

Few willing to change lifestyle to save the planet, climate survey finds

Exclusive: poll of 10 countries including US, UK, France and Germany finds people prioritising measures that are already habits



People generally saw themselves as much more committed to the environment than others in their local community, or any institution. Photograph: Emanuele Cremaschi/Getty Images

Jon Henley

@jonhenley

Sun 7 Nov 2021 16.28 GMT

Citizens are alarmed by the climate crisis, but most believe they are already doing more to preserve the planet than anyone else, including their government, and few are willing to make significant lifestyle changes, an international survey has found.

“The widespread awareness of the importance of the climate crisis illustrated in this study has yet to be coupled with a proportionate willingness to act,” **the survey of 10 countries** including the US, UK, France and Germany, observed.

Emmanuel Rivière, director of international polling at Kantar Public, said the survey, carried out in late September and published to coincide with

the **Cop26** climate conference in Glasgow, contained “a double lesson for governments”.

They have, first, “to measure up to people’s expectations,” Rivière said. “But they also have to persuade people not of the reality of the climate crisis – that’s done – but of what the solutions are, and of how we can fairly share responsibility for them.”

The survey found that 62% of people surveyed saw the climate crisis as the main environmental challenge the world was now facing, ahead of air pollution (39%), the impact of waste (38%) and new diseases (36%).



‘I get scared’: the young activists sounding the alarm from climate tipping points

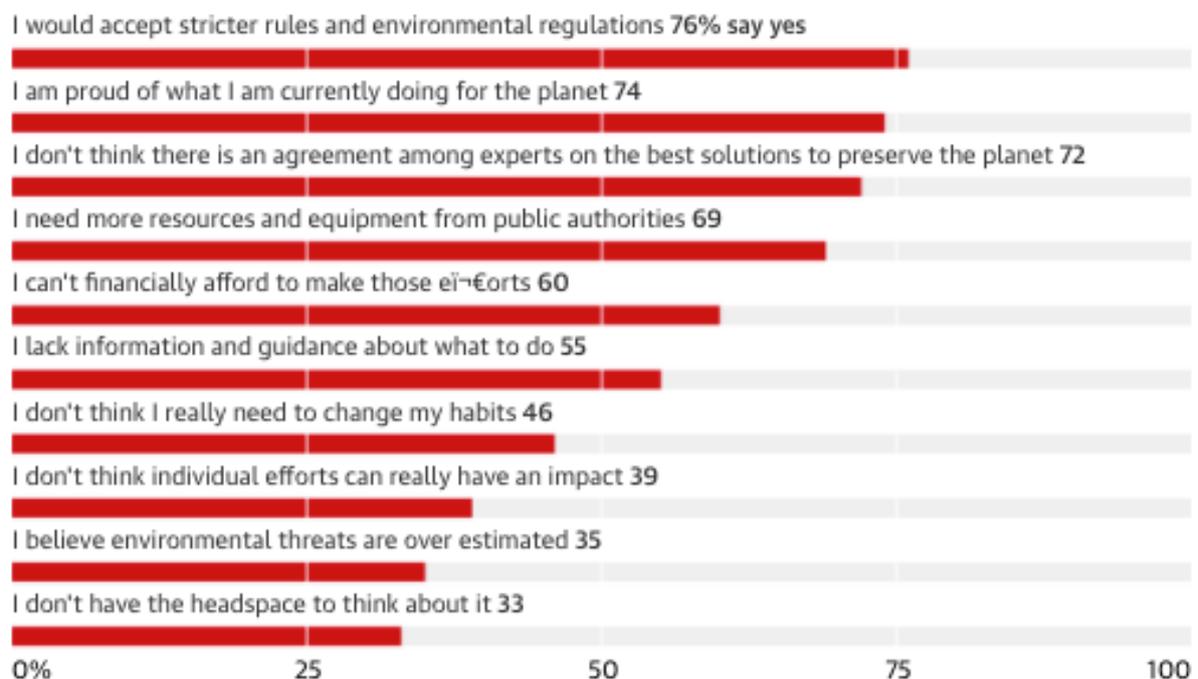
But when asked to rate their individual action against others’ such as governments, business and the media, people generally saw themselves as much more committed to the environment than others in their local community, or any institution.

About 36% rated themselves “highly committed” to preserving the planet, while only 21% felt the same was true of the media and 19% of local government. A

mere 18% felt their local community was equally committed, with national governments (17%) and big corporations (13%) seen as even less engaged.

Respondents were also lukewarm about doing more themselves, citing a wide range of reasons. Most (76%) of those surveyed across the 10 countries said they would accept stricter environmental rules and regulations, but almost half (46%) felt that there was no real need for them to change their personal habits.

Thinking about your personal efforts to preserve the planet, would you say that the following applies to you?



Guardian graphic. Source: Kantar

Only 51% said they would definitely take individual climate action, with 14% saying they would definitely not and 35% torn. People in Poland and **Singapore** (56%) were the most willing to act, and in Germany (44%) and the Netherlands (37%) the least.

The most common reasons given for not being willing to do more for the planet were “I feel proud of what I am currently doing” (74%), “There isn’t agreement among experts on the best solutions” (72%), and “I need more resources and equipment from public authorities” (69%).

