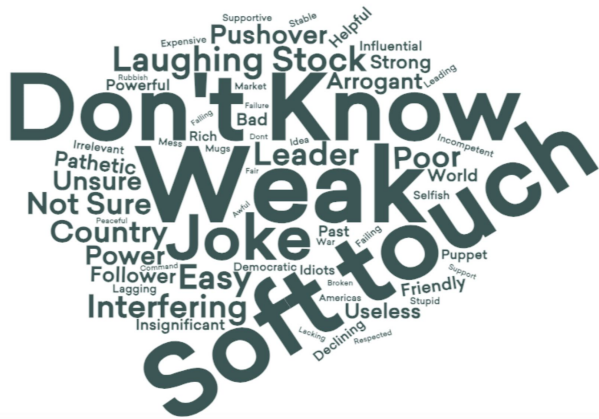
What do you think the UK's role in the world should be?



Public frustration with British weakness in foreign affairs

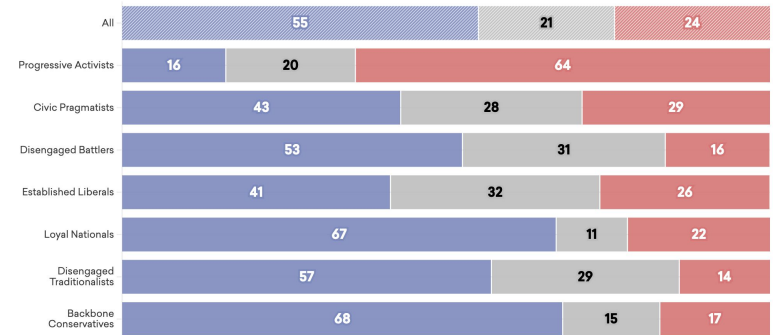
Britons' views on climate and foreign policy are shaped both by an expectation that we should lead on the world stage, as well as a frustration that Britain is taken advantage of - seen as both weak and a soft touch by others. Any new approaches to climate foreign policy which can respond to these views will help better command public support.

How do you think the UK is seen by the rest of the world?



"I think there's been a shift of late. I don't think we've got much clout." - Graham, Probation Officer, Blyth

Thinking about the UK taking a stance on global issues, which statement comes closer to your view?
 ● Other countries take advantage of the UK ● Don't know ● The UK takes advantage of other countries



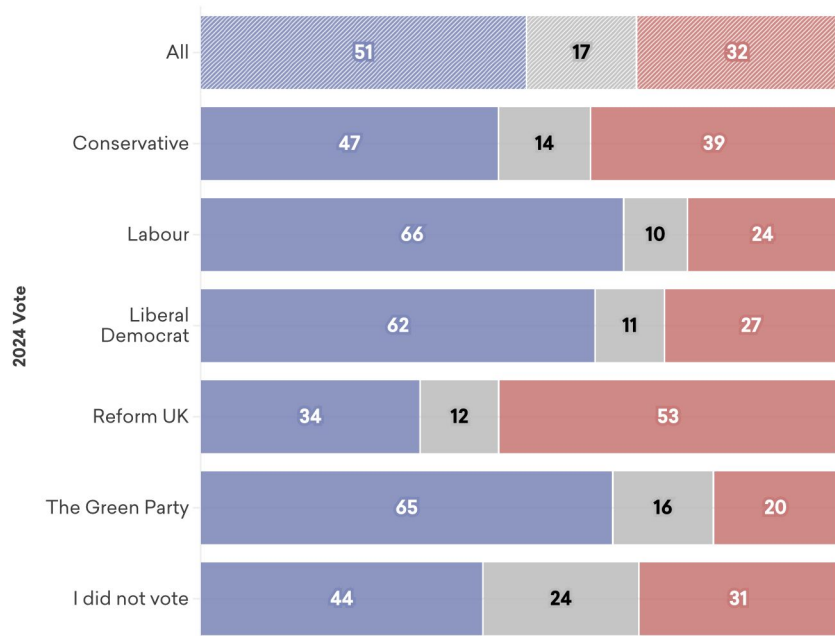
Source: More in Common, February 2024

"I believe that we've been lost for quite a while. I think for maybe certainly over a decade, maybe even two decades that we lack a strong leader. I feel like the country's lost its way." - Lisa, Veteran, Blyth

Climate foreign policy is an opportunity to lead and restore pride in British leadership on the world stage

Thinking about the UK taking a stance on global issues, which statement comes closer to your view?

● The UK should do more to lead the way on global issues ● Don't know ● The UK should not try to lead the way on global issues



A clear opportunity emerges from this research suggesting that climate foreign policy can be used as an instrument to respond to public frustration about British weakness on the world stage while also meeting their expectations for British leadership.

Climate action is one area where Britain is seen as a leader - across the political spectrum, the public is more likely to say Britain is one of the countries leading the way on climate action than not.

The kind of climate foreign policy that will most effectively restore the public's pride are things which deliver tangible benefits at home and abroad - from job creation in clean industries, to energy self sufficiency, to leading the way on efforts to protect oceans and rainforests around the world.

Selling the national benefits of Britain's climate foreign policy will be key to building and maintaining public support and will help to give Britons confidence that our standing on the world stage has been restored.

Backtracking on Britain's international climate commitments is supported by only a tiny minority of the public - 46 per cent of Britons say they would be ashamed if Britain pulled out of the Paris Climate Change Agreement (compared to the 50 per cent of Britons who would be ashamed if the country was to pull out of NATO). Moreover, Britons do not want climate action to be derailed by Trump - two in three Britons say if the US scales back on climate action the UK's global action on climate change should increase or stay the same.

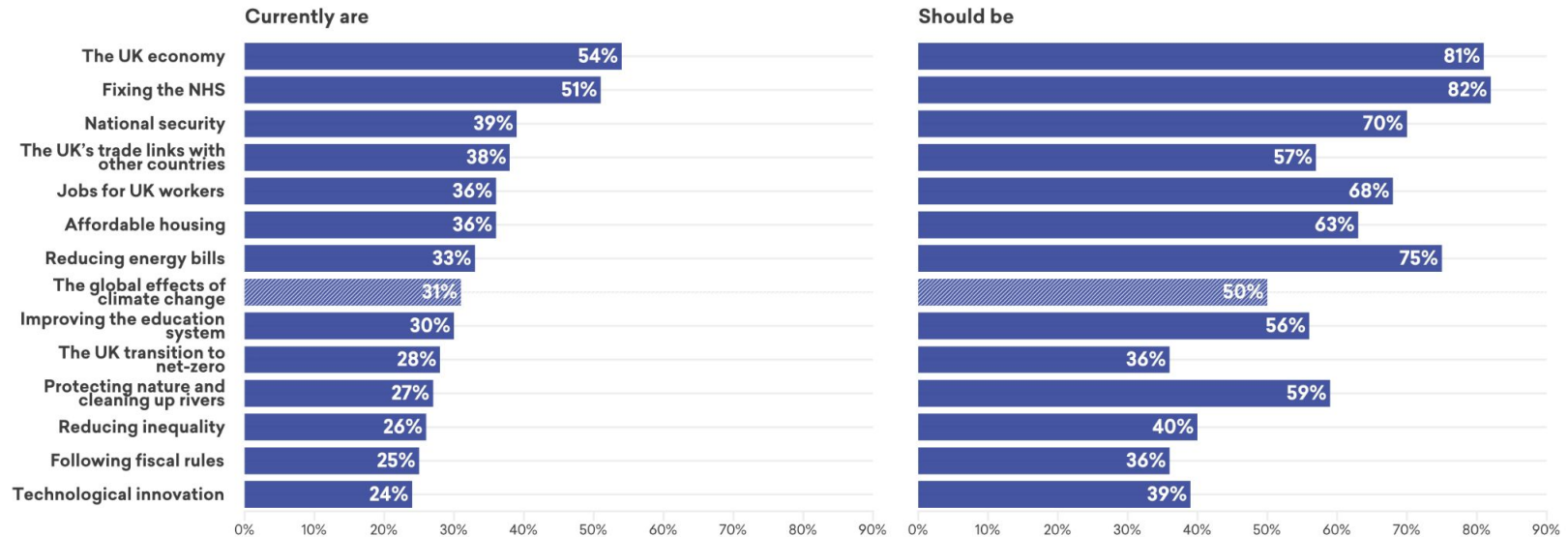
"We need to come together as a planet to look at real sensible solutions instead of keep having these meetings and then saying, oh well we can't agree again. If you want to do something, you need strong leadership." - Tracy, Blyth

Britons want the Government to make global climate action a higher priority

One in two think the global impacts of climate change should be a high priority for the Government, but only one in three think it currently is. This desire unites Labour's diverse coalition - every segment won by Labour in the General Election is likely to say that the global effects of climate change should be a high priority for the Government, but within each segment a majority say it is not currently a high priority.

