Fair Transition Unit

A RISING TIDE

STRENGTHENING PUBLIC PERMISSION FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Steve Akehurst and **Luke Murphy**

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ABOUT IPPR'S FAIR TRANSITION UNIT

IPPR's Fair Transition Unit (FTU) was established in June 2022 as a new landmark initiative to carry forward the work of IPPR's cross-party Environmental Justice Commission and award-winning work on environmental breakdown.

The FTU's mission is "to accelerate progress in reducing emissions and restoring nature and secure a fairer, more just and thriving society". To realise this mission, the FTU delivers projects, programmes and support to others focused on securing a fair transition to net zero and the restoration of nature.

The Environmental Justice Commission drew on views and recommendations from citizens from across the country in a way that has genuinely shaped policy thinking and had tangible policy and media impact. Building on this legacy, the FTU puts the public at the heart of its work through extensive public deliberation.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER
The purpose of this paper is to evaluate which thematic narrative or message performs best to increase permission among UK voters for government action on climate change.

SUMMARY

This paper sought an answer to a straight-forward question:

> *Which thematic narrative or message performs best to increase permission among UK voters for government action on climate change?*

To find out, we used RCT (randomised control trial) methodology to test 10 different thematic climate narratives. These included a broad range of traditional and non-traditional narratives, including risk based and opportunity based, moral, and utilitarian.

Narratives were scored on their persuasion effects over eight key metrics, including raising issue salience, willingness to bear cost, levels of policy support/opposition, and reducing support for the opponents of climate action. Particular attention was paid to the performance of these messages among those aged over 40 and those without a university education. Research took place in April 2022.

The narratives which performed most consistently across our key persuasion metrics – particularly with the swing demographics we identify – were '**global leadership**' (a patriotic narrative about the potential for Britain to lead the world on climate action), '**climate impacts**' (a narrative about the proximity of impacts now and in the future) and '**future generations**' (an intergenerational message about leaving a better world for young people).

It is notable that the most consistently persuasive messages were all simple narratives of shared destiny or concern. These narratives are occasionally deemed outmoded or unfashionable, but it appears they remain effective (Nagal 2021).

By comparison, more utilitarian or 'co-benefit' narratives (such as 'jobs', 'levelling up/community regeneration', 'consumer benefit', 'energy security') which sought to emphasise the transactional benefits of climate solutions did not perform as consistently well, despite in some cases being highly topical. This finding aligns with previous research (Raikes and Cooper 2021). These narratives often generate high levels of agreement among ordinary voters, but do not appear to be emotionally persuasive enough to change their underlying beliefs or priorities.

These findings present a dilemma for climate communicators: co-benefit narratives are often popular with elites (politicians, civil servants) and activists, and these audiences matter. Moreover, they are a useful way of keeping climate in the news. This paper does not recommend, therefore, jettisoning co-benefit narratives, but rather it is clear that – for now at least – they are best invested in for elite influencing or reactive messaging, rather than pro-active public messaging.

The central recommendation of this paper is to invest in a sustained, pro-active campaign aimed at swing voters which has as its central theme one of 'global leadership', 'climate impacts' or 'future generations'. With so many other pressures and world events competing for voters' attention, this is the best way to maintain the salience of climate change among ordinary voters, and to boost the permission structure for action.

The question should no longer be 'what is our message?', but 'what are we going to do with it?'

1.
INTRODUCTION

One of the by-products of climate change being so multifaceted is that there are almost infinite ways to discuss it. You can focus on risk or opportunity, jobs or generations, humans, or the natural world, and so on. This begs the question: which of these many stories is the most powerful in building permission for climate action with ordinary voters?

This question is given added urgency by the emergence of 'net zero sceptics' in Westminster and sections of the media (Wilcock 2022). While their arguments are often without evidence, they have a relatively consistent story about climate policy: that it will do nothing other than leave us all 'colder and poorer'. The appeal of this message with voters is often significantly over-stated by political and media elites, but it is nevertheless important to be mindful of it – and do what we can to maintain and build support for climate action among the public (Akehurst 2021).

There are numerous ways we can rise to that challenge. Rebuttal is important where necessary, of course. But so is telling our own compelling story to voters. A big task is keeping the salience – that is, prioritisation – of climate change relatively high among ordinary voters, especially as other issues (such as the cost of living or the war in Ukraine) compete for the public's attention (Akehurst 2022).

But it is incumbent on those arguing for this action to provide frontline communicators with practical recommendations, based on evidence, on how this can be done. That is the aim of this paper.

Of course, messaging is not the only challenge faced by campaigners. Equally important factors include messengers, routes to market, or other infrastructure that a movement must call upon to consistently get its cause in front of its audience (Laybourn-Langton et al 2021).

Nevertheless, message still matters. A good message alone is not enough to keep a campaign airborne, but not having one at all is sufficient to ensure it never get offs the ground to begin with.

There are also some genuine gaps in the existing UK climate communications literature. Focus group work, for instance, offers insights but not definitive conclusions on message. Segmentations, such as those offered by Britain Talks Climate, tell us who we need to move, but not always how (Wang et al 2020) – which is not their intended purpose.

Likewise, much polling research deploys methodologies (for instance support/ oppose statements)[1] that ably test agreement with individual policies or value statements but they are not designed to measure or observe prioritisation of, or persuasion to, our campaign objectives.

All of which can make it hard for climate campaigners to decide which theme or message to invest in, with confidence that it will add new voters to our coalition.

This paper aims to provide direction for campaigners looking to inoculate voters from the culture war division on climate change, and to build and sustain further public support for climate action.

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1   For instance, 'The government has set a target for net zero by 2050. Do you support or oppose?'

2.
WHAT WE WANTED TO FIND OUT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary research objectives were to discover which thematic message on climate change is best able to:

1. drive up salience of climate change in the minds of voters
2. increase permission for net zero policy – ideally through increasing support, but at the very least reducing opposition
3. drive down support for the messages of the opponents to climate action

A secondary objective was to:

4. Understand which messengers may be best placed to carry these messages

There is more on how these were measured in the 'metrics of success' section in chapter three of this paper.

In analysing results, we had a particular interest in ensuring messages worked well with Conservative-leaning voters as well as the country at large. This was done by analysing two main demographic cross-breaks: those aged over 40 and those without a university education.

The reason for this is simple: these audiences are much more likely to be 'swing' voters – both in general elections and, as figure 1.2 shows, on climate.[2] As figure 1.1 shows, they are also relatively more vulnerable to our opponent's message.

FIGURE 1.1: NON-GRADUATES AND OVER-40S ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE UNWILLING TO PAY EXTRA TAX TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

Percentage of UK respondents stating: 'I would not be willing to pay any extra tax to achieve effective action on climate change in the UK'
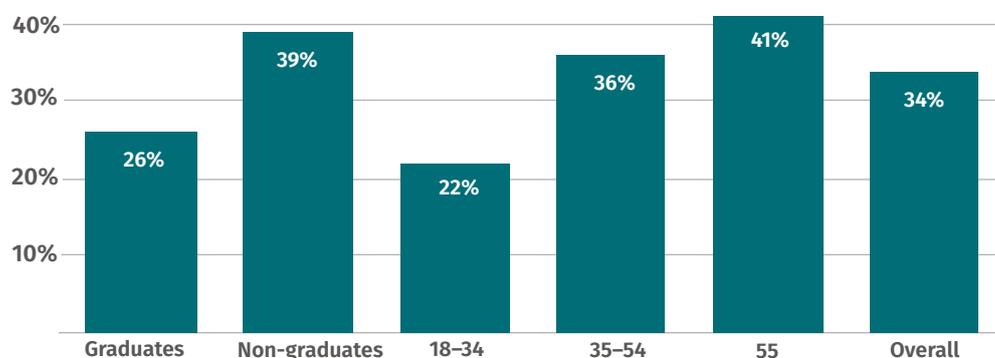
Source: Opinium (2021)
Notes: Respondents were asked: 'Imagine that the UK taking action on climate change required some increases to pay for these efforts. What is the MAXIMUM amount of EXTRA TAX, if any, that you would be willing to pay to achieve this?' Possible answers ranged in £25 bands from £0 to £200+ per month.

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2   For evidence on the electoral salience of these voters, see, for instance Skinner et al (2019).

Sympathy and salience towards climate change action, by Britain Talks Climate segment
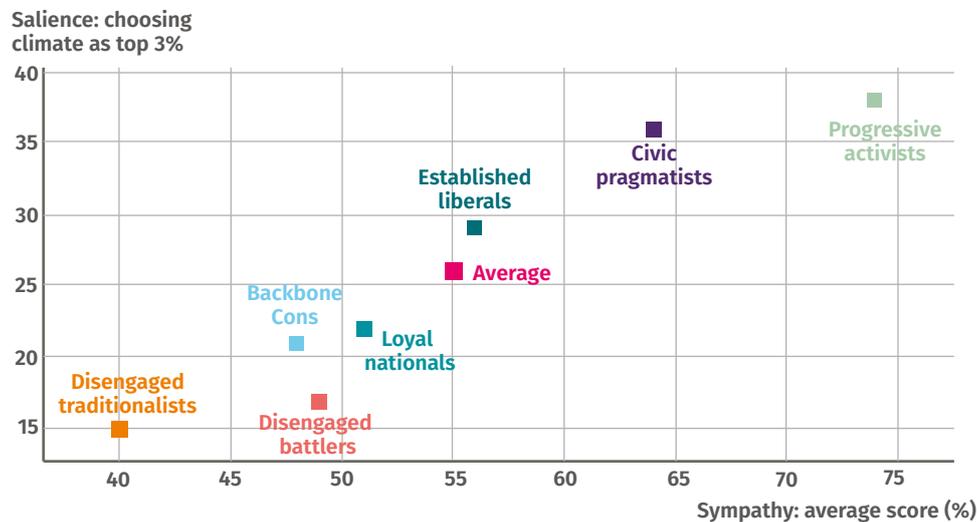
Source: Opinium (2022)
Note: 'Sympathy' is the average support for five key climate policies (phasing out diesel vehicles; phasing out gas boilers and replacing them with heat pumps; frequent flier tax; investment in EVs; and climate finance). 'Salience' is the average percentage of those choosing climate in their top three issues facing the country.