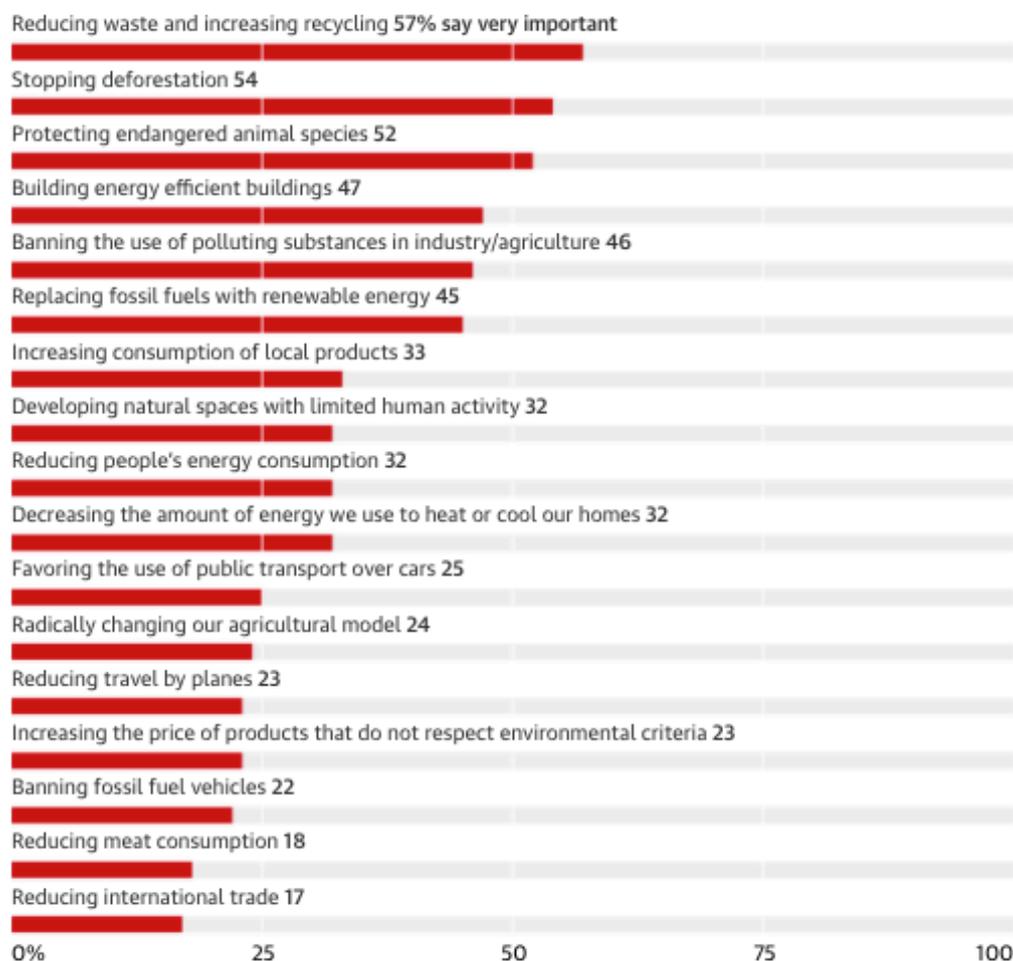
Other reasons for not wanting to do more included “I can’t afford to make those efforts” (60%), “I lack information and guidance on what to do” (55%), “I don’t

think individual efforts can really have an impact” (39%), “I believe environmental threats are overestimated” (35%) and “I don’t have the headspace to think about it” (33%).

Asked which actions to preserve the planet should be prioritised, moreover, people attributed more importance to measures that were already established habits, required less individual effort, or for which they bore little direct responsibility.

About 57%, for example, said that reducing waste and increasing recycling was “very important”. Other measures seen as priorities were reversing deforestation (54%), protecting endangered animal species (52%), building energy-efficient buildings (47%), and replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy (45%).

How would you rate, in terms of importance, the following measures aimed at preserving the environment and the planet?



Guardian graphic. Source: Kantar

Respondents viewed measures likely to affect their own lifestyles, however, as significantly less important: reducing people's energy consumption was seen as a priority by only 32%, while favouring public transport over cars (25%) and radically changing our agricultural model (24%) were similarly unpopular.

Only 23% felt that reducing plane travel and charging more for products that did not respect environmental norms were important to preserve the planet, while banning fossil fuel vehicles (22%) and reducing meat consumption (18%) and international trade (17%) were seen as even lower priorities.

“Citizens are undeniably concerned by the state of the planet, but these findings raise doubts regarding their level of commitment to preserving it,” the study said. “Rather than translating into a greater willingness to change their habits, citizens' concerns are particularly focused on their negative assessment of governments' efforts.”

Representative samples of more than 1,000 people were questioned in the US, UK, Spain, France, the Netherlands, **Germany**, Sweden, Poland, Singapore and New Zealand.

People gave themselves the highest score for commitment everywhere except Sweden, while only in Singapore and New Zealand were national governments seen as highly engaged. The gulf between citizens' view of their own efforts (44%) and that of their government (16%) was highest in the UK.