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Restoring Human Progress

Winning citizens' support for actions on climate and nature

Zero Ideas®

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Zero Ideas is a research charity established to challenge leadership thinking on climate action. We conduct primary and secondary research and publish articles and research reports to inform leaders on climate issues and to drive a more ambitious leadership mindset regarding climate action.

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Front cover and other pictures show Little Island in Hudson River Park, New York.

Foreword

Lindsay Hooper
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We are living through a paradox. Across the G7, people care about climate change and nature loss, yet many are losing confidence that progress is possible, or that it will be fair. As Cambridge economist Diane Coyle observes in the Financial Times (29 October 2025), "societies without much hope for their future do not see the need to build for it." Without that belief, public support for long-term investment weakens. That is the challenge this paper takes on directly, because the necessary economic, energy and industrial transitions to tackle climate and environmental challenges will require a long investment cycle that depends on durable public support.

Until recently, much of the progress has been upstream, technocratic and largely invisible to households. The next phase of economic transition is being shaped by decisions that people will feel more directly: infrastructure build-out, retrofit of homes, and shifts in how we travel and eat.

It becomes easy for people to rationalise why 'we don't have to do this' in response to any particular policy. It is also easy to despair of institutional competence and focus instead on community-level action. Citizen agency matters, and community-level action will be essential, but cannot carry the transition alone. The scale of change required depends on state-led infrastructure and policy, and on major business and finance decisions that follow from clear frameworks, and these require sustained public support.

The value of this paper is its pragmatism and solutions-focus in building that support. It reminds us that huge progress has already been achieved and that citizens do want action. Yet it also recognises what is not working. It shows that support wanes when change is experienced mainly as cost, constraint or remote instruction, rather than as a credible route to security, prosperity and pride. It makes a clear proposal for what works better, anchored in three principles: deliver meaningful gains in the sectors people care about, play to national strengths through credible industrial strategy, and help people believe in better by making progress visible and believable.

The implications are clear. Leaders need to earn and sustain citizens' support, learning quickly from what has not worked and changing how the ambition is framed. They need to combine place-based delivery with clear and compelling industrial strategies that build capability, good jobs and investable pipelines, because people back what they can see works well and delivers real-world outcomes.

CISL is publishing this paper because these dynamics shape our work every day. We work with leaders in business, policy and finance on the investments and market choices that shape competitiveness, resilience and social progress, and we see repeatedly that momentum depends upon sustained public support, and that, in turn, requires confidence in the future. A transition at the scale required to safeguard our futures will only hold if it is understood as an economic project that improves people's lives, not as a niche, technical agenda that asks for sacrifice without visible gain. Restoring confidence, and making progress tangible, is now a core leadership task, and this paper offers a clear way to start.

Executive summary

This is the critical pivot: from burden to desire; from obligation to aspiration.

People across the world and across the political spectrum care about climate change and nature loss. Their concern, though, does not translate into dependable support for the government policies and business strategies needed to solve the problem.

Winning citizens' support is critical – not as an alternative to their own direct effort, but as a multiplier of that effort. To act effectively at the scale of the problem citizens depend on changes to our economic system. Government, business and finance have many of the tools and means to make such changes and are often aligned with the need to act; but without citizens' support for specific actions, they do not have the licence. When citizens prioritise more immediate issues they face in their lives, the effect is to hold back the action they want to see on climate and nature.

The path from caring about the issue to supporting policies to fix it is tortuous. Even where there is consensus about the problem, that does not mean there is consensus about the solution. There are legitimate choices to be made, each placing burdens on different groups of people. Climate and other science say we *have* to act at scale and speed to live within our planetary boundaries. While this imperative holds for our species and the world, it is less convincing at the scale of specific people and places, and specific policies. Someone and somewhere else can always carry the burden.

This evasion is overcome if citizens *want* to support something, rather than being told they must. This is the critical pivot: from burden to desire; from obligation to aspiration. Table i shows the core beliefs that are blocking citizens' support today; the simple rebuttals that are proving ineffective against them; and the positive pivot that can make the difference.

Table i. A positive pivot can counter the beliefs blocking citizens' support

Belief	Rebuttal	Positive pivot
'We don't have to do this.'	'We *do* have to do this.'	'We *want* to do this.'
'It threatens how we live.'	'It is less worse.'	'It *enhances* how we live.'
'It won't work.'	'It must work.'	'It is *already* working.'

Executive summary

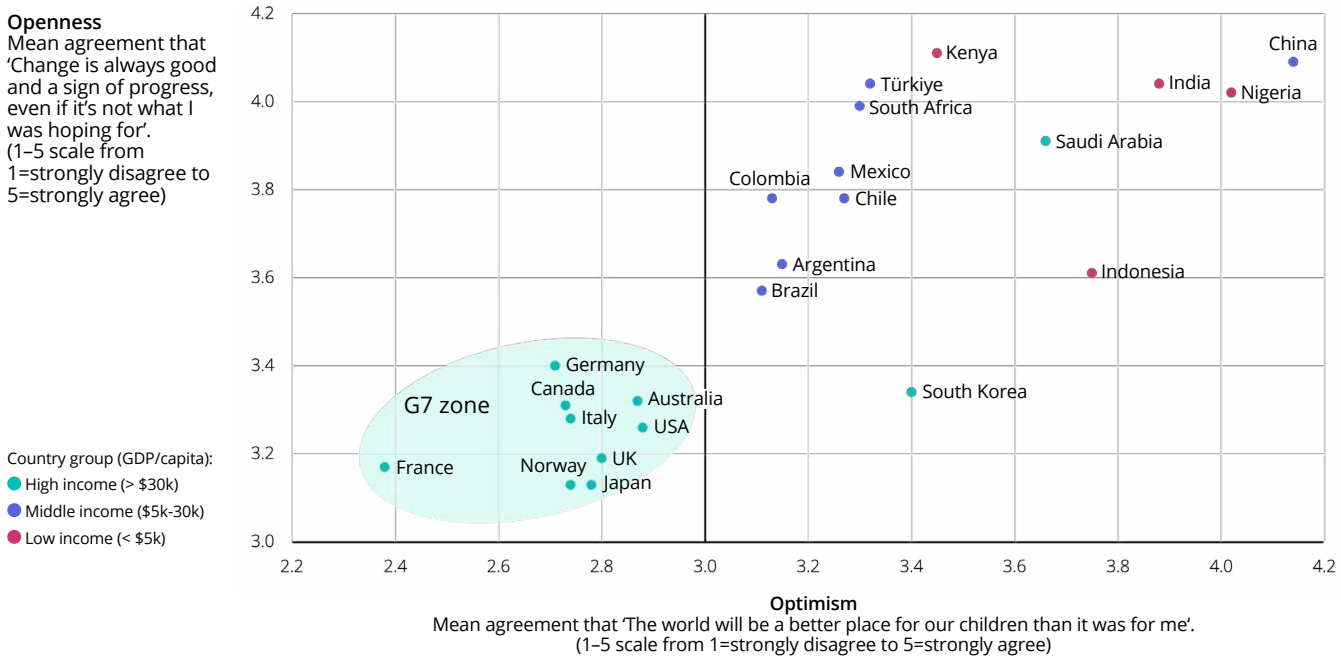
To want to support action on climate change and nature loss, citizens must care about and engage with the future. People do indeed care about it. And in most of the world they are optimistic and open about it; but not in rich countries such as the G7 (Figure i).

Here, a despondency about the future prevents us from attending to it in the way that action on climate change and nature loss requires. It reinforces the framing of climate action as a *conservation* problem: restricting what we do to preserve what we have. But climate action is, in many ways, a *transition* problem: it needs investment in a new economy and the creation of new markets. Executing the transition needs proactive behaviours, and a goal-seeking mindset, that come from a grounded conviction that the world can be better. Today in the G7 people are missing that conviction.

To win citizens' support, leaders need not only to elevate climate and nature as issues, but also to elevate a vision for the future: to help citizens *restore human progress* as their aspiration and expectation for society.

This broader mission is ambitious. What makes it realistic is the common interest of different actors in pursuing it. Risk-taking, innovation and investment all require optimism and openness about the future. Mainstream political leaders facing populist challenges at home, and business and finance leaders facing competition from more dynamic economies abroad, share a self-interest in rebuilding citizens' belief in *restoring human progress*.

Figure i. Optimism and openness about the future are missing in the G7



Executive summary

This report describes three principles for engaging citizens on climate change and nature loss in a way that helps to restore human progress, and therefore to promote and benefit from the alignment of interests (Table ii):

1. Delivering meaningful gains. To counter the fear that climate action threatens how we live, people must see meaningful gains that will both protect and *enhance* how we live. People need inspiring visions and tangible goals that they relate to, find worth striving for and will be proud to see achieved.

To make the case for climate action, leaders need to engage citizens not just in climate change and nature loss as standalone issues, but in the future of sectors that are meaningful to them: travel, food and farming, our countryside, our cities. Solving for sectors, not just for climate and nature, leads to approaches that will stand up to challenge from other interests, because those interests are built into the solution. It also shifts a problem-solving, damage-limitation frame to a frame of hope, ambition and progress.

2. Playing to national strengths. To build citizens' confidence in and excitement about the future, leaders need to focus on where their countries can thrive, lead and, potentially, win.

This is what China has been doing so effectively in solar, wind, batteries and electric vehicles, building not only on their natural endowment of rare-earth minerals but also on their unmatched manufacturing and learning curves. It is what Germany could be doing in industrial electrification, heavy transport and non-fossil chemicals; or France in nuclear energy and sustainable aviation; or Japan in high-efficiency and precision technologies.

Success is not guaranteed, but playing to national strengths allows different countries to contribute effectively in ways that work best for them, and crucially this is a narrative frame that grounds climate action in a relatable vision for citizens. It helps the shift from problem solving and damage limitation to opportunity, choice and ambition.

3. Believing in better. Today, many people share a sense that climate change efforts are not making progress. But the metrics that show still-rising global carbon emissions hide serious progress made in individual sectors and countries. As a consequence, it is easy to underestimate what the world is capable of.

People need to believe in better: to feel part of something bigger, recognising and celebrating the progress made, proud to be working towards a better future and embracing the dynamism of the journey.

The motivations of hope, ambition, progress, prosperity, pride and belonging all help to bring acceptance of the costs and compromises along the way, expanding the scope of what citizens will consider palatable.

Restoring human progress as a believable and achievable goal can unlock citizens' support for policies on climate change and nature loss, and for our prosperity more broadly. This insight provides an important redirection and sets an ambitious, and ultimately rewarding, leadership agenda. Government, business, finance and citizens have a shared interest in restoring human progress. The opportunity now is to bring these different actors together to turn that interest into action for our shared future.

Table ii. Principles for *restoring human progress*

1. Delivering meaningful gains	2. Playing to national strengths	3. Believing in better
Involving citizens in shaping the future of sectors they care about, solving for climate and nature within the mix of issues that reflect societal self-interest	Choosing where each country can thrive, lead and win, building on distinct natural and economic strengths and ambitions	Recognising and celebrating achievements and feeling part of something bigger, embracing the journey to a better future

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Introduction

A lack of support from citizens is an important factor preventing governments, business and finance from taking bigger actions on climate change and nature loss. Why are citizens, who overwhelmingly care about the problems, not more supportive of the solutions? What can win their support?

To answer these questions, this report draws on extensive quantitative and qualitative research:

- published academic literature on citizens' attitudes to climate change and nature loss, and support for policies related to those issues
- broader academic literature on motivations and behaviours
- surveys of public opinion published by commercial polling organisations
- two recent, multinational, quantitative surveys conducted by the authors, with new analyses for this report
- qualitative interviews for this report with 25 analysts and practitioners from a diverse range of corporate, finance, policy, community, non-governmental organisation (NGO) and academic backgrounds.

This broad set of inputs has allowed us to go beyond the specifics of climate change and nature loss, and explore the questions in a bigger societal context. It is this perspective that has led us to the essential theme of *restoring human progress*, as the key to unlocking support for actions on climate and nature, and as a broader stimulus to our societal and economic future.

In going so broad in this societal dimension, we have had to go narrow in others. This report does not seek to be a comprehensive approach to climate and nature policy and strategy. In particular:

- It focuses on citizens' support for actions by government, business and finance because that support is a crucial missing link; there are other influences on these actors, and other roles that citizens play through their own actions and involvement.
- It helps to guide policy design in order to win citizens' support; it does not make specific policy recommendations. Citizen support is a necessary but not sufficient condition for good policy.
- It proposes the idea of *restoring human progress* as a vision for motivating citizens, a context for pursuing climate and nature actions, and a way to align stakeholder interests; it is not a playbook for restoring human progress.

Recognising this focus, what follows is an evidence-based case for a new narrative to engage business, finance and government on climate and nature action.

1. Beyond caring
The need for citizens' support

Citizens as enablers

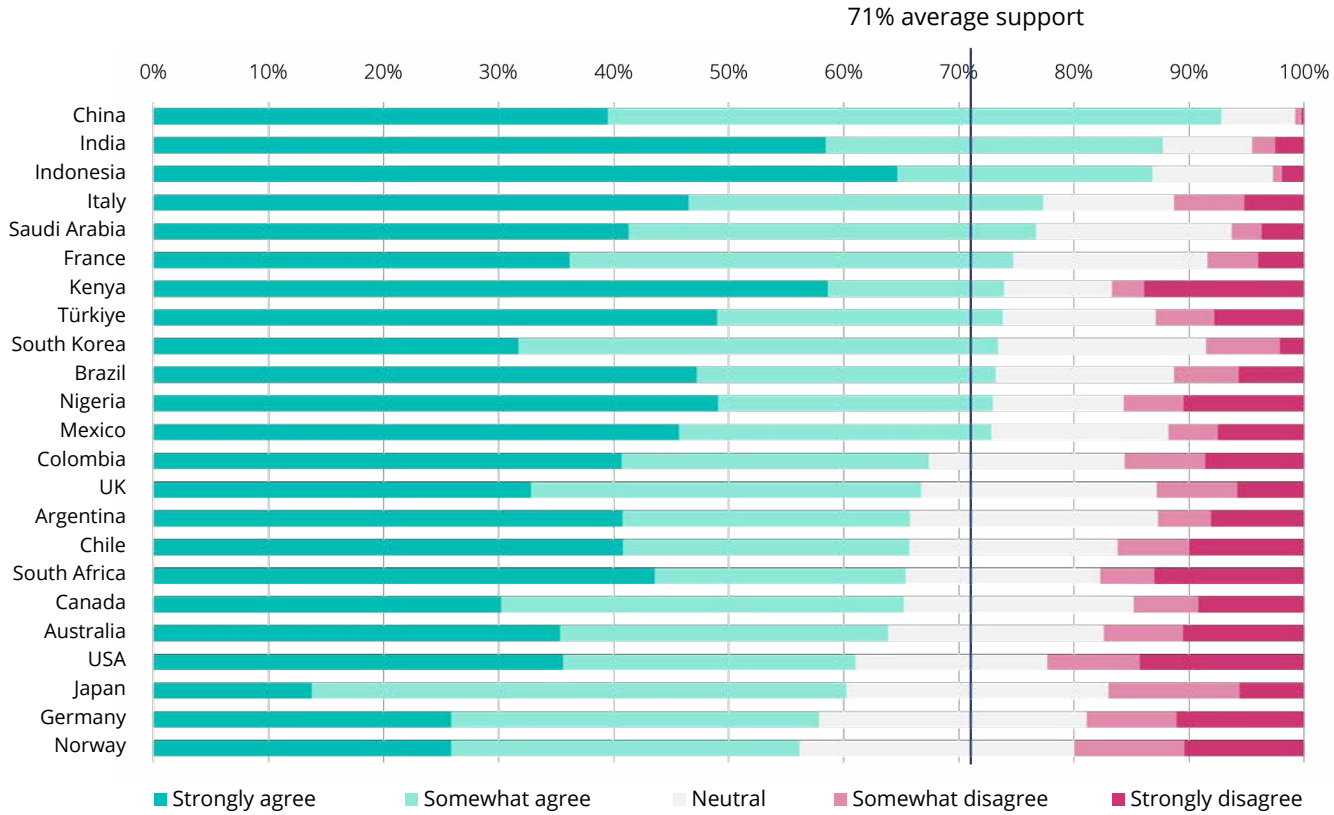
In one view of the world, citizens are the advocates for action on climate and nature, and are frustrated by the resistance that comes from short-termist and self-serving governments, businesses and investors. It is easy to find examples of each actor that fit this picture. Citizens have been misled and feel understandably frustrated.