Our original intention had been to try and be more precise and analyse results by the 'Loyal Nationals' segment (Brexit leaning, socially conservative) in the Britain Talks Climate segmentation. However, for cost and methodological reasons, this was not possible.[4] Age and education were thus the best available proxies for this group.

STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS

We made a series of assumptions in undertaking this research which, though defensible and in our view justified, are all completely contestable matters of taste or philosophy. It's important to note them for the sake of clarity.

This research is designed to inform 'air war' campaigning by NGOs. It assumes that we have, say, £1 million to spend on a big campaign aimed at agenda setting and we are asking ourselves questions like, what message should we invest in for our ads, and what are the themes for our earned media? The messages identified through this research may, therefore, not translate perfectly into every environment or forum of communication, especially among more niche or engaged audiences.

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3   'Traditional and proud to be British, Loyal Nationals feel threatened and are galvanised by issues such as crime, immigration and terrorism. They believe the UK is already living with the reality of climate change, but they understand it as an issue linked to localised (rather than global) inequality and environmental degradation. Their relatively high political participation is driven by moral outrage about a system that supports corporate greed over everyday working people.' See Wang et al (2020).

4   Since Loyal Nationals only represent 17 per cent of the population, trying to build a representative pool of them spread across 11 sub-groups would require either an extensive overall sample – or else significant margins of error that would very likely render the results meaningless.

We assume the goal of the narratives is to create or build consent for government action on climate change. The research is thus of less use in telling us what will make more engaged activists take a civic action, or citizens take steps to reduce their own emissions through behaviour change.

We assume salience raising of the climate crisis among the general public is both (a) desirable and (b) possible. Others may object that salience raising makes climate a target for polarisation, or that it's not feasible given the immediacy of issues such as the economy or public services.[5]

We assume message discipline in campaigns is desirable. Others may argue that the best approach is to 'let a thousand flowers bloom' in our communications.

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5   See, for instance, Hawkins and Kimaran 2022.

3.
WHAT WE DID

For this experiment we used an approach called 'randomised control trial' (RCT) message testing. This was conducted via a sample of 3,388 voters between 1 and 4 April 2022, through the polling firm YouGov.

We had 11 treatment groups, testing a total of 10 messages in text form, alongside one control group who saw no message at all. YouGov advised that the minimum meaningful persuasion effect was 6 per cent.

We were interested only in testing message, not creative.

WHAT IS 'RCT' TESTING?

RCT testing is sometimes referred to as 'split testing', and works on a similar principle to A/B testing.

The idea is to take a large, nationally representative sample of voters and split them up into statistically identical sub-groups, weighted by age, gender and education lines.[6] Each message we wish to test is seen by *just one* of these sub-groups. A final sub-group, the 'control' group, see no message at all.

Though they see different messages (or in the control group's case, no message at all), respondents in every sub-group (including the control) go on to take the same survey ('outcome survey'), with the same questions ('outcome variables') at the end of the experiment.

Results are then obtained by comparing the survey answers of each treatment group to each other and, especially, to the control group (which saw no message). Since, statistically, the only thing that distinguishes sub-groups is the message they have been exposed to, any significant difference in attitudes can be attributed to the message.

PROS AND CONS OF RCT TESTING

This approach has numerous advantages. The first is that it allows us to test and observe the persuasion effects of a message, not just whether people agree with it in principle. There are many messages that people can agree with, but not all of them move them to our cause.[7]

Moreover, survey respondents are not always good at identifying the messages that best move them. Asked to choose the most effective messages, respondents can sometimes choose those that are simply the most familiar to them. In this way, RCT testing is a 'revealed preference' form of message testing. In addition, it allows us to test many messages without exhausting respondents, and to identify clear winners.

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6   For instance, each sub-group has roughly the same number of men and women, young and old people, graduates, and non-graduates, and so on. This of course is never perfect and we therefore apply margins of error (minimum persuasion effect) to any differences in the outcome survey before we can say it is significant.

7   For instance, we know that most people agree that climate action can create much-needed jobs – but does it make them more supportive of individual climate policies, or increase their prioritisation of climate overall?

There are of course limitations to this approach. For one, this is testing in a controlled environment, within the 'laboratory' of a polling platform. It can't tell us whether such a message can compete for attention with, say, cat videos on Facebook.

There are a few counterpoints here. Firstly, for methodological reasons, it's very hard (albeit not impossible) to run any kind of persuasion experiment – including RCT testing – 'in the wild' on the likes of Facebook.[8] In-platform message testing therefore tends to rely on engagement metrics (likes, shares), which are very poor proxies for persuasion among swing audiences.[9] Secondly, attention-grabbing content at least partially relies on high-quality creative, which is different to message.

RCT testing of our type can at least allow us to know that if enough resource is spent bringing the best message to life in terms of output, or indeed ad-buy, then it will be effective in moving a target audience.

NARRATIVES TESTED

Each narrative was presented in text form and was around 150-200 words long. The structure was the same, and each ended with the same broad call to action: government must act on climate change. We didn't include references to individual policies; we put these in the outcome survey instead.

We tested the following 10 narratives.

1. **Climate impacts.** This is a narrative about the impacts of climate change. It draws on lessons from Yale research which makes the narrative proximate and relevant, but also leaves room for hope and redemption to avoid fatalism (Yale 2015).
2. **Levelling up/community regeneration.** This narrative relates to the potential for using climate policy to re-make or 'level up' communities, emphasising the opportunity of climate policy to create affordable transport and new green spaces.
3. **Future generations.** This message emphasises the duty we have to help younger generations avoid the worst effects of climate change.
4. **Jobs.** This is another co-benefit narrative, emphasising the benefit that climate policy will have in terms of creating good, secure and well-paying jobs.
5. **Natural world.** This is what we might call 'the David Attenborough' narrative, emphasising the potential destruction of natural habitats and species as a result of climate change.
6. **Consumer benefit.** This narrative emphasises how action on climate change can bring down people's cost of living by reducing the running costs of heating their homes or powering their cars.
7. **Energy security.** This seeks to link concerns about energy security to the need for climate action – in particular, being vulnerable to the whims of rogue foreign regimes. It makes the case that moving to clean energy is the best way to kick our dependence on unreliable gas from abroad.
8. **Global leadership.** This is an upbeat, patriotic narrative about how Britain can lead from the front on climate change. It is positive about the action Britain

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8   The biggest challenge is that, at least in busy media markets, you need to spend a significant amount of money on an ad (or sets of ads) to be able to then recruit a decent sized sample of people who have been exposed to it into a poll. This is because only a fraction of any target audience is willing to take a survey. This is to speak nothing of the demographic (and thus sample) skews of users on any such platform.
9   Research by Potential Energy (2021) has shown that these metrics tend instead to measure how popular your message is with highly-engaged audiences, or your 'base'.

has taken so far on climate at home and abroad, and the potential for us to go 'over and above' in international action and coordination.

9. **Make the polluters pay.** This is a narrative about how big corporations are responsible for most pollution, and how climate action is a way that we can hold these firms accountable and stop putting money in their pocket.

10. **Social norms.** Leaning on nudge theory, this narrative in effect subliminally tells respondents that other people care about climate change – so they should too. It does this by pointing to rising levels of public concern and personal action.

The full list of narratives used can be found in annex A. An example of one narratives used can be seen in the box below.

CLIMATE IMPACTS NARRATIVE

We're used to hearing about the future threats of climate change. But the truth is, some of its impacts are with us today.

All over the world, climate change is already leading to dangerous weather events.

We've seen bushfires in Australia. Extreme heat waves in Canada. Increasing flooding in low-lying countries across Asia. Even in the UK, people have been forced out of their homes by flooding, while many breathe in the unclean air that pollutes our cities.

Scientists agree that things will get worse if we don't take action. In the UK, we could see coastal towns submerged by rising sea levels. Heat waves that threaten our food supply; flash floods which cause destruction on a scale never seen before.

We still have time. **But we simply have to change now if we want to protect our way of life for the future.**

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. Before it's too late.

MESSENGERS
Within each treatment group, we asked respondents which messenger they would most associate with the message they had just seen. This is not a perfect approach, since it in effect only tests recognition or association rather than effectiveness per se. But it gives us some useful information. We supplement the findings of this with new data on trusted messengers generally.

METRICS OF SUCCESS: OUR OUTCOME SURVEY
A point was given to each narrative each time it achieved a statistically significant score (6 per cent or more) among the country at large, over-40s or non-graduates, with three points available per outcome variable.

In total this was done across eight key outcome variables. These were:

1. **Increasing salience #1: issue prioritisation**
Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please choose up to three.

Respondents saw YouGov's standard issue list.[10] A good message drives up those choosing 'climate and the environment' because this is strongly correlated with prioritising climate in voting behaviour, being willing to bear the cost and inconvenience of supporting climate policy (see figure 3.1).

Amount of extra tax per month respondents would be willing to pay in order to address climate change (UK)
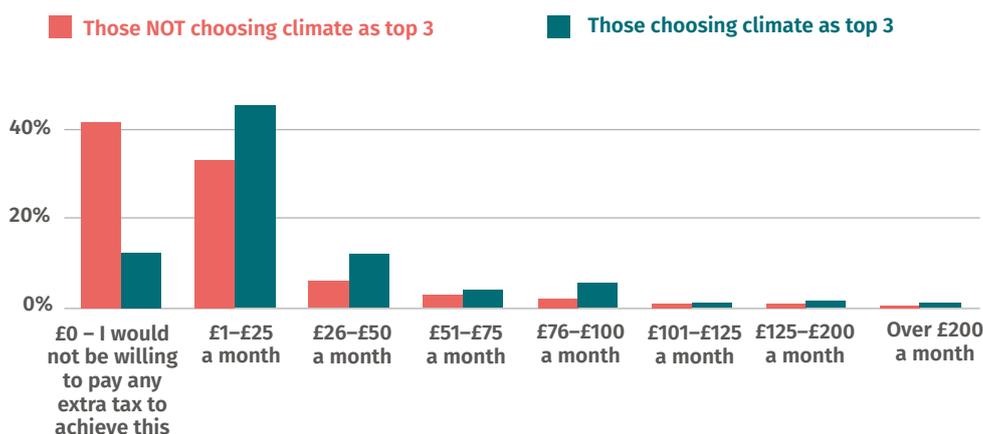
Source: Opinium (2021)

Notes: Respondents were asked: 'Imagine that the UK taking effective action on climate change required some increases in tax to pay for these efforts. What is the MAXIMUM amount of EXTRA TAX, if any, that you would be willing to pay to achieve this?'

