

FEPS POLICY STUDY  
February 2022

# TALKING GREEN: THE UK SURVEY

WINNING THE ARGUMENT  
FOR CLIMATE ACTION

*Luke Raikes, Ben Cooper*



Policy Study published in February 2022 by

**FEPS**  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



**THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE  
STUDIES (FEPS)**

European Political Foundation - N° 4 BE 896.230.213  
Avenue des Arts 46 1000 Brussels (Belgium)  
[www.feps-europe.eu](http://www.feps-europe.eu)  
@FEPS\_Europe



**FABIAN SOCIETY**

61 Petty France  
London SW1H 9EU  
[www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)  
info@fabian-society.org.uk



This Policy Study was produced with the financial support of the European Parliament. It does not represent the view of the European Parliament.

Copyright © 2022 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies.  
Front page photo: Shutterstock  
Copy editing: Kate Murray

**ISBN: 978-2-930769-70-7**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is part of the wider project: Talking Green and implementing an inclusive Just Transition model – The People’s Transition. It is a collaboration between the Fabian Society, FEPS and TASC that seeks to determine how progressive parties should talk about green issues and how participation in a just transition can be ensured.

We are particularly grateful to European Climate Foundation (ECF) for their financial support and for partnering with us on this project. Specific thanks go to Charlotte Billingham (formerly of FEPS), Saïd El Khadraoui, David Rinaldi and Andreas Dimmelmeier at FEPS, Sean McCabe at TASC, Steve Akehurst at GSCC and Jessica Nicholls at the ECF. We would also like to thank our colleagues Andrew Harrop, Kate Murray and Emma Burnell. Finally, special thanks to Anthony Wells and Patrick English at YouGov for their extensive and highly valued advice and work on the polling.

We are especially grateful to our advisory group who offered support to shape our thinking, especially early on in the project. This group included: Tom Brookes (European Climate Foundation); Dr Gráinne Healy (researcher and campaigner); Dr Clare O’Grady (Trinity College Dublin); Emma Rose (Unchecked.uk); and Dr Chris Shaw (Climate Outreach).

Thanks to More in Common for permission to use its mapping of the UK population into seven segments based on their core beliefs, as set out in the Britain’s Choice report and in the Britain Talks Climate report, in partnership with the European Climate Foundation and Climate Outreach. For further information on the Britain’s Choice project see <https://www.britainschoice.uk>. More in Common is not responsible for the recommendations in this report.

This report represents the views of the individual writers and not the collective views of the Fabian Society, FEPS, ECF or the European Parliament. The responsibility of the society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement.

# KEY POINTS

The 'green jobs' rhetoric favoured by politicians fails to persuade the people it is supposed to:

- 'Green jobs' messages **do persuade** groups already convinced (on average) that the benefits of climate action outweigh the costs: middle class households, 'progressive activists', Remain and Labour voters.
- 'Green jobs' arguments **do not persuade** people who are more sceptical (on average) that the benefits of climate action outweigh the costs – as they are intended to: working class households, older people, Leave and Conservative voters are not persuaded.

Instead of using slogans about 'green jobs', politicians should avoid jargon; highlight the link between climate, nature and a good quality of life; and appeal to widely shared values.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	4
1. INTRODUCTION .....	8
2. PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ECONOMY .....	13
3. MESSAGE TESTING .....	27
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	43
<b>AUTHORS, ABOUT FEPS &amp; PARTNERS</b> .....	46
5. THE AUTHORS .....	46
6. ABOUT FEPS AND PARTNERS .....	48

---

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

---

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Politicians and campaigners often sell 'green jobs' as a benefit of climate action

- **'Green jobs' messages are now quite common** – politicians and campaigners often use terms such as 'green industrial revolution', 'green jobs' or a 'green new deal' to present the economic benefits of tackling climate change.
- **This is intended to appeal to a broad range of the electorate** – both middle-class people, which have traditionally been more concerned with climate change, and working-class people, who have been more sceptical and tend to prioritise jobs.
- **This project investigates how persuasive these messages are.** We worked with YouGov to ask questions and test messages with 5,005 adults in Great Britain in October 2021.

## Working-class people don't often rate 'the environment' as a top priority

- **26 per cent of respondents put 'the environment' as one of the top three issues** facing the country at this time – joint fourth of the options, alongside 'Britain leaving the EU', and slightly more than 'immigration and asylum' (23 per cent). More thought the economy (40 per cent), the Covid-19 pandemic (34 per cent) or health (29 per cent) were one of their top priorities.

- **Labour and Remain voters, younger people (18-24), members of 'middle-class' households (ABC1)<sup>1</sup>, degree holders, and particularly 'progressive activists'<sup>2</sup> were far more likely to select 'the environment' as a top issue.** The environment was a lower priority for large swathes of the electorate – including people of 'working-class' social grades, such as C2s, for whom it was sixth most selected issue, and DEs, for whom it was the seventh most selected.

## Working-class people, non-degree holders, Conservative and Leave voters are also less convinced of economic benefits of climate action

- **Only 44 per cent of people thought climate action was 'more of an opportunity to create jobs', than a 'threat to jobs',** but only 14 per cent of people thought action on climate change was 'more of a threat to jobs'.
- **Degree holders, Remain and Labour voters were far more likely to say 'action on climate change is more of an opportunity to create jobs',** compared to Leave voters, working-class people under the age of 50, and Conservative voters.
- **When forced to choose, people are more likely to prioritise climate change than jobs.** When asked 'do you think it is more important to protect jobs, or more important to take action on climate change?' – 45 per cent selected 'more important to take action on climate change', and 24 per cent selected 'more important to protect

1 Social grade based on the occupation or former occupation of members of the household is a common proxy for social class, although it is imperfect. 'ABC1' we refer to as 'middle class'; C2DE we refer to as 'working class'. We use these terms interchangeably.

2 We categorised voters into different groups using values-based segmentation developed by More in Common, for details see box 1.

jobs' (19 per cent said 'don't know' and 12 per cent 'neither').

- **Conservative and Leave voters said it was about equally important to protect jobs** (both groups at 35 per cent) as to take action on climate change (both at 34 per cent).

## Messages promoting 'green jobs' fail to persuade groups who need persuading most

- **We tested the impact of 'climate action' messages with respondents** using three methodologies. First, we used 'split testing' – exposing similar groups of people to different paragraphs of text. To assess the impact, we asked people whether 'the benefits of tackling climate change outweigh the costs' before and after seeing the statements. Second, we asked people to pick the most and least convincing messages from a list of eight.<sup>3</sup> Finally, we invited people to write down their reactions to key phrases, and analysed the sentiments in their responses.

### 1. 'Green jobs' arguments only persuade groups who are already convinced

- **We tested three different 'green jobs' narrative frames**, using the split test methodology: one based on industrial decline and revival; one based on 'green new deal' rhetoric about transforming capitalism; and one focused purely on specific job creation.
- **All three 'green jobs' frames were ineffective** at persuading groups who don't already tend to think climate action is a priority: working class people, older people, Leave voters and Conservative voters were largely unpersuaded.
- **'Green jobs' messages 'preach to the converted'**

– they boost support for climate action among groups who already tend to be supportive: middle class people, progressive activists, Labour voters, Remain voters and degree holders showed an increase in agreement.

### 2. Key climate change terms often provoke negative reactions and understandable confusion

- **Net zero' is often misunderstood:** 28 per cent reacted to the term with responses such as 'don't know', 'no idea' or 'not sure', while a further 12 per cent associated it with something unrelated to the environment. 27 per cent had a negative reaction, with responses such as 'load of cobblers', 'low-grade management speak' as well as 'impossible' or 'utopian'.
- **'Green jobs' are well received by some, but there is significant confusion and scepticism:** 29 per cent responded that the term was associated with climate change, emissions or the environment. But 21 per cent had some form of negative reaction – with responses such as 'expensive', 'unrealistic' 'baloney', 'propaganda' or 'jargon'.
- **A 'green industrial revolution' had a significant negative response:** 30 per cent had a negative reaction, or expressed scepticism, concerns about waste or cost and views that it was jargon or rhetoric: 'Haha, you live in cuckoo land', 'rubbish, or 'wishful thinking' for example.

### 3. Quality of life, nature and values are a much stronger basis for wide support

- **Messages that emphasised nature, quality of life and shared values had broader appeal** among some of the more sceptical groups, as well as among those already supportive of climate action,

<sup>3</sup> We also asked for people's free text reactions to key phrases, and analysed these manually for their general sentiment – some people simply gave their association (for example 'climate') while others had overtly negative or positive responses, which we separated out. We published this research here: <https://www.feps-europe.eu/resources/publications/820-talking-green-public-reactions-to-key-climate-change-terms.html>

with support spanning across political divides, age, education, class and value segments. The message that was most successful at increasing support for climate action began:

*"We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air. We need to be in balance with nature, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world."*

- **"We owe our children a better future but if we don't act, they will pay the price" was the most popular** single-sentence message of the eight we asked people to respond to.
- **"We need to reduce our dependence on foreign countries for energy"** scored highest for large sections of the public: Conservative voters, Leave voters, people aged 50-64 and those aged 65 and over.

### **Campaigners must improve their messages on climate action**

- **Now, more than ever, politicians and campaigners need to secure broad support for climate action.** Emissions are at a tipping point and much of the 'low-hanging fruit' has gone: in the next decade, policies to mitigate climate change will impact how we live more and more.
- **A strategy which exclusively aims to pressure politicians will not work**, because those politicians also need to stand for election. Climate change communication therefore requires a far broader, more inclusive approach.
- **Politicians and activists must turn outward** and connect with the wider public to make a case for action that people in all their diversity can relate to. To build a broad and strong coalition of support for climate action, politicians and activists should:

1. **Focus on quality of life and emphasise shared values.** Messages popular with a diverse range of groups included: "We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air" or "We owe our children a better future but if we don't act, they will pay the price".
2. **Be specific about the jobs, if using 'green jobs' messages.** For example, this sentence was popular across different political and demographic groups: "As we tackle climate change, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, secure jobs in clean industries like electric cars, home insulation and renewable energy. We are already the largest producer of offshore wind energy in the world."
3. **Use stories, not slogans and jargon.** Across all groups, people were more persuaded when they were told a story about how climate action is a way to fulfil shared values and improve quality of life. Slogans tend to be received with scepticism, particularly with respect to climate change: 'green jobs', 'green industrial revolution' and 'net zero' can provoke significant scepticism and are not understood by many people.

---

# 1. INTRODUCTION

---

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Two crises: climate and jobs

The climate crisis is real and immediate. We are falling short in our attempts to mitigate climate change, and we will need to make significant, sometimes costly or inconvenient changes to how we live. The United Nations Environment Programme has warned that: “The climate emergency we currently face requires adequate and immediate action. It is one of the most pervasive and threatening crises of our time.”<sup>4</sup>

There is also a very real and immediate crisis for poorer people in the UK: jobs are often insecure and low-paid; deindustrialisation, the financial crisis, then austerity have embedded decline and stagnation in many communities.

Now, the pandemic and Brexit continue to hold down pay and working conditions, just as bills are rising – in large part due to our dependence on oil and gas.

That is why the progressive call for a ‘just transition’ is more crucial now than ever before. On the one hand, there is opportunity: to develop good jobs in new industries – such as manufacturing batteries for electric vehicles – or to provide new work for trades, such as building or plumbing, as we upgrade our homes to be more energy efficient. But there is also a real and immediate risk: if this moment is mishandled, the planned ‘revolution’ in how we live could cost vital working-class jobs, or come with financial costs for the people who can least afford it.

## The policies meet the politics

“

*Tackling climate change is inherently political.*

”

Tackling climate change is inherently political. The challenge of developing ‘just transition’ policies remains significant: policymakers must make sure that these policies genuinely benefit low-income and working-class people, or at least protect them

from the costs of moving to net-zero.<sup>5</sup> But there is also a political challenge: how to win support for the policy platform required to implement those policies.

<sup>4</sup> Why does climate change matter? UN Environment Programme, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> What are the social outcomes of climate policies? A systematic map and review of the ex-post literature, William F Lamb et al 2020 Environ. Res. Lett. 15 113006. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abc11f/meta>

This policy study is focused on the latter challenge. Specifically, we ask: how can progressive politicians and campaigners communicate the benefits of tackling climate change, in a way that resonates with working-class people?<sup>6</sup>



*How can progressive politicians and campaigners communicate the benefits of tackling climate change, in a way that resonates with working-class people?*



Progressives have already attempted to translate the opportunities of ‘just transition’ into language that can appeal to voters. Most notably, this includes promoting a ‘green new deal’ or a ‘green industrial revolution’. Politicians and campaigners often claim they can create hundreds of thousands of new ‘green’ jobs; and some propose radical transformations of society, the economy and politics. There is often a strong regional focus, in areas which have experienced long-term economic decline or stagnation, such as the North of England.

From what we know about people, and about campaigns, there are reasons to doubt the effectiveness of these messages. While the public is generally convinced that climate change is a big problem, evidence shows that economic priorities are more immediate: as one campaigner put it, people are concerned with the ‘end of the month, not the end of the world’.<sup>7</sup> The evidence also shows that different groups of people conceive of the ‘environment’ very differently from one-another – for many, it is related to local green space, waste, pollution, nature and farming, while only a vocal minority of campaigners sees these issues as globally connected.<sup>8</sup>

This challenge has never been more important. Not only is climate change reaching a point of no return, but the politically easy, ‘low-hanging fruit’ is now gone. Past a certain tipping point, the financial and human costs accelerate dramatically. Soon, policies could start to affect the daily lives of people living in high-income countries in a much more real and tangible way. Experience suggests that the most vulnerable will continue to be the worst affected.