However, this picture works both ways around. Governments, businesses and financial institutions that seek to act on climate and nature may find that they cannot get the support from citizens that they need.

Citizens do care about climate change and nature loss. One survey of citizens across the G20 countries and beyond found that 71 per cent of people say they "support immediate action by the government to address climate change" – and only 13 per cent oppose it (Figure 1.1). A much-cited study in *Nature Climate Change*, surveying citizens of 125 countries, found that 89 per cent of people say their "government should do more to fight global warming".[1]

Care is widespread across society, not limited to one part of the political spectrum (see box on p13: *Climate worry across the political spectrum*). Worry about nature loss is even higher than worry about climate change (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.1. Citizens' support for government climate action by country[2]



Source: Marshall et al., *Later is too late*

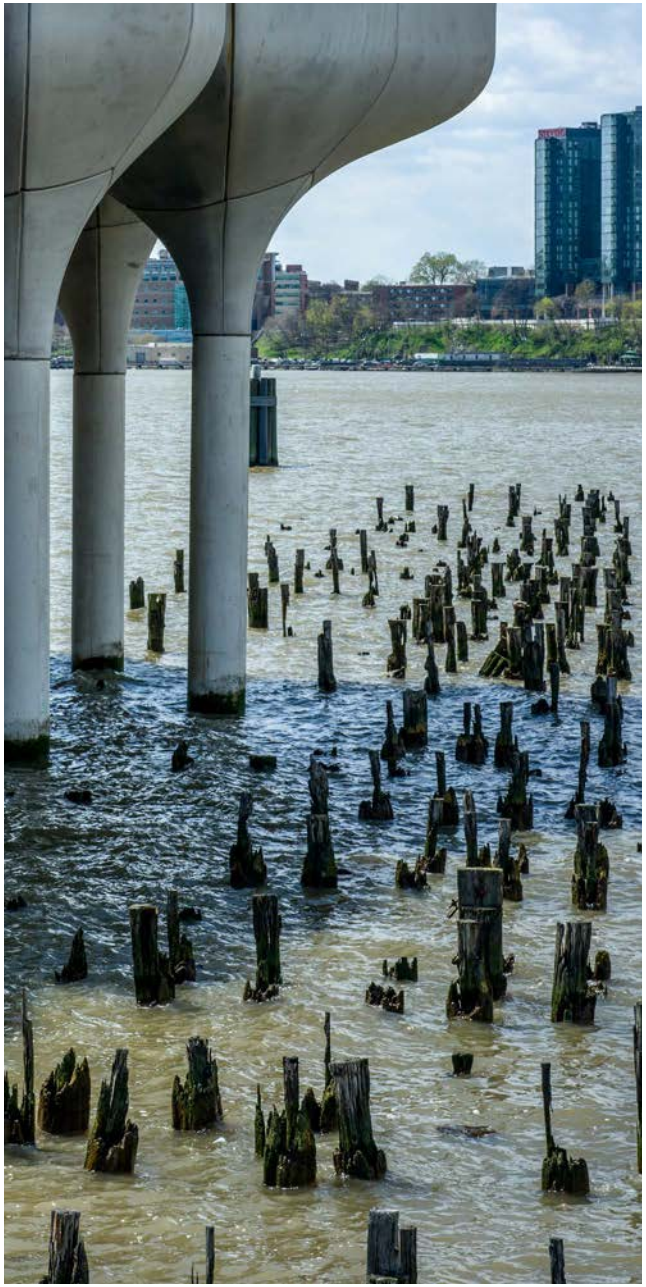
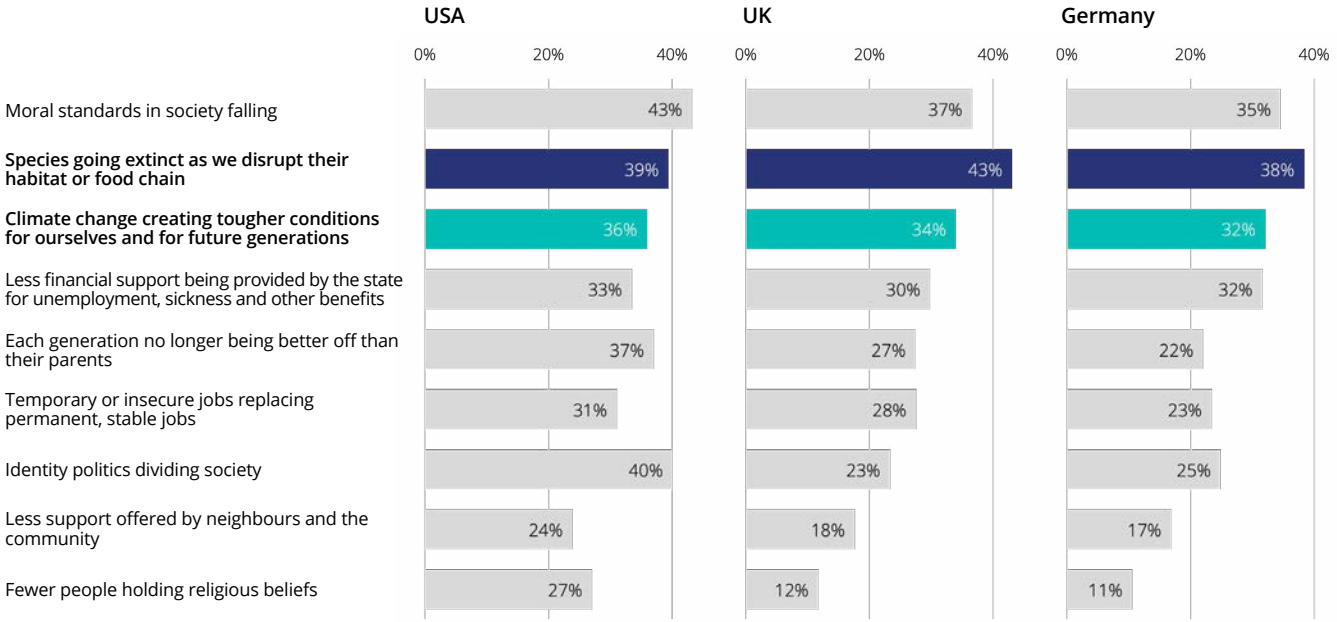


Figure 1.2. Proportion of people very worried about types of societal loss[3]



But although we overwhelmingly care, we prioritise other issues when we vote, invest, shop and pursue our careers. For most of us, climate change and the environment are not one of the big issues affecting how we vote. In the United States, 21 per cent of people count either climate change or the environment as one of their top-three voting issues (from a list of 15); in the UK it is 25 per cent and in Germany 30 per cent.[4]

This matters, because most people think responsibility lies with government and/or business, not with themselves as individuals, particularly in more developed countries (Figure 1.3).

Those in power in government, business and finance also prioritise other issues: profitability, personal status, remuneration, etc. Some of that is by self-interested choice; but much is constrained by pressure from the stakeholders they serve: electorates, customers, employees, investors – ultimately, citizens. Government, business and finance cannot do enough of what is needed without citizens' support.

Even then, they face headwinds: lobbying pressure from incumbent businesses threatened by the climate transition, and powerful media interests. These pressures are real; they increase the need for citizen support to compensate.

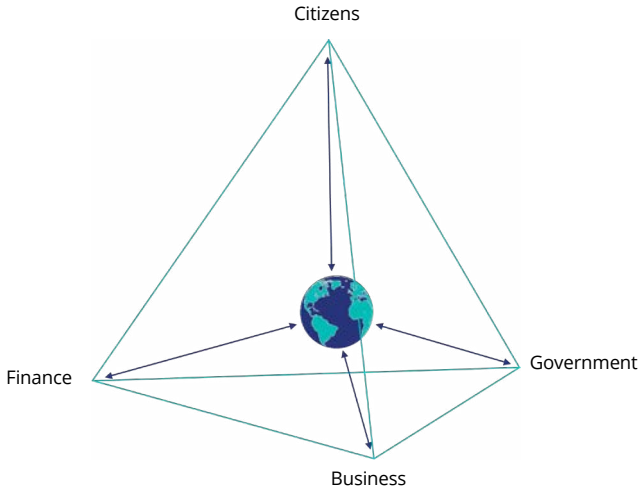
The schematic in Figure 1.4 illustrates the interconnectedness of finance, business, government and citizens in impacting the physical world. The past decade has highlighted the critical role of citizens in this interconnected system:

The finance sector set out to drive the transition, through environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing and through the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero. GFANZ showed up at the 2021 Conference of the Parties (COP) with "$130 trillion of capital to be deployed… an historic wall of capital for the net zero transition around the world", as described at the time by the then UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak.[6] The sector has since acknowledged "the boundaries of the financial sector's role as a *supporter and enabler, but not a driver*—of real economy transition", in the words of the Institute of International Finance. The drive must come from business and from government. "Over-reliance on the financial sector and its regulators to deliver the net zero transition risks diverting attention from the fundamental policies needed to catalyse actions across the entire economy."[7]

Figure 1.3. Who citizens feel is responsible for tackling climate change[5]

Source: Marshall et al., *Later is too late*

Figure 1.4. The interconnectedness of actors impacting the physical world



Businesses may want to be responsible, but for both fiduciary and competitive reasons must prioritise what is financially and commercially viable. Businesses will do what customers and investors ask, and what governments require. Many business initiatives on climate and nature have been based on anticipating stakeholder requirements: investor demands for ESG performance, and government introduction of carbon pricing. When these have not happened as anticipated, business leaders have been left exposed. Where leaders of big, publicly traded companies have gone much further than what their stakeholders are asking, it has proved unsustainable: leaders who succeeded them have reverted to the norm. Businesses are therefore increasingly lobbying in support of climate action,[8] leaning on governments to create the market conditions in which climate transition plans are commercially viable.

Elected governments, however, also have little room for manoeuvre. They are bound to do what electorates will accept, not what alienates them.

Passing responsibility between finance, business and government is not working. Each player's immediate self-interest is winning out. It is down to citizens to break the deadlock.

From caring about the problem to supporting solutions

Supporting climate- and nature-related policies is not the only way for citizens to contribute; individual and group behaviour also matter. But citizens' policy support is the critical enabler of climate action at scale. Citizens themselves cannot act effectively without government, business and finance driving changes to our economic system. Government, business and finance have many of the tools and means to do that; but without citizens' support, they do not have the licence. Trying to work without that licence has held climate action back at an incremental level that is insufficient, and even at that level is provoking backlash.

Numerically, the priority in winning this support is not to get more people to care about climate and nature. The concern that people feel is widespread and substantial. The priority is to translate the care that is already there into practical support for tangible government policies and business strategies. That challenge is not just about communications; it is about prioritising and shaping the policies and strategies to reflect citizens' varied interests and concerns.

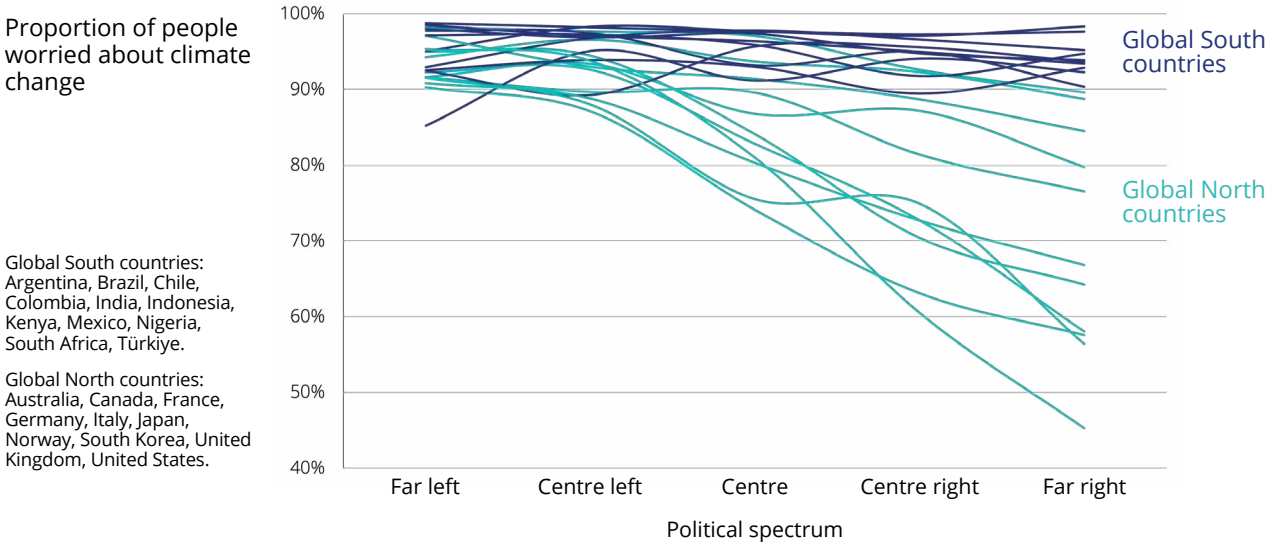
Climate worry across the political spectrum

Although climate *policy* has become politicised in some countries, climate *worry* is strong across the political spectrum. Climate is not an intrinsically politically skewed issue. Treating it as one can drive a vicious circle of polarisation. Conversely, recognising the breadth of worry, with policies that appeal to the right as well as the left, can drive a virtuous circle of concern and support.

Climate is not intrinsically politically skewed

Figure 1.5 shows the level of climate worry across the political spectrum for 21 countries, mostly in the G20. The pale lines show Global North countries; the dark lines Global South. The political polarisation of climate worry is limited to the Global North – and is far from universal even within the Global North.

Figure 1.5. Climate worry across the political spectrum by country[9]

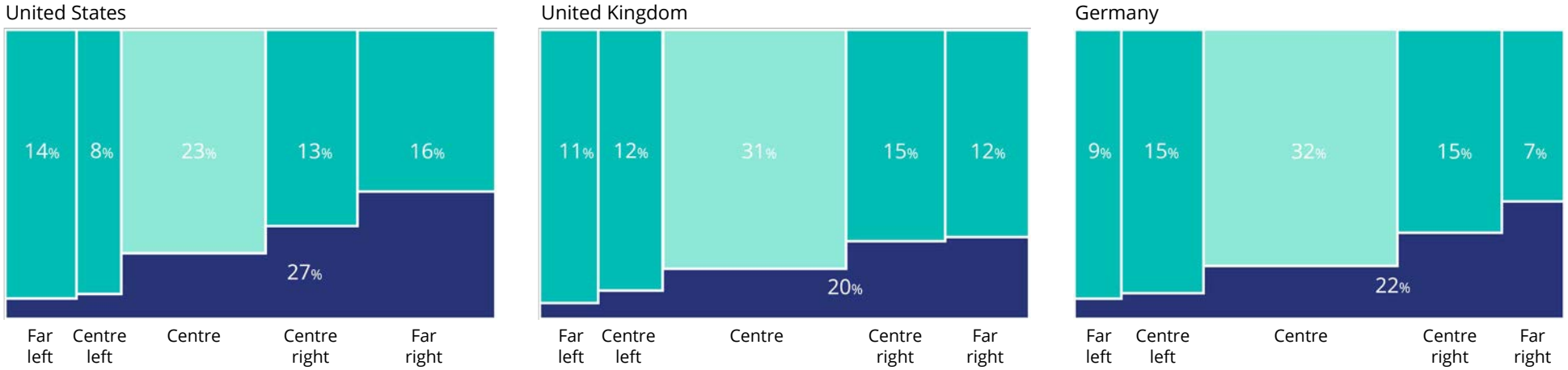


Even in polarised countries, most people on the far right worry about climate change

Even where climate scepticism is stronger on the right than the left, it is a minority position throughout the political spectrum. In the United States – the country with the most politically polarised views on climate – among those who see themselves on the political left, 92 per cent are climate-worried. Among those on the right it is still 61 per cent – and even on the far right it is 56 per cent.

Further, although the proportion of people worried about climate change is smaller on the right, the size of the right means that in many countries (including the UK and US) there are more climate-worried people on the right than on the left (Figure 1.6). In Germany, there are more climate-worried people aligned with the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party (13 per cent of people overall) than with the Greens (9 per cent).