2. Increasing salience #2: willingness to bear cost/inconvenience

Imagine that the UK taking effective action on climate change required some increases in tax to pay for these efforts. What is the MAXIMUM amount of EXTRA TAX, if any, that you would be willing to pay to achieve this?

This is not testing a carbon tax. It is a rough proxy for salience, measuring people's willingness to bear cost or inconvenience for the sake of effective climate action.

3. Increasing support for typical net zero policies

To what extent would you support or oppose each of the following policies intended to reduce emissions which contribute to climate change? (Possible answers: strongly support/tend to support/neither support nor oppose/tend to oppose/ strongly oppose/don't know).

- *Phasing out petrol vehicles.*
- *Investing in incentives and infrastructure around electric cars.*
- *Phasing out the sale of new gas boilers and replacing them with electric heat pumps.*
- *Providing financial aid to poor and vulnerable countries to help them shift to clean energy and reduce their emissions.*
- *A tax on frequent fliers.*

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10   Health; immigration and asylum; crime; the economy; tax; pensions; education; family life and childcare; housing; the environment and climate change; Britain leaving the EU; transport; welfare benefits; defense and security; none of these; don't know.

- *A 1 per cent increase in the basic rate of income tax to invest in a new generation of renewable energy.*

For simplicity, we averaged results across these six areas into one overall figure.

4. Decreasing opposition to typical net zero policies

Questions analysed were the same as for question 3 (Increasing support for typical net zero policy), except this time we analysed the reduction in opposition.

This is because moving people from opposition to support with one message exposure is difficult. Moving them from opposition to open-mindedness/ ambivalence, for instance to 'don't know' or 'neither agree nor disagree', is easier – and still useful from a campaigning perspective.

5. Reducing support for our opponent's message

To what extent do you agree that policies designed to address climate change will achieve very little other than leaving us all colder and poorer? (Possible answers: strongly support/tend to support/neither support nor oppose/tend to oppose/ strongly oppose/don't know).

A good message drives down support for this sentiment.

6. Narrative divide #1: government action

Which of these comes closest to your view?
- *The government should be doing more to address climate change.*
- *The government is doing the right amount to address climate change.*
- *The government is doing too much to address climate change.*

7. Narrative divide #2: cost of action vs inaction

Which of these comes closest to your view?
- *We can't afford to implement policies intended to address climate change. They cost the taxpayers and consumers too much at a time when they can afford them least.*
- *We can't afford NOT to implement policies intended to address climate change. The damaging effects of climate change are here already – and future generations will suffer further if we don't act now.*

8. Narrative divide #3: UK vs others

Which of these comes closest to your view?
- *The UK should not take steps to address climate change until other, bigger countries such as China agree to do so as well.*
- *The UK should be one of the most ambitious countries in the world when it comes to addressing climate change – we need to lead the way and do our bit, regardless of others.*

4.
WHAT WE LEARNT

In analysing results, it is important to bear the following things in mind.

- **Consistency of performance**. It is not advisable to over-invest in one result on one outcome metric, but instead see how a message performs across a range of metrics.
- **Margin of error**. Any persuasion effect less than 6 per cent is deemed by YouGov to be statistically insignificant.
- **Making sense of the graphs in this report**. Results will be mostly visualised by showing the difference in an attitude within each treatment group versus the control. It is this difference we are most interested in.

1. RESULTS BY OUTCOME METRIC
1. Increasing issue salience: the belief that climate is a top three issue facing the country

- 'Climate impacts' appeared to achieve the largest overall increase (+12 per cent), compared to the control group, in the number of respondents choosing climate as a top three issue facing the country. 'Future generations' and 'natural world' also performed well.

FIGURE 4.1: AROUND 29 PER CENT OF THE COUNTRY CHOSE CLIMATE AS A TOP THREE ISSUE FACING THE COUNTRY. THIS ROSE IN MOST TREATMENT GROUPS, BUT MOST NOTABLY AMONG THOSE EXPOSED TO THE 'CLIMATE IMPACTS' MESSAGE

Sub-groups choosing climate as a top three issue in the outcome survey
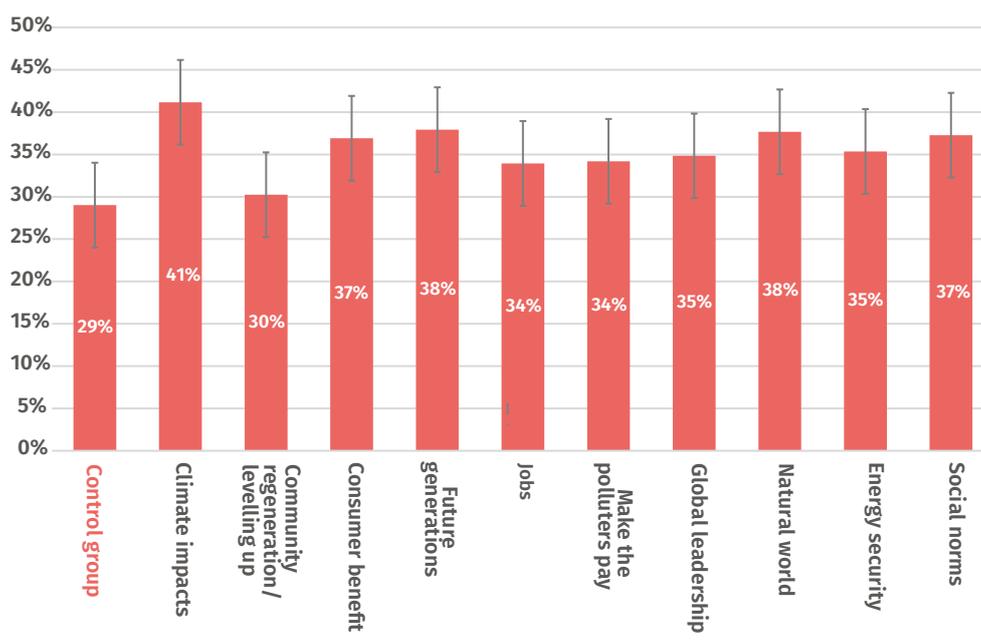
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data for this experiment

- This carried through to non-graduates and the over-40s, where 'climate impacts' also saw the biggest uplift (+13 per cent and +14 per cent respectively), with 'future generations' also doing well with non-graduates (+12 per cent).
- However, 'consumer benefit' performed better with the over-40s (+10 per cent) and non-graduates (+11 per cent) than the country at large, and 'global leadership' with the over-40s (+11 per cent).

FIGURE 4.2: AS WELL AS 'CLIMATE IMPACTS', 'FUTURE GENERATIONS' AND 'NATURAL WORLD' WERE AMONG THOSE WHO PERFORMED WELL ON THIS METRIC

Change vs control in climate being chosen as a top three issue facing the country
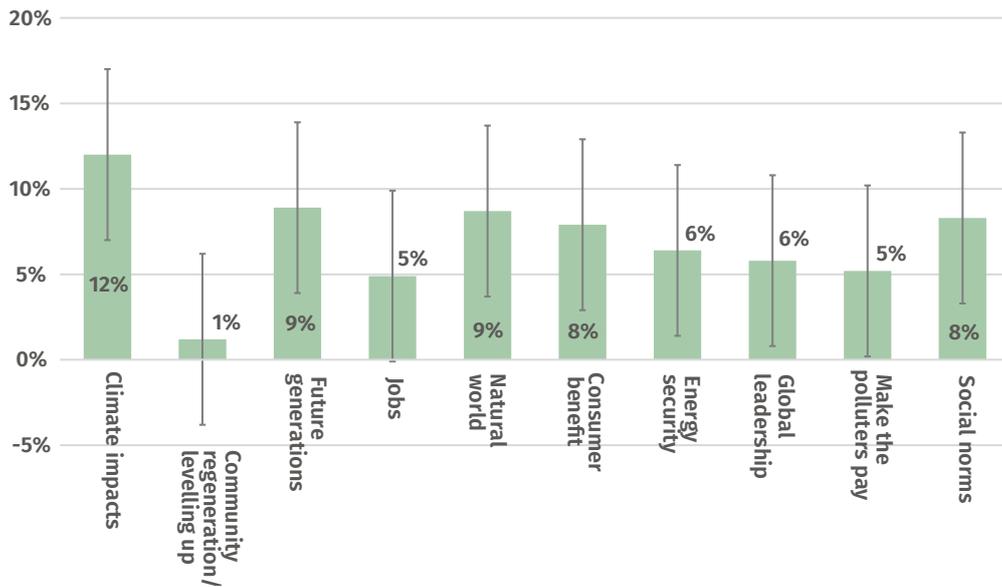
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

FIGURE 4.3: OVERALL PERSUASION EFFECTS ON THIS METRIC WERE BROADLY REFLECTED AMONG NON-GRADUATES AND THE OVER-40S

Change vs control in climate being chosen as a top three issue facing the country
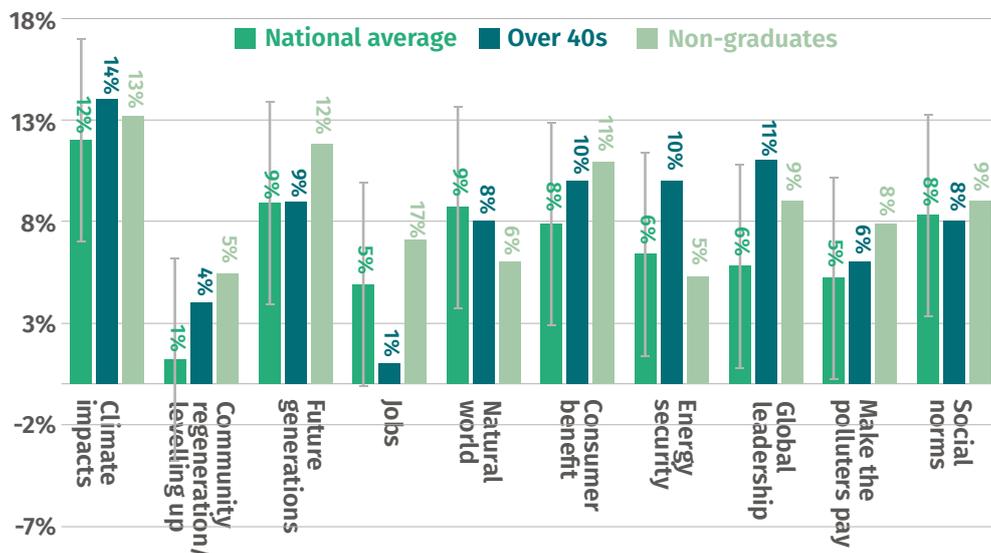
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

2. INCREASING ISSUE SALIENCE: WILLINGNESS TO PAY EXTRA TAX

- For ease of analysis, the scale was collapsed into willingness to pay 'something' versus nothing. We can see that no message creates a significant uplift among the overall population in willingness to pay.