Politicians and campaigners must therefore sustain the most convincing case possible, in order to win the politics of climate change, and deliver the policies we need.

## Methodology

This project investigates how progressives can improve the way they communicate with the public on the economic opportunities of climate change. To do this, we developed a survey in consultation with our advisory group and a range of experts and stakeholders. The Fabian Society and FEPS then commissioned YouGov to survey 5,005 people across Great Britain. The survey was carried out online and sent to members of YouGov’s panel.

6 As part of this work TASC and FEPS also published a paper on Ireland: ‘Talking Green - The Irish Survey’, Sean McCabe, FEPS and TASC. <https://www.tasc.ie/publications/feeps-tasc-talking-green-the-irish-survey/>

7 The ‘end of the world’ vs. the ‘end of the month’: understanding social resistance to sustainability transition agendas, a lesson from the Yellow Vests in France. *Sustain Sci* 16, 601–614 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-020-00877-9>. Martin, M and Mine Islar. 2020.

8 Britain talks climate: A toolkit for engaging the British public on climate change, Dr Susie Wang, Dr Adam Corner and Jessie Nicholls. Climate Outreach, 2020.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 1 and 10 October 2021. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). This survey was conducted at a time shortly preceding COP26, when climate change issues were in the news more than usual. It was also a time when waste water was in the headlines and energy prices were a major concern.

We asked a wide and comprehensive range of questions related to climate change and tested messages using the methodologies of: MaxDiff (asking people to pick their most and least convincing messages); and split testing (also known as 'A/B' testing). These methodologies are explained further in section 3.

This policy study draws on the literature in order to design a new opinion survey. It forms part of a wider project which is a partnership between FEPS, the Fabian Society and TASC as well as the Institute for Social Democracy and the Progressive Hungary Foundation. These have each involved opinion surveys on climate change and climate policies, as well as on the reception of different frames, in the UK, Ireland and Hungary.

In turn we:

1. Analyse public attitudes on climate change with a focus on the economy
2. Analyse the effects of particular messages on different groups
3. Conclude with high-level recommendations for progressives

## VOTER SEGMENTS

Throughout this report, we use values-based segmentation of the population developed by a collaboration between Climate Outreach, More in Common, the European Climate Foundation and YouGov.<sup>9</sup> They engaged a representative group of 10,000 people to understand their psychology, and used 'k-means clustering' to identify groups of people with similar core beliefs. They identified seven segments in total.<sup>10</sup>

We focus on four of the segments, because they are the core progressive and working-class groups that politicians and activists need to bring together.<sup>11</sup>

- **Progressive activists (13 per cent of the population):** a vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan and environmentally conscious.
- **Civic pragmatists (13 per cent of the population):** a group that cares about others, at home and abroad, who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal.
- **Disengaged battlers (12 per cent of the population):** A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked and socially liberal.
- **Loyal nationals (17 per cent of the population):** A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and those facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

---

9 More in Common led the research project, integrating their model of understanding people's core beliefs with European Climate Foundation and Climate Outreach's issue expertise. The findings form part of a broader United Kingdom project undertaken by More in Common in 2020 (<https://www.moreincommon.com/where-we-work/more-in-common-uk>). YouGov undertook the field research and collaborated with More in Common and Climate Outreach in the data analysis. Britain Talks Climate follows the release of More in Common's Britain's Choice report in October 2020

10 The methodology and segments are described in further detail here: <https://www.britainschoice.uk/>

11 Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain, Míriam Juan-Torres, Tim Dixon and Arisa Kimaran, More in Common, 2020.

---

## **2. PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ECONOMY**

---

## 2. PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ECONOMY

Before looking at how politicians and activists communicate climate policy, we need a clear and comprehensive picture of how the public views climate change itself, and its relationship with the economy. This section summarises the wide range of public opinion evidence.



*Public attitudes toward climate change are more complex than many suppose.*



Public attitudes toward climate change are more complex than many suppose. Pre-existing assumptions need to be challenged: it is not true that climate is purely a middle-class concern. But, equally, not all groups think it is a high or immediate priority and there remain significant and, familiar differences – by class, age, education and politics.

**The public is concerned about climate change and want action, but not overwhelmingly**

### Evidence from previous studies

Previous studies have found that the public is concerned about climate change but it is not their top priority. They have found that:

- **People are very concerned about climate change.** One study found that 61 per cent were either ‘extremely’ or ‘very worried’<sup>12</sup> about climate change, while an additional quarter of the population were ‘somewhat’ worried. Another reported that the public believe that climate change is affecting the UK now, with higher air pollution, increased flooding and more extreme weather all recognised as being caused by climate change.<sup>13</sup>
- **The public are also generally supportive of government action to tackle climate change.** One study found that 82 per cent assign a high degree of responsibility for achieving net zero to national government, and 78 per cent assign as much responsibility to local government.<sup>14</sup> Another study found that a majority of the population believe that measures to protect the environment have not gone far enough, with an increase of nearly 20 per cent since 2014 in the proportion of the population wanting greater action.<sup>15</sup> Recent work by GSCC and ECF found that 64 per cent of people think we should reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or earlier.<sup>16</sup>
- **There is no clear geographical or metropolitan vs non-metropolitan divide.** One study found that cities and towns, and rural areas all recognise the need to tackle climate change to a similar extent.<sup>17</sup>

12 Britain talks climate: A toolkit for engaging the British public on climate change, Dr Susie Wang, Dr Adam Corner & Jessie Nicholls. Climate Outreach, 2020.  
13 Climate snapshot 2019: A survey of UK attitudes towards climate change and its impacts. Client Earth, 2019.  
14 Going greener? Public attitudes to net zero, Anvar Sarygulov. Bright Blue, 2020.  
15 Public opinion on the environment in towns and cities, Dr Will Jennings. Centre for Towns, 2020  
16 Opinion polling for Hope for the Future, 4,026 UK adults, 11-16 November 2021  
17 Public opinion on the environment in towns and cities, Dr Will Jennings. Centre for Towns, 2020; Equipping rural councillors to engage effectively on climate change. Climate Outreach, 2021.

- Another found that among the general population in the so-called ‘red wall’,<sup>18</sup> 63 per cent supported climate action as one of the government’s top priorities (albeit in a poll that did not ask respondents to consider other specific issues facing our country).<sup>19</sup>

**Public understanding of climate change, and their support for climate action, is often more nuanced and potentially fragile than is assumed.** Previous surveys have found that:

- **Many people think that humans are only partially responsible for climate change.** Just 17 per cent believe that climate change is wholly caused by human activity, while 47 per cent believe it is at least as much a consequence of natural processes as it is of human activity.<sup>20</sup>
- **The environment is rarely the most important issue for people.** According to YouGov tracker polls, ‘the environment’ (note, not ‘climate change’) has come in the top 3 issues 60 times out of 136 polls between 24 June 2019 and 31 January 2022.<sup>21</sup> <sup>21</sup> One 2018 study concludes that: “Overall, it appears that Britain is relatively relaxed about climate change, and not strongly divided over it. There are more worried than there are sceptical individuals, but the majority in Britain appears to have fairly middling attitudes”<sup>22</sup> (although views may have changed somewhat in the four years since).

- **Parties’ climate change policies do not motivate voters to change their vote.** Only 16 per cent of urban voters and 12 per cent of rural voters would vote based on climate change policy.<sup>23</sup> 47 per cent of people said it would make no difference to their vote if a party that promised to create ‘green jobs’ in their constituency.<sup>24</sup> This may change: after COP26, polling found that 39 per cent of people said that climate change would be one of the top priorities, if not the highest priority, for their vote.<sup>25</sup>
- **People don’t make a strong link between Covid-19 recovery and opportunities for climate action, but they don’t want climate change deprioritised either.** Just 18 per cent said they would support the government increasing spending on the environment in order to recover from the crisis.<sup>26</sup> However, other research found that 59 per cent of people agreed with the statement: ‘Coronavirus is a national emergency but we must not forget about other emergencies and make sure we’re tackling climate at the same time.’<sup>27</sup>

18 There are several definitions of this, but it generally refers to seats which the Conservatives won from Labour in recent elections.

19 Is the stereotypical image of ‘red wall’ residents actually accurate?, Patrick English. YouGov, 17th May 2021.

20 Ready to deal with another crisis? Prospects for attitudes towards climate change in the post-Covid-19 world, John Curtice. IPPR Progressive Review, 2020.

21 Top Issues Tracker (GB), YouGov.

22 Climate change: Social divisions in beliefs and behaviour, Stephen Fisher, Rory Fitzgerald & Wouter Poortinga. The National Centre for Social Research, 2018.

23 Rural attitudes to climate change – equipping UK rural councillors to engage with their communities, Dr Susie Wang, Dr Chris Shaw, Alex Randall and George Marshall. Climate Outreach, 2021.

24 Survation-New Economics Foundation polling, 21st – 22nd November 2019.

25 Opinion polling for Hope for the Future, 4,026 UK adults, 11-16 November 2021

26 Public First polling for ZeroC Commission, 2nd June – 4th June 2020.

27 Opinion polling for Hope for the Future, 4,026 UK adults, 11-16 November 2021

- **The public may not truly grasp the scale of the change required, despite supporting climate action.** Many frequently mix up climate action with other commitments on plastics or recycling.<sup>28</sup> Around half of the population do not know that how we heat our homes is one of the biggest contributors to the nation's carbon footprint.<sup>29</sup> Increasing taxes and spending more on tackling climate change secures support from 35 per cent of the public, compared to 62 per cent for the NHS, 48 per cent for the police, and 40 per cent for education.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, young people were 14 percentage points more willing to pay higher prices than those aged 55 and over, but were 41 percentage points less likely to expect prices to rise as a result of lowering emissions.<sup>31</sup>

## Evidence from our survey

Our own findings confirm this general picture. We asked for people's general top three concerns, and then for their top 3 environmental concerns. The results for the general population are in figures 1 and 2 below:

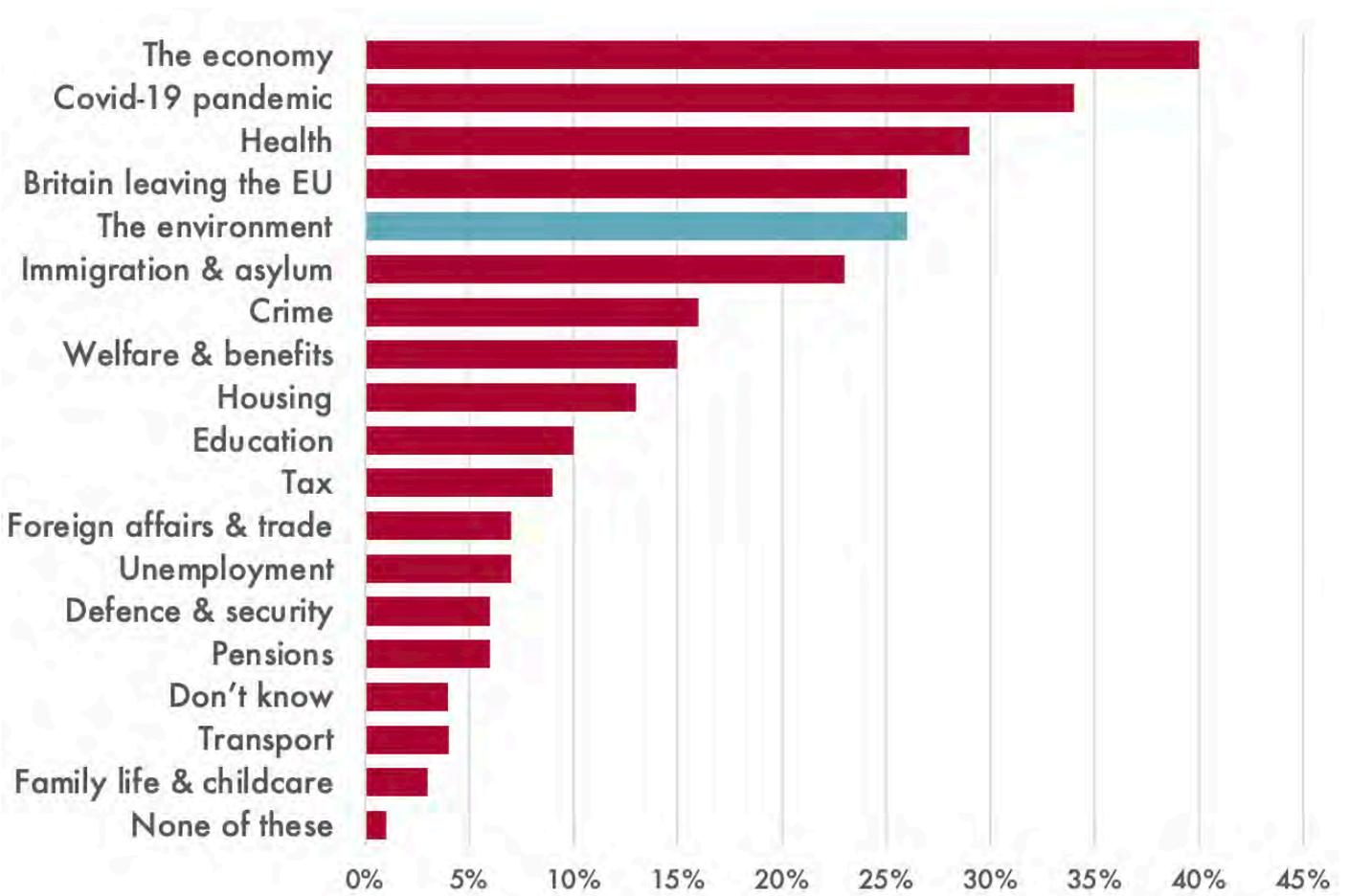
- **26 per cent put climate change as one of their top 3 concerns, ranking fourth of all the options** – compared to 40 per cent who put the economy, the same proportion who put 'Britain leaving the EU', and only slightly more than the proportion who put 'immigration and asylum' (23 per cent).
- **Of the many environmental issues tested, 43 per cent put 'climate change' – the second most frequently selected, after 'the amount of waste we produce'.**

28 Achieving net zero will require massive changes to our lives – when is anyone going to tell voters?, Rachel Wolf. ConservativeHome, 6th February 2020; YouGov Cambridge survey results, 9th – 10th January 2020.