Figure 1.6. Distribution of people by climate worry and political spectrum[10]



Policies that appeal to the right can unlock concern that is currently suppressed

One reason for the lower proportion of people worried about climate on the right is the association of the issue with left-leaning policy solutions: big-government interventions and constraints on personal freedom. For people averse to these solutions, acceptance of the climate problem can create a cognitive dissonance with what they value and believe is right for society. It is natural to resolve that dissonance by rejecting the premise and preserving the values and behaviours. "Rather than changing my actual behaviour, I can modify my thinking to match what I do." I then do not have to do or support what I dislike or disapprove of. Or, "put differently: many conservatives do not oppose climate science because they are ignorant. Rather, it is a way of expressing who they are."[11]

Very/somewhat worried about climate change

Not very/not at all worried about climate change

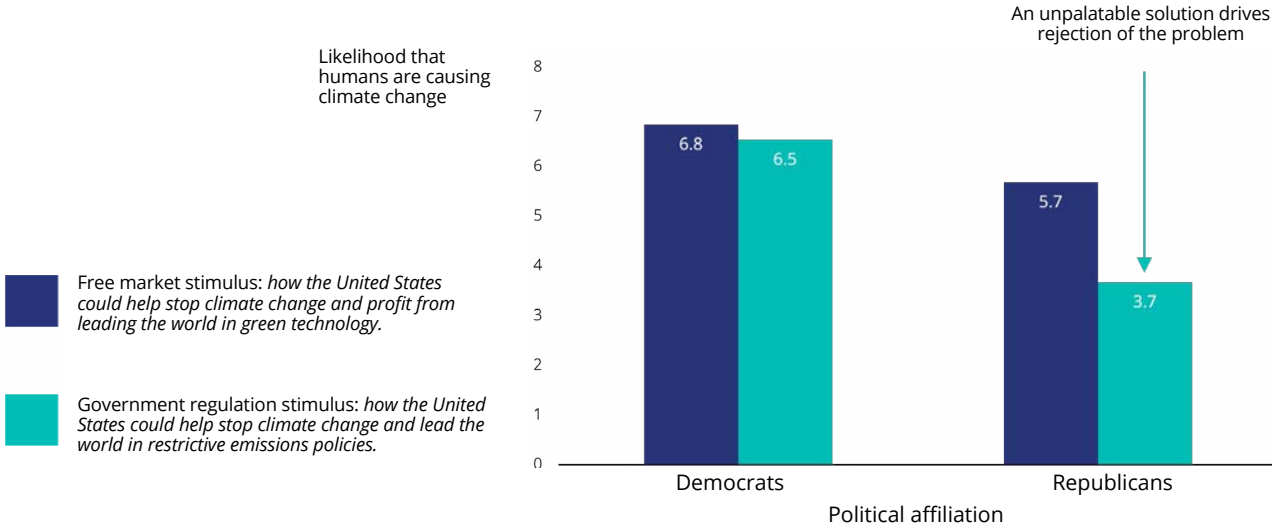
How worried are you about climate change?

Some people talk about politics in terms of left, centre, and right. On a left-right scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating extreme left and 7 indicating extreme right, where would you place yourself?

Can our reaction to climate policies affect our acceptance of, and worry about, the underlying climate science? An experiment to test this asked two randomly selected groups of citizens in the United States whether they believed humans are causing climate change. The researchers primed one group with a story about how the US could help stop climate change and profit from leading the world in green technology – a free-market narrative designed to appeal to the right. They primed the other with a story about how the US could help stop climate change and lead the world in restrictive emissions policies – a government regulation narrative designed to appeal to the left.

Figure 1.7 shows the results. Democrat-voters had a high belief that humans are causing climate change regardless of narrative. But Republican-voters had a differing belief in the two groups. A politically palatable solution allowed acceptance of the problem, but an unpalatable solution drove rejection of the problem.

Figure 1.7. Impact of solution aversion[12]



Source: Campbell and Kay, *Solution aversion*

2. We don't have to do this
The beliefs blocking support today

Little appetite for sacrifice

If people care so much and so broadly about climate change and nature loss, what is stopping them from supporting government policies and business strategies that would help to stop it?

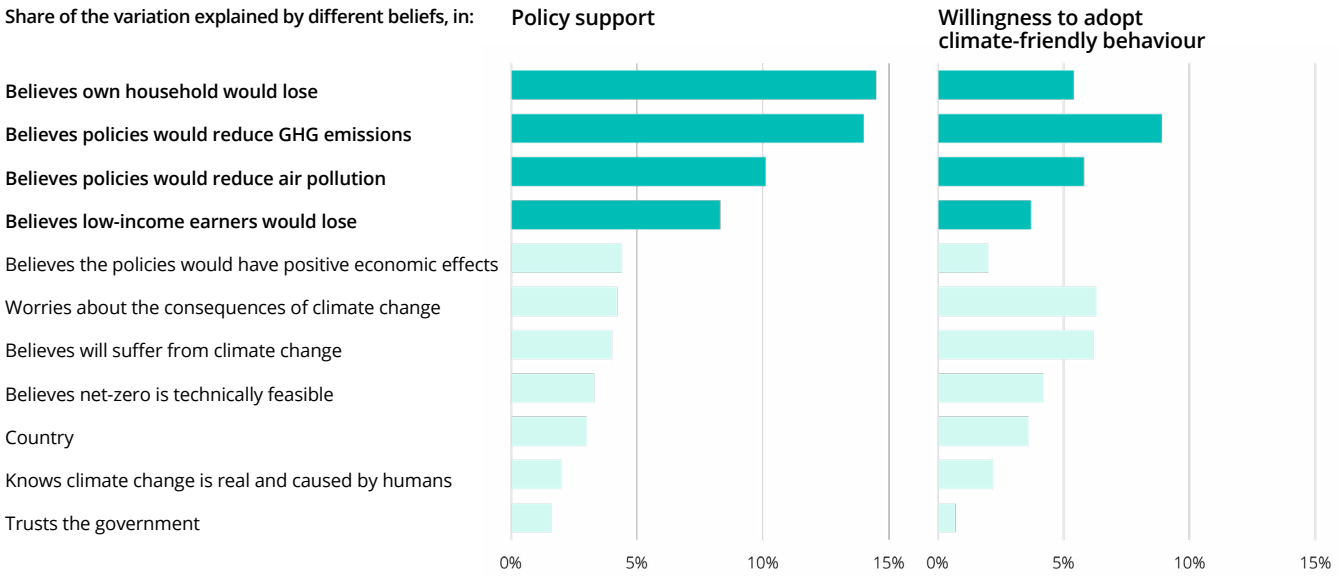
The short answer is that there is little appetite for sacrifice. People tend to withhold their support when they believe their own household will lose, low-income households will lose, or the policy will not be effective (Figure 2.1).

What drives people to support government policies can differ from what drives them to change their own behaviour. Both are influenced by what people believe is effective; individual behaviour also by the level of people's climate concern (righthand chart). The importance of sacrifice – affecting one's own household and those on low incomes – is specific to policy support (lefthand chart).

These drivers help to explain why people particularly resist policies about 'phasing out fossil fuels'. Such policies get to the core of the climate issue, but raise concerns about affordability and quality of life, both for people themselves and on behalf of low-income households in their country. They are some of the least supported climate policies, along with banning or penalising cars powered by fossil fuels. The approach of *First build, then break*[13] – ensuring the clean solution is available and affordable before withdrawing the old – wins much greater citizen support.[14]

Academic research papers and commercial polling studies have explored citizens' reactions to a wide variety of climate- and nature-saving policies. This report groups the barriers they have identified into three core blocking beliefs: (1) we don't have to do this; (2) it threatens how we live; and (3) it won't work. The remainder of this chapter explores these beliefs. Chapter 3 shows why a straight rebuttal of these beliefs is ineffective. Chapters 4 and 5 show how to pivot these beliefs, rather than simply rebut them, in order to win citizens' support.

Figure 2.1. Beliefs explaining support for climate policies, and behaviour[15]



Source: Dechezleprêtre et al., *Fighting climate change*

1. 'We don't have to do this.'

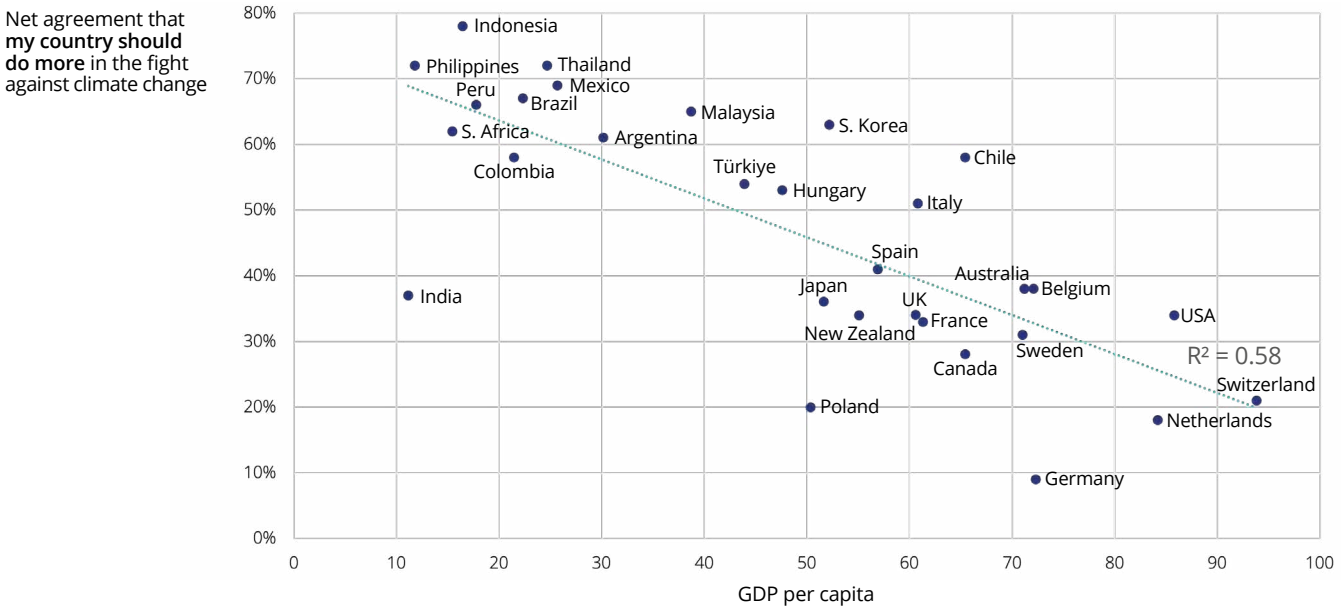
There are many reasons why a given approach may not be thought necessary. The phrase itself reveals three types of objection: *we* don't have to do this; we don't *have to* do this; we don't have to do *this*. All three are in play in resisting policies on climate and nature.

***We* don't have to do this**. It should be other people, or other countries. This is the well-known problem of collective action. Why should it be down to us? Emissions are heavily skewed by wealth and activity, so almost everyone can point so someone else with a bigger footprint. It should be people who have more money; or drive cars; or eat meat; or fly on holiday; or fly in private jets.

At a country level, this passing of responsibility tends to be a rich-country phenomenon. Figure 2.2 shows to what extent citizens in different countries agree that their country should do more in the fight against climate change. Citizens of developing countries generally have the strongest belief that their country should do more, with citizens of developed countries being the most reluctant. Ever since 1992 the United Nations has worked to the opposite principle: that developed countries should take the lead, with countries contributing according to their "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities".

For more on the tension between altruism and self-interest, see box on p24: *Altruism and self-interest – Learning from* Make Poverty History.

Figure 2.2. Readiness for my country to do more, by country income[16]



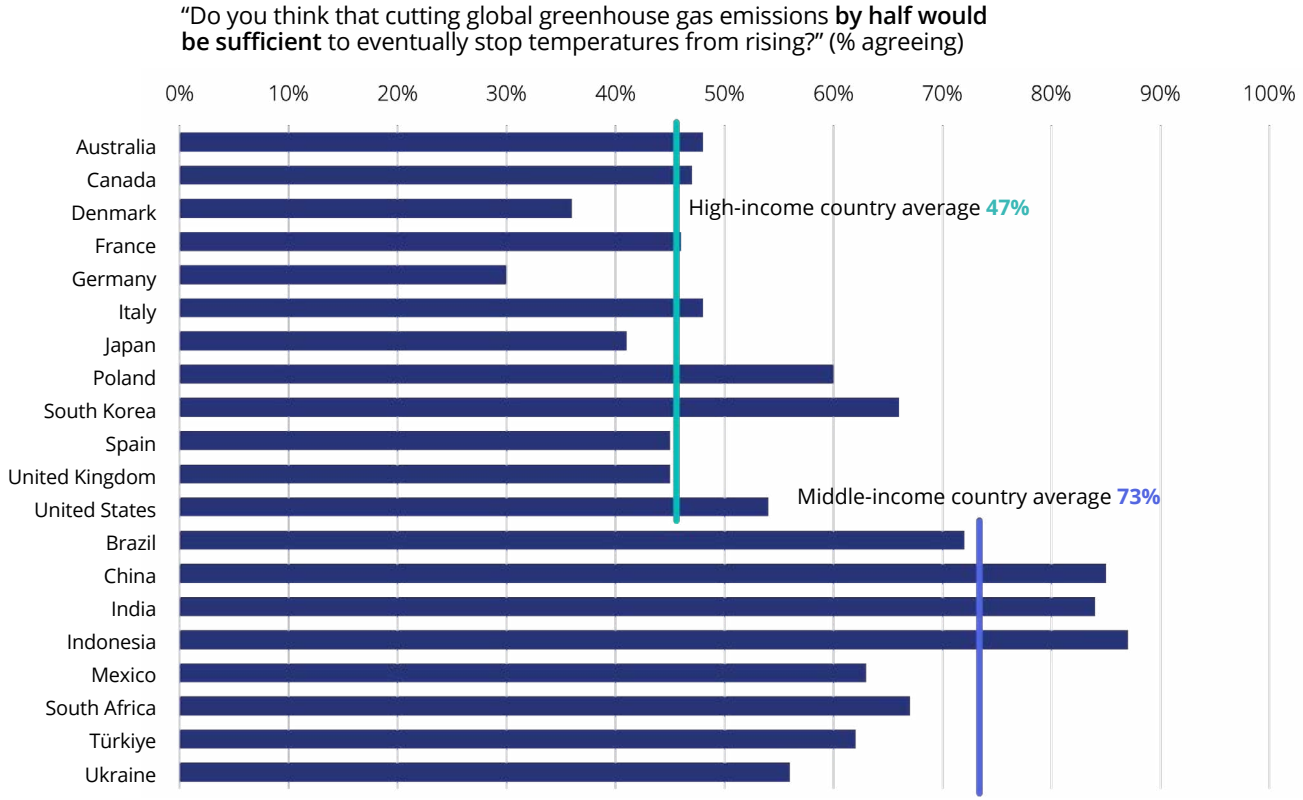
Sources: Ipsos, *People and climate change*; World Bank

We don't *have to* do this. Obligation is a high bar. With climate change in particular, it can be hard to feel the true severity of the problem and see what is at risk. 'Climate change is already happening', we are told. It is. But what we are experiencing is a 1.5˚C world, which is at the optimistic end of target outcomes, not the threat the world is seeking to avoid.

Many of the actions we are encouraged to take, particularly as individuals, suggest the need for incremental rather than radical action. The ways citizens think of to address climate change include recycling more, driving less, eating less meat. These incremental efforts do not add up to the systems changes needed to achieve net zero. So it is perhaps unsurprising that people underestimate what is required. Almost half of people in high-income countries, and three-quarters in middle-income countries, think that "cutting global greenhouse gas emissions by half would be sufficient to eventually stop temperatures from rising" (Figure 2.3).

Most people think that cutting emissions by half would be sufficient to stop temperatures from rising.