- However, among non-graduates, 'climate impacts' (+11 per cent), 'future generations' (+11 per cent) and 'social norms' (+10 per cent) are the top three. 'Levelling up/community regeneration' and 'global leadership' also achieve a clearly significant uplift statistically.

- Technically, both 'consumer benefit' and 'energy security' created a 'backfire effect' on this question with the over-40s (-6 per cent and -9 per cent). That is, these narratives inadvertently created fewer people willing to pay something extra towards climate policy than if no message had been seen. This could just be noise, or it may point to a framing dilemma: by hooking climate to other more newsworthy issues we can risk subconsciously reminding people of cost-of-living pressures.

FIGURE 4.4: CLIMATE IMPACTS, FUTURE GENERATIONS AND SOCIAL NORMS PERFORMED WELL AMONG NON-GRADUATES AT INCREASING WILLINGNESS TO BEAR COST FOR CLIMATE POLICY

Change vs control in willingness to pay some extra tax towards climate change policy
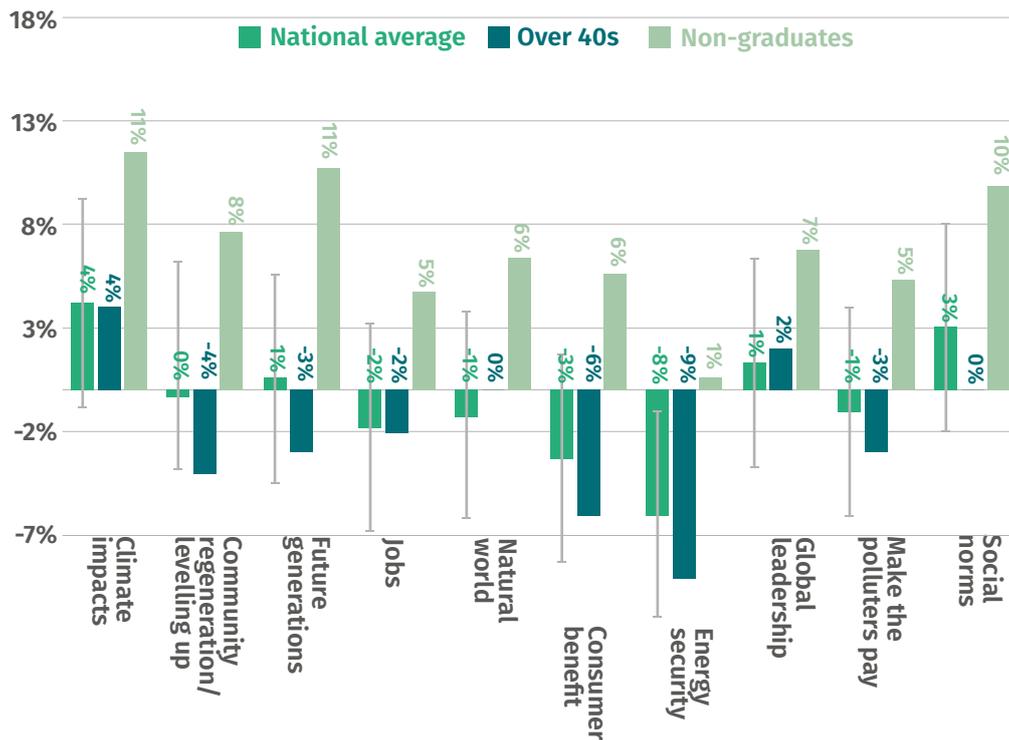
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

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FINDING 1

'Climate impacts' performed most consistently well in raising salience on the issue of climate change. 'Future generations' also performed well.

3. DRIVING DOWN SUPPORT FOR OUR OPPONENTS: AGREEMENT WITH 'COLDER AND POORER' MESSAGE

- 'Future generations' (-9 per cent), 'natural world' (-9 per cent) and 'global leadership' (-8 per cent) all performed well in driving down agreement with our opponents' core message. 'Social norms' (-8 per cent) performed admirably too.

- For those achieving a statistically significant shift, performance on this metric is broadly consistent across demographics.

FIGURE 4.5: 'NATURAL WORLD', 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP', 'FUTURE GENERATIONS' AND 'SOCIAL NORMS' ALL PERFORMED WELL ACROSS KEY DEMOGRAPHICS IN DRIVING DOWN AGREEMENT WITH OUR OPPONENTS' CORE MESSAGE, AS WELL AS THE POPULATION AT LARGE

Reduction vs control in agreement with the statement, 'Climate change policy will achieve very little other than leaving us all colder and poorer' (key message of opponents of climate action)
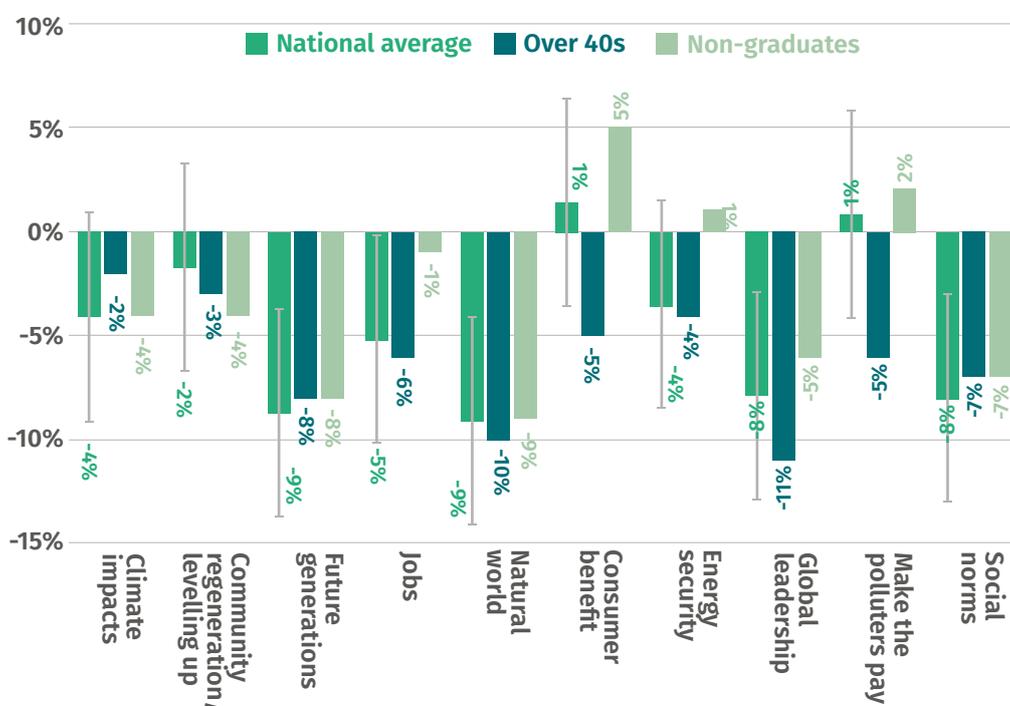
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

4. DRIVING DOWN SUPPORT FOR OUR OPPONENTS: OPPOSITION TO NET ZERO POLICY

- Most narratives achieved some effect in driving down opposition to the average net zero policy (scores averaged out support/opposition across six key policies[11]). In most cases, this moved people out of opposition towards 'don't know' or 'neither support/nor oppose', rather than active support. This is to be expected; exposure to a message once is unlikely to move people from opposition to support, but rather from opposition to ambivalent. We can at least theorise from this that repeated exposure may be successful in moving people further towards support.

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11   Phasing out petrol vehicles; a frequent flier tax; 1 per cent on income tax to fund renewable energy; phasing out gas boilers and bringing in heat pumps; investing in EV infrastructure; climate finance.

- The narratives which performed best at reducing average policy opposition were 'climate impacts' (-7 per cent), 'global leadership' (-6 per cent) and 'make polluters pay' (-6 per cent).
- 'Global leadership' performed especially well with non-graduates (-7 per cent) and over-40s (-8 per cent)

Average change vs control in opposition to six-item battery of net zero policy (policies include: phasing out petrol and diesel cars; phasing out gas boilers for heat pumps; investing in electric vehicles; climate finance; frequent flier tax; 1 per cent on income tax to fund a new generation of renewable energy)
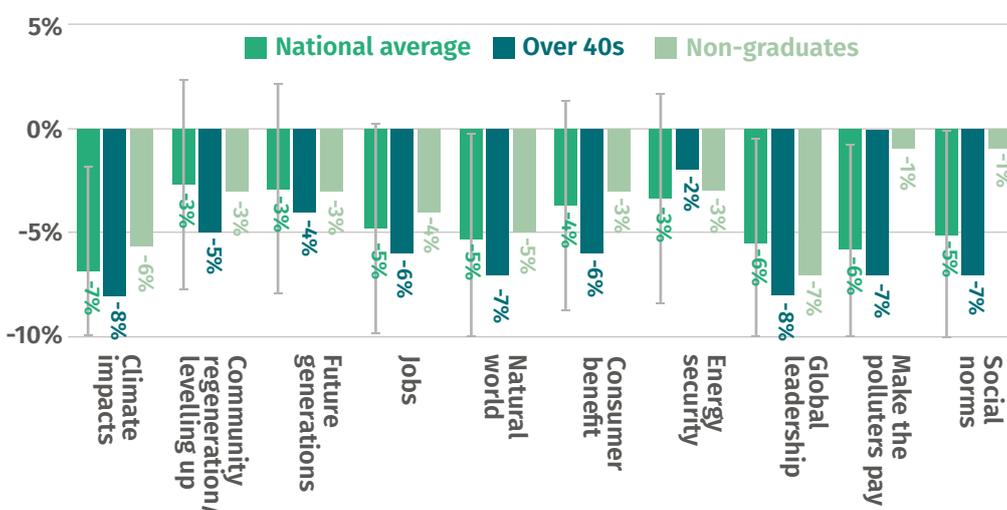
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

5. INCREASING SUPPORT: NET ZERO POLICY

- No narrative was successful in increasing active support for the net zero policy among the population at large.
- However, 'global leadership' (+9 per cent) and 'natural world' (+7 per cent) performed well among non-graduates. This was mostly achieved by moving some of these audiences out of ambivalence and into active support.
- 'Climate impacts' and 'levelling up/community regeneration' also achieved statistically significant effects with over-40s and non-graduates.