29 1 in 2 not aware of gas boilers' climate impact – survey. Catapult Energy Systems, 25th August 2019.

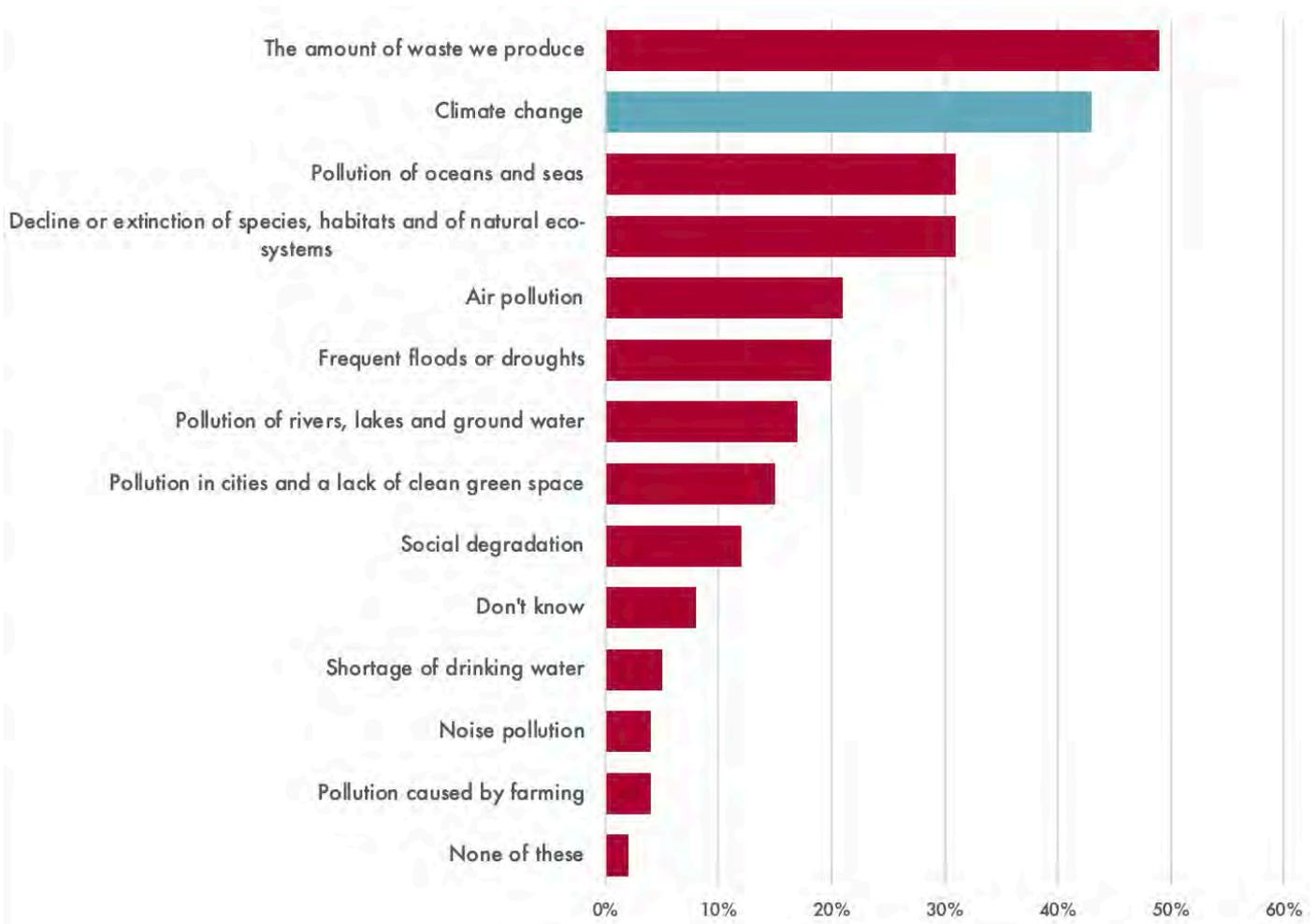
30 YouGov-Cambridge Centre survey results, 14th – 15th January 2020. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/science/articles-reports/2020/01/29/climate-concern-phantom-populism>

31 Going greener? Public attitudes to net zero, Anvar Sarygulov. Bright Blue, 2020.



N=5,005

**Figure 1: Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.**



N=5,005

**Figure 2: Which, if any, of the following do you think are the most important environmental issues facing the country?**

We then asked people about their **tax and spending priorities**. First, we asked them generally about the level of taxation and spending on climate change policies. We then asked which policies they would support. These results for the general population are displayed in figure 3 below:

- **More people preferred to keep taxes and spending on climate change policies at the same level as now:** 38 per cent preferred the option to 'keep taxes and spending on climate change policies at the same level as now' than to 'reduce taxes and spend less on policies to tackle climate change' (20 per cent) or to 'increase taxes and spend more on policies to tackle climate change' (25 per cent).

- **People tended to support measures to spend public money on climate change.** The most popular measures were: spending public money to prepare the country for the impact of climate change (72 per cent support) and spending public money to subsidise renewable energy (69 per cent support). There was also significant support for subsidising insulation (61 per cent), banning inefficient household appliances (65 per cent) and subsidising electric vehicles (60 per cent). Perhaps most surprisingly, there was a high level of support for introducing a 'frequent flier levy' (61 per cent support) with relatively little opposition (24 per cent).
- **The least popular measures** involved direct costs to the public and, perhaps unsurprisingly, have rarely been proposed by politicians: increasing the price of electricity to reduce our consumption (80 per cent oppose); increasing taxes on gas central heating (73 per cent oppose) and increasing taxes on petrol and diesel (60 per cent oppose).

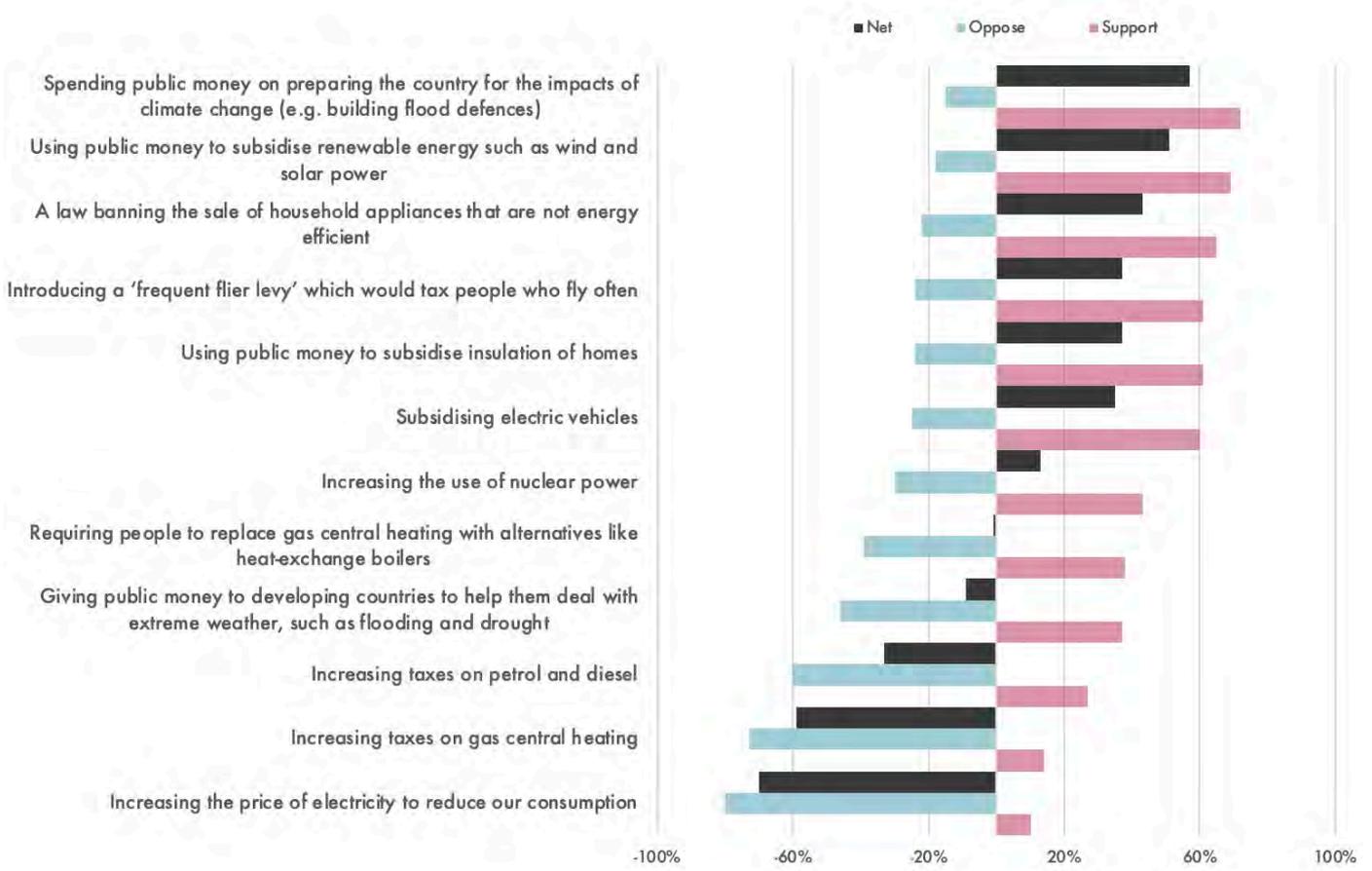
These findings are consistent with previous research, which show the population as a whole has a general, but not overwhelming concern for climate change.



*The population as a whole has a general, but not overwhelming concern for climate change.*



And that they do tend to support some actions to tackle climate change, particularly investing public money in mitigation and renewable energy, but are unwilling to pay higher prices or taxes.



N=5,005

**Figure 3: To what extent would you support or oppose the following policies in the UK designed to reduce climate change? Net = Support-Oppose**

## Views differ by age, level of education, political viewpoint and class

### Evidence from previous studies

Previous studies have found a variety of different views on climate change. Despite all groups showing significant concern for climate change, there remain differences between them. Previous surveys have found that:

- **Older people are not as worried by climate change and think its impact will be less severe.** The British Social Attitudes survey found just 19 per cent of over-65s were 'very' or 'extremely' worried about climate change, compared to 31 per cent of 18-34 year olds.<sup>32</sup>
- **People's values and level of education clearly influence their approach to climate change.** Those with socially conservative views are 40 per cent less likely to see climate change as being caused by humans compared to those with socially liberal views – a gap that is widening.<sup>33</sup> Just 20 per cent of those without educational qualifications above GCSE reported being 'very' or 'extremely' worried, compared to 35 per cent of graduates.<sup>34</sup>

### Evidence from our survey

Our own survey investigated the extent to which climate change was a top concern for different groups of people. **We found significant variation in the extent to which people think climate change is a major concern**, in a pattern which is not surprising, but is nonetheless important. As figure 4 below shows:

- **'Progressive' voters tend to select the environment as a top issue more often:** Labour voters and people who voted Remain in the 2016 Brexit referendum were far more likely to select climate change as one of their top three issues than Conservative and Leave voters.
- **Younger people were also most likely to see the environment as important: Younger people (18-24) were far more likely to select it as a top three issue** (37 per cent) than other age groups – older people (aged 65+) were least likely to select it (23 per cent)
- **Education seems to be more relevant than social class.** Middle-class degree holders were very likely to select the environment as a top three issue, followed by working-class degree holders.<sup>35</sup> Middle-class non-degree holders were significantly less likely to select this as an issue, while working-class non-degree holders were the least likely to select it as an issue.
- **By values-based population segment, 'progressive activists' stood out from all other groups.** Civic pragmatists also selected 'the environment' quite often, but other groups did not – particularly loyal nationals.