Figure 2.3. Proportion who think halving emissions would be enough[17]



Source: Dechezleprêtre et al., *Fighting climate change*

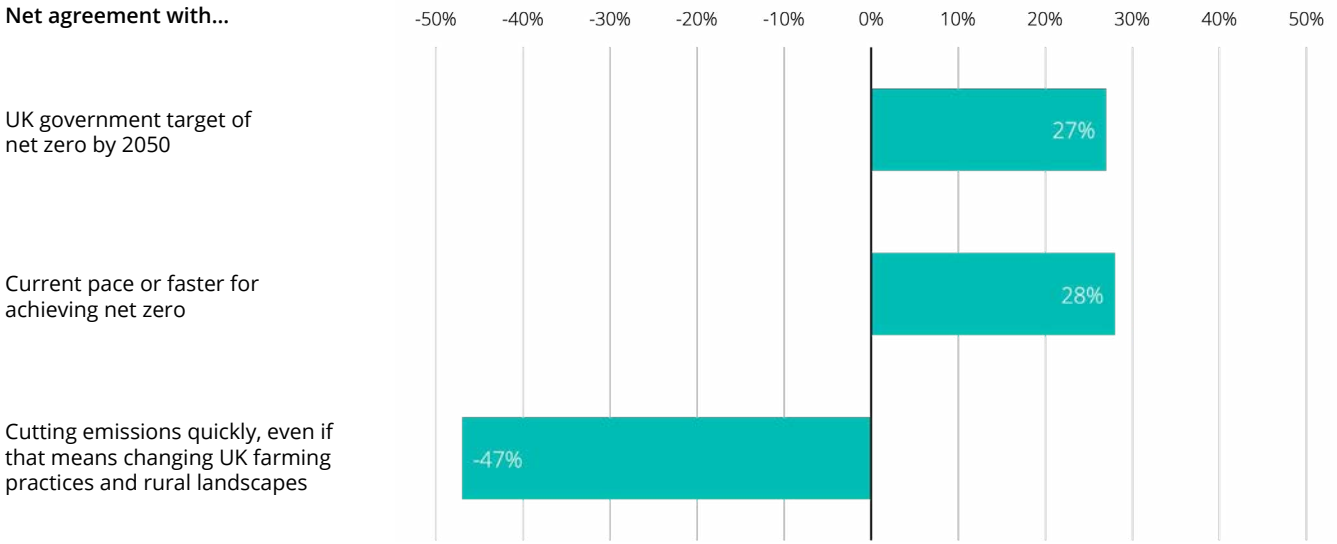
Obligation is also not straightforward because climate change is intergenerational. Our obligations to the unborn are real, but can be hard to defend and make salient from both an ethical and a practical perspective.[18]

We don't have to do *this*. There are always other ways available, so it is plausible to object to any particular approach while still wanting to solve the problem. 'Let's solve climate change, but not by taking away fossil fuels. Or putting up energy costs. Or changing what we eat. Or spoiling the countryside.'

In the UK, for example, there is strong net support for the government's target to reach net zero by 2050. And there is strong net support for going at our present pace or faster in order to achieve it. But other things matter to people's futures too. For example, far more people think that "it is important to protect UK farmers and rural landscapes, even if that means taking longer to cut carbon emissions", than that "it is important to cut carbon emissions quickly, even if that means changing UK farming practices and rural landscapes" (Figure 2.4).

Achieving consensus is hard, because different people have different domains they prefer to protect. Figure 2.5 shows how people in Germany who use different modes of transport respond to climate-related policies that affect different modes of transport. The findings are unsurprising, but illustrate the challenge. Car policies are particularly opposed by those who drive internal-combustion-engine (ICE) cars; public transport policies are particularly opposed by those who drive cars in general; policies on air travel are particularly opposed by those who fly. Everyone has at least one policy territory that they are relatively okay with, because it does not personally affect them.

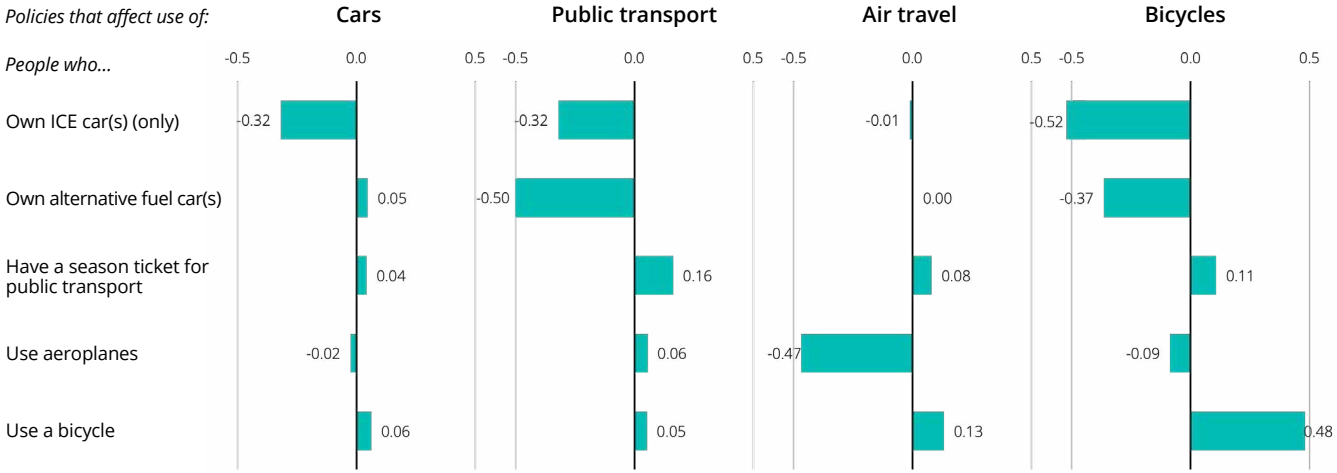
Figure 2.4. Impact of real-life trade-offs on support for net zero[19]



Source: More in Common, *Shattered Britain*

Figure 2.5. Support for transport policies among different transport users[20]

Impact of the use of different transport modes on support for policies that affect different transport modes (Germany)



Source: Habla et al., *Self-interest and support*

2. 'It threatens how we live.'

Loss aversion – wanting to protect what we have and care about – is the biggest motivator of climate concern and the desire for action. It is also why people feel so strongly about biodiversity, out of concern for the irrevocable loss of animal species. But loss aversion cuts both ways. Must we sacrifice our way of life in order to protect our way of life?

Some climate policies and environmental narratives seem to ask us to do so, in a case of 'it became necessary to destroy the town to save it'. We are asked to sacrifice:

- our standard of living: flying, driving, shopping, consuming
- our countryside (fewer cows and sheep; more solar, windmills, pylons) and farmers
- the diets at the heart of our traditions and cultures
- our freedom (bans, mandates, taxes).

This is not what citizens want or expect when they support the principle of climate action. Figure 2.6 shows how citizens in Germany, the UK and the US position themselves between contrasting viewpoints. There is a strong consensus for moving forward with technology and innovation, decoupling economic growth from environmental damage.

Climate policies can feel unfair, either to citizens themselves or to the people they care about. This sense of unfairness can also be a threat to how we live. People cite 'the well-off also changing their behaviour' as an important factor in themselves adopting a sustainable lifestyle – as important as affordability (Figure 2.7 Left).

And while the idea of making polluters pay can sound fair and attractive, it is neither if it becomes a let-out for the rich and powerful, who can simply 'pay to pollute'. In general people dislike bans as policy, because of the restriction on their freedom. But they prefer a ban, which at least applies equally to all, to a hefty financial penalty which they see as an effective ban for them, but a licence for the rich (Figure 2.7 Right).

Fairness and justice are multidimensional and hard to arbitrate objectively and morally.[21] The focus here is on citizens' perceptions of fairness and justice that affect their support for different policies. As Chapter 3 will show (Figure 3.2), this subjective concern for fairness is focused within citizens' own community and country. It does not extend globally.

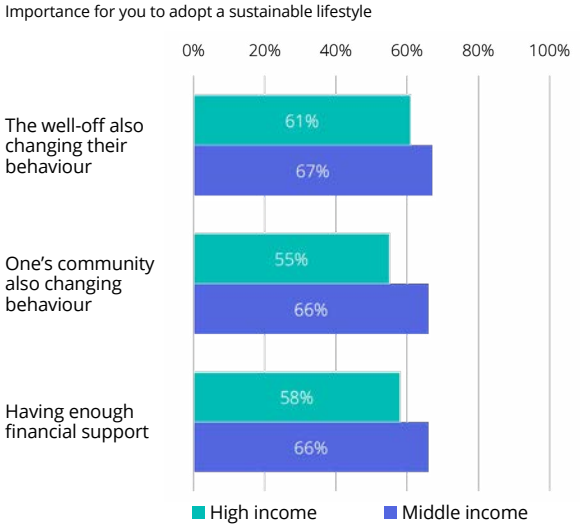
Figure 2.6. Position of the population between contrasting viewpoints[22]

It's only sustainable when everyone can afford it.

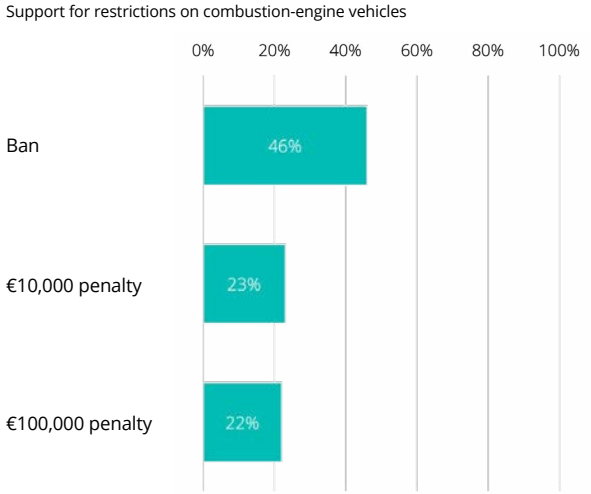
Karen Pflug
(Chief Sustainability Officer, Ingka Group)

Figure 2.7. Importance of the rich contributing to the effort[23]

The well-off joining in matters more than the community joining in, and as much as affordability



While people dislike bans, financial penalties that are effectively bans to them, but let-outs for the rich, are worse



Source: Dechezleprêtre et al., *Fighting climate change*

3. 'It won't work.'

Along with 'we don't have to do this' and 'it threatens how we live', the third big barrier is the belief that 'it won't work'. People want to back winners, and climate action does not feel like a winner. What many people see is that it is not working; people will not support it; and it is a futile effort.

It is not working. We appear to be making a relentless effort with nothing to show for it. In 2015, the world agreed in Paris that we need to halve global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Ten years on – with two-thirds of that time used up – global emissions are still rising. But this global failure is hiding what *is* being achieved, in individual countries or sectors.

In the UK, only 26 per cent of people agree that "Britain's policies to tackle climate change have made a meaningful difference to reducing Britain's emissions"; 41 per cent disagree. And yet the reality is that the UK has already reduced its territorial emissions by half (Figure 2.8).

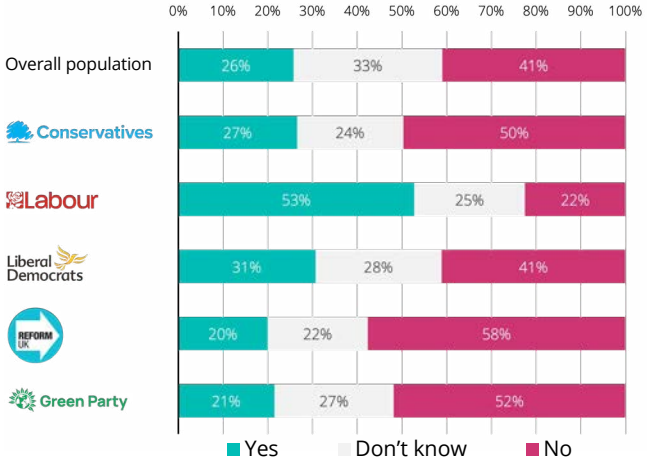
People will not support it. People generally think other people are less supportive of climate action than they themselves are – a phenomenon known as 'pluralistic ignorance'. Figure 2.9 illustrates this effect with a question of whether people would be willing to contribute 1 per cent of their income to tackle climate change. Consistently across countries (each dot on the chart represents a country), the proportion of people saying that they themselves are willing to do this is consistently greater than people's estimate of the proportion of the population who are willing. In Germany, for example, 68 per cent of people say they are willing themselves, but on average people think that only 40 per cent of other people are willing.

This research is from the same paper that finds 89 per cent of people globally say their government should do more, quoted in Chapter 1. One interpretation of the pluralistic ignorance is that people underestimate other people's support, and if we only recognised it, we would be more likely to follow through on support ourselves. A journalistic project, *The 89 Percent Project*, seeks to publicise the level of self-stated support, so that the 89 per cent "know that they are the global majority".[24]

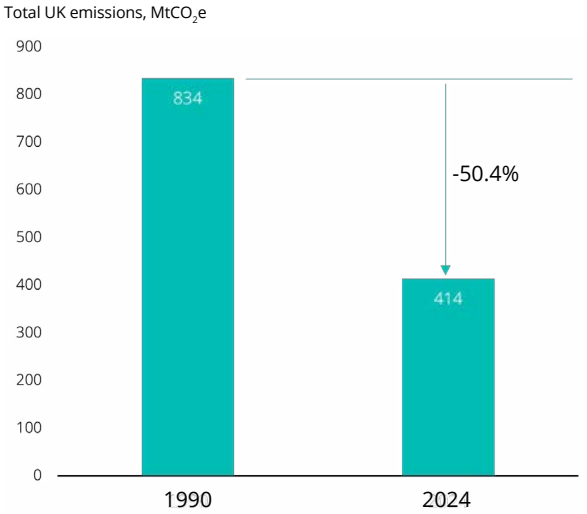
An alternative interpretation is that people are in fact demonstrating 'pluralistic insight'. Their estimates of other people's support are in fact more realistic than their estimates of their own. Their perceptions are informed by what they see other people do in reality, which is substantially less than what people say in surveys. The numbers on *both* axes of Figure 2.9 are vastly higher than anything achievable in practice.

Figure 2.8. Perception and reality of the UK's emissions reduction[25]

Citizens' perspective:
There is net disagreement that Britain's policies to tackle climate change have made a meaningful difference to reducing Britain's emissions

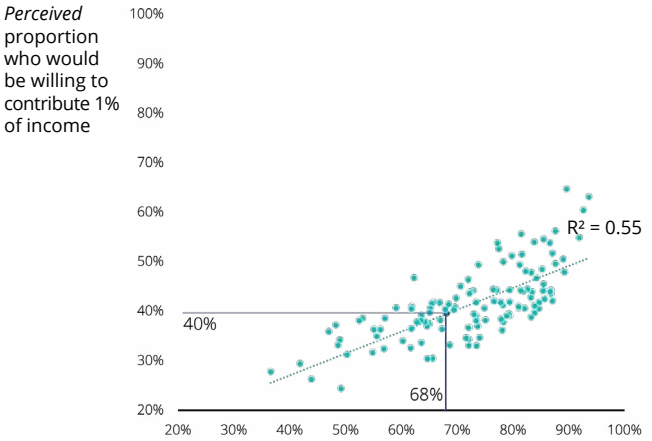


Actual numbers:
Britain's emissions have already reduced by half



Sources: More in Common, *Shattered Britain*; Burnett et al., *The UK's plans and progress*

Figure 2.9. Perceptions of others' vs. own willingness[26]