FINDING 2
Overall, 'global leadership' performed the most consistently at reducing support for our opposition. It managed to reduce overall opposition while also actively increasing support among non-graduates.

FIGURE 4.7: WHILE NO NARRATIVE, ON AVERAGE, MOVED PEOPLE OVERALL INTO ACTIVE POLICY SUPPORT, 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP' AND 'NATURAL WORLD' REGISTERED DECENT EFFECTS AMONG NON-GRADUATES.

Average change vs control in support for six-item battery of net zero policy (policies include: phasing out petrol and diesel cars; phasing out gas boilers for heat pumps; investing in electric vehicles; climate finance; frequent flier tax; 1 per cent on income tax to fund a new generation of renewable energy)
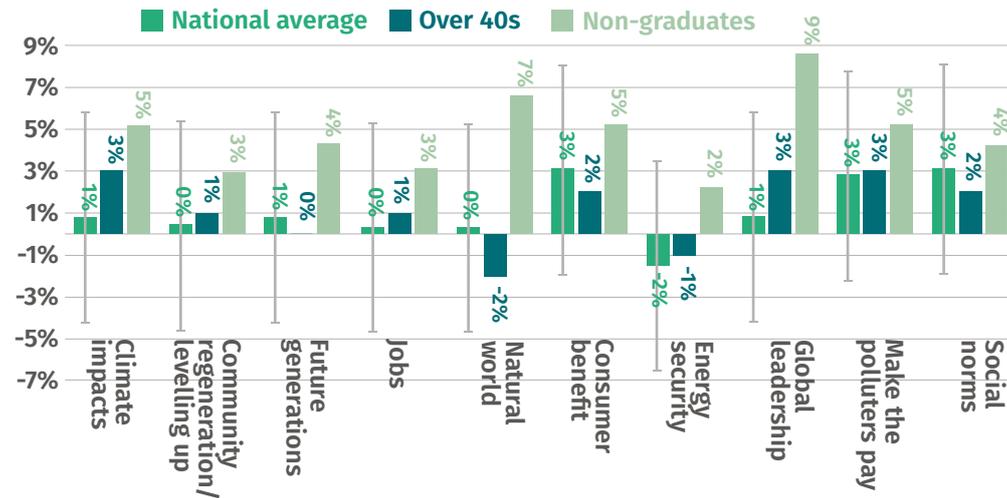

Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

6. NARRATIVE DIVIDE #1: INCREASING THE BELIEF THAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO MORE

FIGURE 4.8: 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP' AND 'MAKE POLLUTERS PAY' PERFORMED MOST CONSISTENTLY ON THIS METRIC, ALTHOUGH 'LEVELLING UP/COMMUNITY REGENERATION' PERFORMED WELL WITH NON-GRADUATES AND OVER-40S.

Change vs control in the belief that 'government should be doing more to address climate change' (vs 'government is doing the right amount' and 'government should be doing less')
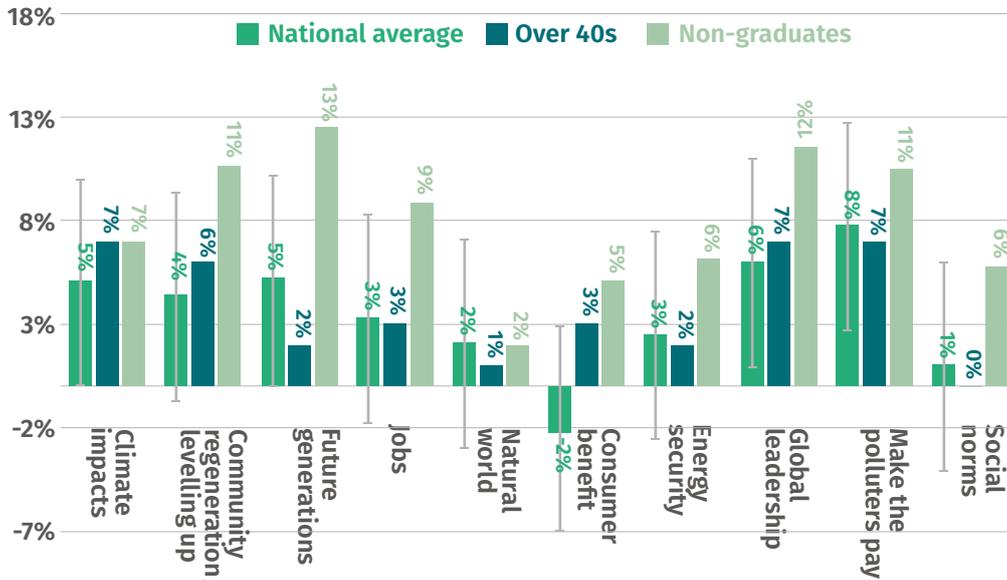
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

- 'Global leadership' (+6 per cent) and 'make polluters pay' (+8 per cent) were both able to persuade a statistically meaningful number of people to think that 'the government should be doing more on climate change'.
- Both these narratives saw meaningful uplifts on this metric with non-graduates and over-40s.
- 'Future generations' (+13 per cent) also achieved a noteworthy increase among non-graduates.

7. NARRATIVE DIVIDE #2: INCREASING BELIEF THAT WE CAN'T AFFORD *NOT* TO ACT ON CLIMATE

- No narrative achieved a significant persuasion effect among the overall population here.
- However, 'climate impacts' (+7 per cent), 'future generations' (+7 per cent) and 'global leadership' (+6 per cent) all achieved a meaningful effect among non-graduates.
- Once again, we see a potential backfire effect with the 'energy security' narrative, with 6 per cent *fewer* people on our side on this metric compared to the control.

FIGURE 4.9: 'CLIMATE IMPACTS', 'FUTURE GENERATIONS' AND 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP' REGISTERED NOTABLE PERSUASION EFFECTS AMONG NON-GRADUATES, EVEN IF NO MESSAGE MOVED THE DIAL MUCH AMONG THE OVERALL POPULATION

*Change vs control in the belief that 'we can't afford* not *to take action on climate change' (vs 'we can't afford to take action on climate change')*
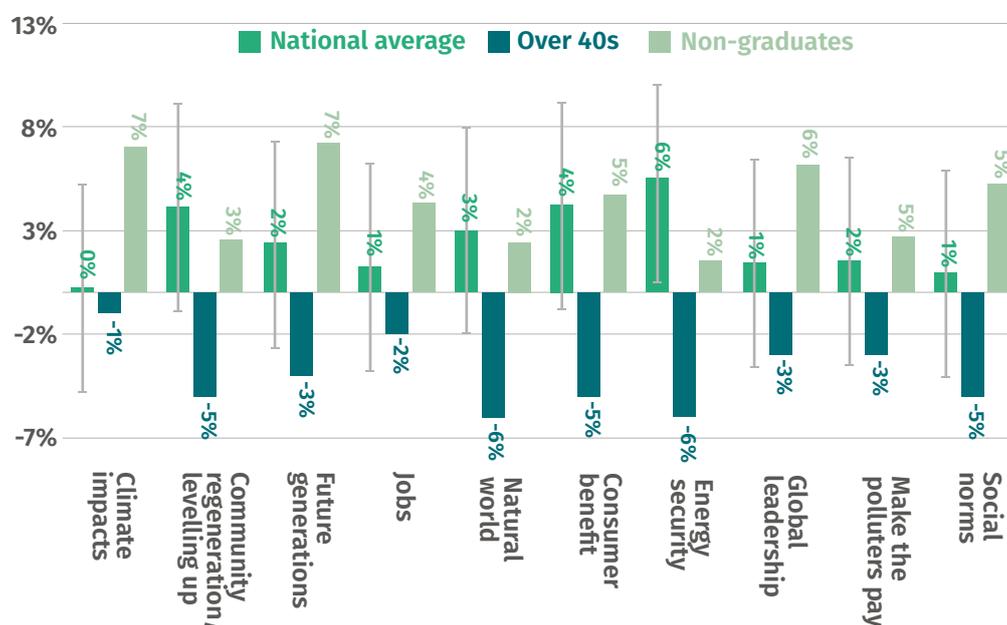

Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

8. NARRATIVE DIVIDE #3: INCREASING THE BELIEF THAT THE UK SHOULD BE AMONG THE MOST AMBITIOUS COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD ON CLIMATE CHANGE

- Likewise, no effects at a population level were achieved here.
- However, once again, a number of narratives saw a meaningful effect among non-graduates: 'climate impacts' (+10 per cent), 'global leadership' (+10

per cent), 'consumer benefit' (+10 per cent), 'jobs' (+9 per cent) and 'future generations' (+8 per cent).

- In addition to this, 'global leadership' was able to achieve a meaningful effect with over-40s on this measure (+8 per cent). 'Climate impacts' also just about achieves the same (+6 per cent).

