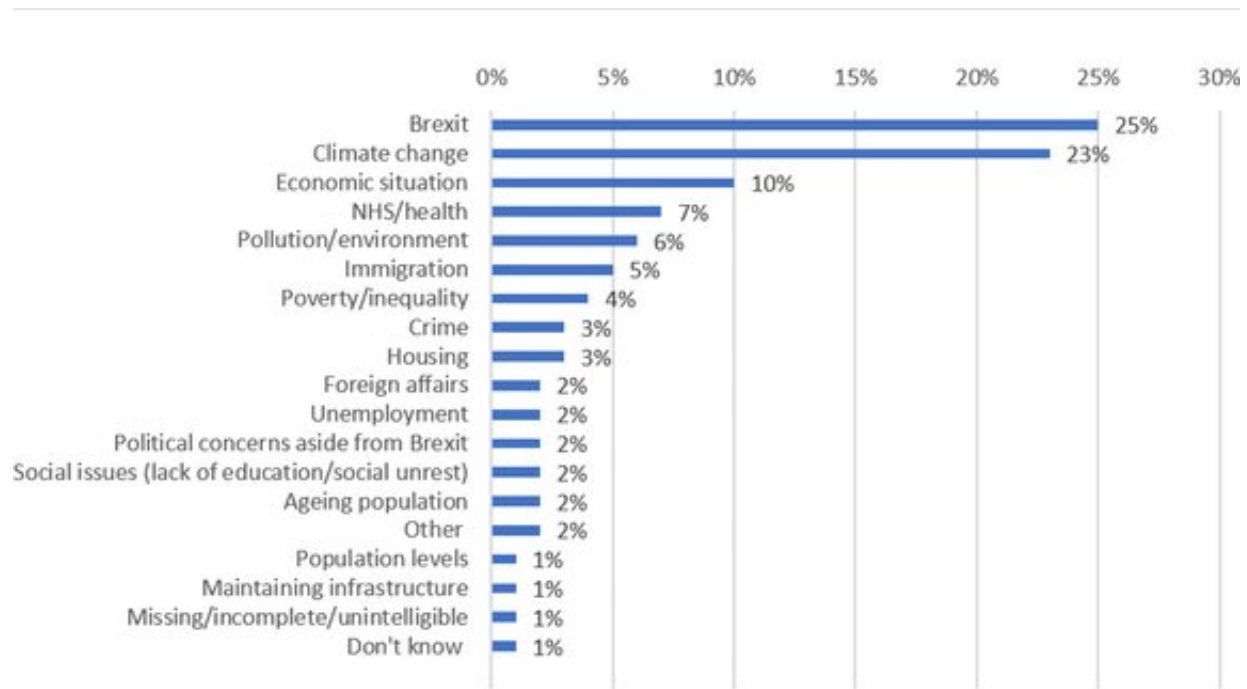


# 'Biggest shift yet' in British public's attitude to risks of climate change

March 3 2020



Survey question 1: What would you say will be the most important issue facing the UK in the next 20 years?

Britons believe climate change is one of the most important issues facing the country in the next 20 years, according to research led by Cardiff University.

A [wide-ranging survey](#) examining social attitudes to the risks and

impacts of climate change suggested the issue was now second only to Brexit for the British public.

The survey, carried out by a team of researchers from Cardiff University and Climate Outreach, also highlighted rising [public concern](#) about storms, flooding and, in particular, heatwaves, and suggested strong support for policies to address these.

"This is a remarkable shift in British public opinion—the biggest change we've seen in recent years," said Professor Nick Pidgeon, from Cardiff University's School of Psychology, who led the project.

"With [climate policy](#) entering a critical phase, as the UK prepares to host the UN climate summit—and as many areas seek to recover from winter flooding—these [survey results](#) provide strong evidence of a shift in perceptions among the British public towards greater concern for climate risks and their impacts.

"Many people are beginning to worry and care enough to demand wide-ranging action from government on the climate crisis."

The study, based on 1,401 nationally-representative respondents to a survey conducted in October 2019, found:

## On beliefs

- A quarter (23%) said climate change was the most pressing issue facing Britain in the next two decades, second only to Brexit (25%). In 2016, this figure was 2% (ranked 13th) in response to an identical question
- Climate concern has doubled since 2016, with 40% saying they were now "very or extremely worried"
- A third of respondents reported feeling anxiety, fear, and outrage

- "very much or quite a bit" when thinking about climate change
- Climate change skepticism was low—and about two thirds (64%) felt Britain was already feeling the effects of climate change (as compared to 41% in 2010)

## On climate impacts

- Storms and flooding remain the highest perceived risks, prompt high levels of concern, and are seen to be likely to increase in the future
- There was a surprisingly big surge in concern over heat risks—72% thought heatwaves were now a serious problem for the UK (compared to 23% in 2013)
- Other knock on effects due to [extreme weather](#) such as effects on food supplies and health impacts were also of very high concern for most respondents
- The majority believe [climate change](#) has had a role to play in recent extreme weather events in Europe and around the globe

## Public support for climate action

- There was very strong support for a range of adaptation policies, for example spending on flood defences or tighter building regulations
- 75% of those asked supported using public money now to prepare the UK, and protecting health, [vulnerable groups](#) and the emergency services from climate impacts were top priorities (but there was less concern about protecting historic buildings or economic growth)
- There was support for taking personal action, such as turning down winter heating, travelling more by public transport, flying less and eating less meat

- But many respondents opposed action like increasing electricity bills to cut consumption

Cardiff University's Understanding Risk group has been studying climate perceptions since 2002, with previous shifts in attitudes between surveys (with identical questions) "relatively modest" over many years.

"The current sharp rise in risk awareness is a real departure from that trend," said Professor Pidgeon, "and this is probably due to prominent recent severe weather events, widespread climate protests and greater media coverage."

The research is part of the UK Climate Resilience Programme, an £18.7m inter-multidisciplinary collaboration, funded by UK Research and Innovation and led by the Natural Environment Research Council and the Met Office as part of the Strategic Priorities Fund.

Dr. Kate Lonsdale, co-champion of the UK Climate Resilience Programme, said: "The scientific consensus is increasingly clear that [climate](#) risks are increasing in likelihood and severity.

"Now we have evidence that people in Britain see these risks are relevant to their lives today rather than something that will happen in the future and in other places."

Provided by Cardiff University

Citation: 'Biggest shift yet' in British public's attitude to risks of climate change (2020, March 3) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-03-biggest-shift-british-attitude-climate.html>

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