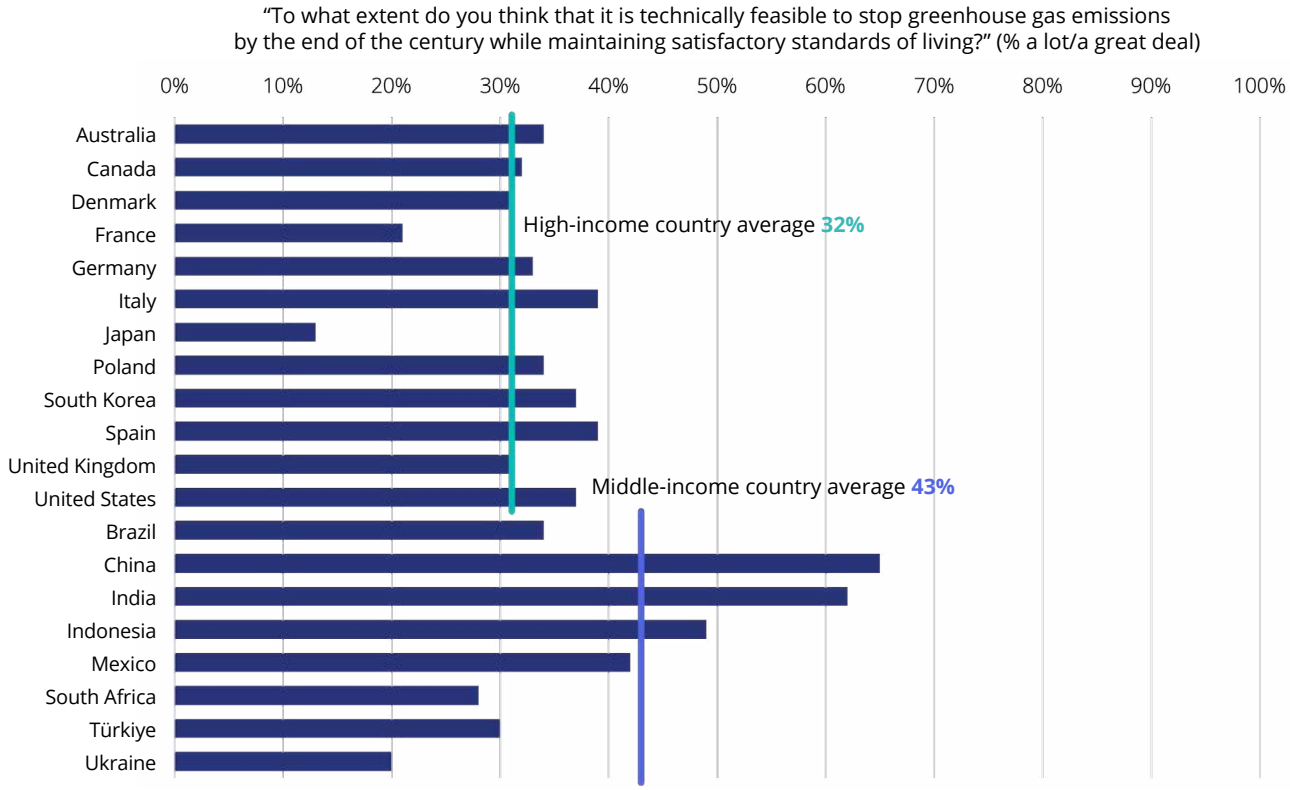
Proportion of a country's population saying they *themselves* are willing to contribute 1% of income to tackle climate change

Adapted from Andre et al., *Globally representative evidence*

It is a futile effort. Figure 2.1 showed that a big factor explaining the level of support a policy gets is whether people think it will work. A factor dragging down the general support for climate policies is that people doubt whether the overall effort can be effective. Figure 2.10 shows the proportion of people who believe that "it is technically feasible to stop greenhouse gas emissions by the end of the century while maintaining satisfactory standards of living". In middle-income countries that proportion is only an average of 43 per cent, and in high-income countries only 32 per cent.

A minority believe it is technically feasible to stop emissions while maintaining satisfactory standards of living.

Figure 2.10. Proportion believing we can practically stop emissions[27]



Source: Dechezleprêtre et al., *Fighting climate change*

Altruism and self-interest – Learning from Make Poverty History

Make Poverty History, the campaign built around the 2005 Live 8 concerts, is a helpful analogy that illustrates the power, limitations and nuances of altruism and self-interest as motivators.

As a carefully timed, one-off tactic, *Make Poverty History* was highly successful, building the popular support for large-scale ($100 billion) debt write-offs at the G8 meeting in 2005. It drove a measured increase in the UK population's concern about global poverty at the critical moment.

Yet research into public perceptions published the following year concluded that while *Make Poverty History* "achieved near-total public awareness", "few people understood what it was or knew anything about the issues it was campaigning on". It "had minimal impact on public perceptions of global poverty, and by 2006 the small positive changes were beginning to slip back again".[28]

Statistical analysis of a survey by the UK's then Department for International Development (DfID) shows that:

- Concern about poverty in developing countries is primarily driven by altruism (it is seen as a moral issue), and only marginally by belief that poverty in these countries affects me or my country.
- A government attempt to position global poverty reduction as a matter of self-interest for the UK was ineffective: seeing developing-country poverty as a matter of self-interest is *inversely* correlated with concern about poverty in those countries.[29]

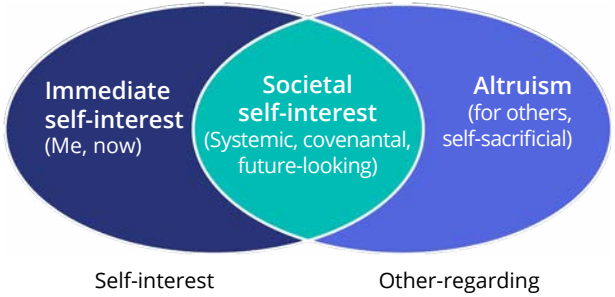
These research findings illustrate a fundamental dilemma that applies also to climate and nature. If you frame the issue in terms of altruism, then for many people the *problem* has little resonance. If instead you try to frame the issue in terms of immediate self-interest, then the *solution* has no resonance, because other policy agendas tackle the problem more intuitively.

For example, the DfID survey tested the argument that reducing developing-country poverty is in the self-interest of people in the UK because developing-country poverty drives immigration and refugees. But respondents who associated developing-country poverty with immigration and refugees in the UK were *less* concerned than others about the poverty. The argument the survey tested was logical: by ending poverty, we would remove a root cause of the immigration problem. But for people looking at the issue through this self-interested immigration lens, ending developing-country poverty seems a remote and indirect way to solve the immigration problem.

The research also explored other ways in which the UK can be affected by developing-country poverty, which turn out to be associated with *higher* levels of concern about poverty; these include "global effects"; "trade"; "by leading to conflict and war"; "by damaging the earth's environment". Respondents who selected these ways that they can be affected tended to be those *more* concerned about poverty. These issues are examples of *societal self-interest*.

A binary distinction between self-interest and other-regarding is therefore too simplistic. It hides an important space in the middle (Figure 2.11). The considerations in this space are not altruistic, because the benefits are shared, with no requirement for self-sacrifice; but nor are they an immediate self-interest limited to me and now. Instead, they are systemic, future-looking and covenantal: there is mutual commitment to, and interest in, a common outcome. The opportunity of societal self-interest for climate and nature is explored in Chapter 4.

Figure 2.11. Between immediate self-interest and altruism



3.

‘We do have to do this’
Why rebuttal is not working

> *There is a fine line between urgency and hopelessness. A sense of urgency is important, so long as it sparks action rather than hopelessness.*
>
> **Aron Cramer (President and CEO, BSR)**

Losing arguments

Knowing that a strong majority of people do care about climate change, it is tempting to approach the barriers blocking their support by simply rebutting each one:

We don’t have to do this? Yes, we *do* have to do this.

It threatens how we live? But the status quo is not an option, and acting is *less worse* than if we do not.

It won’t work? It *must* work. We have no choice but to make it work.

These rebuttal arguments are frequently made, but they are not winning.

The analysis of the barriers in the previous chapter shows why these arguments are quite so easy to oppose. Even where there is consensus about the problem, that does not mean there is consensus about the solution. There are legitimate choices to be made, each placing burdens on different groups of people.

Climate and other science say we *have* to act at scale and speed to live within our planetary boundaries. Together as a species, we *do* have to act on climate and nature loss in order to avoid a catastrophic future; doing so *is* much less worse, economically as well as socially, than if we do not; and we *do* need to make it work. But this world-scale and holistic argument is less convincing at the scale of specific people and places, and specific policies.

Raising the profile of climate change and nature loss can boost the salience and immediacy of these issues when people make decisions (as citizens, consumers or employees). But as long as the focus is on today, these issues will be at a disadvantage in competition with the pressures of daily life.

It is about the future

Supporting climate mitigation or adaptation makes sense if, and only if, you are concerned about the future.

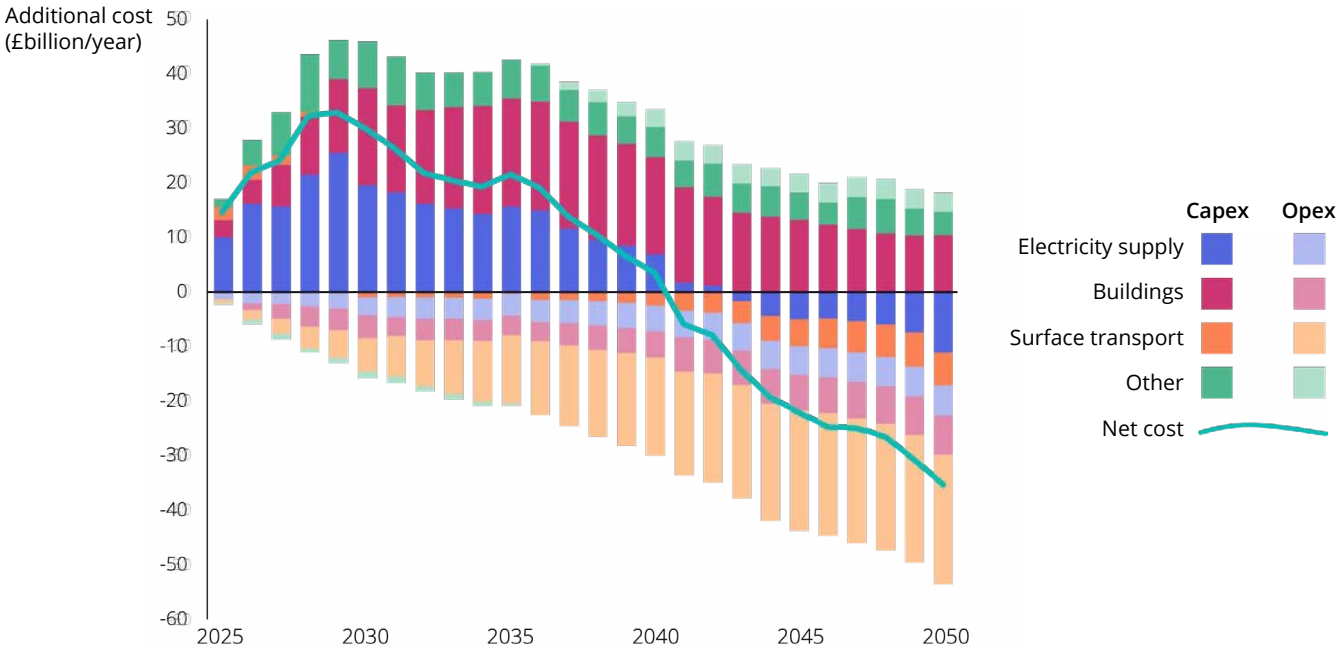
The benefits that climate action is seeking to bring about happen in the future. For most people, the impact of climate change *today* is a minor threat, relative to what we are trying to prevent, and relative to other concerns in their daily lives. But also, actions today do not influence the climate today. Even if we were to switch globally today to a lower-emission pathway, with sustained reduction in carbon emissions, the effect on global temperatures would become apparent only in 20–30 years.[30]

The financial picture, too, requires a future perspective. Over time, the capital investment in climate mitigation will be repaid, even independent of its climate impact, through savings in operating cost. Figure 3.1 shows a projection of the costs and savings for the UK, with the net cost turning negative after 2040. But the investment is a financial burden in the short and medium term.

'Conservation' is too retrospective. Sustainable development has left the concept of a better future quite dormant.

Adam Carrel (Partner, Climate Change and Sustainability Services, EY)

Figure 3.1. Additional costs in UK Balanced Pathway[31]



Source: Climate Change Committee, *The seventh carbon budget*

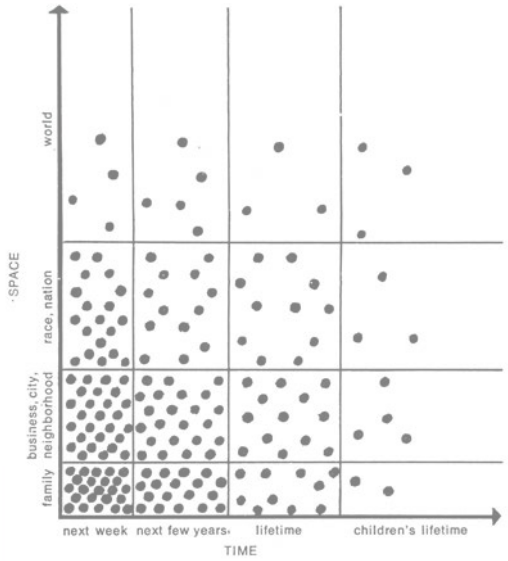
Evolutionary pressures have given us a tendency to prioritise the here and now.[32] The influential 1972 environmental publication *The Limits to Growth* starts with an imagined matrix of human concerns plotted over space and time (Figure 3.2 Left), and asserts that "[t]he majority of the world's people are concerned with matters that affect only friends or family over a short period of time. Others look farther ahead in time or over a larger area—a city of a nation. Only a very few people have a global perspective that extends far into the future... In general the larger the space and the longer the time associated with a problem, the smaller the number of people who are actually concerned with its solution."[33]

Figure 3.2 Right attempts to quantify this distribution, by asking citizens proxy questions to position themselves on the two axes. The figure shows the average positions of people who support different political parties, in Germany, the UK and the US. It reveals an asymmetry between space and time: relatively few people sit in the top half of this matrix, as *The Limits to Growth* hypothesised; but proportionately more sit on the right. In keeping with their societal self-interest, people are not so concerned about the foreign, but they *are* concerned about the future.

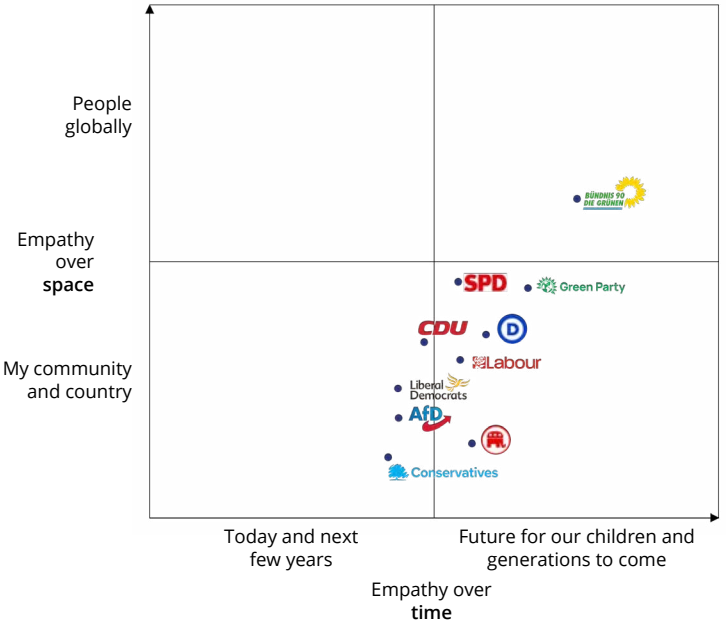
The critical issue affecting our support for climate- and nature-related policies is less about *whether* we think about the future, and more about *how* we think about the future.

Figure 3.2. Empathy people feel over space and time[34]

Human perspectives from The Limits to Growth



Thinking about your reaction when you hear about a new government policy. Which impact matters more to you, in general?



Source: Meadows et al., *The limits to growth*

Rich-country despondency

In the world today, the richer a country is, the more despondent its people tend to feel about the future. In G7 countries, most people believe the world will be worse for their children – a view far less common in emerging economies. Yet paradoxically they are also less open to change (Figure 3.3).

This combination is dispiriting: we feel the world will worsen, yet we resist the actions needed to improve it.