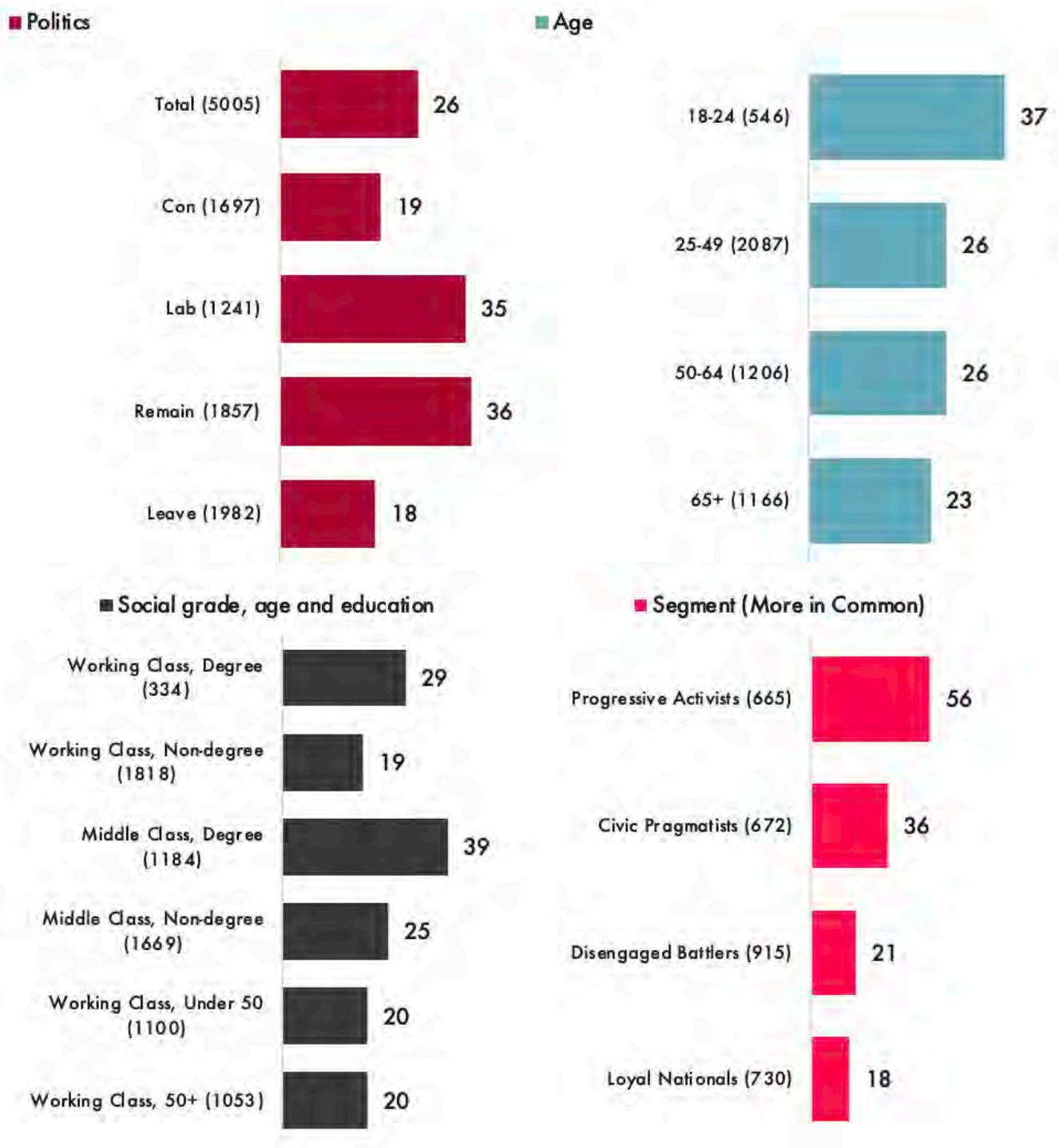
When it came to which top three environmental issues were of most concern, all groups showed a relatively consistent pattern: 'the amount of waste we produce' almost always came top. The exception was with progressive activists and Remain voters, for whom climate change was first. The second most selected issue showed significant divergence too: for Leave voters, working-class over 50s, and loyal nationals 'pollution in our oceans and seas' was the second most frequently selected – above climate change. Water pollution issues were quite prominent in the media when the fieldwork was undertaken.

32 British social attitudes: The 35th report. The National Centre for Social Research, 2018.

33 Polls apart? Mapping the politics of net zero, Tim Lord, Brett Meyer & Ian Mulheirn. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2021.

34 Climate change: Social divisions in beliefs and behaviour, Stephen Fisher, Rory Fitzgerald & Wouter Poortinga. The National Centre for Social Research, 2018.

35 Class is complex, but here we use the NRS/MRS social grade classification, a household measure derived from the occupation or former occupation of the household member with the highest income



N=5,005

Figure 4: Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three - per cent selecting 'the environment'

## The economic opportunities of climate action are not always clear



*Activists and campaigners have recently taken to presenting climate action as an economic opportunity.*



Activists and campaigners have recently taken to presenting climate action as an economic opportunity. Prioritising climate change has historically been associated with particular sections of the population, such as middle-class or younger people.<sup>36</sup> Jobs or the economy have typically tended to be more of a concern for working-class people.

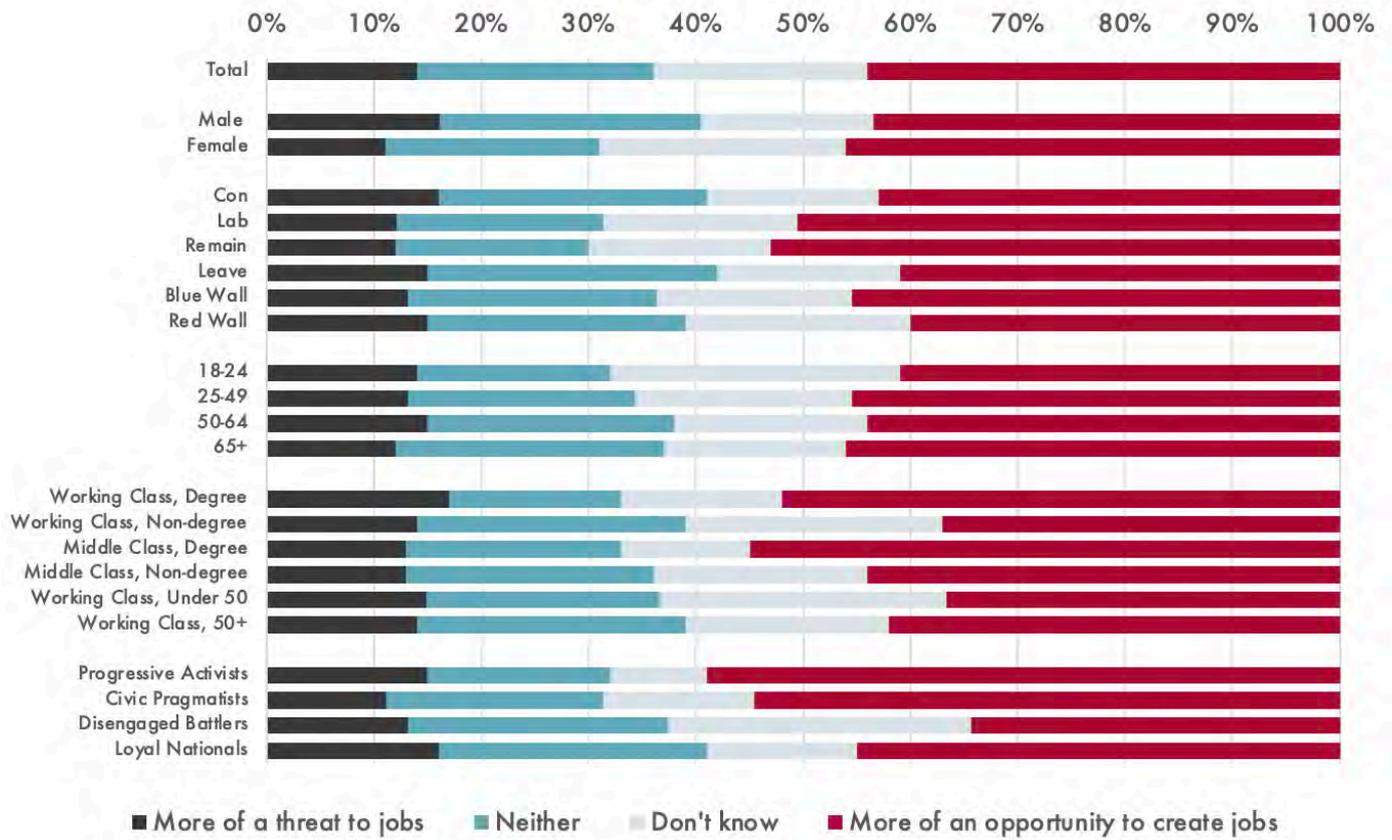
- By values segment, **progressive activists stand out – they were the most positive about climate action creating jobs**, followed by civic pragmatists and loyal nationals. Disengaged battlers, a group which ‘feels that they are just keeping their heads above water’ were far less positive.

Our survey found divergent views on the relationship between climate action and jobs, as figure 5 below shows:

- **Encouragingly, very few people thought action on climate change was more of a threat to jobs (14 per cent) than an opportunity to create them (44 per cent)**, but large numbers said they ‘don’t know’ (20 per cent) or selected ‘neither’ (22 per cent).
- Middle-class degree holders, working-class degree holders, Remain and Labour voters were significantly more likely to say that it was an opportunity to create jobs.
- Leave voters, working-class under 50s, and Conservative voters were less likely to say climate change is an opportunity to create jobs.

---

36 Britain talks climate



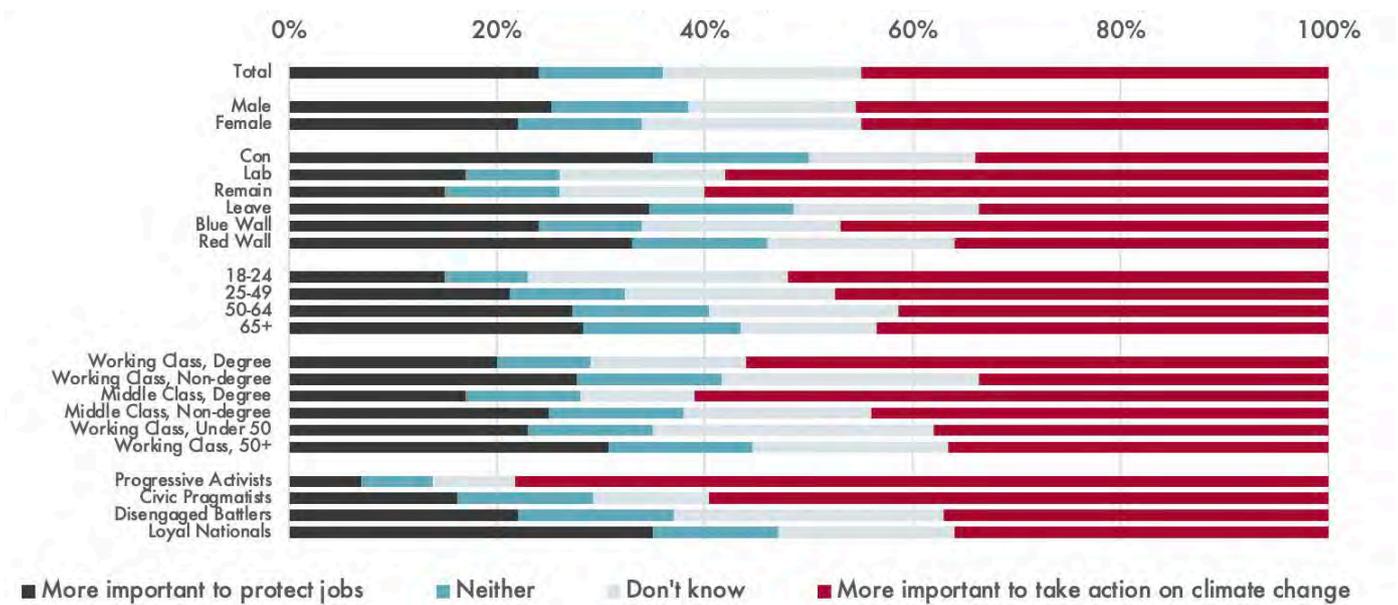
N=5,005

**Figure 5: In your opinion, do you think climate change is more of a threat to people's jobs, or an opportunity to create jobs?**

When we asked it if was more important to protect jobs or take action on climate change (figure 6, below):

- 45 per cent said 'taking action on climate change' was most important, with 24 per cent saying it was 'more important to protect jobs'.

- But this hides significant variation: **slightly more Conservative and Leave voters said it was more important to protect jobs**, while working-class over 50s and loyal nationals had only a small majority of people who thought that it was more important to take action on climate change.