FIGURE 4.10: A NUMBER OF MESSAGES MOVED THE DIAL AMONG NON-GRADUATES, ALTHOUGH 'CLIMATE IMPACTS' AND 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP' PERFORM MOST CONSISTENTLY ON THIS METRIC

Change vs control in the belief that 'the UK should be one of the most ambitious countries in the world when it comes to climate change' (vs 'the UK should only do what bigger countries like China do')
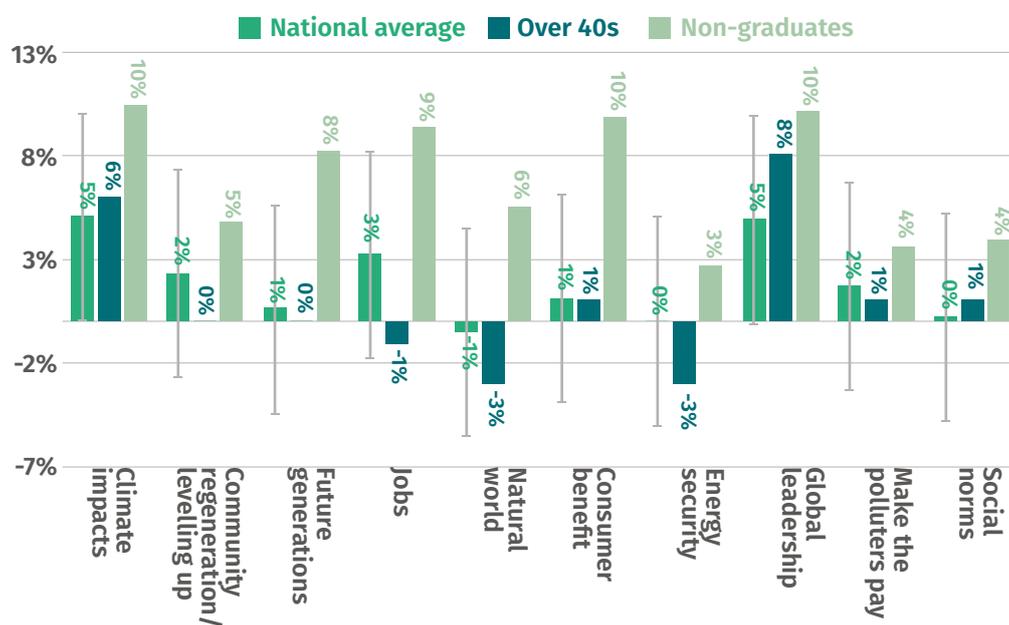
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

FINDING 3
Overall, 'global leadership' and 'climate impacts' performed most consistently in moving people across narrative divides. 'Future generations' and 'consumer benefit' performed less consistently but did well with non-graduates.

OVERALL SCORING AND PERFORMANCE
- For overall scoring, we gave narratives one point each time they achieved a statistically significant persuasion effect in the 'green' direction among the population at large, over-40s or non-graduates. A maximum of three points per metric were therefore available for each narrative.
- Overall results, at a 6 per cent minimum threshold of statistical significance, are: 'global leadership' performs most consistently well overall, and especially with swing audiences, closely followed by 'climate impacts' and 'future generations'. 'Natural world' also performs well. For more discussion on these results, see chapter 5.

FIGURE 4.11: ALL TREATMENTS SCORED AT LEAST A FEW PERSUASION EFFECTS ON A FEW METRICS, BUT 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP', 'CLIMATE IMPACTS' AND 'FUTURE GENERATIONS' PERFORMED MOST CONSISTENTLY WELL ACROSS METRICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS, ESPECIALLY NON-GRADUATES

Tally of significant persuasion effects at 6 per cent minimum effect, broken down by demographic
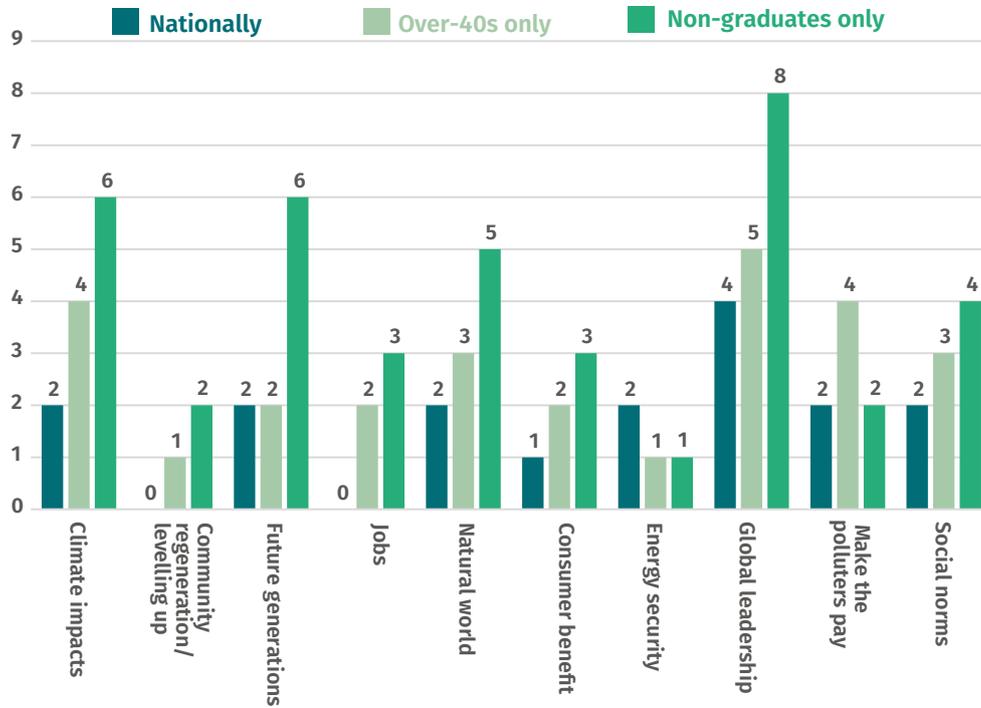
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

FIGURE 4.12: TOTALLING UP THE EFFECTS, 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP' IS OVERALL THE MOST CONSISTENT PERFORMER ACROSS THE RANGE OF METRICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS, BUT 'CLIMATE IMPACTS' AND 'FUTURE GENERATIONS' ALSO PERFORM WELL

Overall tally of persuasion effects, at 6 per cent minimum effect
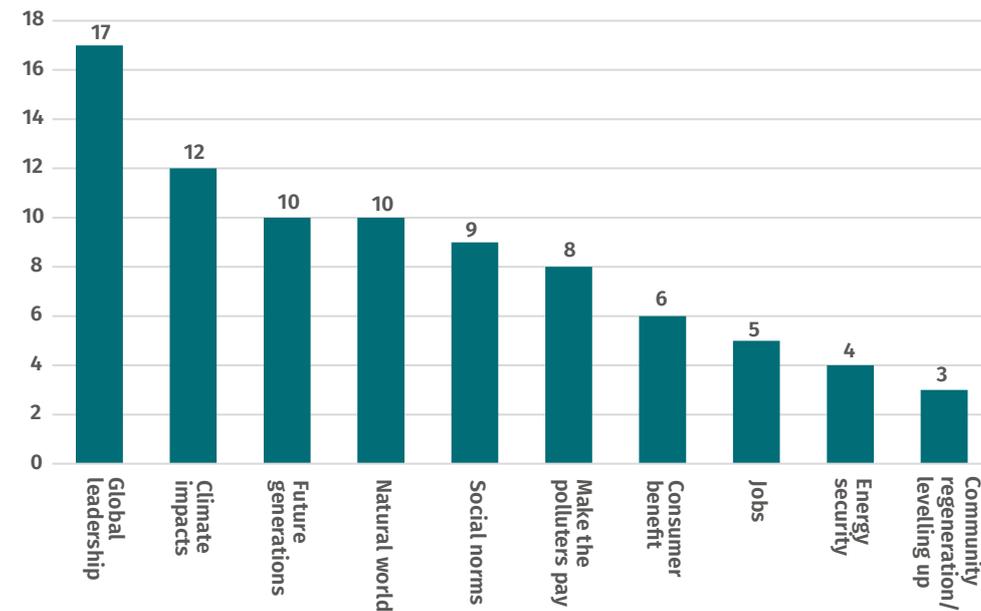
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

- If we apply this same system but, for extra rigour, increase the minimum persuasion effect to 7 per cent, the scoreboard looks like this:

FIGURE 4.13: APPLYING A SLIGHTLY HIGHER MARGIN OF ERROR GIVES US THE SAME TOP THREE ISSUES AFFECTING THE COUNTRY, ALTHOUGH IT FLATTENS OUT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM

Overall tally of persuasion effects, at 7 per cent minimum effect
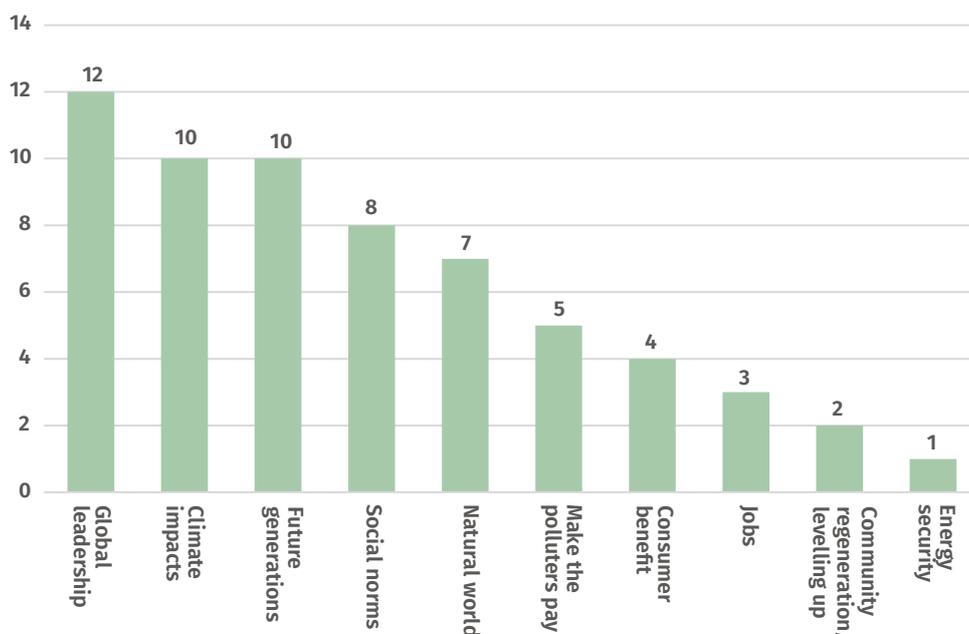
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

FINDING 4
Overall, 'global leadership', 'climate impacts' and 'future generations' performed most consistently well across the broad range of key metrics, among the population at large and among swing audiences.

A NOTE ON MESSENGERS
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, 'climate impacts' and 'future generations', as the most recognisably 'climate' narratives, over-index on association with scientists, naturalists, and climate NGOs.
- What is most striking is that nobody really seems to own the 'global leadership' narrative. It has a small over-index with the Conservative party, but it is relatively minor. This underscores the opportunity for anyone who adopts and owns this narrative.
- Likewise, 'make the polluters pay' is less likely to be associated with any one type of messenger.
- From separate polling, we can see that the most *trusted* messengers in the climate space are scientists and health professionals. High profile naturalists such as David Attenborough, Chris Packham and Michaela Strachan also have high levels of trust and name recognition. This is consistent with previous research (Akehurst 2021).