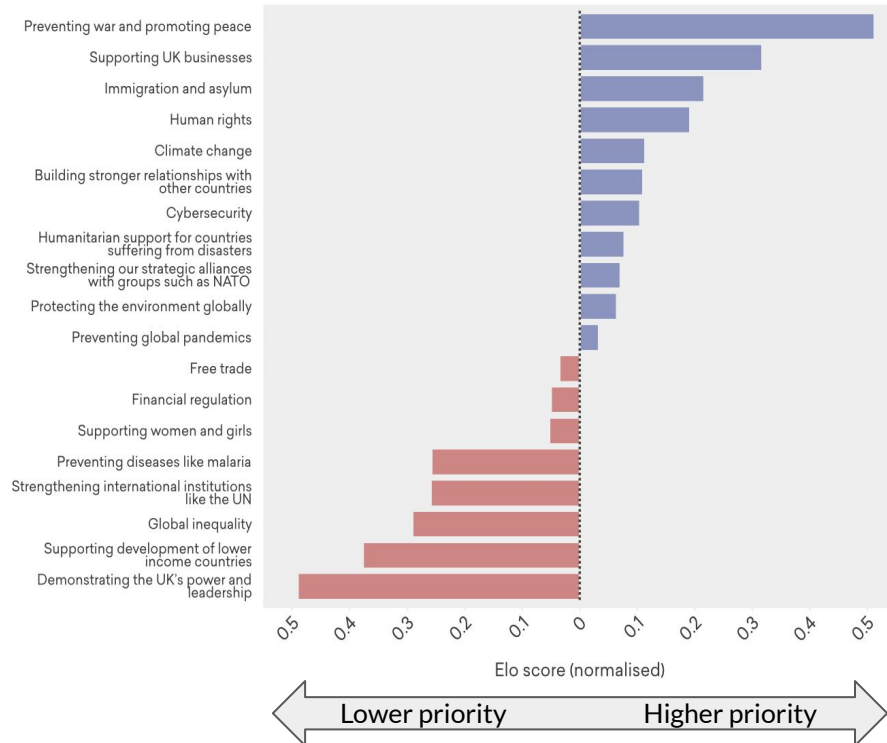
How much of a priority do you think the following issues [currently are/ should be] to the Government?

% selecting 'high' or 'top' priority



Public see climate change embedded into other foreign policy priorities

Max diff analysis based on the question 'Of the foreign policy issues listed, which do you think should be the highest and lowest priority for the UK government?'



The public consider climate an important top priority in its own right - the fifth highest priority in a MaxDiff analysis which places war/peace as the top foreign policy duty of the Government followed by supporting UK business in second place.

Focus group conversations reveal the public see tackling climate change as an issue that is integral to UK foreign policy, as the impact of global warming and the work done to ameliorate it materially affects Britain's security and economy.

"I think climate change is a ticking time bomb. I think it's something that the Government should be focused. It is not just focus on one thing and take a backseat at the other." - Jade, Bristol

"There's definitely higher priorities than climate change, but I don't think it should be ignored totally either." - James, Selby

The public expects climate change to impact their sense of security

More than two in five people - 43 per cent - expect to personally feel an increased impact from climate change over the course of this Parliament.

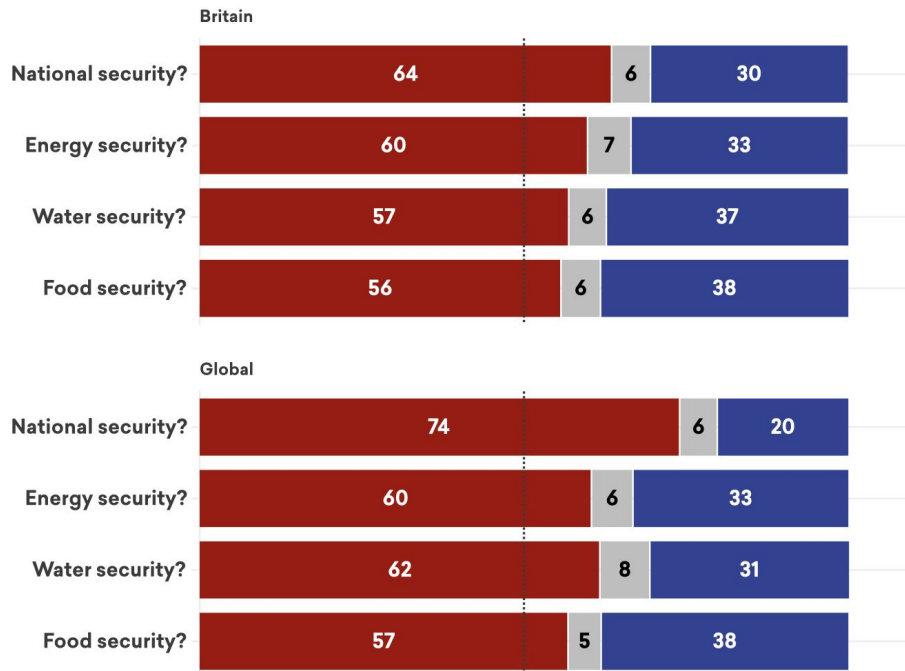
Britons increasingly think about climate change - and its wider knock-on impacts - as something which affects the safety and security of the country.

The public take a broad view of what 'security' means in the national and global context. Around two thirds of the public are worried about national security at home and almost three quarters worried about global security. But more than half of the public also worry about energy, water and food security.

"I know our shoreline is going to be reduced because of climate change, so that means our land is going to be less, but there's going to be I think heavy pressure people still coming to this country due to the effects of climate change in other countries, and I think it could lead to climate wars in terms of water and food scarcity." - Mohamed, Potters Bar

How worried are you, if at all, about threats to [Britain's/global] ...

● 'Quite' or 'Very' worried ● Don't know ● 'Not very' or 'not at all' worried

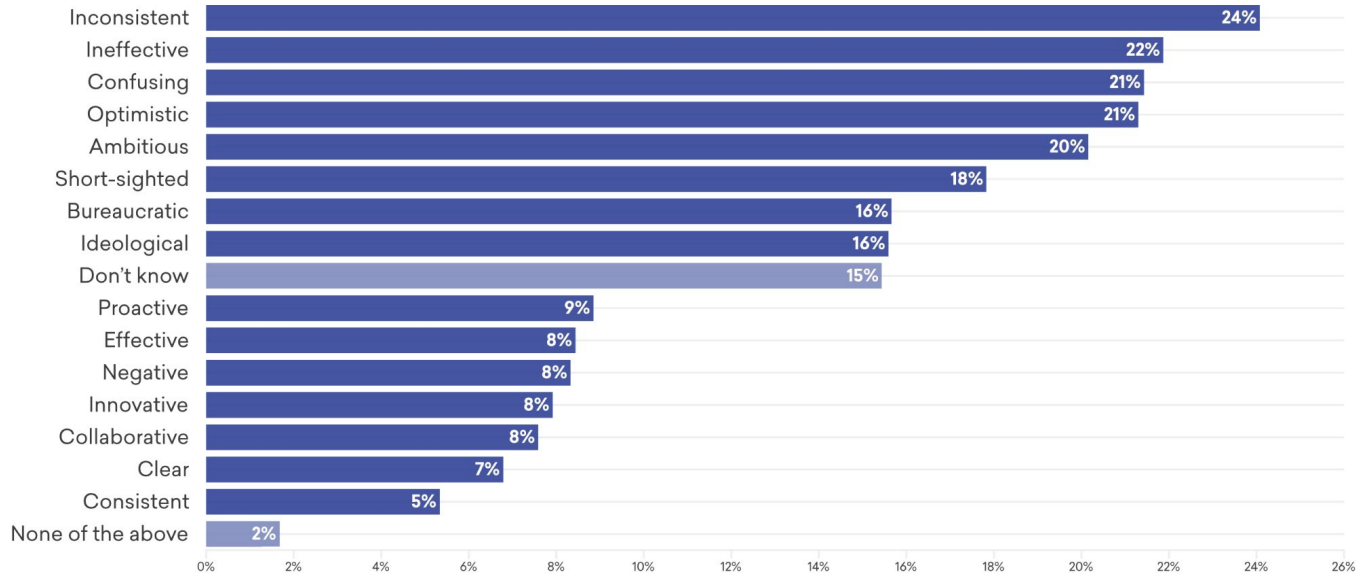


There is broad desire for a clearer plan on climate action

Current government policies about climate change are seen as inconsistent, ineffective and confusing. In focus groups people point to examples of policy reversals to explain a lack of confidence in new policies. The public wants our climate solutions to be cost-effective, long-term and science-led.

Which of the following best describes the UK Government's policies about climate change?

Select up to three



The public support a multilateral approach on climate

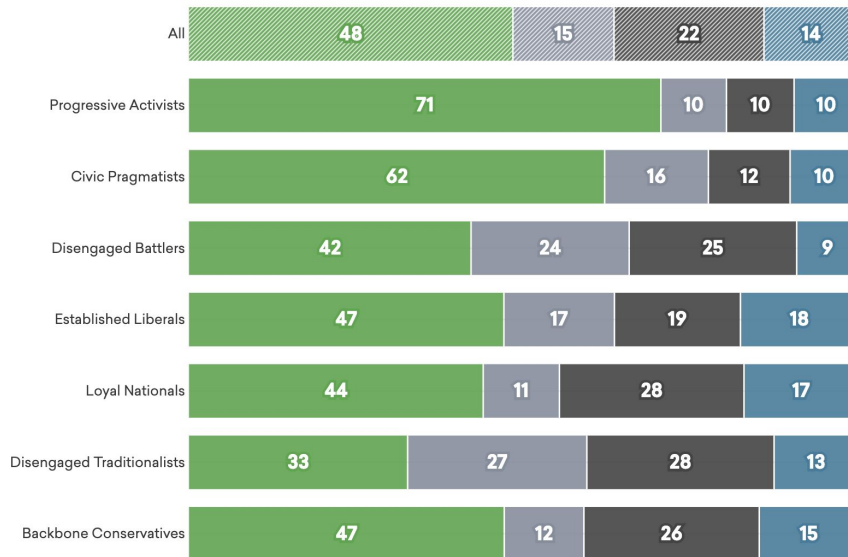
The public believe that a multilateral approach will succeed in persuading more countries to do their bit on climate change - particularly those who are not currently 'pulling their weight' to get emissions under control.

Most Britons see climate change as a global problem requiring a global response. In fact, the apparent absence of a global response leads some to question the point of exclusively British measures if others are not taking action as well. For this reason, the public are more likely to believe that working together with other countries on a multinational basis will make our approach to tackling climate change more effective.