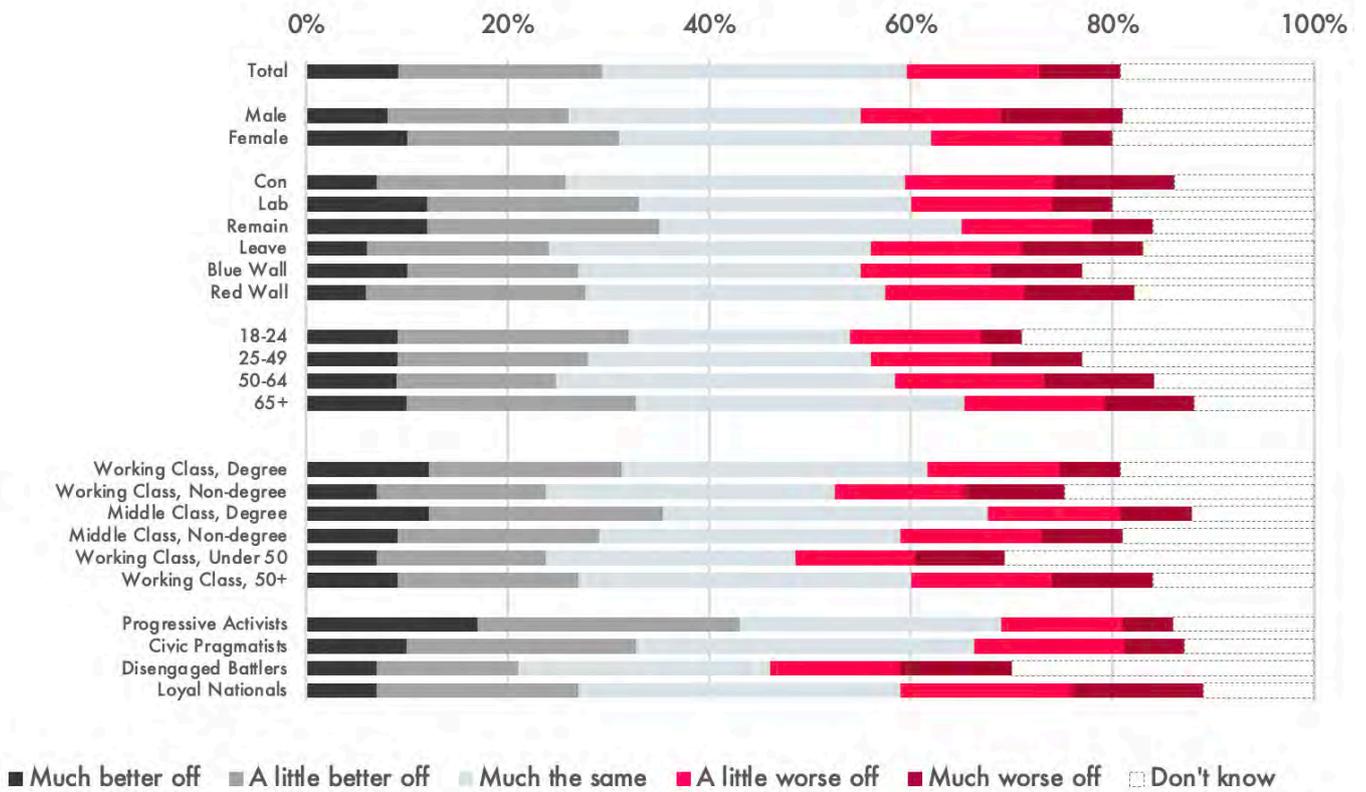


**Figure 6: Thinking about action on climate change that may pose a threat to people's jobs, do you think it is more important to protect jobs, or more important to take action on climate change?**

When polluting industries close, the government often proposes 'retraining' schemes to help people made redundant to move into new jobs. We also wanted to see if people believed the government can mitigate downsides when they happen, so we asked: "Imagine that a polluting factory has to close to reduce carbon emissions, resulting in people losing their jobs. The Government instead offers opportunities for these people to learn new skills to do new jobs." We asked whether people thought they would be much/a little better off, much/a little worse off, or 'much the same' (see figure 7, below):

- Women, Labour voters, Remain voters, 18-24 year olds, 65+ year olds, degree holders (middle and working class), progressive activists, civic pragmatists, and blue wall residents<sup>37</sup> were more likely to think people would be better off (measured as net better-worse off).
- More Conservative voters, Leave voters, 50-64 year olds, disengaged battlers, loyal nationals and men thought they would be worse off than better off, while red wall residents, working-class non-degree holders, working-class under 50s and over 50s had as many thinking they would be worse off as better off.

<sup>37</sup> These are seats which are: currently held by Conservatives; voted Remain in 2016; and have a higher than average concentration of degree holders in the population: 'The first ever poll of the so-called 'Blue Wall' finds the Conservatives struggling in their traditional heartland seats' Patrick English, YouGov, 2021.



N=5,005

**Figure 7: Imagine that a polluting factory has to close to reduce carbon emissions, resulting in people losing their jobs. The government instead offers opportunities for these people to learn new skills to do new jobs. Do you think those people will ultimately end...**

---

# **3. MESSAGE TESTING**

---

### 3. MESSAGE TESTING

Public opinion on climate change is clearly diverse and nuanced. While there is little climate scepticism, there is a broad range of views about how relatively important it is to people; economic concerns are far more pressing; and many people don't intuitively link climate action and economic opportunities. These patterns are familiar and represent traditional dividing lines: class, age and voting intention.

This section now looks at how different groups respond to different messages about the case for climate action. First, we look at the theory and current examples of messages, drawing on literature and our conversations with experts.

Then we summarise the findings from our detailed poll of 5,005 people, first with 'split testing' for four narrative messages; then by analysing reactions to key terms; and finally by gauging reactions to particular sentences, using the MaxDiff methodology.

We find that that messages appealing to quality of life, nature and values are more effective and more unifying than economic messages.

“

*Messages appealing to quality of life, nature and values are more effective and more unifying than economic messages.*

”

Many of the economic messages currently used by progressive activists only appeal to middle-class people, degree-holders, people under 50, Labour voters and Remain voters – and can even deter other groups of the population, especially working-class, non-degree, older, Conservative and Leave voters.

Clearly, this defeats the primary object of using such messages.

#### **Progressives are often tone-deaf with their climate messaging**

First, it is important to review how progressives currently communicate, or 'frame' the economic benefits of tackling climate change. Framing, or 're-framing' environment related communication is one way to increase support for climate action. Generally, 'framing' involves diagnosing a problem, evaluating its cause and prescribing a solution. Different frames can arise from emphasising different aspects of a complex situation, such as climate change.<sup>38</sup>

Progressives' messaging on climate change tends have certain features which are often combined into frames. These often emphasise the causes and solutions most closely aligned with progressive or left-wing world views. They also use communication tools to get attention, rally activists, or highlight the scale of the challenge.

Progressive climate change messages often include:

1. Abstract slogans or jargon – 'green industrial revolution' or 'green jobs'
2. Big numbers and promises – '1 million good, green jobs in the next decade'
3. Alarmist tone – 'climate emergency' or 'climate crisis'
4. Radically disruptive policy proposals – 'overthrow current policy' or 'urgently radically transform'
5. Exclusively left-wing 'economic justice' framing, or universalist moral arguments of global responsibility

38 For a discussion on the definition of 'frames', see here: Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>

These messages are often presented by messengers, or ‘message carriers’ who resonate with politicians, activists and the already persuaded, rather than reaching out to wider and more diverse audiences – although there are some good exceptions to this general rule.

The progressive approach to talking about climate change is often successful in rallying activists or reinforcing identities – but risks repelling other groups. Arguments that are mainly associated with the left risk exacerbating division, if climate change becomes associated only with certain political identities or sets of values, as has happened in the United States.<sup>39</sup> These types of messages have also created perceptions of climate action as ‘one of giving things up, or of losing rather than gaining’.<sup>40</sup>

As climate action moves into ‘more politically fraught terrain’, the messages progressives use must resonate with a broad range of different people, with different life experiences.

“

*The messages progressives use must resonate with a broad range of different people, with different life experiences.<sup>41</sup>*

”

Progressives sometimes use climate messaging that connects with the public, and if placed at the heart of ‘talking green’ this could reduce the risks of division, secure stronger public support for climate action, and strengthen electoral prospects.

There is already evidence that:

- **Reframing environmental messages in different moral terms reduces division between different groups.** Messages around pollution and how people should clean or purify the environment were persuasive for more conservative voters.<sup>42</sup>
- **Focusing on the positive opportunities of climate action increases support for adaptation and mitigation in the UK, including amongst those not concerned with the effects of climate change.**<sup>43</sup> In the UK, 83 per cent of the population agree that adaptation can have a positive outcome, significantly higher than the EU average of 70 per cent.<sup>44</sup>
- **Talking about continuity, security and preserving the things people value is as important as talking about change.** Rather than focusing on the scale of the change or radicalism, action should be presented as taking a long-term, responsible view of the future.<sup>45</sup>

Climate Outreach suggests these kinds of messages are popular with the public, particularly those who are not activists or individuals who see climate change as central to their politics and identity.<sup>46</sup>

39 The moral roots of environmental attitudes, Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer. *Psychological Science*, vol. XX, no. X, 2012.

40 Polls apart? Mapping the politics of net zero, Tim Lord, Brett Meyer & Ian Mulheirn. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2021.

41 The end of Britain’s “invisible transition”, Joss Garman. UK Climate Memo, 12th March 2021.

42 The moral roots of environmental attitudes, Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer. *Psychological Science*, vol. XX, no. X, 2012.

43 How do different frames affect public support for climate change policy: Evidence from a multi-country conjoint study, Niheer Dasandi et al. *SocArXiv*, 2021.

44 Special Eurobarometer: Climate change. European Commission, April 2019.

45 Equipping rural councillors to engage effectively on climate change. Climate Outreach, 2021; Communicating effectively with the centre-right about household energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies, Dr Adam Corner. Climate Outreach, 2016.

46 Britain talks climate: A toolkit for engaging the British public on climate change, Dr Susie Wang, Dr Adam Corner & Jessie Nicholls. Climate Outreach, 2020.

Based on the existing evidence and our consultation with experts in public opinion and climate change, we designed our survey to investigate whether the following frames could be more productive:

1. **Specific jobs:** describing how specific local jobs will be secured and specific local industries will benefit
2. **National or regional leadership or economic competitiveness:** highlighting how the place or country could realistically 'lead' in a particular industry, or could be left behind
3. **Economic/national security:** highlighting the threat to the economy or national security of failing to act
4. **Fairness or populism:** showing how we are all doing our bit, so businesses should too
5. **Future generations/children:** talking about how we owe our children a decent future
6. **Local environment/clean air:** highlighting the real health benefits of acting on climate change

## PROGRESSIVES OFTEN FAIL TO FRAME DEBATES IN THEIR FAVOUR

Climate change isn't the only area where progressives fail to communicate effectively. Progressives often focus on facts or on values the rest of the population doesn't share. Facts matter, but they are often made to fit within or reinforce pre-existing narratives, 'frames' or opinions towards an issue, a worldview, a political party or candidate. How an issue is framed can alter preferences towards a policy, bringing in new support or turning off voters. A simple appeal to a narrow, external assessment of social and economic interests alone is not enough.

**Progressives need to communicate beyond their support base, utilising different frames to tell a new story – with policy backing it up.<sup>47</sup>**

Progressives particularly need to tune into voters' 'values, social group identities and cognitive frames'.<sup>48</sup> Values explain how policy lands with the electorate, how they understand it, and how it defines a party or candidate.<sup>49</sup> Conservative politics often fares better because it speaks to a wider range of voters' values, including those that progressives appear too afraid to touch.<sup>50 / 51</sup>

There is evidence that progressive parties should reframe the debate and adopt moral reframing to secure broader electoral support for a transformative political agenda. Progressives in the UK could, for example, align with so-called 'settler' values such as safety and security to address the concerns of a wider range of voters.<sup>52</sup> After all, people with these values are likely to be better served by progressive economic and climate policies. But in the past they have not done that and instead catered to a narrow support base.<sup>53</sup>

---

47 Hearts, minds, votes: A summary of UK voting demographics, social attitudes and approaches to mapping values, Clifford Singer. September 2020.

48 New working class: How to win hearts, minds and votes, Claire Ainsley. Policy Press, 2018.

49 New working class: How to win hearts, minds and votes, Claire Ainsley. Policy Press, 2018.

50 New working class: How to win hearts, minds and votes, Claire Ainsley. Policy Press, 2018.

51 Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations, Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, Brian A Nosek, J Pers Soc Psychol. 2009 May;96(5):1029-46. doi: 10.1037/a0015141. PMID: 19379034.

52 Hearts, minds, votes: A summary of UK voting demographics, social attitudes and approaches to mapping values, Clifford Singer. September 2020.

53 Resolving the progressive paradox: Conservative value framing of progressive economic policies increases candidate support, Jan G. Voelkel & Robb Willer. 8th May 2019.

## Reactions to key climate change terms

Before investigating framing in greater depth, we wanted to see how the public understands some of the key climate change terms.<sup>54</sup> The climate change discussion has developed its own vocabulary, especially when discussing the economic benefits of taking action: terms like 'green jobs', 'net zero' or 'green industrial revolution' are now widely used by campaigners. We asked our sample for their immediate reaction to some of these terms.

We found that:

- **'Net zero' is often misunderstood.**<sup>55</sup> 28 per cent had reactions such as 'don't know', 'no idea' or 'not sure', while a further 12 per cent associated it with something else. 27 per cent had a negative reaction, with responses such as 'load of cobblers', 'low grade management speak' as well as 'impossible' or 'utopian'. 25 per cent responded, at least in general terms, that it was something to do with climate change, of which 19 per cent (of all respondents) referred specifically to emissions. A further five per cent of respondents responded positively but in a more general sense.
- **'Green jobs' are well received by some but there is significant confusion and scepticism.**<sup>56</sup> 29 per cent responded generally that it was associated with climate change, emissions or the environment. 22 per cent had a generally positive response, such as 'hopeful', 'essential', 'promising', or 'the future' and a further five per cent associated it with the economy, technology or jobs in a positive sense. 21 per cent had some form of negative reaction – with responses such as 'expensive', 'unrealistic' 'baloney', 'propaganda' or 'jargon'.

- **A 'green industrial revolution' had a significant negative response.**<sup>57</sup> 30 per cent had a negative reaction, or expressed scepticism, concerns about waste or cost, and views that it was jargon or rhetoric: 'Haha, you live in cuckoo land', 'rubbish, or 'wishful thinking' for example. 27 per cent had a generally positive response, including those who responded 'future', 'progress' and 'change' and terms like 'innovation' or 'technology'. 18 per cent associated it generally with emissions, climate or the environment. 15 per cent were not sure what it meant and there was a range of 'other' responses, which show associations aren't always in line with expectations: 'Kermit the frog working in a factory', for example.