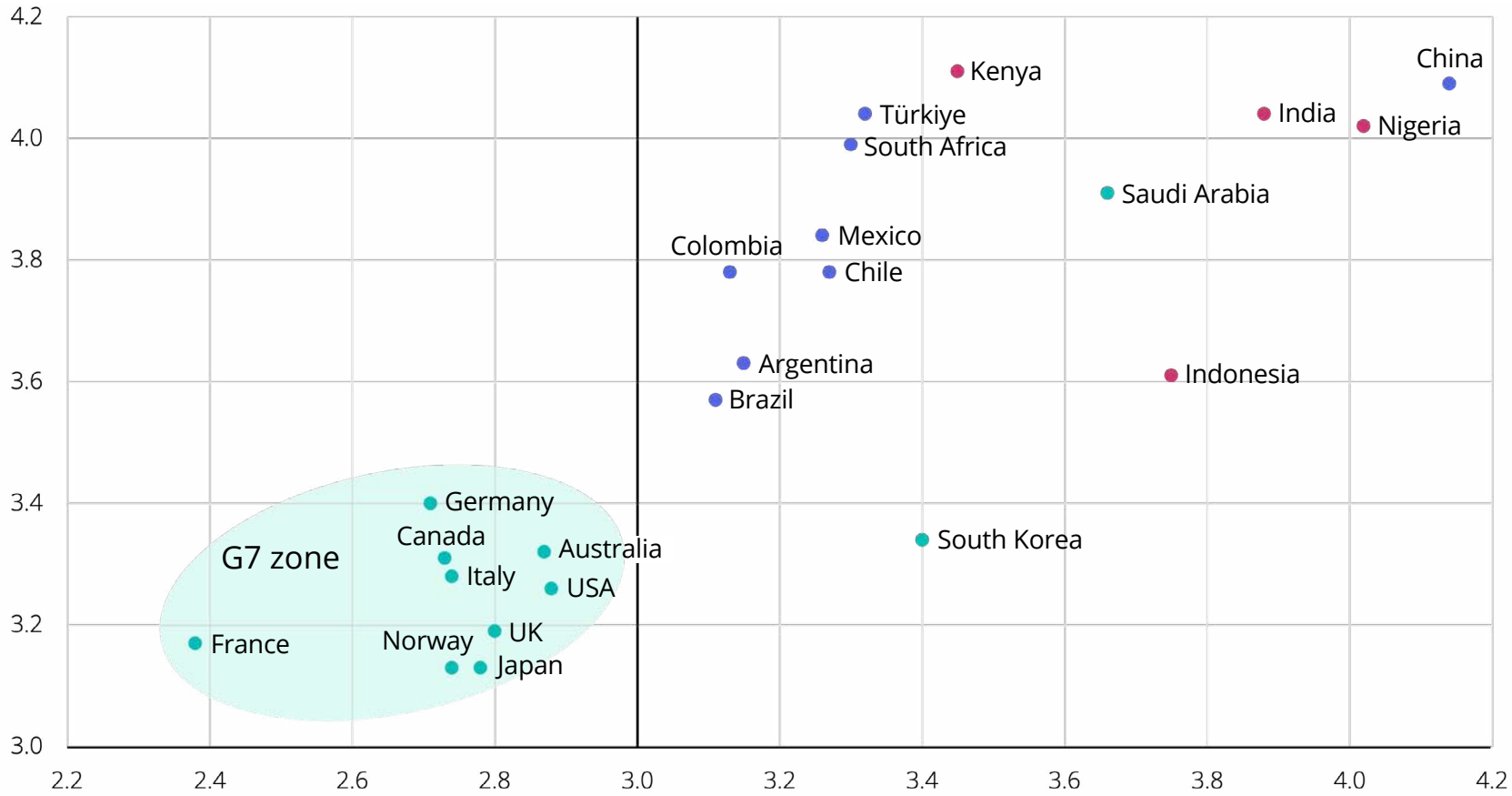
When societies are this pessimistic, we live for today and do not invest in tomorrow. We borrow from the future, regardless of whether we will be able to repay. We resist change, to protect ourselves from it. We extract and pollute without regard for it. We care about the future, but we do not attend to it.

Overcoming this despondency is critical for economic growth in rich countries. Risk-taking, innovation and investment all require belief in the future and openness to change. Without this, how do we respond to the transformational innovations of artificial intelligence, quantum computing and bio-digital convergence? The self-interest of business and mainstream political leaders in rebuilding citizens' belief in the future is clear.

The despondency is driven not only by absolute wealth (the primary driver of openness), but also by a slowdown in long-term economic growth. Because it is a long-term (20+ year) effect, the mindset shift must come first to rekindle growth, and not the other way around. We need a new, credible story of our future.

Figure 3.3. Optimism and openness about the future by country[35]

Openness
Mean agreement that 'Change is always good and a sign of progress, even if it's not what I was hoping for'.
(1–5 scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)



Country group (GDP/capita):
- High income (> $30k)
- Middle income ($5k-30k)
- Low income (< $5k)

Optimism
Mean agreement that 'The world will be a better place for our children than it was for me'.
(1–5 scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

It's ineffective just to do the positive, and dangerous just to do the negative.

Tom Brookes (CEO, Meliore Foundation)

From conservation mindset to transition mindset

The rich-country despondency reinforces the framing of climate action as a *conservation* problem. Pessimism about the future and resistance to change fit well with restricting our activities and hunkering down, as a way to protect what we have. To encourage these behaviours, communicating the threat of climate change can make the issue more salient, and help it to stand up to the more immediate concerns in people's lives that it must compete with.

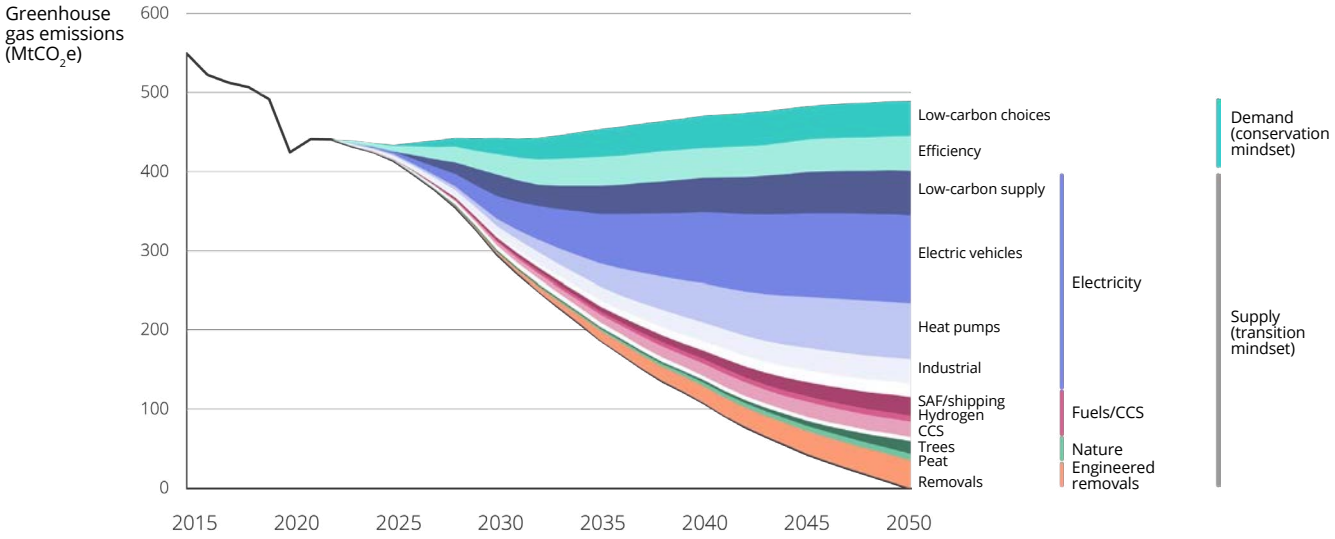
But the emotional response to threat is fear, reinforcing avoidant behaviours (see box on p30: *Human responses to fear and hope*).

The consensus view around the most ambitious governments, businesses and finance institutions seeking to accelerate climate action is that it is a *transition* problem: it needs investment in a new economy and the creation of new markets.[36]

For example, the UK's national transition plan illustrates the limited role of citizens' conservation actions (reducing demand) relative to economic transition actions (substituting supply). Figure 3.4 shows the sources of abatement of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK's Balanced Pathway. To achieve net zero by 2050 the UK needs to avoid 500 megatons per year of carbon emissions relative to current projections. On this Pathway, a small minority of that total – 18 per cent, less than 100 megatons – will come from people reducing demand, by making low carbon choices or efficiency savings. The overwhelming majority – 82 per cent – will come from substituting supply, adopting new practices and technologies to do what we do.

Executing this transition needs proactive behaviours and a goal-seeking mindset. And these in turn come from positive emotions such as hope; not blind hope or naïve optimism, but a grounded conviction that the world can be better. Today in the G7 people are missing that conviction.

Figure 3.4. Sources of abatement in the UK's Balanced Pathway[37]



Note: SAF = Sustainable aviation fuel, CCS = Carbon capture and storage

Source: Climate Change Committee, *The seventh carbon budget*

Human responses to fear and hope

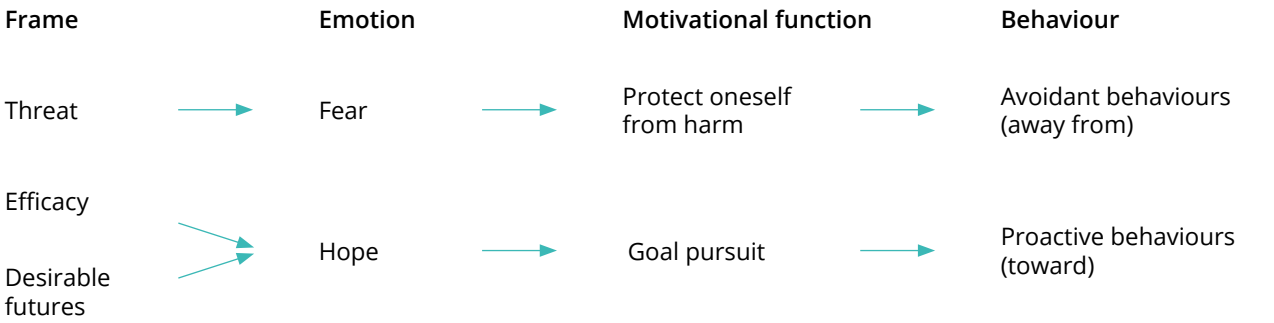
To persuade people that 'we have to do this' would mean dialling up the fear that people feel about climate change. Currently the threat feels distant and theoretical. Getting people to feel the extent of the climate threat can indeed grow people's level of worry about climate change and their desire for government action – unsurprisingly, since fear of loss is what motivates worry about climate change, and loss aversion is a recognised human bias.

The problem with relying *only* on fear is in how people react to their increased level of worry (Figure 3.5). Focusing on the threat of climate change will increase people's fear, which drives people to protect themselves from harm, leading to avoidant behaviours. In the case of climate change, the fear will include a degree of anxiety, because for most people the danger is uncertain and in the future, rather than imminent, physical harm. How, then, to protect oneself from harm? When the threat is both existential and uncertain, "[t]here is, in effect no concrete harm to avoid or flee… It is an action tendency without a concrete goal… an effort to get away without anything specific to get away from."[38] Fear in this context can be disabling. We react by focusing on what has upset us, rather than on doing things.

Fear is also hard to sustain. This is the challenge of *slow violence*: "calamities that are slow and long lasting, calamities that patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans."[39]

In the absence of imminent, physical harm, fear is an abstract belief, which needs to be activated to be effective. In daily life, "beliefs are rarely activated at the point of consumption or other decisions. We would have to reconcile our existential concerns with our daily decisions, which is an unrealistic ask."[40]

Figure 3.5. Behaviours resulting from fear and hope[41]



Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1) showed that a greater level of fear about the threat ("Worries about the consequences of climate change") is not strongly correlated with support for climate-related policies. But a greater belief in the efficacy of a solution ("Believes policies would reduce GHG emissions") is. Focusing on efficacy increases people's hope, which drives people to pursue goals, leading to proactive behaviours.

The two are not in competition: they can work in combination. Priming people about the threat, prior to promoting a solution, is a proven approach, "sequencing emotional experiences to enhance persuasive effect".[42]

But hope is not limited to negative or threatening conditions. Hope, according to the 'standard account', requires desire for an outcome together with uncertainty about that outcome happening.[43] Arguably, hope may also involve further factors to bring about the possibility of the outcome, through mental imaging, resolve, agency or pathways.[44] The definition does not include negative conditions.

Much of the attention on hope with respect to climate change has focused on efficacy of solutions: the hope that the threat can be ameliorated. But hope can come from the desire to realise uncertain but positive futures that are not just 'least worst' compared with a feared threat, but better relative to today. And given the difficulty that people have in internalising the threat of climate change, this broader hope may be more accessible.

4.

‘We want to do this’
Pivoting to an aspirational future

> *People have an instinct to care about the future. When you have 1:1 conversations with people to get to what they really care about, this brings out an interest in the future*

Richard Springer (Rector, St George-in-the-East)

From burden to desire

To recap: despite widespread concern about climate change and nature loss, it is hard to persuade people that they *have* to support any given policy or strategy – at least at the level and scale needed.

Even if the *problem* is made salient, that does not assure support for a specific *solution*. Resistance comes from the prioritisation of more immediately felt issues in people’s daily lives; the availability of alternative solutions that shift the burden elsewhere; and a protective mindset in rich countries that resists change. To make it harder, these three factors get purposefully amplified: for political and business interests seeking to maintain the status quo, there is ample material to work with. ‘We *do* have to do this’ is not winning.

But what if we *want* to do this? What if there is a future that we aspire to, that we want to see brought about? What if the policies and strategies asking for my support are not least-worst options that we should responsibly tolerate, but are openings to a better way of life that I want to be a part of? Not centred on solving the problems of climate change and nature loss, but on better solutions for how we feed ourselves, how we travel, or what we want our cities or countryside to be?

It is odd *not* to have this aspiration. For centuries, human progress – economic growth and increased energy use creating better health, wealth, security and opportunity – has been the way of things. In most of the world, citizens still believe in this. In the G7, they increasingly do not.

Restoring human progress

Our opportunity, then, is to *restore human progress* as citizens’ aspiration and expectation for our societies, and not see it as something we have left behind. We need it for tackling climate change, but we also need it for our societal wellbeing and for ongoing economic growth at a time of intense disruption. The self-interest of business and mainstream political leaders in rebuilding citizens’ belief in the future and restoring human progress is clear.

Restoring human progress sounds a tall order. It is. But it is also reassuringly familiar, not disarmingly new. In order to move forward, we need to reconnect with beliefs we have held before.

In fact, our reluctance is familiar, as well as the solution:

> [T]hough in every age everybody knows that up to his own time progressive improvement has been taking place, nobody seems to reckon on any improvement during the next generation. We cannot absolutely prove that those are in error who tell us that society has reached a turning point, that we have seen our best days. But so said all who came before us, and with just as much apparent reason… On what principle is it that, when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us?[45]

So wrote the British historian and politician Thomas Macaulay two centuries ago, when citizens were struggling with the infamous working conditions in the mines and mills of the Industrial Revolution and the country's indebtedness after the Napoleonic Wars.

To quote Macaulay's observation is not to deny planetary boundaries or bet on techno-optimism. But it is to remember that popular despondency about the future at a time of disruption and transition may be misplaced and can be overcome.

As citizens, if we are to *want* to support climate policies, in the societal self-interest of restoring human progress, we need to feel the benefits in our own shared futures. Three complementary approaches can help us to do that (Table 4.1):

- *delivering meaningful gains*, through societal improvements we can aspire to and relate to
- *playing to national strengths*, to build pride and prosperity
- *believing in better*, so we feel part of something we want to support and belong to.

Table 4.1. Principles for *restoring human progress*

Delivering meaningful gains	Playing to national strengths	Believing in better
Involving citizens in shaping the future of sectors they care about, solving for climate and nature within the mix of issues that reflect societal self-interest	Choosing where each country can thrive, lead and win, building on distinct natural and economic strengths and ambitions	Recognising and celebrating achievements and feeling part of something bigger, embracing the journey to a better future

Delivering meaningful gains

How can actions on climate and nature lead towards an aspirational future, when people fear that these actions threaten how they live? To overcome this concern, and embrace a transition mindset, people must see meaningful gains that will both protect and *enhance* how they live. People need inspiring visions and tangible goals that they relate to, find worth striving for and will be proud to see achieved.

