Relationship Between Attitudes to Climate Change and Voting Intention (February 2024)

Introduction

In February 2024 a series of questions on Attitudes to Climate Change was asked on the Opinium Political Omnibus. The results are particularly interesting when analysed by voting Intention, and this short report summarises the differences and similarities between the supporters of the various political parties.

The questions asked covered belief and concern about climate change, the three main issues facing the country, demographics and voting intention. In addition the following question was asked with regard to possible government actions:

Q. Here are some things the government could do to try and combat climate change. In each case, please say how much you are in favour or against the proposition:

Ans: Strongly in favour/Somewhat in favour/Neither in favour nor against/Somewhat against/Strongly against

(note, we have grouped the options below for convenience of reading, they were asked in random order)

Subsidising options

- Subsidising the cost of replacing gas boilers in people's homes with heat pumps

- Subsidising the cost of travelling by bus or train

- Subsidising the cost of insulating people's homes

- Subsidising the cost of building wind turbines

Taxing options

- Increasing the tax on petrol and diesel.

- Increasing the tax on flying by plane

- Taxing companies on the basis of the amount of carbon they release into the atmosphere

Banning options

- Banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars from 2035

- Banning the installation of new gas boilers in people's homes from 2030.

Planning/Nuclear options

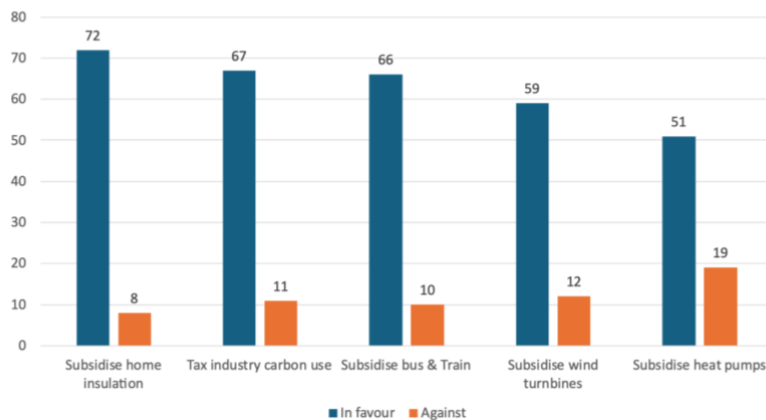- Building new nuclear power stations

- Making it easier to build electric pylons across the countryside
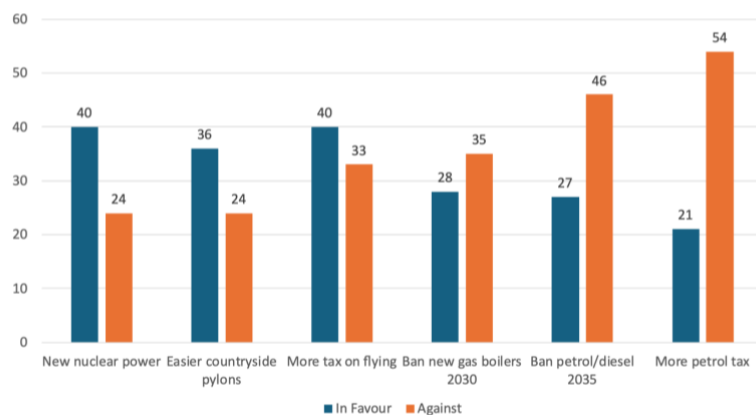
Overall Summary of Views

It's worth saying at the outset that some of these options are agreed by a majority of the total population, and some are contentious/definitely less popular: the charts[1] below highlight the contrast between the two reactions.

In this summary our concern is to also highlight the '*political divide*' – i.e. the extent to which supporters/voters of the different political parties agree or disagree with particular proposals. So '*Taxing companies on the basis of the amount of carbon they release into the atmosphere*' might have a good overall level of agreement in favour (66%) but it is much more approved of by Labour (75%) and other parties (Greens 84%) than by Conservative voters. (56%)

Largely Uncontentious

More Contentious or Unpopular

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[1] Charts selected from Presentation provided by Sir John Curtice to the **Net Zero Seminar**

Analysis by Voting Intention

We now summarise the contrasting attitudes of the supporters of the various parties. Please see **Tabulations** for the complete survey results.

General order of Parties on the Govts possible options

The order of the parties with regard to the level of approval of the options listed in the questionnaire is almost always the same: the Greens always have the highest level of approval for each initiative, followed by Labour and Lib-dem who alternate at 2nd and 3rd positions, the Conservatives are 4th, and then the lowest approval levels are from Reform. This is true for all of the options listed above with the exception of increasing the use of Nuclear Power where it is completely reversed with supporters of the Reform party most in favour and the Greens least.

So, if we take some of the more contentious issues like '*Tax on flying by plane'* then the order of percentage in favour is Green 54%, Lib-dem 51%, Labour 47%, Conservatives 37% , Reform 25%.

Or for '*Banning the sale of Petrol and Diesel cars by 2035'* then the order of percentage in favour is Green 48%, Labour 37%, Lib-dem 35%, Conservatives 23%, Reform 12%.

This order holds with large differences between the Greens and Reform, and Labour and the Lib-dems generally close.

The Green Party

The Greens are the youngest party with the highest proportion of 18-34 year-olds and they also have a higher proportion of women than other parties. By Social Class they are more likely than other parties to be C1 and (with Labour) the most likely to be non-white (note, however, that the sample is not particularly representative of ethnicity). Green party supporters are more high/mid Education level and least likely to be retired! Demographically they are closest to Labour. Their Achilles heel is perhaps that they are slightly less likely to actually vote!