These findings confirm that some of the terms used most often in this debate do not connect with the public in the way they are intended to: they often provoke negative reactions and understandable confusion.

54 This research is discussed in greater detail here: [https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/V1.3\\_Talking-Green-briefing-1.pdf](https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/V1.3_Talking-Green-briefing-1.pdf)

55 Sample: 1,693

56 Sample: 1,680

57 Sample: 1,632

## Persuasive narrative frames



*We investigated which narrative frames could best persuade people about the opportunities of climate action.*



### Approach

We investigated which narrative frames could best persuade people about the opportunities of climate action. These frames were all longer messages which told more of a story about climate change. Drawing on the above lessons, we tested three versions of an economic message and one based on quality of life. They were constructed to explore different potential ways to appeal to those unconvinced: one was a story about industrial decline; another about transforming capitalism; the third had less of a coherent narrative but emphasised the importance of jobs, first and foremost.

The split testing involved several steps. First, we asked people to what extent they thought that “the benefits of government tackling climate change will outweigh the costs” on a scale of one (strongly agree) to seven (strongly disagree). We then asked them to read one of four statements about climate change (see below), and select the sentences they liked and disliked. We then asked them to what extent they thought the statements were convincing, appealing, realistic or close to their values. Finally, we asked the same question concerning the benefits and costs of climate action as in step 1, in order to measure how much their opinion had changed after seeing and interacting with the statement. We could then compare results for each of the four messages.

---

58 People answering 4 out of 7 neither agree nor disagree

The change for such tests is usually small, given how well embedded people’s views are, and the limited power of any single message to change people’s minds in isolation.

Not all people saw all the messages: each person went through the above process with a randomly assigned message at the start of the survey. They were then asked further questions (such as those in section 2), before going through the process again at the end with a second message. This enabled us to test four messages, each with a sample of 2,500, while minimising the effect of messages on one another.

### Findings

**Across the total sample of people in aggregate, all four messages had a similar, small positive effect on people’s views** – disagreement fell by two percentage points, while agreement rose by two percentage points – a net increase of 3-4 percentage points. This means that, on a scale of one to seven, where one means strongly agree and seven means strongly disagree, more people answered one to three (agree), and fewer people answered five to seven (disagree).<sup>58</sup> However, their different effect on different segments was quite stark, as can be seen in figures 8 to 11. The differences between groups can be summarised as follows:

- Groups containing the most people who said the opportunities of climate change outweighed the costs before seeing an economic message, were much more persuaded by that message – usually progressive activists, middle-class degree holders, younger people, Labour and Remain voters.
- Groups with fewer people who thought that the opportunities of climate change outweighed the costs before seeing an economic message, were less easily persuaded by that message, with some even reacting negatively to some messages – usually working-class non-degree holders, older people, loyal nationals, Conservative and Leave voters.

We asked further questions related to these four statements. We asked to what extent people thought each was: convincing, appealing, realistic or close to their values. In general, economic messages were not convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples' values for broad swathes of the population, when compared to a quality of life message. The results are shown in figure 12 below.



*In general, economic messages were not convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples' values for broad swathes of the population, when compared to a quality of life message.*



### **Message 1: 'Industrial decline' – and climate action as an opportunity to revive British industry**

This was the narrative frame which read:

*Britain was at the heart of the industrial revolution and then led the world in manufacturing cars and steel. Communities around the country had good secure jobs that provided work for generation after generation.*

*But we fell into decline in the 1980s and these days British manufacturing is a shadow of its former self. Good jobs have been cut and young people now have to leave where they grew up to look for work.*

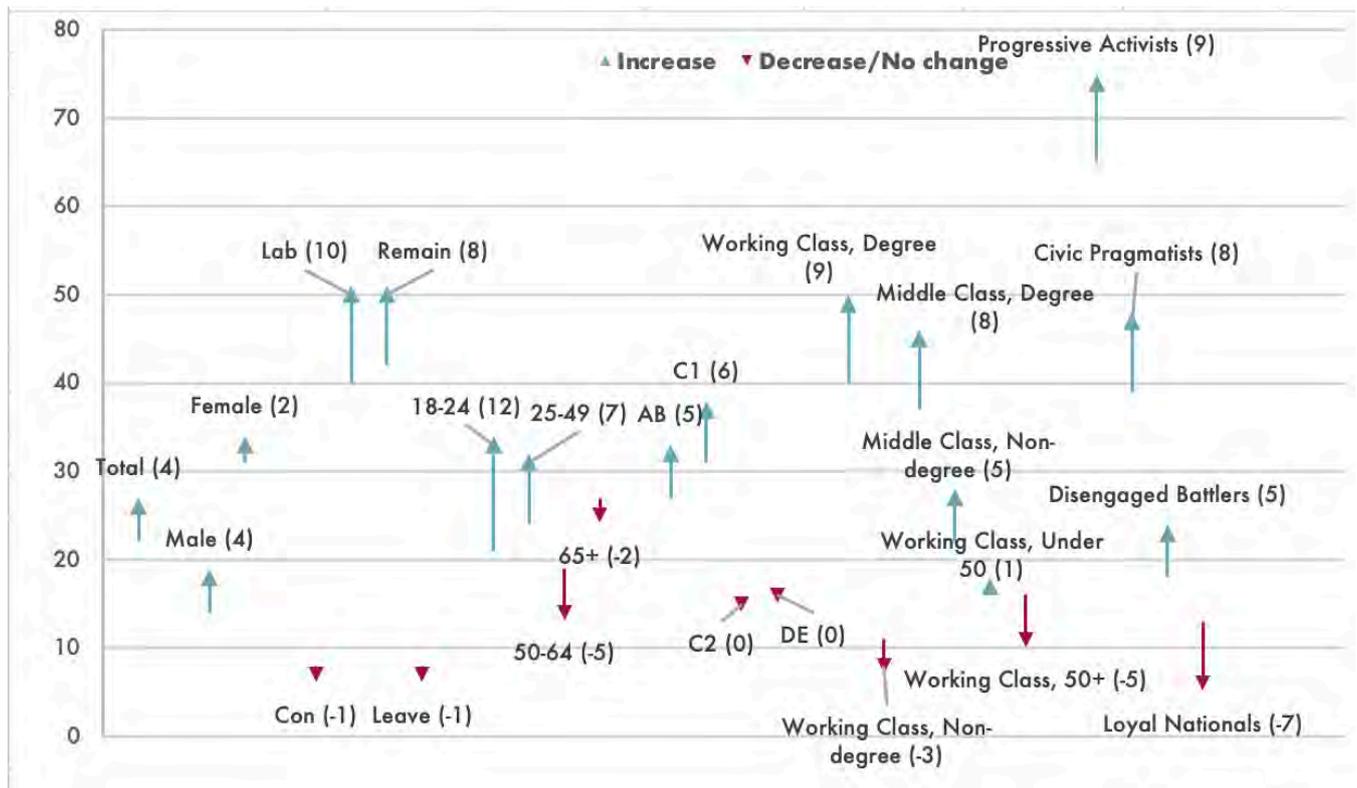
*As we tackle climate change, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, secure jobs in clean industries like electric cars, home insulation and renewable energy. We are already the largest producer of offshore wind energy in the world.*

*If we act on climate change, we can provide jobs which give people pride in what they do, especially in parts of the country that need it most.*

*Let's show we can lead the world again by acting to tackle climate change.*

The 'industrial decline' message saw the biggest positive shift in people who were already positive, as figure 8 below shows: Labour, Remain voters, 25-49, AB, C1, middle-class degree holders, progressive activists, civic pragmatists and disengaged battlers. But it provoked a negative shift among: 50 to 64-year-olds, working-class 50+ year olds, working-class non-degree holders and loyal nationals. There was also no effect or a small negative changes for 65+ year-olds, Conservatives, Leave voters, C2s and DEs.

When asked to what extent people found this message convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples' values (figure 12, below): in general, the 'industrial decline' message scored well for women, Labour, Remain voters, blue wall, C1, middle-class degree holders, progressive activists and civic pragmatists. But it scored much lower for other groups and never as strongly as the 'quality of life' message.



\* Arrows indicate change in response, before and after reading the narrative frame, to the question: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means strongly agree and 7 means strongly disagree. The benefits of Government tackling climate change will outweigh the costs'

Figure 8: Industrial decline - Change after message (NET agree, per cent)\*

## Message 2: 'Jobs first' – climate change as a means to that end

This was the narrative frame which read:

*Jobs are our top priority, especially for our young people living in towns across the country, where there often aren't many jobs and opportunities.*

*We can create real jobs and hire more young apprentices by tackling climate change.*

*We will need an army of builders and plumbers to fit insulation or better heating systems in our homes, and we will need people to work in manufacturing – building electric vehicles, wind turbines or solar panels.*

*These are good, well-paid, secure jobs in parts of the country where they are needed most.*

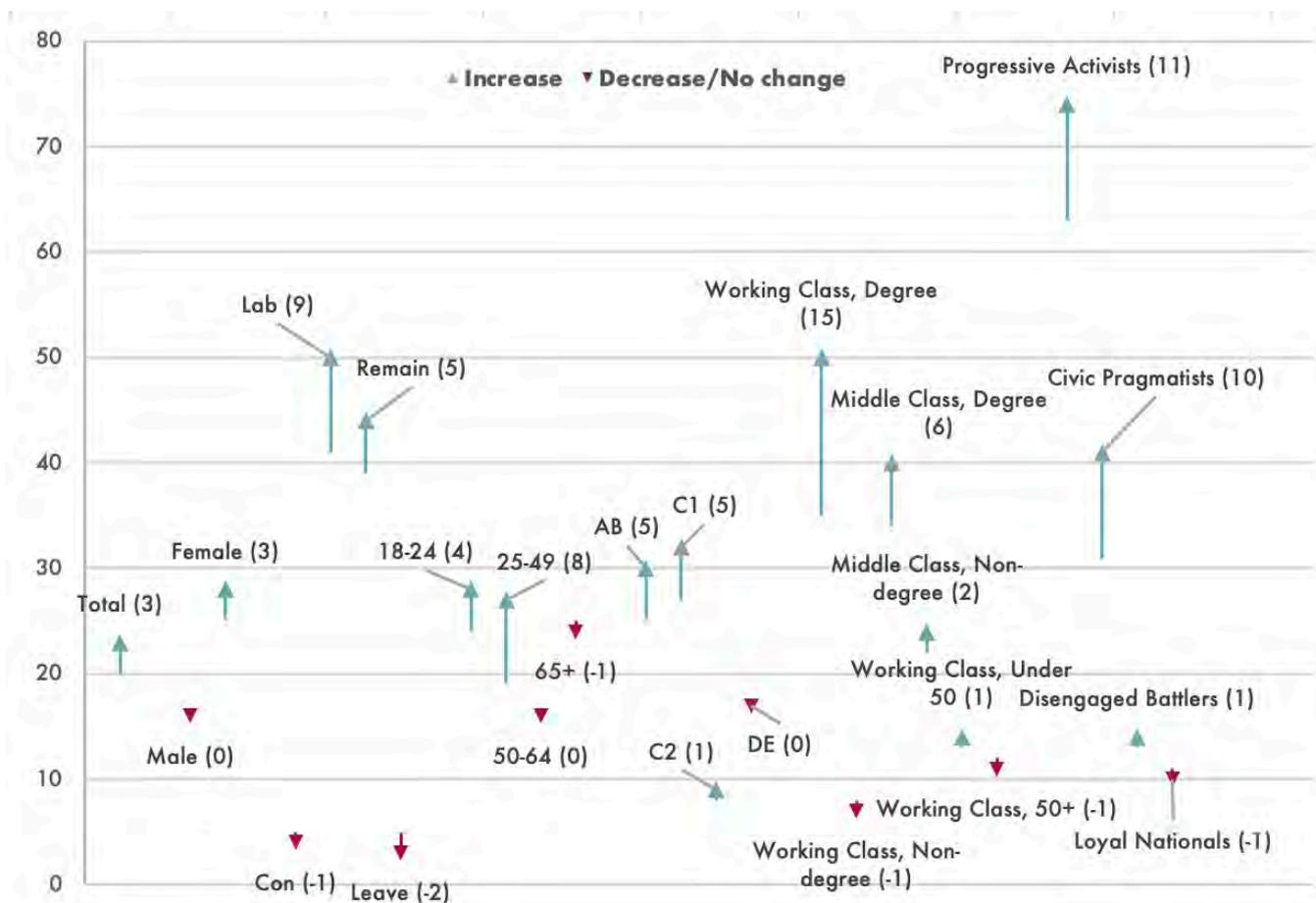
*Acting on climate change will help keep the jobs we have in these industries and give young people who don't go to university a proper career.*

*Jobs are our priority, so let's tackle climate change*

A 'jobs first' message presented a similar pattern to the 'industrial decline' message: it resulted in a positive shift, highest among progressive activists, and civic pragmatists, and also quite high among Labour, Remain and middle-class degree holders. It failed to have an impact on most other groups, particularly those which had a less positive view at the outset (see figure 9 below).

When asked to what extent people found this message convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples' values (figure 12, below): the 'jobs first' message showed a similar pattern as 'industrial decline' again – it was the least 'convincing' of all messages, but on other measures it scored well for

Labour, Remain voters, middle-class degree holders progressive activists and civic pragmatists – but the positive perception for these groups was less pronounced than with the other messages.



