



# Poll: Londoners' Attitudes to Climate Change and Actions They Might Take

This briefing alerts members to some of the key findings from a recent poll commissioned by London Councils to gauge Londoners' understanding of climate change and the effect it has on their lives.

## Overview

This is the first year that London Councils has conducted public polling on climate change. We have asked over 1,000 London residents about their level of awareness, concern, impacts from, and motivation to take action regarding climate change. The poll findings were launched at London Climate Action Week (14 – 20 November) and follow the adoption of net zero emission targets for the majority of London boroughs. The poll shows that a significant majority of Londoners across all groups are concerned about climate change, and believe that everyone should be taking action to address it.

## Background

With the world currently on course for warming of between three and four degrees, climate change is a significant threat across the world with likely increases in flooding, droughts, water stress, food shortages, heat stress, and biodiversity loss. London is not immune from such issues, with increased flooding, water stress, and heat waves likely creating a serious public health issue as well as economic loss during this century.

In response to these concerns, climate change has become an important issue in recent years. The UK government was the first major economy to commit to net zero emissions by 2050, which was swiftly followed by 77 countries at the Climate Action Summit in 2019. Climate change has also become a priority for the general public, with opinion polls showing increasing concern.

## Analysis

London Councils commissioned a survey of Londoners' attitudes to climate change across six areas – concern, impact from, and motivation to act; their understanding of climate change; sources of information on climate change; responsibility for solving climate change; how climate change impacts decision-making; and their current and potential behaviour. The survey was undertaken over October 2020, and will be repeated annually.

## Concern, Impact and Motivation

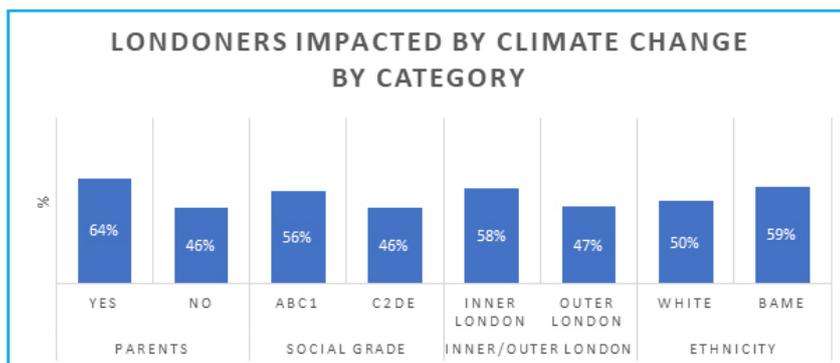
**82% of Londoners are concerned about climate change, with 40% describing themselves as very concerned.** Women (85%) are more concerned than men (80%), and with age the highest levels of overall concern are seen in the 35 – 44 age bracket (88%), against young adults (16 – 24, 78%), and 45 – 54-year olds (79%) and 55 – 64 year-olds (80%).

**57% of Londoners say their level of concern has increased in the last 12 months.**

**71% agreed with the view of all the London boroughs** that: *“Climate change is a significant threat to London and Londoners, and we need to act quickly and work together to reduce its severity and adapt to its impacts now and in the future.”* with an equal split between strongly agree and somewhat agree.

**Climate denial is close to non-existent.** 2% of Londoners don’t believe in climate change.

**52% say their day to day life has been impacted.** Younger people from 25-44 say they are most impacted compared to older people 45-65+. Parents say they are impacted more than non-parents (64% vs 46%). Inner London residents say they are more impacted than outer London residents (58% vs 47%). There is also a significant difference by ethnicity in those who say they are impacted, with 59% of BAME respondents saying they are vs 50% of white respondents, though it should be noted both totals are uniformly high.



Q019. Do you feel your day-to-day life in London has been impacted by the changing climate, for example in terms of heatwaves or flooding? Base: All Londoners 16+ (n=1006)

**87% of Londoners are motivated to help prevent climate change.** Women were more likely to be motivated (90%) as compared to men (85%). Those aged 25 – 34 (89%) and 35 – 44 (92%) showed the highest levels of being motivated against those aged 45 - 54 (85%) and 65 and over (80%).

