

Europeans want climate action but show little appetite for radical lifestyle change: new polling

October 20 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Europeans want urgent action on climate change but remain committed meat-eaters and question policy proposals such as banning the sale of

new petrol vehicles after 2030, according to a new poll from the YouGov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion Research that surveyed environmental attitudes in seven European countries, including the UK.

The results—part of a collaboration with Cambridge Zero, the University's climate initiative—also found that as the UK prepares to host crucial climate talks in Glasgow next month, barely a third of British adults have noticed that the event is taking place.

According to [polling](#) conducted last week, just 31% of British adults have read or heard much about COP26 so far, compared with 63% answering to the contrary—either "not very much" or "nothing at all". These numbers have also barely changed in two months.

When the same question was asked as part of the main, [international fieldwork](#) in August, results showed a slightly larger difference of 28% versus 67%. Predictably, the other populations showed even less impact, such as 17% versus 75% in France, 9% versus 84% in Sweden and 7% versus 83% in Germany.

However, the poll indicates that while survey participants may not be following COP26, a significant majority of the 9,000 people polled across the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Italy strongly support many of the aims of the talks, at least in principle.

Dr. Emily Shuckburgh OBE, Director of Cambridge Zero, said:"As the impacts of climate change are starting to be felt everywhere, COP26 should be seen as a vital summit where the world must [deliver immediate and meaningful climate action](#). But the bad news is that most people have still barely noticed that the world leaders who can actually take the actions needed will be in our own backyard."

Dr. Joel Rogers de Waal, Academic Director of YouGov, said:"The good

news for COP26 organisers is that in every country surveyed, the vast majority are on board with the programme, at least in principle. In each national sample, most agreed that [climate change](#) is a genuine phenomenon and a considerable concern, and rejected the idea that its seriousness is being exaggerated."

Beyond overall terms of debate, however, the same findings also indicate both strong support for certain environmental agendas—the polling showed widespread enthusiasm for "rewilding", with 70% support in Britain and 79% in Spain for programmes to restore parts of the country to their natural state—and some obvious challenges.

However, when it comes to making lifestyle changes, participants were less enthusiastic. Despite the clear environmental benefits of eating less meat, all seven countries showed majorities who eat meat at least several times a week. Within the meat-eating section of respondents, only a small proportion claimed to have reduced their meat consumption over the past 12 months, and of those, generally around half or under had done so for environmental reasons.

Attitudes towards environmental action at the policy level are a mixed bag. In nearly every country, large portions support the policy of greatly expanding government investment in renewable energy, such as solar, wind and tidal power, including majorities or pluralities in Britain (66%), Germany (52%), Denmark (65%), Sweden (47%), Spain (74%) and Italy (69%). Only France was an outlier in this respect, where just 24% said the same.

But in other areas, [public support](#) is tentative and variable, such as bans on the sale of petrol or diesel cars and vans, or a frequent flyer tax.

Poll results also give a sense of public attitudes towards the new environmental activism. [Additional polling](#) for the project at the start of

September asked British voters two questions regarding Extinction Rebellion—one about methods, the other about message. On the former, a 53% majority said the methods used by the protest group generally go too far, compared with only 10% saying they got the balance about right and 7% saying they didn't go far enough. On the latter, however, only 38% thought the environmental warnings of Extinction Rebellion generally overstate the situation, next to a combined 41% saying that they describe the situation about right (32%) or even understate it (9%).

"The most powerful protest movements are those that ultimately manage to inspire and co-opt the wider population, creating a sense of social momentum that becomes impossible for the political centre to ignore," said de Waal. "By contrast, acts of civic vandalism that specifically target the basic necessities of daily life are more likely to do the opposite, since by infuriating the public, they only make it easier for governments to ignore the message behind the action."

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample sizes were: Britain= 1767; Germany=2108; France=1035; Denmark=1009; Sweden=1015; Spain=1050; Italy=1000. Fieldwork was undertaken online between 6th—23rd August, 2021. For each country, the figures have been weighted and are representative of the adult population aged 18+.

Provided by University of Cambridge

Citation: Europeans want climate action but show little appetite for radical lifestyle change: new polling (2021, October 20) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-10-europeans-climate-action-appetite-radical.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.