In focus groups, participants were persuaded by the logic of pursuing multilateral agreement and felt that international treaties were more likely to deliver stability and better decision making that would benefit both Britain and other countries, even if they took more time to reach.

When it comes to the UK influencing international action on climate change, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

- The UK will be more effective at getting countries around the world to act on climate change if we club together with other like-minded countries who are committed to tackling climate change.
- Don't know
- There will be no difference to how effective the UK will be at getting countries to act on climate change, whether we work with other countries or individually
- The UK will be more effective at getting countries around the world to act on climate change if we act as an individual country influencing other countries one-to-one.



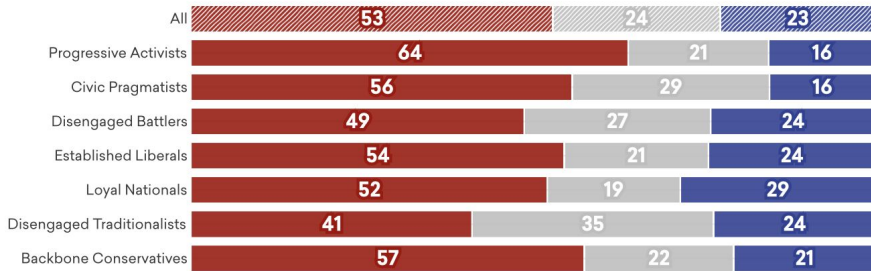
*"It's a global problem so we can do as much as we can, but everyone needs to be on board."
- Chris, Godalming and Ash*

*"I think the 1:1 level just wouldn't work because I think there's so much history between different countries, which is why obviously you'd have other countries there to mediate. That's why it is good to have the United Nations because you've got other countries that are kind of mediating and supporting with that."
- Jade, Bristol*

How would the public engage with China on climate change

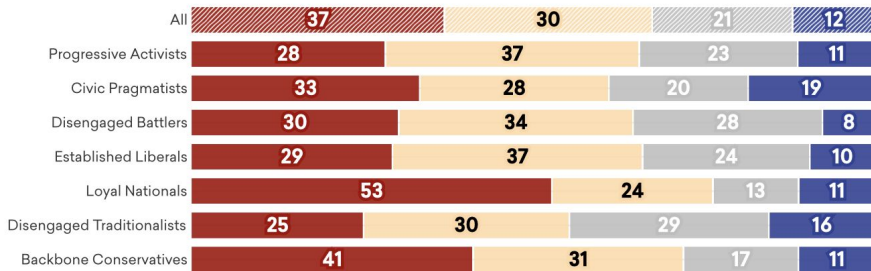
When it comes to tackling climate change, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

- It is in the UK's best interest to work together with China
- Don't know
- It's in the UK's best interest to avoid working with China



Do you think the UK should be...

- Trying to do less business with China
- Trying to do about the same amount of business with China as we do now
- Don't know
- Trying to do more business with China



China's role features heavily in how the public think about climate foreign policy. The public perceive that China is not pulling its weight or taking enough action on tackling climate change, which in turn contributes to a sense of fatalism that there is little point in Britain acting to cut emissions if China does not do so as well.

The public do not think that it is in Britain's best interest to engage with China on every issue - most (58 per cent) would be concerned about increasing trade links.

However, the public do think Britain should work with China on tackling climate change. The British public are more than twice as likely to think it is in the UK's best interest to work with China (53 per cent) than avoid working with China (23 per cent) on climate - a view held fairly consistently across the British Seven segments. They primarily attribute this to the global nature of the climate problem and the need for all countries to play a part.

"If China doesn't buy in and Russia doesn't buy in and America don't buy in, then us buying into it just doesn't make any sense." - Ryan, Swindon

"China is going to still carry on doing whatever it is they want. They're going to push as much rubbish in the air as they feel like and a lot of other countries will as well. And all the good we do with our tiny little nation is negligible." - Patrick, Ramsgate

Section 2

**Meeting the public's
expectations on climate
foreign policy**

Meeting public's expectation on climate foreign policy

More in Common's polling and focus group research has identified nine key expectations for the Government and how it approaches climate foreign policy. This slide summarises these expectations and they are further explored in the subsequent section.

Help make Britain feel safer: rising global instability heavily influences public views on foreign policy. A key test for any climate foreign policy approach is how does it help make Britain safer in a more uncertain world.

Deliver tangible benefits: the more that climate foreign policy can be framed in a way that delivers tangible benefits for Britons, the more likely it will be to command public support - one of the most compelling ways of doing this is tying climate foreign policy to savings on energy bills at home.

A fair approach: the public want an approach to climate change where polluters pay for the damage they have done and those with the broadest shoulders bear the costs of transition accordingly.

Deliver for both nature and people: a climate foreign policy approach which prioritises protecting animals and nature is one that commands broad public support. Equally, most reject a binary choice between nature and people, expecting the Government's approach to address the needs of both.

Technology is key : the public is supportive of investment in technological innovation to tackle climate issues and think it is something the UK should be doing more of both domestically and around the world.

Work in partnership with business: the public wants government and business to collaboratively tackle climate change, favouring supporting British green businesses to become "climate problem solvers" rather than holding business accountable for damage caused in the past.

Connect the national to the global: while the public are more concerned about the national challenges posed by climate change, linking international challenges to salient domestic challenges (such as flooding) boosts support for international climate action and for climate foreign policy.

Forward-looking on accountability: the public largely rejects assigning historic blame for today's climate issues, favouring a forward-looking approach to accountability and supporting governments and large corporations to tackle climate change in the future rather than a backward-looking blame game.

Helping people adapt to climate impacts: the public leans towards favouring adaptation measures that improve resilience to specific risks, like flooding and drought, rather than mitigation approaches - partly because adaptation approaches seem both more urgent and more tangible.

Expectation 1: Does climate foreign policy help make Britain feel safer?

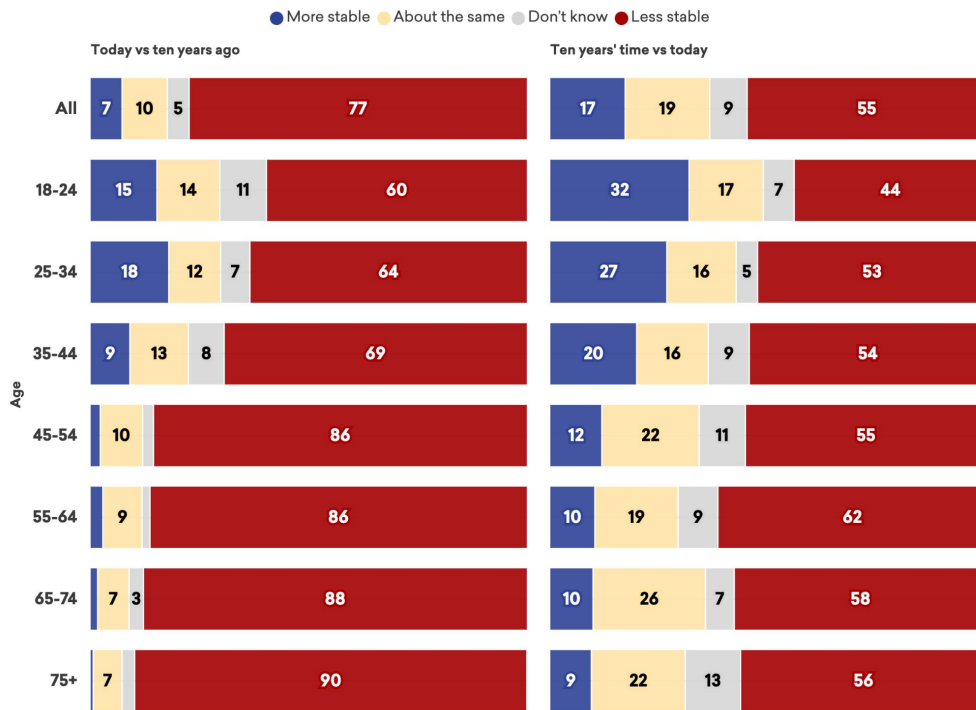
The first expectation that the public have on climate foreign policy is that it must contribute to making Britain safer.

More than three in four Britons (77 per cent) say the world today is less stable than it was ten years ago and more than half (55 per cent) expect it to be less stable in the coming decade - a view held more strongly by older generations than younger generations.

The public take a broad view about what drives instability at home and abroad from wars in Ukraine and the Middle East to global challenges such as climate change. The Government's approach must respond to those concerns about instability. Designing and explaining an approach to climate change which - at the very least - helps manage instability more effectively as well as contributing to reducing that instability would be well received.

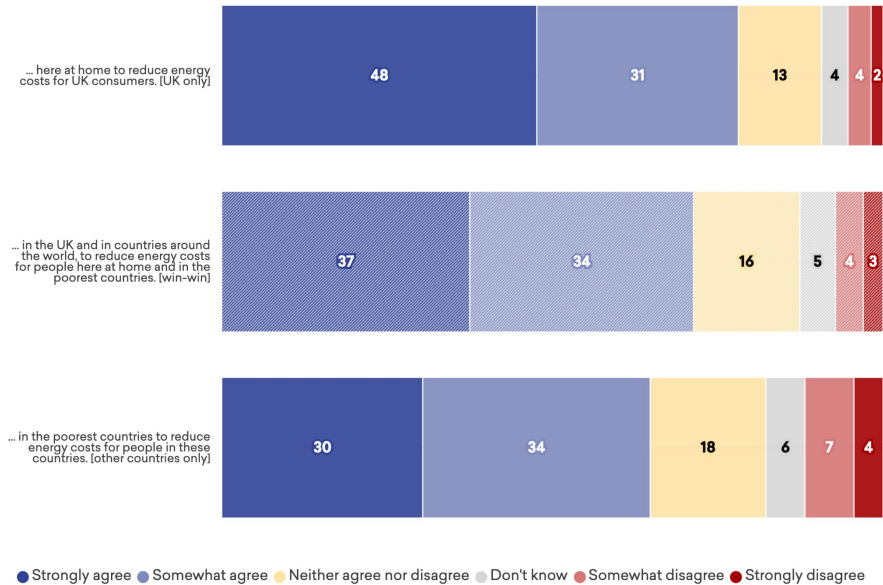
"I'm personally more worried about what happens in this country, but unfortunately when it happens in other countries as well, it can affect the UK. So you've really got to be worried generally about worldwide climate change and it is dangerous and like somebody said before, I'd be worried for my grandchildren. What is it going to be like in, I dunno, 10, 15, 20 years the way things are going at the moment." - Ronald, Selby

Thinking about the world [today/ in ten years' time] compared to [ten years ago/ today], [would you say it is/ do you expect it will be]...