Type of convincing messengers for each message, according to treatment group respondents

Who would be a convincing messenger?	Climate Impacts	Community roots and regeneration	Future generations	Jobs / opportunity	Protect the natural world / environment	Consumer benefit	Security / energy independence	National pride / global leadership	Make the polluters pay	Social norms / bottom up	All
Naturalists (such as David Attenborough, Chris Packham etc)	46%	39%	48%	41%	48%	37%	33%	44%	39%	45%	42%
Scientists	44%	31%	45%	42%	46%	32%	28%	36%	37%	38%	38%
Climate activists generally	29%	23%	24%	26%	27%	18%	23%	20%	23%	24%	24%
Environmental NGOs	24%	19%	19%	23%	26%	22%	17%	14%	19%	20%	20%
Academics	22%	16%	21%	22%	19%	18%	14%	19%	17%	20%	19%
The UN	19%	15%	16%	11%	18%	13%	15%	12%	16%	12%	15%
The EU	12%	9%	12%	9%	11%	7%	9%	9%	12%	9%	10%
Energy companies	15%	11%	12%	20%	9%	19%	16%	13%	9%	12%	14%
The Labour party	13%	11%	12%	12%	6%	10%	11%	8%	10%	11%	10%
The Conservative party	11%	8%	10%	6%	6%	8%	9%	13%	8%	8%	9%
None of these	8%	14%	10%	13%	9%	17%	15%	7%	8%	11%	11%
Don't know	25%	25%	16%	18%	22%	19%	25%	29%	28%	23%	23%
Unweighted N	338	308	298	308	315	310	308	289	318	324	3116

p<.001	p<.01	p<.05	p<.10	p<.10	p<.05	p<.01	p<.001

Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

Note: Respondents were asked: 'Who do you think would be a convincing messenger for the argument you just read? (select all that apply)'

FIGURE 4.14: THERE ARE ONLY A FEW INDIVIDUAL MESSENGERS TESTED HERE WHO HAVE BOTH HIGH AWARENESS AND FAVOURABILITY

Trusted individual climate messengers
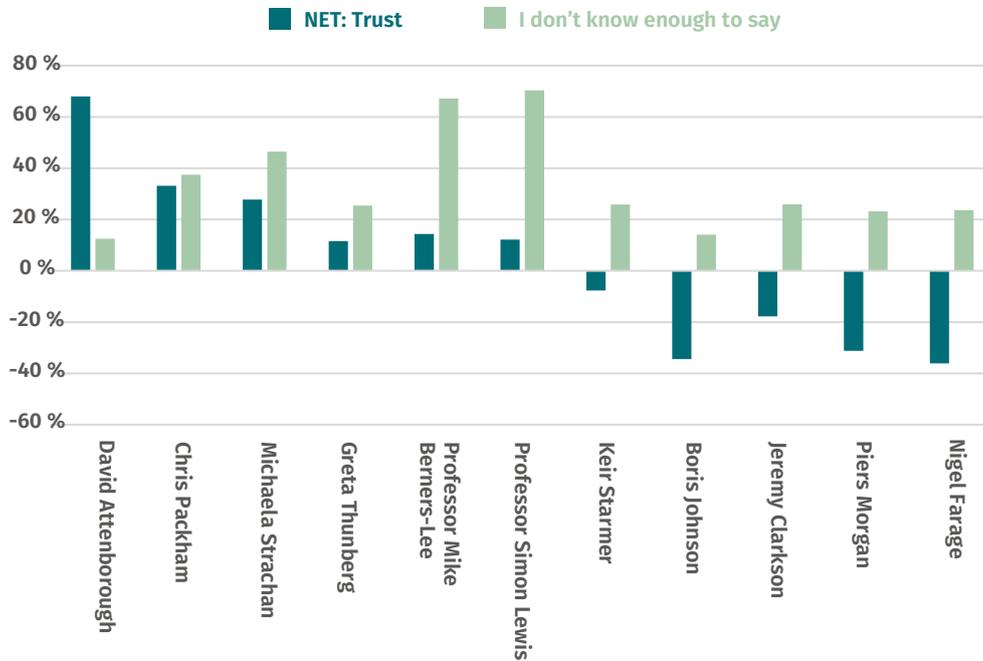
Source: Opinium, June 2022
Note: Respondents were asked: 'To what extent, if at all, do you trust or distrust the following people on the matter of climate change and the environment?'

FIGURE 4.15: THOSE WORKING IN SCIENCE AND MEDICINE ARE THE MOST TRUSTED CLIMATE MESSENGERS, PRESUMABLY AS THEY ARE SEEN AS HAVING A LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN THE TOPIC, BUT ARE ALSO VIEWED AS LESS PARTISAN AND MORE 'ABOVE THE FRAY'

Trusted categories of climate messengers
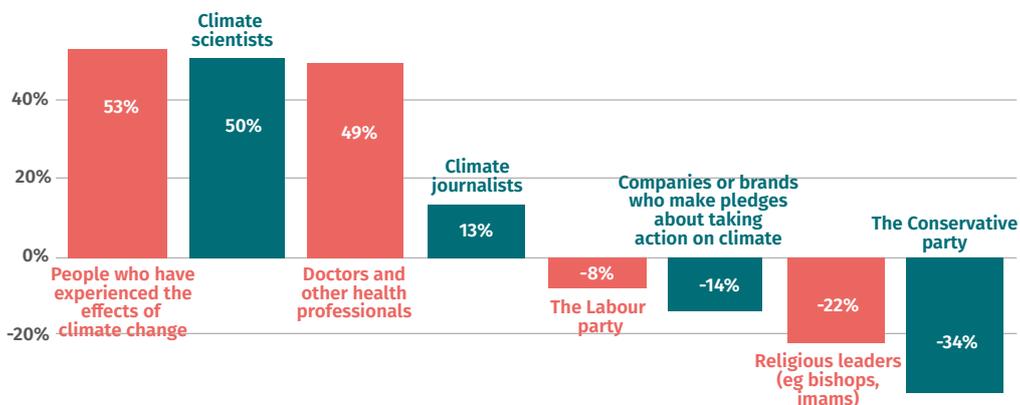
Source: Opinium, June 2022
Note: Respondents were asked: 'To what extent, if at all, do you trust or distrust the following groups of people or organisations on the matter of climate change and the environment?'

5.
REFLECTIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESULTS

'Global leadership', 'climate impacts' and 'future generations' appear, in this experiment at least, to be the most consistently successful narratives at achieving persuasion effects across the public at large and swing demographics. 'Natural world' also performed well.

Ultimately, the difference between these top three narratives is relatively marginal. Any of the three could be used effectively by a prospective climate campaigner who felt comfortable using them, and building content around them consistently. For instance, 'global leadership' may better suit climate-friendly politicians, especially as it is currently 'unclaimed' by any messenger, while 'climate impacts' may be the better narrative for the NGO sector.

It is notable that the most consistently persuasive messages were all simple narratives of shared destiny or concern. These narratives are occasionally deemed outmoded or unfashionable, but it appears they remain effective with voters.[12]

By comparison, the more utilitarian or 'co-benefit' narratives (such as 'jobs', 'levelling up/community regeneration', 'consumer benefit', and 'energy security'), which seek to emphasise the transactional benefits of climate solutions, did not perform as well consistently, despite in some cases being highly topical. These co-benefit narratives often generate high levels of agreement among ordinary voters, but do not appear to be emotionally persuasive enough to change their underlying beliefs.

It is not exactly clear *why* this is, but it arguably aligns with some previous research (Raikes and Cooper 2021). It may also be that some of these narratives require too many levels of understanding, or familiarity with connections between issues, to work with less engaged audiences. It is possible that this will change over time, as, for example, more people know people who work in green industries.

For now, though, this dynamic creates a dilemma since many co-benefit narratives are popular with elites and activists and can be useful in keeping climate in the news agenda. A compromise on this is suggested in the recommendations section of this paper.

On the plus side, some of the best performing narratives ('climate impacts', 'future generations', 'natural world') are ones that the climate sector can carry off authentically – if they are brought to life in the right way and stuck to with confidence.

Some in the sector worry about the preponderance of risk or 'doom' based messages. Research tells us that it's important for any negative framing to hold

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12   See, for instance, Nagal (2021). The author found this to be roughly representative of median opinion among climate communicators and those involved in climate insight in the UK, although this is a subjective judgement. To the author's knowledge, no survey research exists of professional climate communicators or researchers on climate opinion.

out the possibility of redemption (so as to avoid fatalism) and to emphasise evidence that is local and proximate (Yale 2015). It is also noteworthy that the 'global leadership' narrative is upbeat. However, all that said, there is no evidence here that leading on the *problem* of climate causes problems in itself – at least with less engaged voters.

Ordinary voters engage with and think about climate far less than activists or communicators, so are not over-exposed to these messages in the way people working in the field can be. Therefore the risk of doom or paralysis is less. Evidence of the negative effects of risk-based messaging typically relate to over-exposure among activists, tracking their impact on campaign engagement metrics (such as e-mail open rates or petition signatures) (Yale 2018, Whiting 2018). This is a legitimate concern but a different objective to that of salience raising among ordinary voters, most of whom will never become activists.

Also noteworthy are the significant persuasion effects seen throughout this experiment with non-graduates, across multiple treatment groups. To some extent this is because we start with lower levels of support with these groups, so there is more headroom for persuasion (whereas starting at 90 per cent support, for instance, is better but leaves less room for adding new people to our coalition).

However, bigger effects among non-graduates may also be because they are simply less engaged, and thus less fixed in their views. It is not that this group is actively hostile to climate action, no matter what those who claim to speak for this group say. It's simply that they very rarely hear pro-climate action messages that speak to their values or outlook. When they do, they can be moved. This should be a source for optimism for climate campaigners.

