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Earth Day 2023 – Is concern and focus slipping on climate change?

London, 20th April 2023 — A new global Ipsos survey of 21,231 adults reveals that, on average across 29 countries, just under a third (31%) of people agree that their government has a clear plan in place for how government, businesses and people are going to work together to tackle climate change. Agreement has fallen since last year by an average of 8 percentage points across the 26 countries surveyed both in 2022 and this year.

Key findings

- When it comes to who should act, citizens (63%), government (61%), and businesses (59%) continue to be seen in roughly equal measure as having the responsibility to act, but each by a decreasing proportion of the global public.
- Global opinion is divided on whether now is the right time to invest in climate change or not (38% say now is the right time and 30% say it is the wrong time), although a majority disagree that the negative impact of climate change is too far in the future to worry about (52% vs 23%).
- Furthermore, the view that the economic cost of climate change itself will be greater than the cost of measures to reduce it also prevails over the opposing view (42% vs 26%).
- Looking at actions to try and tackle climate change, almost a third (30%) of citizens globally say they would be willing to pay more taxes to help prevent it. Slightly more say they would be most encouraged to take more action to fight climate change through financial incentives/tax cuts for environmentally friendly purchases (38%) or by having easy access to information to fight it (36%).
- Understanding of the behaviours that households could take to reduce their carbon footprint shows progress since last year. In particular, awareness of the positive impact of switching to purchasing renewable energy has increased by 8 percentage points.

What is the plan?

Outside of India and Southeast Asia, awareness of government plans to tackle climate change remains low in 2023, at a global average of one-third (31%). Across the 29 countries, citizens continue to perceive action as a shared responsibility between citizens (63%), government (61%), and businesses (59%). However, there is less belief in the need to act on climate change to prevent failing future generations, customers, employees, and people generally compared to 2022 when looking at the 26 countries surveyed both last year and this year.



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In general, more citizens say that the economic cost of climate change itself will be greater than the cost of measures to reduce it. However, this is not a consensus view, with two-fifths (42%) globally saying this, compared to a quarter (26%) who say the cost of mitigating climate change would be greater. With the exception of Japan (23% and 30% respectively), there is stronger belief in every country surveyed that the economic cost of climate change itself will be greater than the cost of measures to reduce it.

Who is leading the pack?

Citizens in most countries surveyed do not see their country as being a leader in tackling climate change. Just over a third (31%) on average globally hold this view, with the highest proportions found in India (71%) and Malaysia (51%). There is consensus that countries should do more to combat climate change (a global average of 66% agree), and that the greater burden should fall on countries that have historically contributed more to climate change (62%) and on countries that are currently more economically developed (70%). However, there is agreement across the 29 countries (averaging at 75%) that we cannot fully tackle climate change unless all countries work together.

What are we going to do?

Citizens generally do not dismiss the importance of individual action, with seven in ten (70%) globally agreeing that, if everyone made small changes in their everyday lives, it would have a big impact on tackling climate change. However, opinions are more divided on whether climate change is beyond our control. While almost half (48%) disagree with this statement and just a quarter (24%) agree, views vary widely between countries. Disagreement is highest in South Africa (60%), Great Britain (57%) and Poland (57%), and lowest in India (14%) and Japan (32%).

There is similar division over whether now is the right time or not to be investing in climate change given the tough economic conditions (38% say it is the right time and 30% say it is the wrong time), but the majority (52%) disagree that the negative impacts of climate change were too far off to be worried about.

Globally, three in ten (30%) agree that they would pay more of their income in taxes to help prevent climate change, but more (38%) disagree. When asked which of various options would motivate them to make a change, citizens are most likely to say it's a financial incentive or tax cut for environmentally friendly purchases (38%), having easy access to information on steps they can take every day (36%), and seeing climate-driven weather events' impact on their own country (34%). Just 14% say they are already doing everything they can to fight climate change.



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Perils of perception

In general, citizens tend to perceive many actions as having a far greater impact on reducing emissions than they actually do – globally, the “believe-true gap” persists. Compared to last year, there has been an increase in understanding surrounding some of the actions households can take to reduce their carbon footprint. Awareness of the positive impact of switching to purchasing renewable energy was ranked by the public as the best way to reduce emissions (ranking 4th in terms of its actual impact), up 8 percentage points. However, recycling (32%) and using less packaging (24%) (ranking 60th and 38th respectively in terms of actual impact), are still perceived to have more impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions than living car-free (18%), the most effective way to cut emissions.

The public is also fairly divided on which sectors contribute the most to global warming, placing greater emphasis on products that deplete the ozone layer than other, more polluting sectors such as industry, and deforestation.

« It is concerning that the expectation of individuals, government, and business to act to tackle climate change has fallen this year. Attention perhaps being drawn to seemingly more urgent issues impacting an individual’s ability to provide and look after their families on a day-to-day basis. Issues such as inflation, energy and food security and conflict undoubtedly play a role in the polarised opinions as to whether now is the right time to act on climate change.

However, there is still a sense of urgency as more people believe that the negative impacts of climate change are imminent. And that the cost of tackling climate change will be less than the cost of its impact. There is also optimism that climate change is not beyond our control and a strong belief that if we all could make small changes in our everyday lives, it could have a significant role in tackling climate change.

There is also a clear acknowledgement that if we are really going to tackle climate change it will require all countries to come together and that the funding for this activity should be borne by those countries who have contributed most to climate change to this point. »

Pippa Bailey, Head of Ipsos Climate Change & Sustainability Practice

About this study

These are the results of a 29-country survey conducted by Ipsos on its Ipsos Global Advisor online platform, and in India, on its IndiaBus platform. Ipsos interviewed an international sample of 21,231 online adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18-74 in, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa, Turkey and the United States, 20-74 in Thailand, 21-74 in Indonesia and Singapore, and 16-74 in all other markets between 20th January and 3rd February 2023 in 28 countries and 17th February and 3rd March 2023 in Switzerland.



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