Expectation 2: Does climate foreign policy deliver tangible benefits at home and abroad?

Renewable energy is now the cheapest source of energy in the world. We should be producing more renewable energy...



Public support for increased overseas development assistance requires the tangible benefits of such investment - both at home and abroad - to be clear. If this can be done, any increase in ODA or the reprofiling of ODA to include more climate investment, is more likely to command broader public support.

An example of how this can be done is delivering tangible benefits on energy. More than three in five of the public are worried about Britain's energy security. A climate foreign policy which can contribute to delivering permanent and sustainable reductions to energy bills will be one that is more supported by the public.

Tying investment in renewable technologies abroad to reducing bills at home was something that resonated with most voters (79 per cent). However, talking about the benefits for both consumers in the UK and in poor countries around the world also commanded public support (71 per cent). Other research has also found these 'win-win' arguments are popular. While delivering tangible benefits for Britons is a larger public priority for climate foreign policy, delivering those same benefits for people in poor countries also meets with strong approval.

Expectation 3: Does climate foreign policy help tackle climate change in a fair way?

The public want an approach to climate foreign policy that helps us deal with the impacts of climate change in a fairer way.

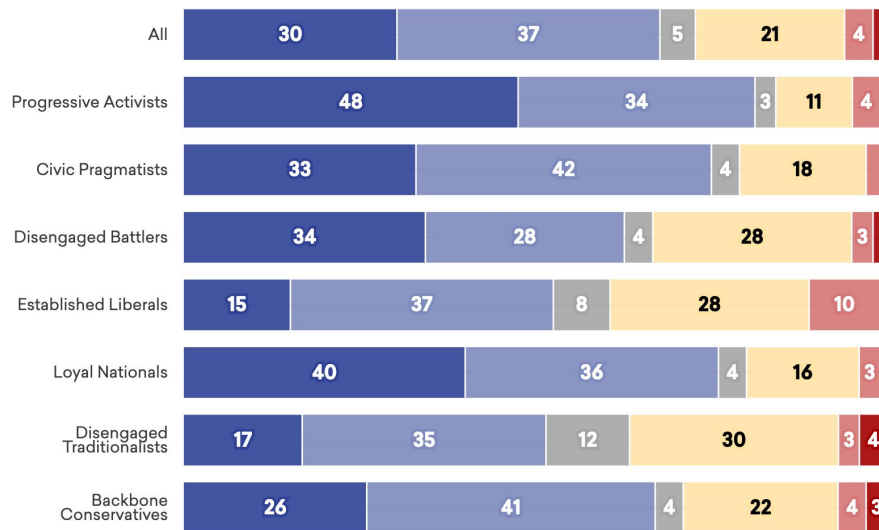
There is broad public support for the 'polluter pays' idea. Two thirds of the public (67 per cent) think that those who've contributed most to climate change globally should lead the efforts to deal with its impacts - countries and corporations alike. This support spans the political spectrum, although Progressive Activists more naturally see it as the role of businesses while Backbone Conservatives a more likely to view it as the country's responsibility.

The public tend to view this 'polluter pays' principle through a forward-looking lens. The idea that industrialised nations like Britain should be held responsible for historic emissions does not command public support. There is instead a sense that now that we know what we know, those that continue to pollute should foot the bills.

To make the case for Britain to do more to help Commonwealth countries deal with the impacts of climate change, a frame which focuses on fairness rather than historical culpability better commands public support.

Some argue that those who are most responsible for causing the climate crisis globally should provide the most money and effort to deal with its impacts. Do you think this is a good or a bad idea?

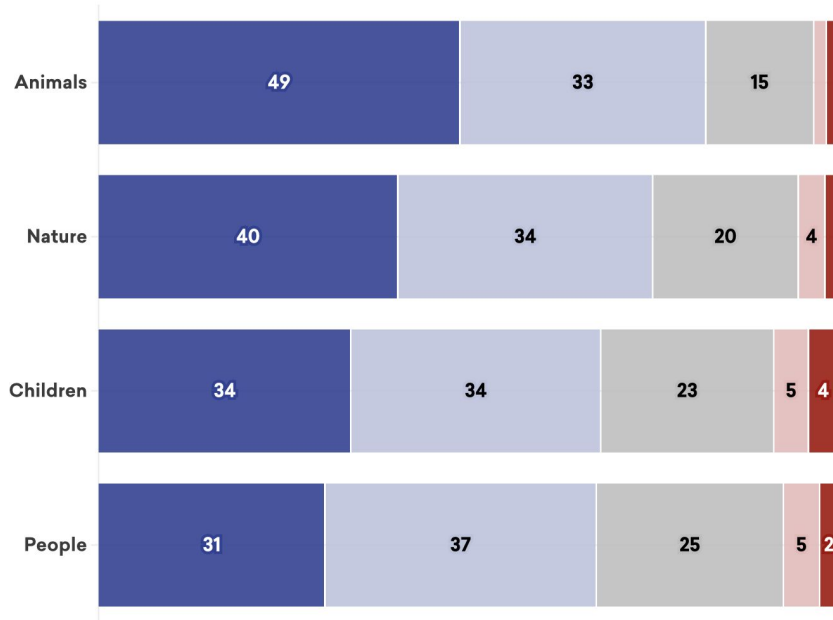
● Very good idea ● Somewhat good idea ● Don't know ● Neither a good idea nor a bad idea
● Somewhat bad idea ● Very bad idea



Expectation 4: Does climate foreign policy deliver for nature and people?

We should protect [animals/nature/children/people] around the world from harmful climate impacts because the climate has no borders.

● Strongly agree ● Somewhat agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Somewhat disagree ● Strongly disagree



The public prioritise an approach which delivers first and foremost for animals and nature. Saving rainforests and protecting biodiversity resonates more with the British public than measures to benefit humans when it comes to tackling climate change.

However, while the public's concern around climate change is nature-centric, they do not see this in isolation. Instead, the public see the impacts on nature and the impacts on people as inextricably linked - and expect the Government to deliver both for nature and people.

Even so, framing climate foreign policy through a nature lens can help build public support for doing more international climate action - including measures that go beyond protecting nature and animals.

"I think nature and humans are interlinked. I think you can't see one without the other because if we're talking about climate change on nature and we're talking about you know deforestation and the climate warming up, that has a direct impact on us too. So I don't think you can separate the two really." - Jade, Bristol

Expectation 5: Does climate foreign policy put technology at the centre?

The public want technological innovation to be front and centre of Britain's approach to tackling climate change both at home and abroad. Meanwhile, they want the Government to demonstrate clearly and tangibly how taxpayers' money will be spent effectively in taking global climate action.

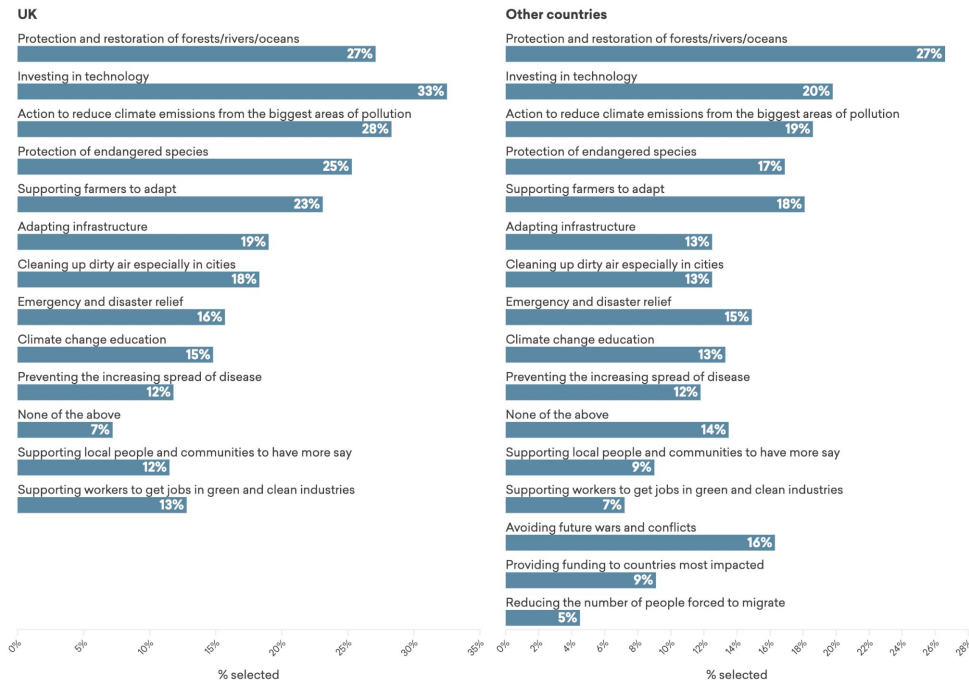
Focus group conversations reveal that the public don't support the use of technology based on a 'techno-optimist' belief that new technology will solve all climate related problems. In fact the public would prefer Britain focussed international investment on proliferating tried and tested technological solutions like wind farms, home insulation and solar panels. Support for a technology-first approach is driven by a sense that investment in technology is a sound use of public money and will be necessary if Britain and the world is to transition to a more sustainable economy.