\* Arrows indicate change in response, before and after reading the narrative frame, to the question: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means strongly agree and 7 means strongly disagree. The benefits of government tackling climate change will outweigh the costs'

Figure 9: Jobs First - Change after message (NET agree, per cent)\*

**Message 3: ‘Green new deal’ – anti-elite, millions of jobs, transform the financial system<sup>59</sup>**

This was the narrative frame which read:

*The world is at risk of climate change because for decades we’ve been following just one path, a path guided by rules written by people who do not have our interests at heart – CEOs, politicians, and the elite defending their own wealth and power.*

*To survive and rescue the world from climate change, we have to forge a new path for our economy to protect and build the things people really care about: things like health, fairness and community.*

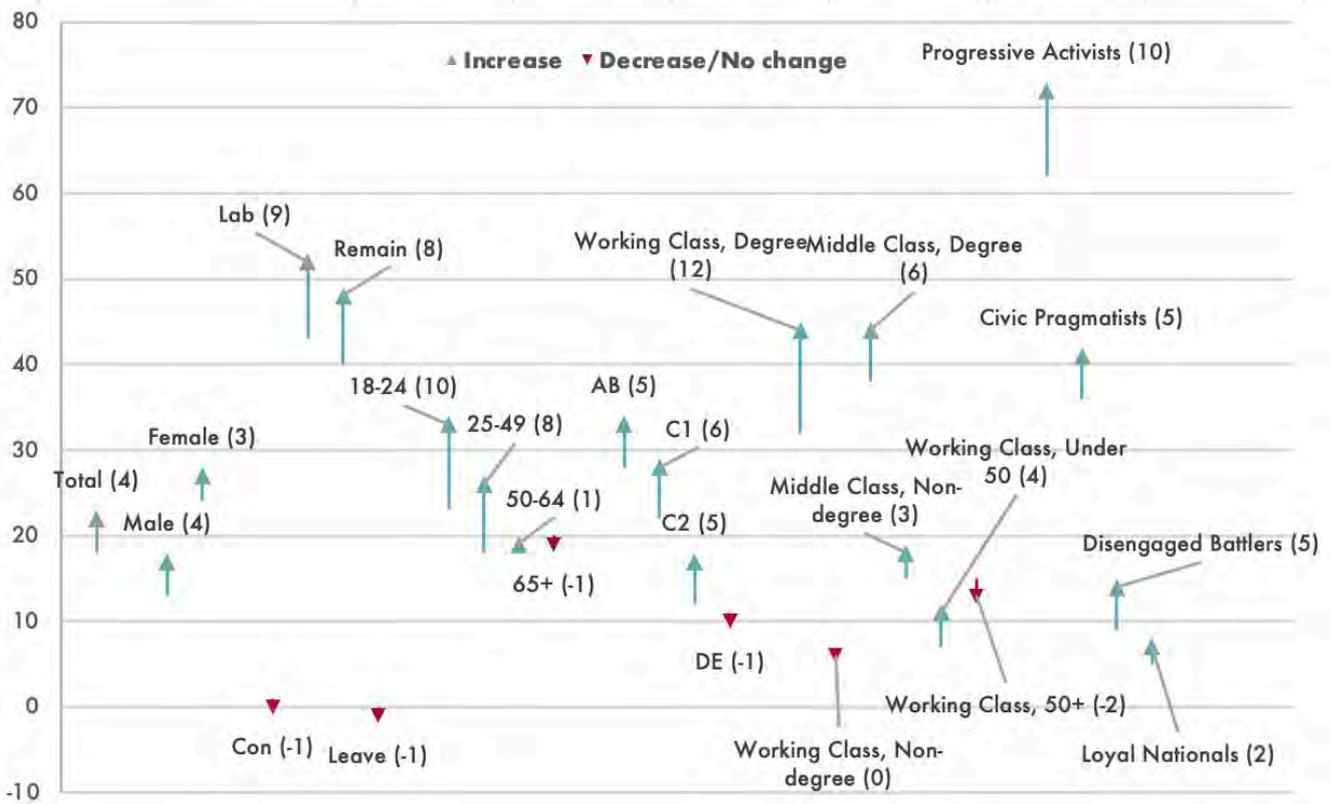
*We can decarbonise our economy and create millions of new well-paid, secure jobs for anyone who needs one, and guarantee a decent livelihood for anyone currently working in high emission sectors too.*

*On top of this, we can transform our financial system so it serves the needs of the people and the planet.*

The ‘green new deal’ message again had a similar effect to the other two economic messages, with especially positive shifts for progressive activists and civic pragmatists. Labour, Remain and middle-class people also showed a positive shift. Again, it had little effect on working-class non-degree holders, working-class 50+ year olds, loyal nationals, 50 to 64-year-olds and those aged 65+. Conservative and Leave voters had a marginal negative reaction (see figure 10 below). The fact that this was as ineffective as the other two economic messages perhaps indicates the general weakness of ‘green jobs’ messages in persuading groups not convinced of the value of tackling climate change, even in very different formulations.

When asked to what extent people found this message convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples’ values (figure 12, below): in general, the ‘green new deal’ message showed a similar pattern to ‘industrial decline’ and ‘jobs first’ – it scored well for Labour, Remain voters, middle-class degree holders, progressive activists and civic pragmatists. It had a significant negative response across large groups of the population, especially Conservatives and Leave voters, in terms of how ‘convincing’ they thought it was.

59 Adapted from Green New Deal UK, here: <https://www.greennewdealuk.org/about-us/>



\* Arrows indicate change in response, before and after reading the narrative frame, to the question: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means strongly agree and 7 means strongly disagree. The benefits of government tackling climate change will outweigh the costs'

Figure 10: Green New Deal - Change after message (NET agree, per cent)\*

#### Message 4: 'Quality of life' – balance, wildlife and natural environment

This was the narrative frame which read:

*We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air. We need to be in balance with nature, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world.*

*But climate change is destroying local wildlife and it has polluted the air our children breathe.*

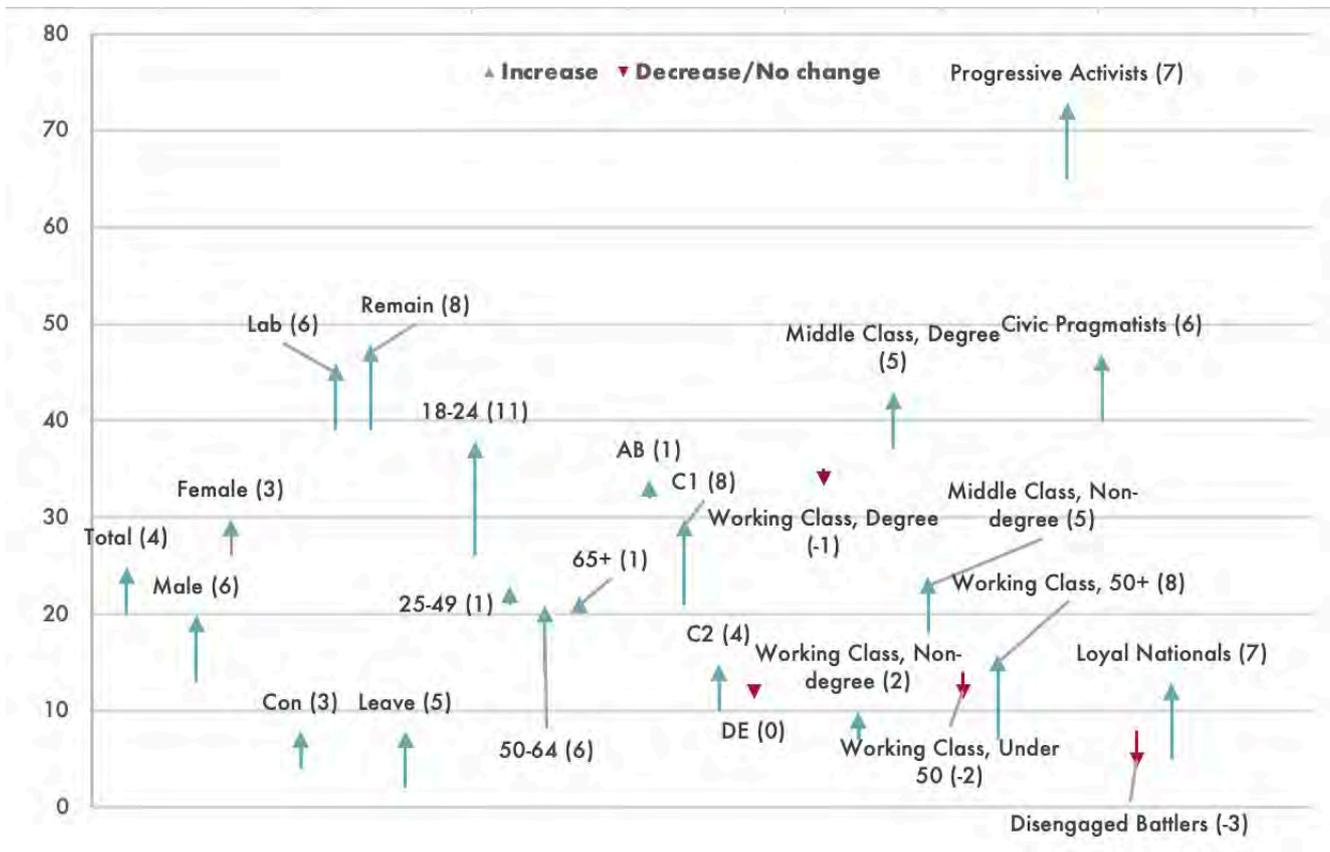
*This happens here on our doorstep, and across the world, where a million wildlife species are threatened with extinction, and ocean life is dying out everywhere because of pollution.*

*A healthy environment soaks up pollutants and shields us against extreme weather, like flooding. If we don't protect nature, it can't protect us.*

*We must act to improve green space, clean up our air and take care of our local natural environment, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world.*

This was the only message which showed some increase in support for climate change action across most major segments. Some of the main groups that were unpersuaded by the economic messages all showed a positive shift, including Conservative and Leave voters. Loyal nationals and working-class 50+ year olds saw a particularly large spike in support, having been unpersuaded or pushed away by all other messages. Some groups remained unmoved or were slightly dissuaded: DE, working-class under 50s and disengaged battlers. See figure 11 below.

When asked to what extent people found this message convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples' values (figure 12, below): again, the 'quality of life' message had the most positive results. This was almost unanimous across all groups, and it outperformed the other messages on all four measures. Some groups were still less positive: Conservative, Leave voters, red wall, C2, DE, working-class under-50s, working-class over-50s and disengaged battlers had net scores that were significantly less positive than those of Labour, Remain voters, blue wall,<sup>60</sup> AB, C1, middle-class degree holders, progressive activists and civic pragmatists.



\* Arrows indicate change in response, before and after reading the narrative frame, to the question: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means strongly agree and 7 means strongly disagree. The benefits of Government tackling climate change will outweigh the costs'

Figure 11: Quality of Life - Change after message (NET agree, per cent)\*

60 These are seats which are: currently held by Conservatives; voted Remain in 2016; and have a higher than average concentration of degree holders in the population: 'The first ever poll of the so-called 'Blue Wall' finds the Conservatives struggling in their traditional heartland seats' Patrick English, YouGov, 2021.

		Total	Male	Female	Con	Lab	Remain	Leave	Blue Wall	Red Wall	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Working Class, Degree	Middle Class, Degree	Working Class, Under 50	Working Class, 50+	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Loyal Nationals
<b>Convincing (net)</b>	Industrial decline	-6	-6	-4	-10	1	-3	-11	-10	-2	9	-9	-20	4	-10	0	-8	-7	5	4	1	2	1	15	3	6
	Green New Deal	-1	-5	1	-14	16	10	-12	-3	-7	4	-1	-8	1	-5	-4	-2	4	10	5	-3	2	36	14	-8	-4
	Quality of life	16	11	21	14	23	24	16	24	3	12	15	16	21	20	21	13	9	18	21	3	18	33	37	4	17
<b>Appealing (net)</b>	Industrial decline	13	10	15	12	19	17	12	21	8	11	13	10	16	14	16	9	12	18	16	10	13	22	21	10	17
	Jobs first	9	7	10	2	16	15	7	9	11	9	6	5	20	7	15	6	9	17	15	6	13	28	15	6	7
	Green New Deal	9	6	14	-5	31	23	-3	10	8	15	11	7	8	11	11	4	11	31	17	6	10	47	25	-1	8
Quality of life	21	19	24	20	28	27	20	30	10	22	18	22	23	25	25	16	16	27	26	10	23	41	42	11	17	
<b>Realistic (net)</b>	Industrial decline	18	13	22	13	28	22	16	16	14	19	19	13	18	16	18	16	23	27	17	21	16	22	18	12	12
	Jobs first	12	10	12	11	20	15	6	9	11	24	11	3	14	12	11	12	15	20	14	15	10	30	7	9	0
	Green New Deal	10	7	12	-2	22	14	1	15	5	18	7	6	9	5	13	7	9	18	13	7	7	33	12	5	7
Quality of life	25	21	26	13	38	36	13	32	17	34	27	19	22	25	25	23	25	38	32	23	24	53	37	15	23	
<b>Close to values (net)</b>	Industrial decline	38	32	45	33	52	48	33	46	29	39	39	37	41	46	43	32	36	44	43	35	33	53	57	30	38
	Jobs first	36	30	39	31	44	46	29	43	36	36	33	36	37	40	35	32	33	49	42	30	36	60	44	28	29
	Green New Deal	40	37	42	25	61	56	24	41	44	52	43	37	35	46	44	35	34	50	51	37	31	73	63	31	34
Quality of life	50	44	57	41	66	65	41	57	48	56	52	50	51	59	56	44	45	57	66	45	43	79	74	39	51	

Percent of respondents net agreement

Colour code: Green = 'good' (high net agreement); red = 'bad' (low net agreement) – compared to other messages, but not compared across all results in the table

Figure 12: Green New Deal - Change after message (NET agree, per cent)\*

### Popular single sentences

We were also able to test which sentences within these statements were more or less popular. We asked respondents to select their most and least favourite sentence within each of the four messages above. Each message will have been seen by approximately half of the sample, selected randomly. They could select as many of these sentences as they wanted to. These sentences weren't all the same length, and some served different functions within the overall message. However, the results give a clear indication of which messages are most appealing to people. The results are presented in figure 13 below.