## Understanding of Climate Change

When ranking the contribution of various sectors to climate change on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being a very large contribution and 1 being no contribution, **Londoners reported similar levels of belief in the impact of the categories** of Food (3.4), Motorised transport such as cars, buses, motorcycles, and trains (3.73), Aviation (3.62), Buildings – office space (3.2), Buildings – homes (3.24), Consumer goods and services (3.36), and Leisure activities (restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, hotels) (3.02).

**Londoners primarily find information on the national media (42%), social media (31%), and from friends and family (24%).**

**There is a generation gap between the use of national and social media,** with use of national media increasing with age and use of social media decreasing with age. The majority (50%) of 16 – 24 year olds stated they find information on social media, as compared to 8% of over 65s. 23% of 16 – 24-year olds receive information from the national media, as compared to 59% of 55 - 64-year olds and 55% of over 65s. 16 – 24 year olds are twice as likely to get information from friends and family (34%) as the over 65s (15%).

## Responsibility for Solving Climate Change

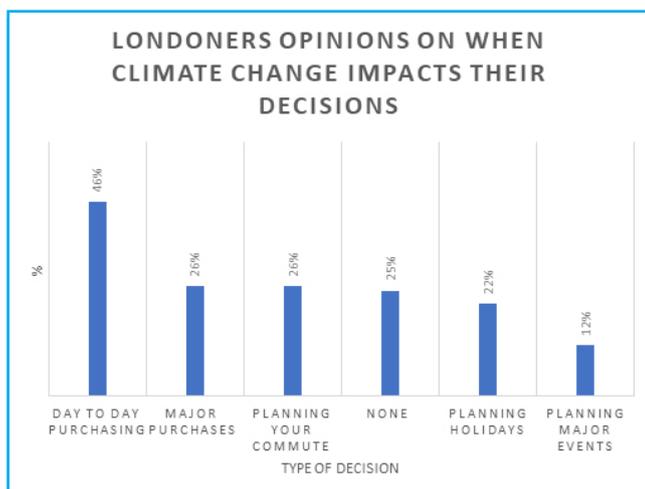
The majority of respondents believe everybody is responsible (56%). Following this, governmental bodies are seen as responsible, with a third of respondents stating that the central government (36%) or the London Mayor (33%) is responsible. This is followed by a quarter believing that local councils and individuals (24% for both) are responsible, with the private sector at 22%.

## Decision-Making and Climate Change

59% of Londoners said climate change affects their decision making. There was a significant generation gap, with strong majorities in the 16 – 24 (59%), 25 – 34 (69%), and 35 – 44 (69%) age groups saying climate change affects their decision making, as compared to the 45 – 54 (54%), the 55 – 64 (49%) and 65+ (42%) age groups.

There were also strong splits between those working and not (65% and 47% respectively), those who are parents and not (71% and 54%), those with children under 15 at home and not (69% and 53%), and social grades ABC1 and C2DE (64% and 52%).

Climate change was a factor for 75% of Londoners when considering at least one of the following types of decision - day-to-day purchases, major purchases, planning a commute, planning a holiday, and planning an event.



Q008. In what types of decisions is climate change a factor for you? Base: All Londoners 16+ (n=1006)

Almost half of Londoners (46%) consider the climate when making day-to-day purchases. This was followed by major purchases (26%), none (25%), planning a commute (26%), planning a holiday (22%), and planning a major event (12%).

## Current and Potential Behaviour

London Councils' survey included questions around people's current behaviour, and actions they would consider taking to help tackle climate change. Questions addressed food, transport, housing and consumer goods. The full results of this element of the survey are due to be published shortly. We have included a snapshot of some of the key findings below.

Overall, we found that significant numbers of Londoners have already adopted environmentally friendly behaviours. For example, 34% said they are currently going meat-free once a week, 31% reported commuting by walking or cycling, 45% of Londoners are currently reducing electricity use at home and 49% are recycling old clothes and electrical goods.

Examining potential behaviour, our survey found a wide mix of views, on what people would consider, or not. We also examined the reasons for this, asking about preference, lack of interest, availability, understanding and time, not knowing any else undertook that behaviour, and cost.

## Food

Going meat-free and swapping some animal products for plant-based alternatives were most frequently given as being currently done or something respondents would definitely consider doing. The main barrier to adoption for all behaviours was preference<sup>1</sup>, ranging from 44% to 32%.