"I like [aid] not to go as money, but in terms of technology and building places around the world that people can help themselves."

- Vishwar, Swindon

What should be the priorities for UK spending on climate change [within/outside] the UK ?

Select up to three.



Expectation 6: Does climate foreign policy see government work in partnership with business?

How effective or ineffective do you consider the following at solving problems related to climate change?



The public want to see government and businesses working together in partnership to tackle climate change. Such a partnership with business represents a key opportunity to build public support for climate foreign policy.

The public see businesses and tech companies as 'climate problem solvers'. Our research with SME business leaders in the North East also showed that many were ready to work in partnership with the government on climate issues.

The public prioritises a more forward-looking approach supporting British businesses to tackle climate change, over a backward looking approach which holds businesses to account for their historical climate footprint.

But on climate action, the public draws a line between local and international businesses. Local businesses are seen as doing at least their fair share on tackling climate change while multinational companies are seen as doing less than their fair share. In particular, the public hold oil and gas companies more responsible for causing climate change, putting less faith in their ability to tackle it without government direction.



Source: More in Common, April 2024

Which of the following comes closer to your view? The government's role is to...



● support UK businesses and companies who are tackling climate change ● Don't know ● hold UK businesses and companies to account over their climate footprint

"Throughout industry they're then adding in more sustainable things. Like all businesses now look to try and put solar panels on the buildings and use ground source heat pumps and water recycle systems as well. So all these sort of things I don't think people really pick on up on as much. It's not really brought up in the news, but if you're in the industry over the last five, six years, you've seen a massive change. People are spending millions on trying to be more sustainable." - Ryan, Swindon

Expectation 7: Does climate foreign policy connect the national to the global?

While the public are most concerned about the impacts of climate change in Britain, there is an opportunity for climate foreign policy to resonate more with the public if it links the national with the global, rather than simply approaching climate foreign policy as a global-only challenge.

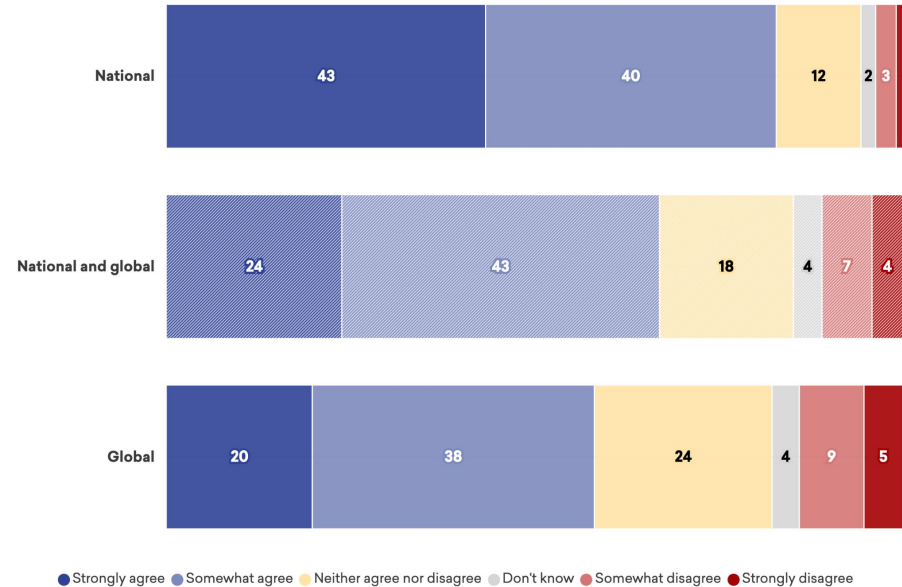
In a message testing experiment the salience of national-only, international-only and national and international messaging was measured on a range of climate foreign policy issues from extreme flooding to extreme heat. The findings - corroborated by focus group research - show that linking foreign climate policy with domestic impacts at home can increase public support for tackling the issue in an international context.

However, this can only work effectively when there is the same salient national problem. For example, linking the national to the international messaging on flooding increases overall support, but the same pattern doesn't appear when trying to link the extreme heat problem which is a challenge internationally, but much less salient in Britain.

Grounding international policies in tangible issues here at home can help bring the public along and broaden support.

“What ticks me off at the moment, because I live quite close to the beach in Blyth, I've seen the erosion of the beach massive at the moment. There are no political parties at the minute what are talking about the erosion factor. The beaches are massively eroding and it's like, again, there's nothing from the political parties to say what they are doing to help combat flood and beach erosion.” - Tracy, Blyth

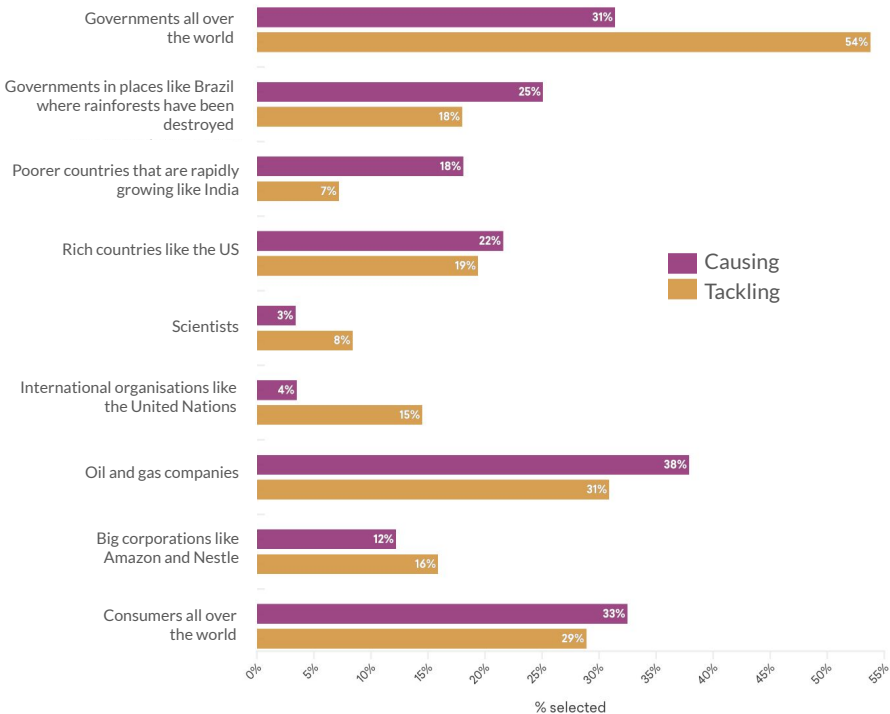
In recent years parts of the UK, along with many countries around the world, have suffered flooding, and this is expected to get worse due to climate change. We should [protect ourselves/ help poor countries facing severe flooding to protect themselves] by investing in flood defences.



Expectation 8: Does climate foreign policy adopt a forward looking approach to accountability?

Who, if any of the following, is most responsible for [causing/tackling] climate change?

Select up to three.



Selected options displayed
Source: More in Common, April 2024

One of the emerging climate foreign policy debate faultlines centres on how to hold countries and corporations accountable for causing climate change and how to ensure they take responsibility for tackling it.

The public's approach to questions of accountability and responsibility for climate is one which puts more emphasis on supporting businesses and countries to do more to tackle climate change today rather than holding them responsible for causing it in the first place. While oil and gas companies are held most responsible for causing climate change, the public places the onus on dealing with it on those able to use their power - in particular governments and consumers.

The public is broadly unconvinced by the 'right to development' - the argument that it is only fair that developing economies today should have the right to prioritise industrialisation over the environment because already developed economies consumed fossil fuels to acquire their wealth. Participants in focus groups rejected this idea on the grounds that as we now know about the harm caused by economic growth reliant on increased carbon emissions it would be unwise to promote this model of development. Participants also talked about the importance of more sustainable economic development for developing and emerging economies as a way to ensure their future self-sufficiency and medium to long term security.

"The world evolves, doesn't it?... You can't just say, well if you've done it, I want to do it now." - Helen, New Hartley

"Not saying countries shouldn't have the chance to expand... but it is as simple as we now know that it's harmful... I don't think they should be allowed to just crack on." - Simon, Tadcaster

Expectation 9: Does climate foreign policy help people adapt to climate change impacts?

The public lean towards adapting to climate change rather than mitigating it. They prioritise measures which help countries become more resilient to climate impacts over climate mitigation measures which take a more preventative approach to reduce a country's carbon emissions - although many don't take a firm view either way. One of the public's tangible expectations on climate foreign policy is that it helps people adapt to the impacts of climate change.