FIGURE 4.12: TOTALLING UP THE EFFECTS, 'GLOBAL LEADERSHIP' IS OVERALL THE MOST CONSISTENT PERFORMER ACROSS THE RANGE OF METRICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS, BUT 'CLIMATE IMPACTS' AND 'FUTURE GENERATIONS' ALSO PERFORM WELL
Overall tally of persuasion effects, at 6 per cent minimum effect
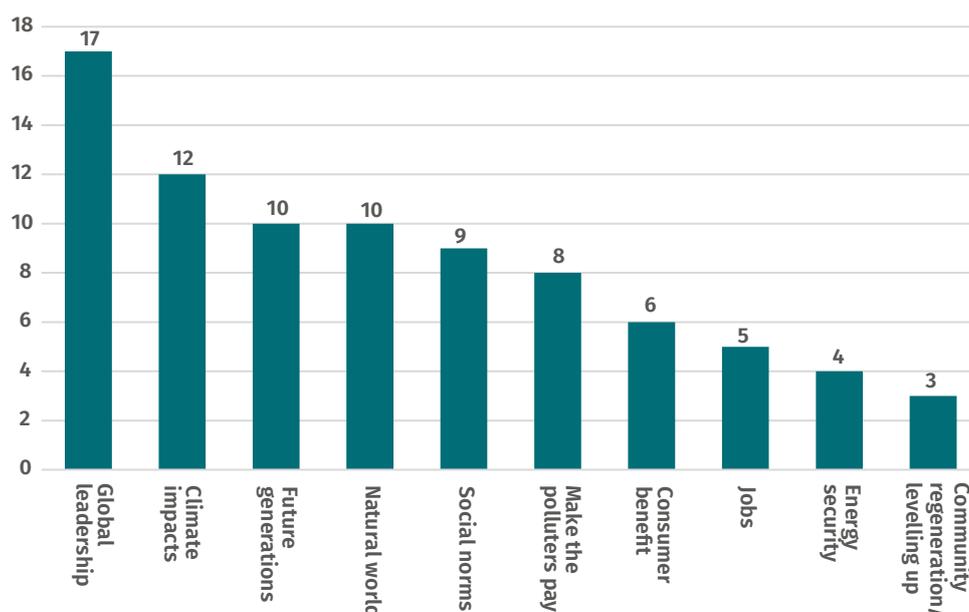
Source: Author's analysis of YouGov data

RECOMMENDATIONS

The best thing for any organisation wanting to raise the salience of climate change (via 'air-war' campaigning, at least) would be to **build a drumbeat of content, interventions and messengers around the narrative of 'global leadership', 'climate impacts' or 'future generations'.** Funders should look to invest in a dedicated, focused, and well-funded pilot campaign (eight to 12 months minimum) with one of these narratives and evaluate how it performs in real life.

Any creative team – whether in-house or an agency – working on this campaign should be given one of these themes to build content around. The idea with any theme is that it should be specific enough to draw clear direction from, but broad enough to allow for versatility.

Likewise, those working on earned media (publicity/exposure not gained from advertising) should look for opportunities to build pro-active stories, or recruit trusted messengers to speak on this theme.

Ultimately the challenge is whether we can bring these messages to life in consistent and creative ways, while staying disciplined, and concentrate sufficient resource on reaching voters over a long period of time. The winning message itself is not mysterious nor convoluted.

We do not recommend that **co-benefit narratives** should be jettisoned. But they **should be focused on elite influencing, or media moments where a topic other than climate is being discussed** (such as energy security). These narratives can neutralise certain areas of debate – for example: does net zero push up consumer bills? – especially with elites. But they are not where we should invest our focus or resource with less engaged voters.

Ultimately, **climate campaigners should remain optimistic about building further support for climate action.** Sympathy on climate remains high despite cost of living pressures and competing items on the news agenda. Attempts to create culture-war style division out of it have, thus far, failed. The challenge remains keeping climate salient in the minds of voters. This report shows the answers to this task are within our grasp.

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ANNEX A: NARRATIVES USED

CLIMATE IMPACTS

We're used to hearing about the future threats of climate change. But the truth is, some of its impacts are with us today.

All over the world, climate change is already leading to dangerous weather events.

We've seen bushfires in Australia. Extreme heat waves in Canada. Increasing flooding in low-lying countries across Asia. Even in the UK, people have been forced out of their homes by flooding, while many breathe in the unclean air that pollutes our cities.

Scientists agree that things will get worse if we don't take action. In the UK, we could see coastal towns submerged by rising sea levels. Heat waves that threaten our food supply; flash floods which cause destruction on a scale never seen before.

We still have time. **But we simply have to change now if we want to protect our way of life for the future.**

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. Before it's too late.

LEVELLING UP/COMMUNITY REGENERATION

No one should have to leave the place they love to live a good life. But too many communities in our country have been left behind.

There is a way we can fix this while also addressing another challenge: climate change.

Reducing the emissions that contribute to climate change will mean moving away from polluting industries. It will mean changing the way we get around, or the way we heat our homes.

In doing that, we have the chance to massively improve local communities.

We can create good local jobs in green industries. We can improve buses, trains and cycling and walking to make them better and more affordable. And we give everyone access to green spaces on their doorstep.

Taking action on climate now means one day no one will have to leave the place they love to live a good life.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. For our communities.

FUTURE GENERATIONS

We all care about the future of our children and younger generations. While some aspects of their lives are easier than in the past, they're growing up in a world with a lot of frightening new challenges.

Amongst the biggest is climate change.

Global warming means our climate is changing fast. On current trends, it will quickly affect our children's future too.

Take someone aged 18 today. Scientists estimate that, without action now, by the time they are 40 they will be living in a world of frequent floods, storms and other extreme weather. Food shortages and refugee crises will be more frequent as a result.

The best years of our children's and grandchildren's lives could be full of disruption on a scale unimagined today.

We owe it to them to do what we can to avoid this.

If we can take action today to secure their future tomorrow, then we should.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. For future generations.

JOBS

Secure, meaningful work is the foundation of a decent life. But more and more we see people struggling to find it.

There is a way we can fix this while also addressing another challenge: climate change.

As we move away from old polluting industries and replace them with cleaner energy, we will create a new generation of good jobs in new industries. Plumbers, engineers and other workers will be able to find decent work installing solar panels, fixing home insulation or making electric cars.

Experts estimate that transitioning to green energy could create two million new jobs in the UK by 2030.

But the longer we leave people in old industries with little or no future, the bigger the risk of mass redundancies.

Taking action on climate now creates well-paid, secure jobs to be proud of in industries of the future.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. Before the jobs opportunity slips by.

NATURAL WORLD

We only have one planet. And the millions of birds, animals and fish living alongside us depend on it as much as we do.

Nature is our oldest form of heritage and we hold it in trust for future generations. But the sad truth is it's now under threat from human actions.

Climate change is starting to not only harm humans, but nature too.

It has already led to loss of habitats and species all over the world. Scientists believe that it threatens over one million wildlife species with extinction. Meanwhile, many coral reefs are dying out because of pollution and plastics.

If we don't protect the natural world, it can't protect us. A healthy environment soaks up pollutants and acts as a buffer against extreme weather like flooding.

Human activities are harming our natural world right now, and we need to stop.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. For the sake of the planet.

CONSUMER BENEFIT

In the last few months UK consumers have started feeling the pinch of inflation and price rises. But there are ways to cut people's bills while addressing another challenge: climate change.

To address climate change, we will need to move away from polluting forms of energy.

But the good news is that renewable energy is now actually cheaper than oil, gas or coal. The lower lifetime costs of an electric heat pump also make them cheaper than polluting gas boilers. The same is true of electric cars over petrol cars.

And experts predict that green forms of energy will only keep getting cheaper and more reliable. While traditional forms of energy get more expensive and unreliable.

So delaying climate action will mean higher costs.

If we want to get spiralling bills back under control, we need to go green.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. For the pounds in our pocket.

ENERGY SECURITY

It's a sad fact that the world is getting more dangerous in new ways.

One of these concerns our energy supply.

As the demand for cheap energy has increased, Western countries have become dependent on those countries who export oil and gas. But many of those countries are dangerous influences in the world, such as Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Our dependence increases their power and our vulnerability. It also leaves us more exposed to volatile global price changes.

That's why moving away from polluting industries like oil or gas is not good for addressing climate change; it's good for security too.

By expanding our production of renewable energy - such as wind and solar - here at home, we take our energy supply into our own hands.

If we want to reduce the power of tyrants and rogue regimes, we need to go green quicker.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. To stand on our own two feet.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

As a country, we have always punched above our weight - leading the world in industry and technology. Time and again Britain has been at the forefront of change in the world.

And we have an opportunity to do this again with the fight against climate change.

Every country needs to play its part.

But Britain can – and is – leading from the front in this fight. We have cut our carbon emissions in half since 1991. Just recently we hosted COP26, international climate change conference. This leadership gives us new influence in the world, but it also gives us something to be proud of.

We should be looking to keep our status as a trailblazer in action to save the world from climate change.

To do that, we have to lead from the front, not duck out the moment things get difficult.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. Let's keep leading the way.

MAKE THE POLLUTERS PAY

Too often these days it's easy for those with power to escape punishment for their actions.

This is the case, too, with climate change.

But a handful of big companies have been responsible for about 71 per cent of the emissions contributing to climate change.

Most of these are 'fossil fuel' companies who have made billions from oil, gas, coal and other sources of energy which pollute the atmosphere.

The only way we can bring them to justice is to decrease our dependence on fossil fuels for heating our homes, powering our cars, and keeping the lights on. That means a massive expansion in renewable green energy in every walk of life, funded by a tax on big polluting companies.

If we want to make big polluters pay, we have to stop putting money in their pocket.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. Hit the polluters where it hurts.

SOCIAL NORMS

We have known about climate change for over 30 years.

But it's only in the last few years – as the impacts of climate change become clear – that public awareness of the issue has shot up.

We are all talking to each other about climate change a lot more, and taking personal action too. The number of people who report taking personal action on climate has doubled in the last decade. You can see it almost everywhere – people using reusable bags, cycling to work, in some cases even going vegetarian.

Climate and the environment is rising up the public and political agenda too. Whereas 10 years ago polls suggested it was the British public's sixth highest issue, today it's in our top three.

That's why support for the government implementing pro-climate change policy has increased too.

Government must follow where the public are leading.

That's why the UK government needs to keep playing its part in the global fight against climate change. It needs to be even more ambitious in reducing Britain's greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy. Let's keep going.

ANNEX B:
FULL RCT DATA

The full data behind this research is available on the IPPR website:
http://www.ippr.org/research/publications/a-rising-tide

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