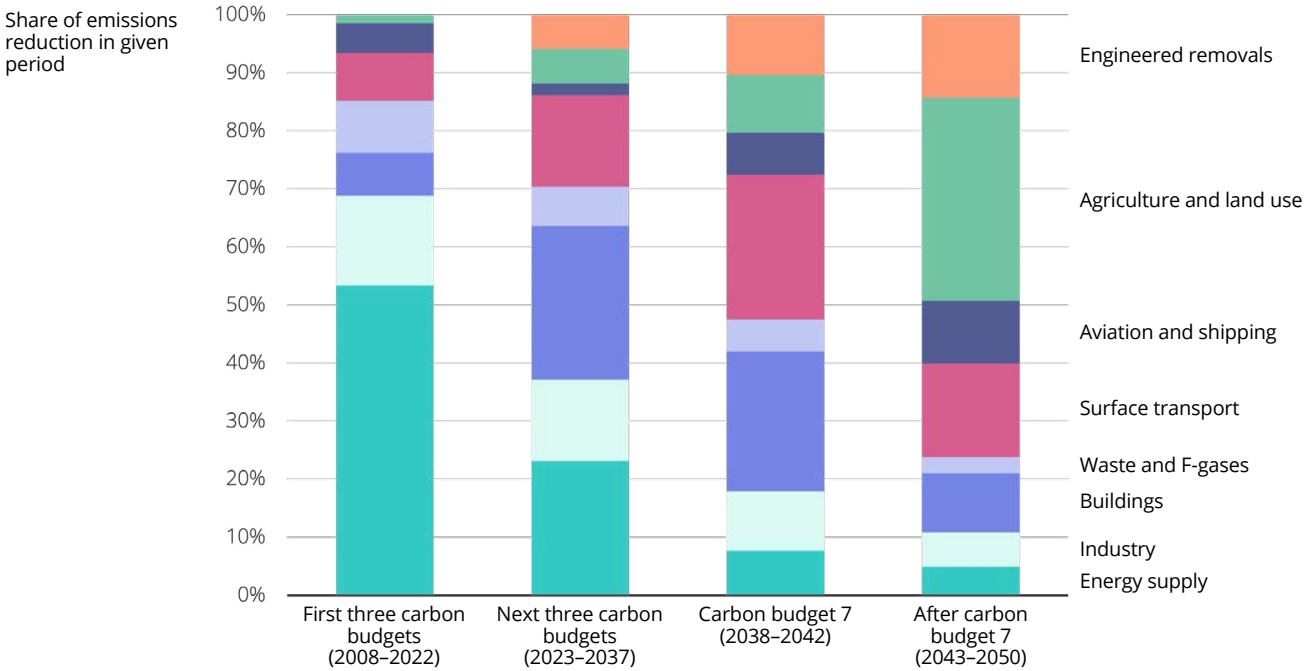
Such visions generally will not centre on climate and nature, but will incorporate climate and nature in solutions for sectors that matter to people, alongside other universal demands that each sector needs to solve for: security, affordability, freedom, culture, etc.

Energy dominates today, but our approach needs to work with different sectors over time. Figure 4.1 shows how the emissions reduction planned in the UK is distributed across sectors, and how this distribution evolves. So far, the effort has been focused mainly on changing the country's energy supply, with industry also important. Now, it is more about buildings and surface transport. Later on, the effort will turn to agriculture, land use and engineered removals.

The availability of clean energy with renewables and nuclear is effectively unlimited, so it is wrong to restrict or ration it. There is no reason why people (or businesses) should not be able to use as much clean energy as they like if they are willing to pay for it.

Mark Lynas (Head of Policy, WePlanet)

Figure 4.1. Evolving distribution of the UK's emissions reduction[46]



Source: Climate Change Committee, *The seventh carbon budget*

What the UK chart illustrates is that while climate change and nature loss are the problems, they are not solved by 'climate policies'. They are solved by sector policies: energy policies, industrial policies, transport policies, etc. And these policies are multi-dimensional.

In the energy sector, the World Energy Council has long recognised the 'energy trilemma': the challenge countries have in achieving energy *security*, *affordability* (or more recently *equity*), and environmental *sustainability* at the same time.[47] Other sectors face the same tensions, or even more. In food and agriculture, for example, people care about food security, affordability, emissions reduction, climate adaptation, nutritional health and choice, countryside protection and enhancement, and sustainable livelihoods for farmers. There are synergies as well as trade-offs. The shift from extraction to circularity, for example, can be a shift from constraint to abundance.

Solving for sectors, not just for climate and nature, guides us to approaches that will stand up to challenge from other interests, because those interests are built into the solution. It also shifts a problem-solving, damage-limitation frame to a frame of hope, ambition and progress. With all the opportunities and imperatives of technology innovation, demographic shifts and generational priorities, what do we want for the future of our cities, countryside, buildings or travel?

These are more engaging issues to involve citizens in than how we share the burden of emission reductions. Inspiration is never going to come from a financial number or a carbon number: growth in gross domestic product (GDP) and reduction in carbon emissions are not goals people can feel. Can we get more excited about shaping the future of sectors that can enhance our daily lives?

Playing to national strengths

The goal of restoring human progress is universal, but not uniform. Over a generation, citizens of G7 countries have seen their collective share of world GDP fall by a third, from two-thirds to less than half. That is still a big share, but the trend hurts; populism is rising in part because G7 citizens are fed up with losing. To build citizens' confidence in and excitement about the future, leaders need to focus on where their countries can thrive, lead, and, potentially, win.

This is what China has been doing so effectively in solar, wind, batteries and electric vehicles, building not only on their natural endowment of rare-earth minerals but also their unmatched manufacturing and learning curves. It is what Germany could be doing in industrial electrification, heavy transport and non-fossil chemicals; or France in nuclear energy and sustainable aviation; or Japan in high-efficiency and precision technologies. Every country has familiar strengths to build on.

Success is not guaranteed, but playing to national strengths allows different countries to contribute effectively in ways that work best for them, and crucially this is a narrative frame that grounds climate action in a relatable vision for citizens. It helps the shift from problem solving and damage limitation to opportunity, choice and ambition.

The uniform rituals of emissions metrics, target setting and disclosures can feel formulaic, even passive. By contrast, playing to national strengths demands more active choices and will lead to more diverse approaches, as countries have different strengths to draw on. Table 4.2 speculates on some relevant strengths for each of the G20 nations. These are presented not as complete or as substantiated recommendations, but to illustrate the diversity of opportunity. Collectively, these nations represent 77 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.[48]

> *"It's about smart modern living, not sacrifice.*
>
> **Karen Pflug, (Chief Sustainability Officer, Ingka Group)**

Table 4.2. Illustrative strengths for different nations to draw on

Country	Theme	Illustrative strengths	Illustrative applications
Canada	Green resource superpower	Natural resource base; ESG credibility	Critical minerals; hydro-based clean metals; forest bio-materials and mass timber; biodiversity and nature credits
France	Nuclear and green aviation powerhouse	State capacity, nuclear expertise, transport leadership, Airbus	Large and small nuclear reactors; high-speed rail; hydrogen-compatible aircraft; SAF ecosystem
Germany	Industrial electrification champion	World-class engineering and industrial networks	High-efficiency heat pumps, industrial-process electrification kits, EV/heavy-vehicle platforms, power electronics
Italy	Circular design and retrofit leader	Design/ manufacturing knowhow and SME flexibility	Circular materials, design-for-reuse; building-retrofit systems; geothermal heating; premium agri-food traceability
Japan	Efficiency and technology precision	Precision engineering and reliability	Solid-state batteries; robotics and automation; high-efficiency appliances; desalination and water treatment; disaster-resilient infrastructure exports
United Kingdom	Finance and infrastructure transition hub	Deep capital markets; London's regulatory influence and services brand; North Sea engineering	Climate finance and risk markets, audit, insurance, and regulatory influence; floating offshore wind; CCS industrial clusters; clean grid for data centres etc.
United States	Frontier technology and clean-industry acceleration	Unmatched venture capital; software ecosystem; deep energy-innovation capacity	Advanced nuclear; advanced semiconductors and power electronics; grid-scale software and AI; carbon management
Argentina	Low carbon food	Land endowment	Regenerative beef/dairy with traceability; high-yield climate-resilient grains
Australia	Green resource superpower	Ore endowment, strength in renewables, maritime scale and Asia position	Green steel, aluminium, lithium, nickel, green ammonia/SAF, CCS
Brazil	Tropical bioeconomy	Biomass, biodiversity, market scale	Deforestation-free agriculture, advanced biofuels, nature credits
China	Scale leadership in green tech	Unmatched manufacturing and learning curves; critical minerals	Next-generation solar, batteries, EVs, grid gear, heat pumps, nuclear
India	Affordable electrification	Demand scale and cost engineering	Grid-connected solar, wind and storage; low-cost EV; electronics/power gear
Indonesia	Battery supply chain	Resource endowment and Asian OEM access	Nickel/cobalt value chain; battery components; battery and EV assembly
Mexico	North American clean-industry near-shoring	Cost-competitive manufacturing close to US	EV and components; appliances/heat-pumps; power electronics; solar module assembly; grid equipment
Saudi Arabia	Green molecules and materials hub	Cheap solar, capital and industrial base	Green/blue hydrogen and ammonia; low carbon steel/aluminium; CCS clusters; solar + storage at scale
South Africa	Grid and industrial revival	Resource endowment and urgent power need	Transmission/generation rebuild; rooftop commercial/industrial solar + storage; green hydrogen/ammonia
South Korea	Advanced electrification	Scale manufacturing and quality	Batteries, power semiconductors, appliance efficiency, offshore wind components, ship decarbonisation
Türkiye	Near-Europe clean manufacturing	Cost-competitive manufacturing close to EU	Heat pumps and HVAC; white goods; EV components; onshore wind/solar components; grid equipment

Note: CCS (Carbon capture and storage), SME (Small and medium-sized enterprise), OEM (Original equipment manufacturer), EV (Electric vehicle), HVAC (Heating, ventilation and air conditioning), SAF (Sustainable aviation fuel)

> *There are many people who are climate-sympathetic who are really patriotic.*
>
> **Rupert Read (Co-Director, Climate Majority Project)**

> *Any meaningful approach must be based on inviting participation, and start with celebrating and respecting what people all over the country are already doing.*
>
> **Jon Alexander (author of *Citizens*)**

Believing in better

Once there are goals that people want to achieve, people need to feel the progress that we are making towards those goals. Today, many people share a sense that we are not making progress. GDP growth is historically low in most G7 countries, and the world is failing to meet its climate targets in a big way.

These widely broadcast headline statistics hide real progress. Diane Coyle has shown how the GDP metric misses out free digital services (Google search, Facebook, satellite navigation, international video calling, etc), even though these have been the biggest focus of innovation and source of meaningful progress in the G7 in the past decades.[49]

Global carbon emissions statistics hide serious progress made in individual sectors and countries. As Chapter 2 showed, citizens in the UK substantially underestimate what has been achieved (Figure 2.8). As a consequence, they underestimate what the world is capable of (Figure 2.10).

People need to believe in better: to feel part of something bigger, recognising and celebrating the progress that we are making (see box on page 38: *Part of something bigger – Learning from the Apollo space program*). This focus on the dynamism of the journey, rather than the destination, can be more meaningful to people: a 'thrutopia' rather than a utopia.[50]

The motivations of hope, ambition, progress, prosperity, pride and belonging all help to bring acceptance of the costs and compromises along the way, expanding the scope of what citizens will consider palatable.

Policy guidelines

What does the quest to restore human progress mean for specific policies on climate and nature? Table 4.3 proposes guidelines for shaping such policies.

The guidelines are not all achievable in every case. There are limits to freedom of choice, for example, because we do not have direct technology substitutes for flying or meat-eating; the substitutes we have require a changed behaviour. These are real constraints, but need not be obstacles to the overall transition. In the UK Climate Change Committee's Balanced Pathway to net zero, aviation and agriculture grow as a share of the country's gross greenhouse gas emissions – from about 20 per cent today to 75 per cent in 2050 – precisely because they are the hardest to substitute. Indeed, in this pathway they are never fully abated, but held at a level that can be plausibly balanced by change in land use and engineered removals to achieve net zero.[51]

But the more that policies follow these guidelines, the more they will win citizens' support, by playing to our collective, societal self-interest and helping to build a future that people want to be a part of.

Table 4.3. Guidelines for shaping climate- and nature-related policies

1	2	3	4	5	6
Advances towards a sector vision Not 'climate policy', but climate and nature embedded in 'travel policy', 'food and agriculture policy', etc, envisioning a better future and building in from the outset the relationships between different interests and objectives (security, freedom, economic success, cultural practices, affordability, etc as well as sustainability).	**Plays to your strengths** Plays to thrive and win in the emerging economy, building on national and local competitive strengths, whether that is in natural resources, location, skills clusters, or leading industries and players.	**Salient solutions to people's real-life problems** Combines solutions for climate and nature with advances in what people will experience in each sector, offering benefits that are covenantal: intrinsic, shared benefits from collaborative involvement, like the local jobs and prosperity from an economic zone built around access to local offshore wind.	**Freedom of choice** Respects people's agency and independence, substituting technology solutions by offering alternatives that people choose (whether for an intrinsically superior experience or better value for money) in order to shift demand.	**Protecting the vulnerable locally** Within what people feel as the relevant community they identify with, ensure a just transition with protection for those most disrupted and most financially vulnerable. Typically this is at the level of the electorate of a nation state, but may be narrower (eg a state within a nation) or broader (eg EU).	**Inspires feeling part of something bigger** Complements the tangible value with the intangible value of belonging, pride, community, and feeling part of something bigger, purposeful and winning.
versus	*versus*	*versus*	*versus*	*versus*	*versus*
Advances towards an emissions goal Treats emissions as the direct output to manage, rather than (like economic growth) as the outcome that will happen as the consequence of a policy.	**Follows a shared, universal approach** Plays to a universal playbook, with a mindset of sharing the burden rather than seeking opportunity, even suppressing national advantages in the interest of 'climate justice'.	**Transactional or indirect solutions** Contractual compensation (like cash handouts from offshore wind to make up for the noise and disruption); or theoretical/ remote solutions to real/ immediate problems (eg jobs matter, and solar farms create some jobs, but other activities may be more effective solutions than solar energy if the problem is local job creation).	**Social engineering** Withholding choice or availability (through explicit bans, or de facto bans through prohibitive pricing) depriving people of what remains their preferred option; especially if the principle of 'polluter pays' becomes the practice of 'pay to pollute'.	**Protecting the vulnerable globally** Expecting to achieve climate justice on a world scale, imposing a significant cost – in cash and/or in loss of competitiveness – on the electorates that must support the policy.	**Direct value proposition to consumer or worker** Focuses only on the tangible value that people receive as individuals.

Part of something bigger – Learning from the Apollo space program

Some of the strongest motivating forces do not come from the tangible 'value propositions' that people receive, whether as consumers or employees. They come from the intangible value of belonging, pride, community, and feeling part of something that is bigger, purposeful and winning.

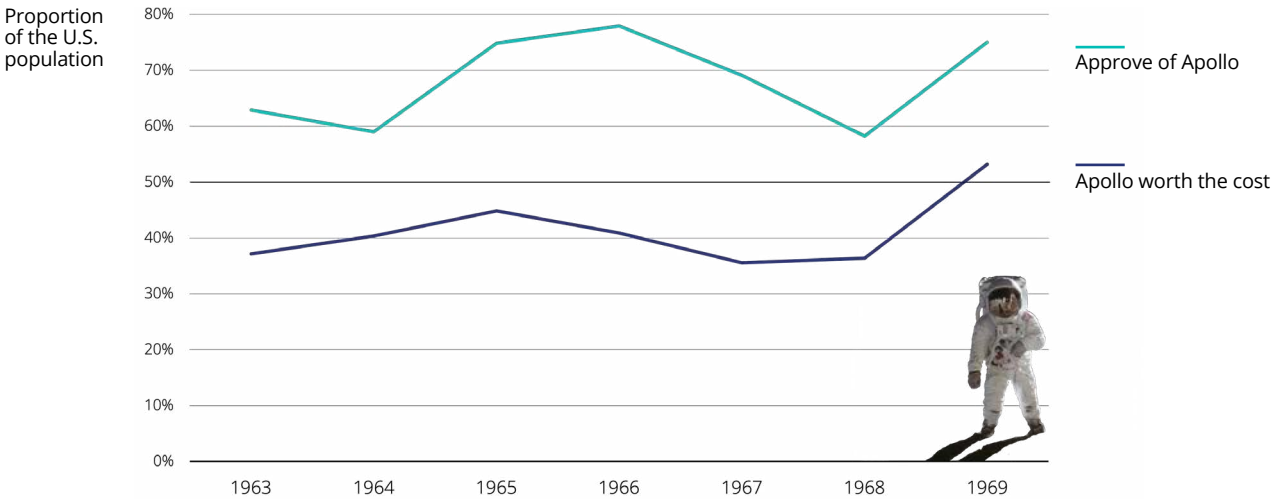
Sport provides one familiar example. Among UK adults, only about 10 per cent play football,[52] but about 40 per cent watch and follow it.[53] Many identify strongly with the players, wearing their team kit and saying 'we' when talking about their team's selection, tactics and performance. The Olympics takes it further: a mass engagement event, full of national pride, centred on the active role of a small number of elite performers.