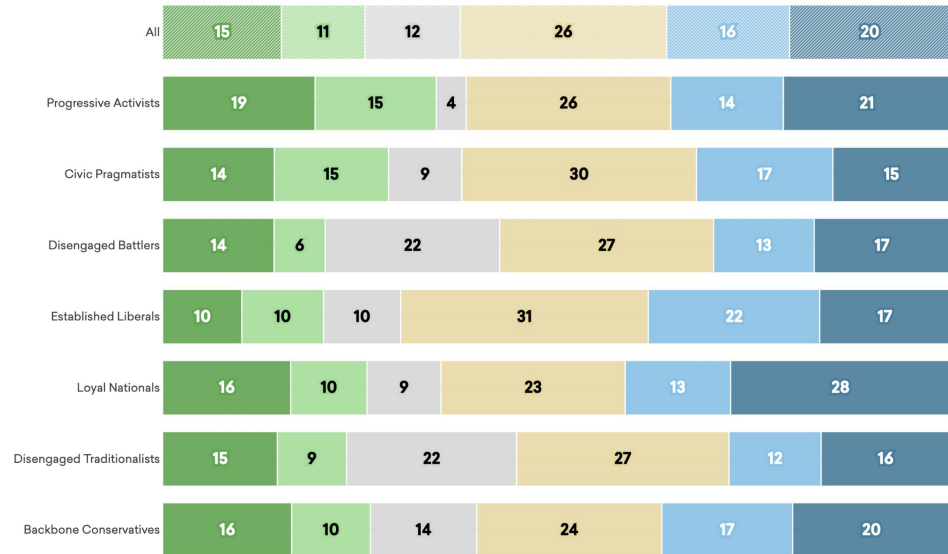
Interesting, the typical Red Wall voters from the Loyal National segment are most likely to favour actions which improve resilience to specific risks such as flooding, drought or wildfires. Due to their high threat perception, they feel adaptation work is both more immediate and more pressing. If climate foreign policy can respond to these concerns on adaptation, it's more likely to command this segment's support which is significant given Loyal Nationals are a key swing group for public opinion.

When adaptation actions (such as improved flood defences) are approached from both a local, national and global perspective - rather than just a global perspective - support for investment in global flood defences increases. In focus groups, when the work on adaptation was linked to identifiable threats, such as protection for small island nations, it was more likely to be supported, particularly by more sceptical groups.

"I think it's relevant to not necessarily to pay towards subsidising China and India, but the likes of the small nations like Fiji, all these small islands who could be wiped out to help them, the Caribbean, et cetera. So I would do it for the fund to help these smaller nations but not this large developing nations." - Mohamed, Potters Bar

Which of the following do you think should be more of a priority for the government's budget for overseas spending on climate change?

- 1 - Reducing all countries' carbon emissions that cause climate change to stop the problem getting worse
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Dealing with the impacts of climate change better in all countries to make sure things like food and water supplies are resilient to flooding, drought or wildfires





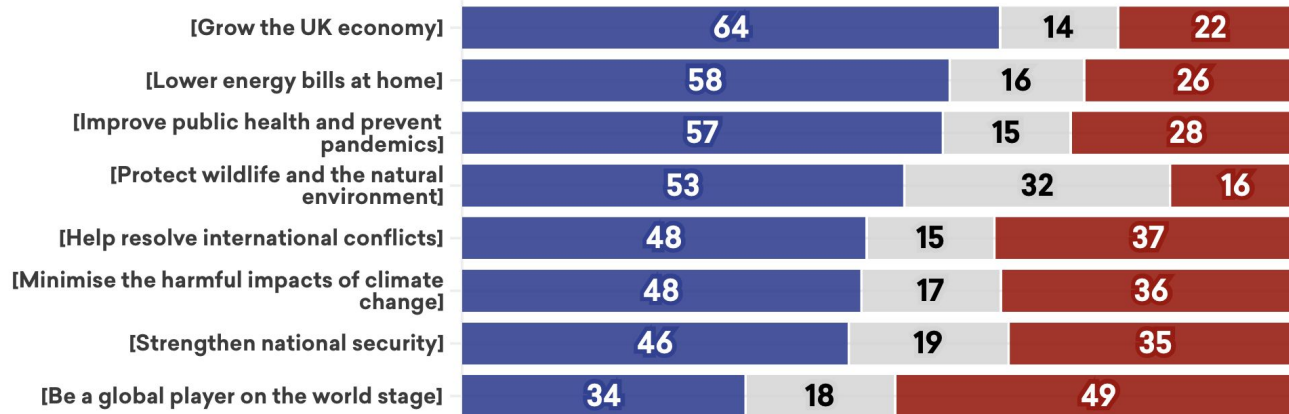
Financing climate foreign policy

The public sees international spending as a trade-off worth making to mitigate climate change

While international aid spending is generally unpopular with the British public, it is seen as more worthwhile for outcomes including protecting the environment and minimising the harmful impacts of climate change. In focus group conversations it is clear people particularly oppose spending they deem wasteful - above all else, the public wants climate solutions to be cost-effective and long-term.

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

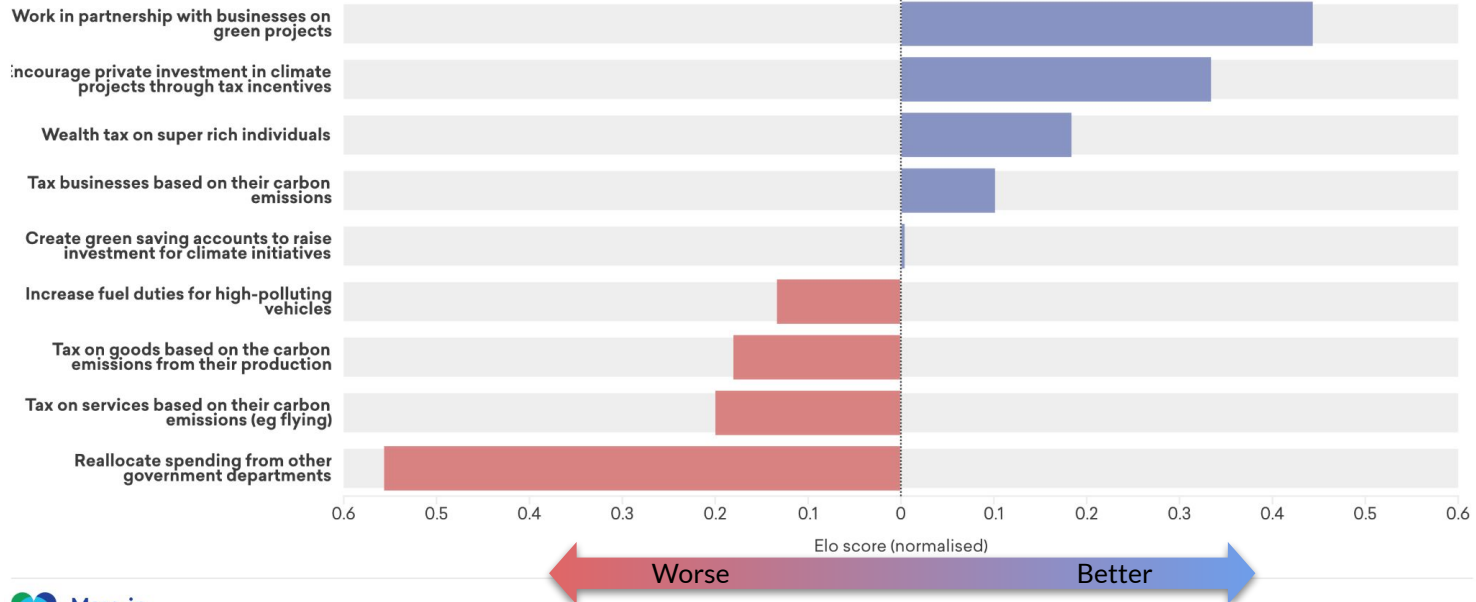
- It is **WORTH** the UK spending more in other countries to [...] ● Don't know
● It is **NOT WORTH** the UK spending more in other countries to [...]



Where the money comes from impacts public support

The source of the monies spent on climate change has a bigger effect on public support than the arguments deployed. The UK public thinks it is better for the burden of climate mitigation measures to fall on businesses rather than consumers. They prefer the Government to work in partnership with businesses, while also incentivising investment rather than levying taxes.

The UK government has committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Which of the following do you think would be the best and worst ways to fund this transition?

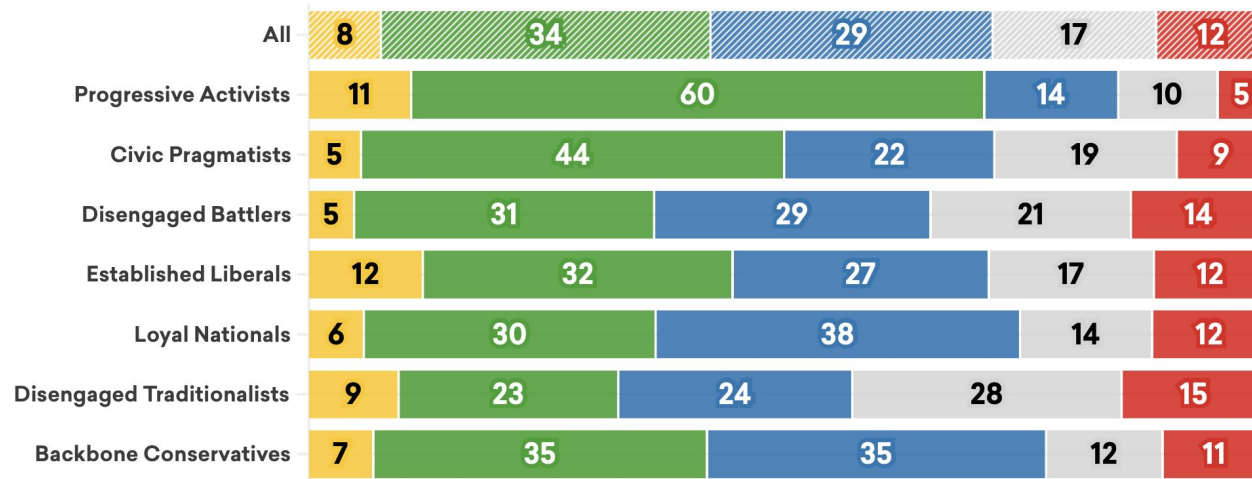


Public thinks funds raised in the UK by taxing international trade should fund climate action globally and at home

If funds are raised through climate-related measures such as a carbon tax, the public would strongly favour hypothecating these funds for climate action. They are also likely to say the Government should use this to fund climate action globally as well as at home.