- Sentences emphasising quality of life, nature and values were overwhelmingly both the most popular overall and the most unifying across different groups. This sentence was the most popular sentence for all groups:

*"We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air. We need to be in balance with nature, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world."*

- This was followed by this sentence – which was second favourite for almost all groups and third favourite for the others:

*"We must act to improve green space, clean up our air and take care of our local natural environment, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world."*

- **Two 'economic' sentences made the top five most popular.** One of these was more unifying, landing in the top five for almost all groups:

*"As we tackle climate change, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, secure jobs in clean industries like electric cars, home insulation and renewable energy. We are already the largest producer of offshore wind energy in the world."*

- One message was much more popular with Conservative, Leave voters, red wall, 50-64 year olds, those aged 65+, C2s, DEs, working-class non-degree holders, middle-class, working-class under-50s, working-class over-50s, and loyal nationals. But it was far less popular for the other groups, particularly progressive activists, Remain voters and Labour voters. This more polarising 'economic' message was:

*"Britain was at the heart of the industrial revolution and then led the world in manufacturing cars and steel. Communities around the country had good secure jobs that provided work for generation after generation."*

	Total	Male	Female	Con	Lab	Remain	Leave	Blue Wall	Red Wall	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Working Class, Degree	Working Class, Non-degree	Middle Class, Degree	Middle Class, Non-degree	Working Class, Under 50	Working Class, 50+	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Batters	Loyal Nationals	
We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air. We need to be in balance with nature, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
We must act to improve green space, clean up our air and take care of our local natural environment, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world.	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3
A healthy environment soaks up pollutants and shields us against extreme weather, like flooding. If we don't protect nature, it can't protect us.	3	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	2	6	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	5	4	3	3	5	4	4	4	4	4
As we tackle climate change, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, secure jobs in clean industries like electric cars, home insulation and renewable energy. We are already the largest producer of offshore wind energy in the world.	4	4	2	5	3	3	6	3	5	3	2	4	4	3	4	5	3	5	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	5	7	
Britain was at the heart of the industrial revolution and then led the world in manufacturing cars and steel. Communities around the country had good secure jobs that provided work for generation after generation.	5	6	8	2	16	17	2	15	4	14	8	5	6	13	10	2	5	16	2	14	8	5	2	19	14	9	2	
If we act on climate change, we can provide jobs which give people pride in what they do, especially in parts of the country that need it most.	5	11	5	9	7	7	8	5	12	5	5	10	11	8	5	6	8	8	8	5	10	6	10	7	7	6	9	
We will need an army of builders and plumbers to fit insulation or better heating systems in our homes, and we will need people to work in manufacturing – building electric vehicles, wind turbines or solar panels.	5	8	7	7	10	10	6	8	7	13	11	5	4	7	9	8	6	9	7	9	6	9	6	14	5	12	6	
To survive and rescue the world from climate change, we have to forge a new path for our economy to protect and build the things people really care about: things like health, fairness and community.	5	9	6	10	6	5	9	6	8	7	6	8	9	5	5	10	8	6	9	5	7	10	8	6	6	8	8	
Jobs are our top priority, especially for our young people living in towns across the country, where there often aren't many jobs and opportunities.	9	5	10	3	15	13	5	12	8	7	9	7	7	9	10	6	6	12	6	12	5	7	7	17	12	6	5	
The world is at risk of climate change because for decades we've been following just one path, a path guided by rules written by people who do not have our interests at heart – CEOs, politicians, and the elite defending their own wealth and power.	9	6	12	16	4	6	13	9	5	4	7	12	11	10	7	8	8	4	10	8	10	7	9	5	9	2	9	

N=5,005

**Figure 13: Please select the most and least appealing sentences in the paragraph below - Rank of sentences selected as most appealing, of 20 sentences overall (top 10 displayed)\***

Finally, we used a ‘MaxDiff’ methodology to test standalone, single-sentence messages.<sup>61</sup> This meant asking people which was their most persuasive and least persuasive message on a list, and then using a standard formula to produce a ‘net’ score for each. These results are summarised in figure 14 below. We found that:

- **“We owe our children a better future but if we don’t act, they will pay the price” scored highest**, and was quite popular with all groups – though significantly less so with Conservative and Leave voters.
- **“We need to reduce our dependence on foreign countries for energy” scored highest for large swathes of the electorate:** Conservative voters, Leave voters, people aged 50-64 and those aged 65+.

- **“A green industrial revolution will create 400,000 new jobs over the next decade and radically transform society” was the lowest scoring message** with all groups except progressive activists and 18 to 24-year-olds – groups which scored the aforementioned ‘dependence on foreign countries for energy’ message lowest, highlighting the divergent preferences between young and old, progressive and conservative.
- **“The air we breathe is getting worse and our local environment is important to all of us” scored surprisingly low**, especially given the popularity of quality of life and nature messages in the split test above, and other evidence showing that highlighting the costs of air pollution can be a powerful way to engage people.<sup>62</sup> It could be that people do not actually think air quality is ‘getting worse’ as they feel it has been worse in the past.

	Total	Male	Female	Con	Lab	Remain	Leave	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Working Class, Non-degree	Middle Class, Degree	Working Class, Under 50	Working Class, 50+	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Loyal Nationals
We owe our children a better future but if we don’t act, they will pay the price.	24	20	29	15	32	36	12	29	25	22	25	26	27	21	24	22	27	25	21	32	36	25	17
Big corporations don’t play by the rules, and get away with emissions while the rest of us pay the price.	8	10	6	-6	24	13	1	20	14	7	-8	2	11	10	9	7	9	15	4	25	12	23	12
We need to create new, secure jobs for builders, plumbers and apprentices upgrading our homes to use less gas and electricity.	5	3	7	8	3	3	9	-1	0	11	11	4	2	11	5	10	1	3	13	1	-1	2	13
We need to reduce our dependence on foreign countries for energy.	3	10	-4	24	-16	-12	23	-26	-3	12	17	5	-2	8	0	6	-3	-8	17	-25	-1	4	17
The air we breathe is getting worse and our local environment is important to all of us.	1	-3	5	-8	6	6	-6	-3	6	0	-2	0	2	0	4	2	3	2	1	32	1	-1	3
It is an opportunity bring back British industry, creating electric cars and wind turbines, making us less vulnerable to decisions made overseas.	-1	0	-1	13	-13	-10	10	-11	-2	-3	6	-2	-3	1	1	1	-6	0	1	-24	-2	-4	5
Britain can lead the world by developing technology to reduce emissions, and ensure our businesses create the best jobs in leading industries.	-9	-7	-11	0	-20	-12	-6	-9	-12	-8	-8	-7	-10	-12	-11	-11	-9	-11	-10	-18	-13	-15	-13
A Green Industrial Revolution will create 400,000 new jobs over the next decade and radically transform society.	-32	-32	-32	-46	-17	-25	-46	-1	-26	-42	-43	-28	-27	-38	-32	-37	-23	-24	-46	-5	-32	-33	-53

N=4,038

**Figure 14: Below are a selection of things people have said about the opportunities presented by tackling climate change. Please look at these arguments and pick the one that you find the most and the least convincing - NET score ie: (most-least)/Total expressing a view**

61 Best-Worst Scaling (MaxDiff) UTS:CenSoc, Centre for the Study of Choice. [https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/Cen-Soc\\_BestWorstScaling\\_Overview.pdf](https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/Cen-Soc_BestWorstScaling_Overview.pdf)

62 The air we breathe, Climate Outreach, 2020. <https://climateoutreach.org/reports/the-air-we-breathe/>

---

# **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

---



*Public opinion on climate change and the economy is far more nuanced than is often presented and there remain big differences by social class, politics, age and values-based segments.*



Public opinion on climate change and the economy is far more nuanced than is often presented and there remain big differences by social class, politics, age and values-based segments. The public is generally supportive of climate action, but while it is a high priority for middle class people, younger people, degree holders, Remain and Labour voters, it is a far lower priority for working class people, older people, non-degree holders, Leave and Conservative voters.

These same groups are often less convinced of the economic benefits of taking action and more likely to prioritise protecting jobs over taking action on climate change. Progressives have often sought to bring these groups together using 'green jobs' messaging. In simple terms, the intention is to appeal to middle-class people who prioritise the 'green' (ie climate change) as well as to working-class people who typically prioritise the 'jobs'.



*But 'green jobs' messages are failing to bridge this divide. They either repel or fail to convince large swathes of the electorate.*



But 'green jobs' messages are failing to bridge this divide. They either repel or fail to convince large swathes of the electorate: working-class people who are older, people who do not have a degree, voted to leave the EU or currently vote Conservative are unmoved by these arguments.

Neither of the main political parties can afford to ignore these groups, and nor can the campaigners who pressure government to take action on climate change: 52 per cent voted to leave the EU in 2016, and 44 per cent voted Conservative in 2019. And many of these voters are now hotly contested swing voters in marginal seats across the country.<sup>63</sup>

This is an urgent problem. Politicians and the public need to do far more to tackle climate change, but much of the 'low-hanging fruit' has gone.

Action over the next decade could be inconvenient for people, or come with an upfront cost, even if it is a sound investment in the long term.

A strategy to win over a simple majority of the population, or to pressure politicians without considering the range of public opinion, will not work. Tackling climate change requires a broader, more inclusive approach. The language used to speak to the public must be different from the language used to rally a group of activists.

As the UK enters such a challenging period, it is important that politicians and campaigners use inclusive language which highlights our shared values.

---

63 Winning 150: Understanding Labour's target seats. Luke Raikes, Fabian Society

To build a broad and strong coalition of support for climate action, progressives should:

- 1. Focus on quality of life and emphasise shared values.** Broadly popular messages included: “We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air” or “We owe our children a better future but if we don’t act, they will pay the price.”
- 2. Be specific about the jobs, if using ‘green jobs’ messages,** for example, this sentence was popular: “As we tackle climate change, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, secure jobs in clean industries like electric cars, home insulation and renewable energy. We are already the largest producer of offshore wind energy in the world.”
- 3. Use stories, not slogans and jargon.** Across all groups, people were more persuaded when they were told a story about how climate action is a way to fulfil shared values and improve quality of life. Slogans tend to be received with scepticism, particularly with respect to climate change: Terms like ‘green jobs’, ‘green industrial revolution’ and ‘net zero’ can provoke significant scepticism and are not understood by many people.

---

**AUTHORS,  
ABOUT FEPS & PARTNERS**

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### LUKE RAIKES

Luke Raikes is research director at the Fabian Society, leading on work around regional economies, devolution and Labour's electoral challenge. Prior to this, he worked at IPPR North and at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Luke is also a Labour Councillor on Manchester City Council. Areas of expertise include regional economies and inequalities, devolution, industrial strategy, skills, employment support, transport.

### BEN COOPER

Ben Cooper is a senior researcher at the Fabian Society. Ben was one of the lead authors of the final report of the Early Years Commission, and has also conducted research on arts and culture, housing, and social security.



## ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

FEPS is the European progressive political foundation and the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Our mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe.

**FEPS**  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



Avenue des Arts 46, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium +32 2 234 69 00  
[info@feps-europe.eu](mailto:info@feps-europe.eu)  
[www.feps-europe.eu](http://www.feps-europe.eu)  
[@FEPS\\_Europe](https://twitter.com/FEPS_Europe)

## ABOUT THE FABIAN SOCIETY

The Fabian Society is an independent left-leaning think tank and a democratic membership society with over 7,000 members. We influence political and public thinking and provide a space for broad and open-minded debate. We publish insight, analysis and opinion; conduct research and undertake major policy inquiries; convene conferences, speaker meetings and roundtables; and facilitate member debate and activism across the UK.



61 Petty France  
London SW1H 9EU  
[www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)  
[info@fabian-society.org.uk](mailto:info@fabian-society.org.uk)

This policy study presents the findings of the Talking Green Survey UK that was carried out by FEPS and the Fabian Society in 2021 and polled 5005 respondents in the UK. The key findings of the project are:

The 'green jobs' rhetoric favoured by politicians fails to persuade the people it is supposed to:

- 'Green jobs' messages **do persuade** groups already convinced (on average) that the benefits of climate action outweigh the costs: middle class households, 'progressive activists', younger people, Remain and Labour voters.
- 'Green jobs' arguments **do not persuade** people who are more sceptical (on average) that the benefits of climate action outweigh the costs – as they are intended to: working class households, older people, Leave and Conservative voters are not persuaded.

Instead of using slogans about 'green jobs', politicians should avoid jargon; highlight the link between climate, nature and a good quality of life; and appeal to widely shared values.

POLICY STUDY PUBLISHED IN FEBRUARY 2022 BY:



**FEPS**  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



*Copyright © 2022 by FEPS*

ISBN: 978-2-930769-70-7