[Click here to see data chart](#)

## Transport

The top three sustainable travel options that respondents are either currently doing, or would definitely consider doing, were commuting by public transport, walking and cycling more when travelling privately, and travelling privately by public transport. The barriers varied across behaviours<sup>2</sup>. Whereas cost was a barrier to buying an electric (24%) or hybrid car (23%), time was a barrier to commuting by walking or cycling (16%), preference was a barrier to giving up flying (37%) and availability was most commonly a barrier for working from home full-time (45%).

[Click here to see data chart](#)

## Home heating and energy

The top three sustainable housing options that respondents are either currently doing, or would definitely consider doing, were reducing electricity use at home, lowering the temperature by two degrees at home, and insulating their homes. The main barriers were lack of availability and cost for most behaviours<sup>3</sup>.

[Click here to see data chart](#)

## Consumer goods and services

The top three sustainable consumer goods and services options that respondents are either currently doing or would definitely consider doing were recycling old clothes and electrical goods, reducing clothing purchases, and purchasing energy efficient electrical goods. The barriers varied across behaviours<sup>4</sup>. Whereas preference was a barrier to reducing clothes purchases and hiring clothes for special occasions (25% and 30%), lack of interest and understanding were both significant for purchasing clothing with a small footprint.

[Click here to see data chart](#)

## Commentary

Londoners are aware of and concerned about climate change, with concern increasing over the last year. The impacts of climate change are already being felt by a majority of Londoners and Londoners wish to act on climate change and are highly motivated. While they feel everyone is responsible, government support is seen as critical.

Londoners understand that transport has an outsized impact on emissions, but otherwise their knowledge of the differing sectoral impacts on climate change is limited. Without understanding which behaviours are high impact and which not, it is very difficult for the public to understand what to do to help stop climate change.

Nevertheless, Londoners are reducing their environmental impact. They are considering the climate in their day-to-day purchases, and large numbers are undertaking other steps such as reducing electricity usage at home, lowering the temperature by two degrees and walking and cycling more. Smaller but significant numbers of Londoners have adopted high impact behaviour such as insulating their home, flying less, switching to renewables, and becoming vegan or vegetarian.

Londoners are, however, less likely to consider the climate when making decisions with large climate impacts such as buying a house or car, planning an event, or taking a holiday.

However, this may well be due to perceived barriers since Londoners are interested in and willing to take up further steps. For the two largest sectors, buildings and transport, Londoners cite cost or lack of availability rather than preference as reasons for not choosing sustainability. Preference is primarily an issue with sustainable diets and to some extent consumer goods and services. There is strong aversion to giving up or reducing flying.

In summary, there is clearly a strong foundation of public support and interest upon which further policy and programmes can be developed. Public support should be built on through investment in green infrastructure and support for green initiatives in the private, public, and voluntary sectors. Public bodies should work with the public to ensure that they are equipped with the tools and knowledge to make sustainable choices and be an active part of a transition to sustainable ways of living.

**Endnotes**

1. Eating cultured meat, choosing a vegan diet, choosing a vegetarian diet, swapping animal products for plant-based alternatives, and going meat-free once a week.
2. Giving up flying, staycation, flying once a year, using public transport instead of the car when travelling privately, ride sharing, joining a car club, commuting by public transport, walking and/or cycling more when travelling privately, commuting by walking or cycling, working from home full-time, working from home full-time, buying an electric car, and buying a hybrid car.
3. Insulating homes, replacing gas heating, installing solar panels, reducing electricity usage and switching to renewables
4. Purchasing clothes with a small footprint, purchasing energy efficient electrical goods, recycling old clothes and electrical goods, reducing clothing purchases and hiring clothes for special occasions.

**Notes on methodology**

- This study was conducted in London via OnLineBus, an Internet omnibus survey run by Research Express which is part of Kantar UK Ltd.
- Sample size – a sample of 1,006 London adults 16+ were interviewed.
- Interviewing - Interviewing was conducted by online self-completion from 15th - 19th October 2020 (Week 42).
- Weighting – The sample has been weighted to represent the adult population of London 16+.
- Low Bases - Where unweighted base figures are less than 100, data should be treated cautiously, as large margins of error are possible.

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