If the UK put a levy on overseas goods being produced with high carbon emissions should the money raised be used to...


- Fund climate action overseas
- Fund climate action in the UK and overseas
- Fund climate action in the UK
- Don't know
- Not be used to fund climate action

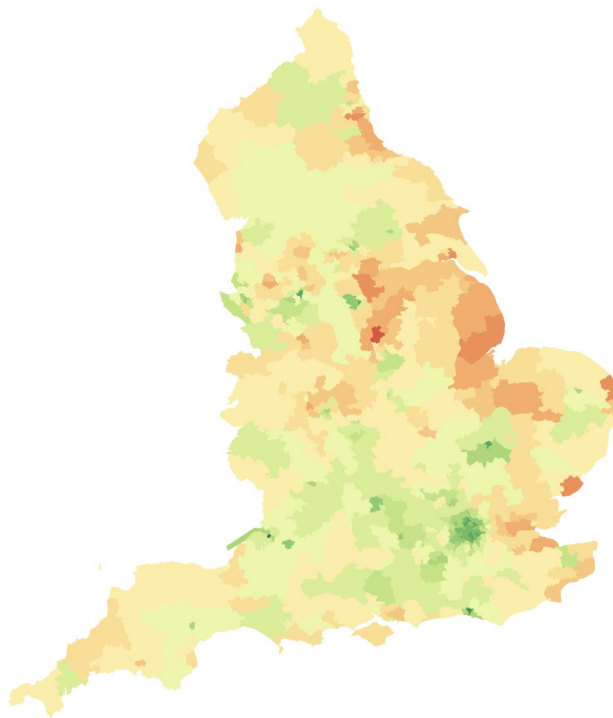


There is net support across the country for helping poorer countries to tackle climate change

Public support for the UK helping developing countries to tackle climate change is not politically or geographically concentrated - modelling suggests there is net positive support in all but one constituency.

To what extent would you support or oppose the UK helping developing countries to tackle the impacts of climate change ?

% support
25%  75%



Fewer people in the east of England support the UK helping poorer countries to tackle climate impacts than elsewhere across the country. Support for international aid is highest in urban centres and university towns.

In the average Labour seat, one in two constituents support helping developing countries to tackle climate impacts. But in seats where the runner-up was a Green Party candidate, this view is more widely held with 61% in support.

Similarly, there is support among 49 per cent of constituents in Conservative seats, but in seats where the Conservatives came second to the Liberal Democrats this rises to 53 per cent.

Marginal constituencies with highest net support:

- Chelsea and Fulham
won by **LAB**, second **CON**
- Bethnal Green and Stepney
won by **LAB**, second **IND**
- Hendon
won by **LAB**, second **CON**

Seats won by	Net support
Labour	+25%
Conservative	+23%
Liberal Democrats	+29%
Reform UK	+3%
Green	+45%
SNP	+16%
Plaid Cymru	+14%



Official Development Assistance and Climate

Climate Change and Official Development Assistance

A major component of any policy or political debate on climate foreign policy will be the role that Official Development Assistance (also known as foreign or development aid) will play. Most Britons (61 per cent) support the principle of Official development assistance (ODA) to poorer countries - both because they think it is the right thing to do and they think it is a proud British value to help countries in need. However, the public are twice as likely to think that Britain's aid budget has increased rather than decreased, and almost half of the public think that Britain should spend less on foreign aid.

A series of tests emerge from the polling and focus group research on how advocates for ODA can better bring the public with them on arguments calling for maintaining current levels of ODA spending, or for increasing it, or for making the case that climate-related investments (such as climate adaptation measures) should form a larger part of ODA spending.

Advocates of more (or more climate) ODA spending must persuade the public of a two-part argument- answering the 'why' and the 'how'.

- **The Why** - Broadly speaking, the public agree that Britain has a responsibility to help countries in need around the world. They also believe that helping those in need is a British value. In focus group conversations, people connect the UK's spending on overseas aid to their own personal experiences of charitable giving and most argue that it is important that Britain does its bit and individuals do their bit too on charitable giving.
- **The How** - The public are more sceptical about how official development assistance works in practice. Increasing support for ODA, or making the case for climate to become a larger part of ODA, is contingent on meeting three tests of the public's expectations: a reciprocity test (how does this deliver benefits for Britain and the recipient country), a self-sufficiency test (how does this help the recipient country become more self-sufficient), and an effectiveness test (how does this investment make a difference). Taken together, these tests form part of the public's broad 'value for money' sniff test on ODA where support or opposition is shaped in part by how advocates of ODA talk about the investment.

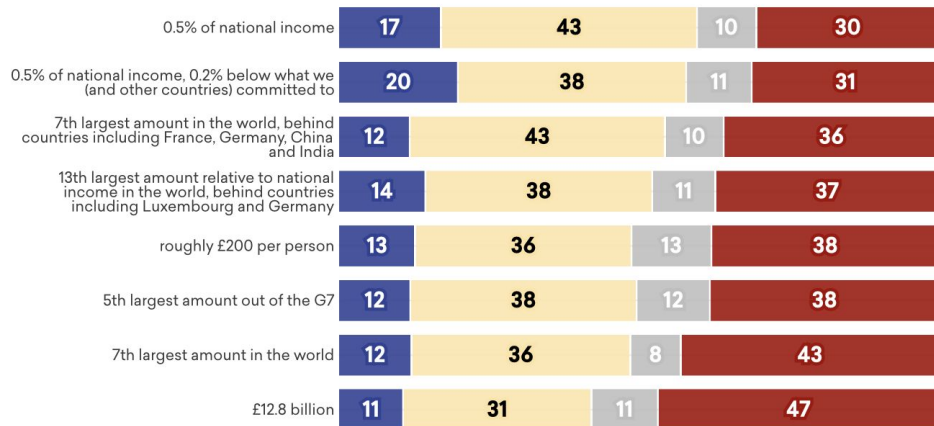
This research finds that climate-related official development assistance - whether that's in the form of supporting green businesses or technology - should be able to meet the public's expectations and tests, and potentially meet it more easily than more traditional forms of aid or official development assistance.

The public opinion challenge on increasing Overseas Aid

Do you think the UK should spend more, less or the same on overseas development aid?

- UK should spend more on foreign aid than we do now
- UK should spend the same amount on foreign aid as we do now
- Don't know
- UK should spend less on foreign aid than we do now

Current annual spending described as...



The challenge facing advocates of increasing overseas aid is clear. While aid spending has been cut over the course of the last Parliament, the public are almost twice as likely to think that aid spending has increased (44 per cent) than decreased (23 per cent). A similar pattern emerges when asking whether the Government should spend more on ODA (18 per cent support) or less on ODA (46 per cent support).

A message testing experiment identified differences between the levels of support on ODA depending on how the funding envelope is described. When current annual spending on aid is described as 0.5 per cent of national income, 30 percent of the public think we should spend less on it; when it is described as £12.8 billion, 47 per cent of the public say we should spend less on foreign aid.

This highlights the limitations of a conversation or debate on aid that is only focused on the size of the funding envelope. To command public support for increasing or reprofiling overseas aid, a broader story has to be told - one which deals with both why Britain should give aid and crucially the ways in which we give overseas aid that can pass the public's tests on reciprocity, self-sufficiency and effectiveness.

Why should Britain invest in overseas aid?

The first question that advocates of increased or reprofiled overseas aid need to answer is the why: why should Britain spend money on ODA?

The public broadly agree with the notion that Britain should spend money on overseas aid - because they think it is the right thing to do morally, because they think we have a responsibility to help countries be more self-sufficient and because they feel that it is a British value to help countries in need.

These are three arguments that command support across the British Seven segments - though the intensity of support is stronger among segments such as Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists than others, such as the Disengaged Traditionalists.

Our research finds however that it is framing and arguments around the 'how' of ODA rather than the 'why' that is more likely to shape the overall level of public support for the ODA budget.

Below are some arguments in favour of the UK spending public money on foreign aid. How convincing do you find the following arguments?

Colour indicates rank of net support (% convincing minus % unconvincing)



Three tests to better command public support for overseas aid

Support for increased overseas aid or spending more overseas development aid on climate adaptation, is contingent upon passing three tests for public support that have emerged from across the polling and focus group research.

Test 1: Reciprocity

What's in it both for Britain and the recipient?

Greater support for ODA can be commanded, particularly for those who are more sceptical, with an approach that focuses on what both the giver and the receiver get out of the relationship. ODA needs to pass the reciprocity test: a more equal relationship where both parties have something to offer and something to gain.

"If the shoe was on the other foot, we would expect some support from somewhere and if we're in the position to offer that support to those who may need it, I feel that we should." - Sabrina, Bristol

"I think that every country and every nation, everyone has strengths and everyone has weaknesses and I think it's important to be able to use those to help each other." - Hiena, Stevenage

Test 2: Self-sufficiency

Will this commitment help the recipient to be self-sufficient?

The public is weary of long-standing and open-ended spending commitments. It's for this reason that the public favours approaches to international aid which prioritise recipients increasing their self-sufficiency.

"You give a person what is it money for him to say buy food or do you give him the tools like a fisherman, a fishing rod so he can catch fish and so he can be in a sustainable himself." - Mohammed, Potters Bar

"Handing out food parcels and other stuff that will just help keep the country stable in the short term. But with the technology that's more of long-term situation." - Faz, Hyndburn

Test 3: Effectiveness

How is our overseas aid making a difference?

The public want something to show for their investment in overseas aid. The more tangible the ODA proposition is (particularly around investment in technology), the more likely the public will think it can be effective and make a difference and the more likely it will be to command public support.