Perhaps the strongest example of this feeling of being part of something bigger remains the Apollo space program from the 1960s.

The Space Race itself was not motivating. A 1965 Gallup survey asked Americans which three from a list of 11 national problems they would like to see the government devote most of its attention to. Only 4 per cent included 'Reaching the moon before Russia does', making it the second lowest priority problem on the list.[54]

What was motivating was not the objective of the race, but the vision that won it. Most Americans doubted that Apollo was worth the cost. Despite that, throughout the decade, most gave the program their support (Figure 4.2). It drove their belief in shaping the future.

Figure 4.2. US citizens' support for the Apollo space program[55]



Source: Launius, *Public opinion polls and perceptions*

5.

Leading the change
Broadening the mission, unlocking support

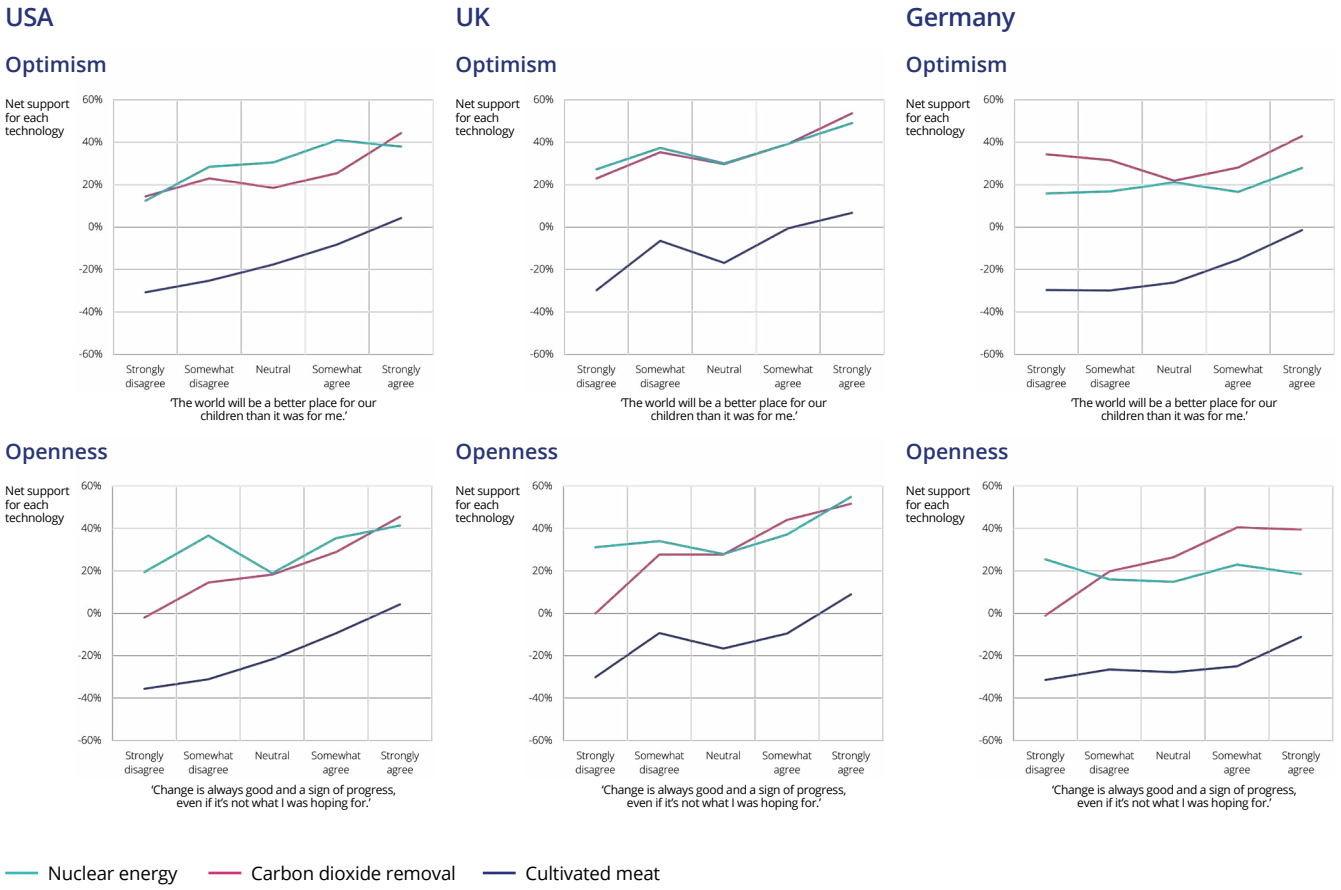
Elevating the future

Restoring human progress is a big mission. It shifts the focus from elevating the salience of climate and nature as issues that drive people's choices, to also elevating the future.

We already value the future, but we shut it out when we feel despondent about it, as most G7 citizens currently do. To achieve the transition to a sustainable economy, we need to overcome that despondency and engage positively with what the future can be.

Will increased optimism and openness about the future unlock resilient support for climate-related policies? Figure 5.1 shows one indication that it will. The charts show citizens' support in three G7 countries for the use of three potentially important but contested climate-related technologies: carbon dioxide removal, nuclear energy and cultivated meat. In each case, the level of support is plotted against citizens' optimism and openness about the future. The growth of support with citizens' increased optimism and openness is clear in almost all cases.

Figure 5.1. Support for climate-related technologies[56]



We are inevitably failing because we do not have the right scale of change.

Tony Juniper

I'd love to see everyone competing to build a future that is safer, cleaner, and more prosperous.

Aron Cramer (President and CEO, BSR)

A question of leadership

Inspiring positive visions and creating well-grounded hope for the future will take leadership. Even when G7 citizens are given the opportunity to envision the future, their visions have tended to be firmly grounded in fixing the perceived problems of today, rather than innovating a better world. People find it easier to look nostalgically backward (fewer cars, less stress, louder birdsong) than creatively forward.[57] In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act requires the Welsh government to act in the interests of future generations as well as today's voters. Yet the most tangible example of its impact, as told by the Future Generations Commissioner representing those interests, has been a conservation story: overturning a plan to spend £1.4 billion on a 14-mile stretch of new motorway.[58]

As a vision for the future, this conservation focus is quite different from the investment in clean economic renewal that Lord Stern has labelled "the growth story of the 21st century",[59] or the "opportunity to reshape markets" that CISL has described as "greater than ever".[60]

Alignment of interests

What makes such a big mission realistic is that the imperative for pursuing it goes beyond climate change and nature loss. Risk-taking, innovation and investment across the economy require optimism and openness about the future. These conditions hold in emerging markets and developing economies, but not in the G7. We may want stability; but at a time of rapid change in technology innovation and geopolitics, hiding from the future is a route to decline, not stability.

President Eisenhower is supposed to have said, "If you can't solve a problem, make it bigger." Although the quotation is apocryphal, the idea can be helpful. When we expand from the challenge of climate change and nature loss to the challenge of restoring human progress, we create a new alignment between the interests of different actors. Mainstream political leaders facing populist challenges at home, and business and finance leaders facing competition from more dynamic economies abroad, share a self-interest in rebuilding citizens' belief in the future.

Increasing citizens' optimism and openness about the future, by restoring human progress as the norm and expectation that our societies have experienced for centuries, is a recipe for national flourishing and economic growth. With this bigger mission, the actors impacting the physical world illustrated in Figure 1.4 need no longer pass responsibility on to each other; it is in their individual interests to pull together.

We need citizens as non-executive directors in national transition plan taskforces; citizens who are experts at the topic under discussion.

Mike Clark (Founder Director, Ario Advisory)

New collaborations

Broadening the mission from climate and nature to restoring human progress means challenging established frames and forging new collaborations. CISL has previously argued for "leaving behind the practice of 'declarative sustainability'" and the instruments of ESG, and shifting the effort to changing markets, not individual businesses.[61] The mission to restore human progress builds on this shift, with a focus on two areas of collaboration:

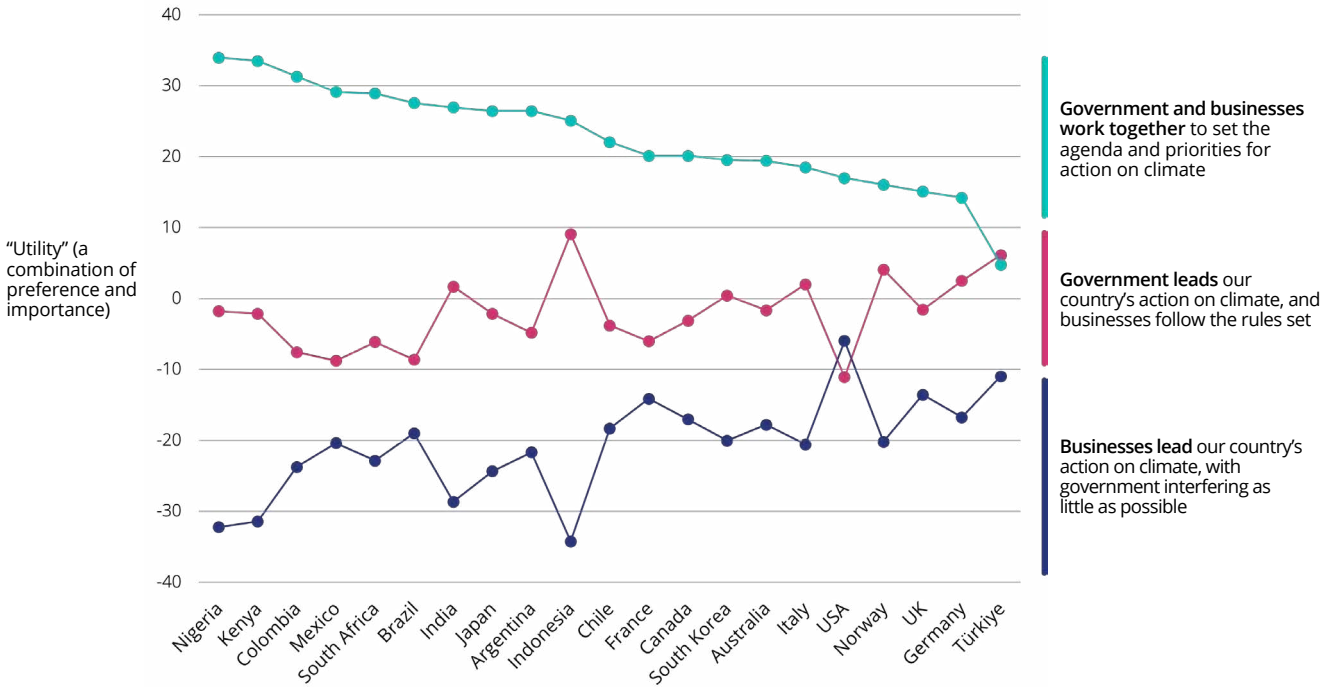
Climate and nature in a sector context. Leaders need to engage citizens not just in climate change and nature loss as standalone issues, but in the future of sectors that are meaningful to them: travel, food and farming, our countryside, our cities. These are the domains in which people can envision positive futures that they are not currently seeing, as discussed in Chapter 4. To shape a credible, aspirational future in a sector, we will need to explore the different interests and issues affecting that sector and tackle these in combination, to resolve the trade-offs and discover the synergies. This may mean organising across established mandates.

For example, citizens' assemblies on climate change have been constructive, but have tended to keep people in a mode of problem-solving and burden-sharing. The way these assemblies are mandated seeks to manage the trade-offs between sectors within the climate agenda, when it may be more fruitful to manage the trade-offs between interests (including climate) in a sector agenda, where citizens can help shape futures they want to be a part of.

Government and business. The alignment of interests described above demands – and enables – collaboration between government and business that goes beyond negotiating and holding each other to account. Such collaboration is not new, but there is scope to take it further. As Figure 5.2 shows, this is a collaborative approach that citizens worldwide would like to see.

The cross-issue perspective for citizens holds true for government and business as well: climate, trade, competitiveness and industrial policy need all to be solved as parts of the same question.

Figure 5.2. How citizens value different leadership models[62]



Adapted from Marshall et al., *Later is too late*

If you look at previous surges in public interest and concern, each time we have seen growing existential angst. The downwaves that follow defuse some of that energy, but the social consequences are cumulatively profound. Like it or not, the change agenda is becoming increasingly political—and politicized. The resulting business environment requires new forms of leadership.

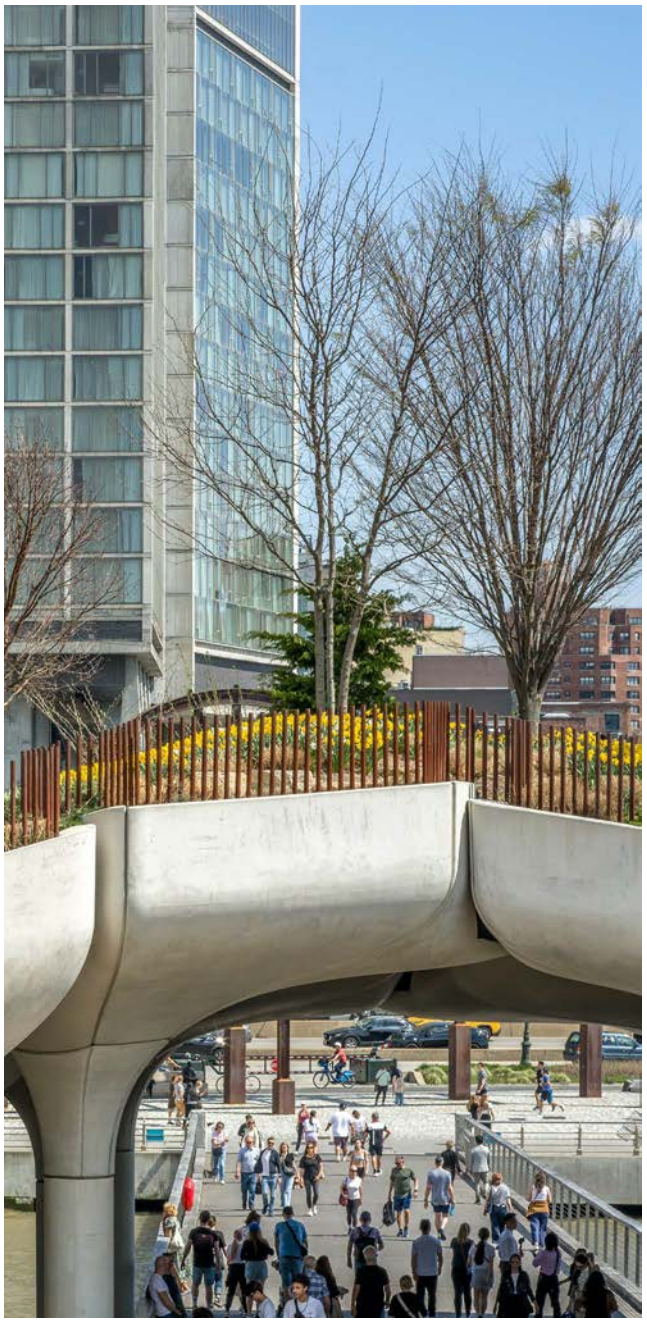
John Elkington (Founder, Volans)

The leadership agenda

The practical need is therefore for new collaboration between government, business and citizens in shaping the future of different sectors. The components to build with are in place: transition-plan taskforces between government and business; single-issue citizens' assemblies; expert citizen consultation groups in sectors such as health, transport, water, energy. The leadership challenge is to bring these together, not in a spirit of opposition or damage limitation, but with a new level of ambition, future vision, and recognition of shared, societal self-interest.

The threats of climate change and nature loss are enormous. Government and business leaders cannot play their part in responding to them without citizens' support. To win that support, leaders need to engage citizens with the promises of a better future. That is a fair expectation: collectively, we are richer, healthier and more capable than we have ever been. But it is an expectation we have lost in much of the world. It is the task of leaders to help bring it back, restoring human progress as the norm and expectation for our societies.

Restoring human progress can unlock citizens' support for the policies needed on climate change and nature loss, and for our prosperity more broadly. This insight can provide an important redirection for our efforts. It is also an invitation to a new, ambitious, and ultimately rewarding, leadership agenda.



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