Only a fifth of those currently intending to vote Green in 2024 voted Green at the last election, a third are defecting from voting Labour in 2019. Of those who voted Green in the last election just over a half plan to vote Green again, the others will vote either Labour or Other/Don't know. They are not particularly successful at converting Conservatives - only 2% of those who voted Conservative in 2019 plan to vote Green at the next election.

They are more likely than Conservatives and Labour to have been Remainers for the Brexit vote – but less likely than Liberal Democrat supporters.

Their key issues are firstly the cost of living (as is every party's except Reform) but more than other parties they identify Climate Change, the War in Gaza and Pollution as their top issues.

They are much more convinced than all other parties that Climate Change is man-made and more concerned about it than other parties (except Lib-Dems).

With regard to '*what the government should do about it*?' they are much more in favour of subsidies, taxing and banning (i.e. on **all** those issues mentioned) than all other parties – but not of nuclear power, where they are 'against' more than all other parties, nor are they particularly in favour of making it easier to build more electric pylons

Liberal Democrats

Lib-dems are older, slightly more up-class and higher educated than the Greens. Definitely more likely to be retired than Greens, so not much better off in terms of income. Slightly more likely than Greens to actually turn out to vote.

A quarter of those who voted Lib-dem in 2019 have defected to Labour, but only 5% to the Greens. (Note: 34% had defected overall). Of those currently intending to vote Lib-dem 63% voted Remain in 2016. Their top 3 issues are Cost of living, Climate Change and the Ukraine war.

They are convinced about Climate Change and 90% are 'very' or 'fairly concerned' about it.

In terms of government options for actions Lib-dems are closer to Labour than the Greens, i.e. they are generally in favour of subsidies, taxes and bans but not quite as much as the Greens.

Labour

Labour are younger than Conservatives (more 18-34, less 65+), same profile by class, more diverse ethnically, much more high education level, more working full-time, less retired, slightly more of both higher income and lower income levels, similar level of likelihood to vote (i.e. lower than Reform). More Leavers than Remainers at the Brexit vote. Issues are cost of living, then climate change, with interest rates, immigration and Brexit issues vying for third place. They are more convinced that climate change is real and more concerned about it than Conservatives.

With regard to solutions they are in favour of subsidies (at the 70-75% level), less in favour of bans (but still more than Conservatives). Only 39% are in favour of nuclear power, compared to 53% for Conservatives and 62% for Reform. On electricity pylons they are similar to other parties.

In terms of 2019 vote, Labour have gained from Conservatives, Lib-Dems and non-voters, they have lost to Greens and Other/Don't know, but have gained more than they have lost.

The Conservatives

The Conservatives are generally older than Labour and the Greens – with more 65+ and fewer 18-34 year olds (along with the Lib-Dems and Reform). By class they are similar to the overall population. They are more ethnically white than the Greens or Labour. By

Education they have a higher proportion of the less educated – but not as high a proportion as Reform. Labour, Lib-Dems and Greens all have a higher education profile – mainly (probably) as a reflection of their age profiles. Conservatives are more likely to be retired (like the Lib-dems and Reform). They are more likely to have voted to Leave the EU than all other parties with the exception of Reform (who are almost exclusively Leavers (83%)).

Their issues are firstly the Cost of Living (as every party except Reform) but then secondly Immigration, where, at 50%, they are higher than all other parties with the exception of Reform (81%). They are less convinced that Climate Change is man-made, and less concerned about it than Labour and Lib-dems.

With regard to solutions they are less in favour of subsidies than other parties (but still over 50% in favour), much less in favour of taxes (OK to tax companies but not flights or fuel), not at all in favour of bans – but they are more in favour of Nuclear Power than other parties, and average on Electricity Pylons

Defecting Conservatives

Of those who voted Conservative in 2019 only 43% say they will vote Conservative at the next election. 14% say they will vote for Reform, 11% Labour, 3% and 2% Lib-dem and Green respectively, the rest (25%) say Other/Don't know. If these voters went back to Conservative the gap with Labour would be very much reduced

Reform Party (compared with Conservatives)

Reform are extreme Conservatives: more likely to be male, older (more 50-64 rather than 65+), lower social grade (more C2DE), more white, slightly more likely to be working part-time, lower income, more likely to vote. (Note: some of these not statistically significant, but the direction is indicative). Very much more likely to be Brexiteers.

Reform's issues are firstly Immigration (81%) followed by Cost of living (75%), and they are high on Terrorism (20%), even relative to Conservatives (14%).

With regard to climate change: Reform is high on belief that it is 'all propaganda, with little evidence'. The majority are 'not very' or 'not at all' concerned. They are very definitely against banning and taxing options, not particularly in favour of subsidies (but still in favour at the 50% level). They are the party most in favour of nuclear power; they are less in favour than everyone else of electricity pylons.

The majority of Reform voters (68%) are defectors from Conservative voters in 2019. Very small numbers have defected from voting Labour, Lib-Dem or Green in 2019; only 11% had voted for the Brexit Party in 2019.

Observations

In summary, the differences between the parties on demographics is not that great. Age is a discriminator, but Social Class no longer differentiates. It is attitudes which are

really different across the parties; in particular attitudes as to whether and how climate change should be managed.

We hope that this relatively simple survey demonstrates the complexity both of the challenge and the solution.

<u>Postscript:</u>

Please see **Net-Zero** for the report of the seminar on Combatting Climate Change held at Number 1 Great George Street on 29th February 2024.

<u>Acknowledgement:</u>

We are grateful to **Opinium Research Ltd** for sponsoring Better Statistics by providing free access to their omnibus surveys.