If we're talking along the lines of government sending money abroad, I guess, well you'd like to think that they are sure about where it's going and who they're sending it to and how it's being spent." - Angela, Bristol

They say put 20 pound or whatever a month in there, but does that all get there?" - Mike, Bristol

The reciprocity test and support for green business

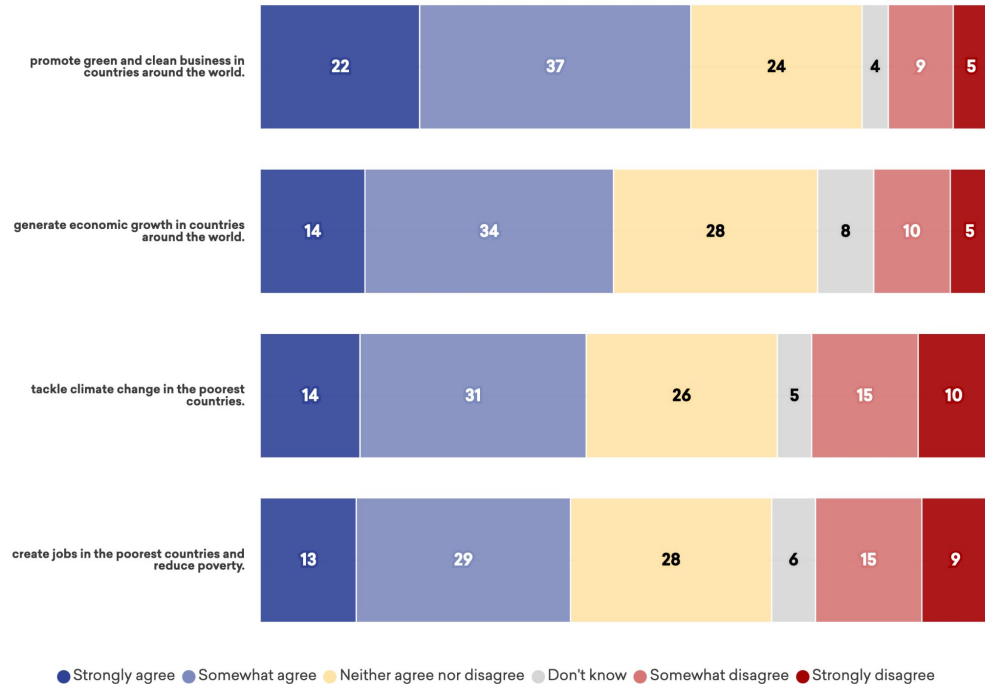
Climate-related overseas development investment based on business and technology transfer presents an opportunity to meet the public's expectations on reciprocity. For example, using taxpayers' money to promote green businesses around the world garners more support than generally tackling climate change or reducing poverty.

Focus group research with small and medium sized businesses in the North East of England also found a clear appetite among business leaders to play an active part in a green-business centric approach to climate foreign policy.

For the public, promoting business is a tangible proposition for the recipient country's long term future development, as well as something which can benefit British businesses.

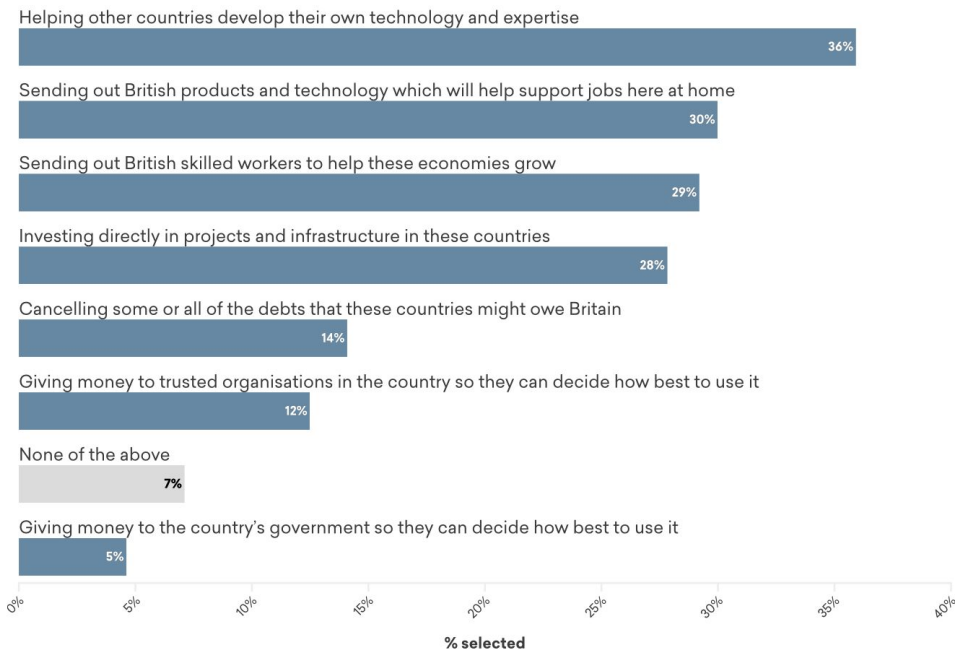
"So give them money, not just the money, but give the money by way of green technology. We are market leaders in what we do. Give the technology to countries that we colonised and other countries because a lot of the countries we colonised are struggling. And that's wrong. So for me, I think we have a duty to give the technology to them." - Vishwar, Swindon

Britain should use its financial power to...



The self-sufficiency test and support for technological investment

Which of the following, if any, do you think are good ways of Britain sending development aid to developing economies around the world?



Across polling and focus group research, technology which focuses on tackling climate change is something which first and foremost passes the public's test for self-sufficiency. The public can clearly see how technology can help recipients of overseas aid to become more self-reliant and independent.

Technological investment also helps pass the 'effectiveness' test - the public can see how investment in technology can contribute to tackling climate change as well as giving Britain something to show for its investment. It also passes a reciprocity test as the public can see the opportunity for British technology to be exported around the world.

This support for investment in climate technology shouldn't be misunderstood as a techno-optimist lens for thinking about tackling climate change. Instead, most of the the public think investment in technology is something highly practical, where there is something in it for Britain, while also helping countries who receive Britain's aid to be more self-sufficient.

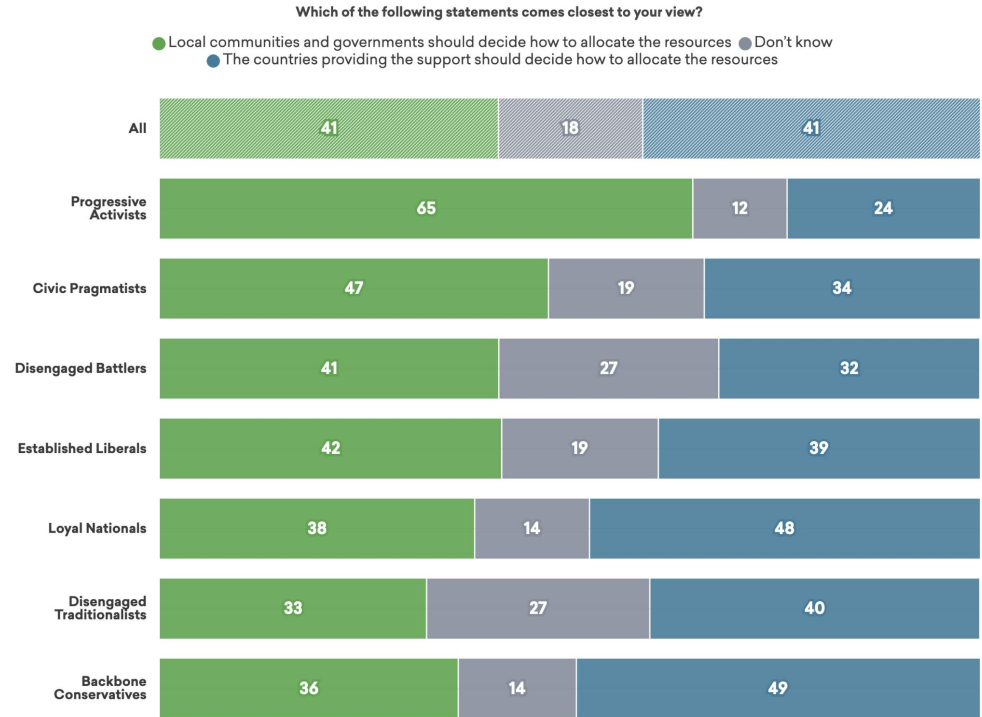
"If you are talking about technology and then you are talking about the critical supply chain of how the country operates, we need to invest in that. We don't just need to be sending blank checks abroad and not worried about where that's going to. We need to be investing in the future of the money that we're investing." - Keith, Aldershot

The effectiveness test and local agency

The public's third test on aid focuses on the question of effectiveness and whether Britain's investment in overseas aid is making a difference on the ground in local communities. This test should also help advocates of particular approaches to overseas aid to reframe how they talk about ODA.

For example, many climate justice activists talk about ODA empowering local governments and local communities to make decisions for themselves and see this focus as a means to address historic power imbalances between nations. In our research, this local agency argument divides opinion among the public and only really convinces the Progressive Activist segment.

However, when the local agency justification is made through the lens of effectiveness or value for money - and very importantly avoiding unnecessary waste - the argument can garner much broader support. This shows how tailoring the pitch to justify aid can help advocates of increased ODA to make a more compelling case to better command public support.



Authors

Anouschka Rajah
Research and Data Analyst
anouschka@moreincommon.com

Conleth Burns
Associate Director
conleth@moreincommon.com

In Partnership with:

Jamie Clarke
Director at Engaging Climate
jamieclarkeclimate@gmail.com

Dr Susie Wang
Research consultant
research.swang@gmail.com

