

# How governments and companies should listen to the people on climate change

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People are more engaged in reducing carbon emissions than previously thought—and governments, scientists and companies should listen to them—according to new research from the University of East Anglia

and the UK Energy Research Centre.

A new study published today in *Nature Energy* investigates how invested people are in making the changes needed to reduce [carbon emissions](#) and stop [climate change](#).

The study shows that people, their views and actions should be included more when it comes to how we transform the way we use energy, to keep global average temperatures well below 2°C as set out in the Paris COP21 climate agreement.

Lead researcher Prof Jason Chilvers, from UEA's School of Environmental Sciences and Co-Director of the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), said: "Transitioning to more sustainable and low-carbon energy systems is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st Century.

"Keeping increases in global average temperature to well below 2°C, as set out in the Paris COP21 climate agreement, means we need to transform the way we use energy on an unprecedented global scale.

"Many countries around the world have embarked on concerted programs to steer such change, by focusing on technological, infrastructural and economic interventions.

"This is really important. But it's also vital that everyone in society is engaged with the effort.

"The assumption used to be that members of the public didn't really understand climate change. And some said that the issue was so urgent that democracy should be put on hold.

"But in many countries, citizen engagement is central to programs for

achieving net zero. And many now say we need more not less democracy in tackling problems of energy and climate change.

"We wanted to know more about the different ways people are actually engaging."

Public engagement about climate change has previously been measured in terms of raising public awareness, exploring support for low-carbon policies and technology, and behavioral change.

But this work has been granular rather than looking more broadly at the 'big picture'.

And importantly, the emphasis has been on inviting the public to engage with an urgent transition that is already set by those in power.

Prof Chilvers said: "Our research shows how this received wisdom has got the problem wrong. Through developing a more open way of seeing the problem of participation we demonstrate a new way of doing [public engagement](#)."

"Most approaches to engaging society on climate change issues fail to address the enormity and systemic nature of the challenge.

"So we pioneered a new, more holistic, approach to mapping the many different ways that people engage with how we transition to a low carbon world.

"We then used this to explore citizen and specialist views on different low carbon energy futures in the UK.

"And we found that people have much more to say and do in reducing carbon emissions than previously thought.

"We found so many different ways that people are now engaging—from citizens' assemblies, activism and protest through to engaging online, with smart technologies in the home, in grassroots community energy schemes and makerspaces.

"These different forms of public engagement interrelate together in wider systems, generating new visions, values and actions on low carbon transitions that are being missed by mainstream approaches like behavior change initiatives and opinion surveys.

"Our findings reveal citizen and specialist support for more distributed and socially inclusive low [carbon](#) energy futures in the UK.

"We offer an alternative to the received wisdom and a more comprehensive approach to public engagement with national energy and net-zero transitions, which can also be applied at local, regional or global scales.

"We are now taking this approach forward in the form of a national Observatory as part of UKERC to map and monitor public participation and engagement with [energy](#) and climate change on an ongoing basis. The Observatory is translating this evidence to improve decision making for just transitions in government, business and civil society.

"We hope that our work to map engagement on a grand scale will help improve public [engagement](#) processes in the future, and help with the development of [climate](#) policy ahead of COP26."

**More information:** A systemic approach to mapping participation with energy transitions, *Nature Energy* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41560-020-00762-w](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-020-00762-w) , [dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41560-020-00762-w](https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41560-020-00762-w)

Provided by University of East Anglia

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