

Climate Change in the Irish Mind

Wave 1: Insight Report No. 1 Support for Climate Policies



Introduction

The ‘Climate Change in the Irish Mind’ project is a baseline study of the Irish people’s beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences and behaviours regarding climate change.

This work was undertaken by the EPA and the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in support of the National Dialogue on Climate Action.

The approach to the project is based on the established methodology of the “Climate Change in the American Mind” survey conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Centre for Climate Change Communication, which was tailored to meet Ireland’s particular socio-economic context. This is the first nationally-representative survey of its kind in Ireland.

Methodology

The fieldwork was conducted during 24th May to 29th July 2021 by the survey company Behaviours & Attitudes following a recognised industry standard.

The survey was conducted with a representative sample of the Irish people, aged 18 years and over. Survey respondents were recruited using a random digit dial sample of live Irish telephone numbers. A total of 84,961 numbers were contacted by telephone, about 80% of survey respondents were reached through mobile phone numbers and 20% through landline phone numbers. A total of 4,030 interviews were completed (including 30 pilot interviews to test survey wording and timing), for a response rate of 5%. All questionnaires were administered by call agents using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) software. The survey took, on average, 25 minutes to complete.

Gender, age, work status and region quotas were used to ensure sample representativeness. Key demographic variables were also weighted, post survey, to match Central Statistics Office norms.

Topic Focus

The national survey questionnaire contained a series of topics and themes: Worry about climate change impacts/extreme weather; Beliefs; Risk Perceptions; Policy Support; Behaviours (consumer and political); Norms; Personal Experience of Climate Change; and Media Sources.

This report 'Climate Change in the Irish Mind: In-Depth report No 1. Policy Support' concentrates exclusively on the national responses in relation to the topic of **Policy Support**.

Key information areas covered in the Policy Support topic included: ***Climate Change as a Government Priority; Support for Policies to Reduce Greenhouse Gases; Climate Change as an Economic and Quality of Life Issue; Who is Responsible for Action on Climate Change?***

In summary, key overall findings for the Policy Support topic included: ***a majority of Irish people support climate action policy. 79% of Irish people say that climate change should be either a “very high” or “high” priority for Government. Most people support spending carbon tax revenues on programmes to reduce carbon emissions and to prepare for climate change impacts.***

The analysis focussed on the demographic differences exhibited in the responses to the topic of **Policy Support**.

Irish people support climate change policies*

The survey found that Irish people support climate change policies. A large majority (79%) of Irish people say that climate change should be either a “very high” or “high” priority for Government.

Support for specific climate-friendly policies includes:

- Grants to encourage residential and commercial building owners to install cleaner and more efficient heating systems: 76% “strongly support” and 20% “somewhat support”.
- Increased Government investment in public transport, such as trains, instead of motorways: 68% “strongly support” and 24% “somewhat support”.
- Government grants to make electric vehicles more affordable: 70% strongly support, 22% somewhat support.
- Banning peat, coal and oil for home heating purposes. 34% “strongly support” and 34% “somewhat support”.
- Higher taxes on cars that use petrol and diesel: 32% “strongly support” and 32% “somewhat support”.

Irish people support climate change policies*

Most people support spending carbon tax revenues on programmes to reduce carbon emissions and to prepare for climate change impacts. Large majorities of people in Ireland support spending revenue from the carbon tax on the following:

- Supporting the further development of new clean energy sources (95%).
- Funding improvements to Ireland’s transport infrastructure such as rail, bus corridors, and cycling and walking paths (95%).
- Helping to pay for energy efficiency improvements in low-income households (94%).
- Funding programmes to help Irish communities prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change (93%).
- Assisting workers in the fossil fuel industry who may lose their jobs (90%).
- Returning the money to all Irish households in equal amounts (63%).

85% of Irish people support building new infrastructure such as pylons or substations in their local area to support the increased use of renewable energy so that the Irish Government can reach its renewable electricity target of 70% by 2030. A large majority of people (92%) support increasing forest areas to offset greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture, while fewer (64%) support reducing the size of the national cattle herd to reduce GHG emissions from agriculture.

Where national opposition is more apparent

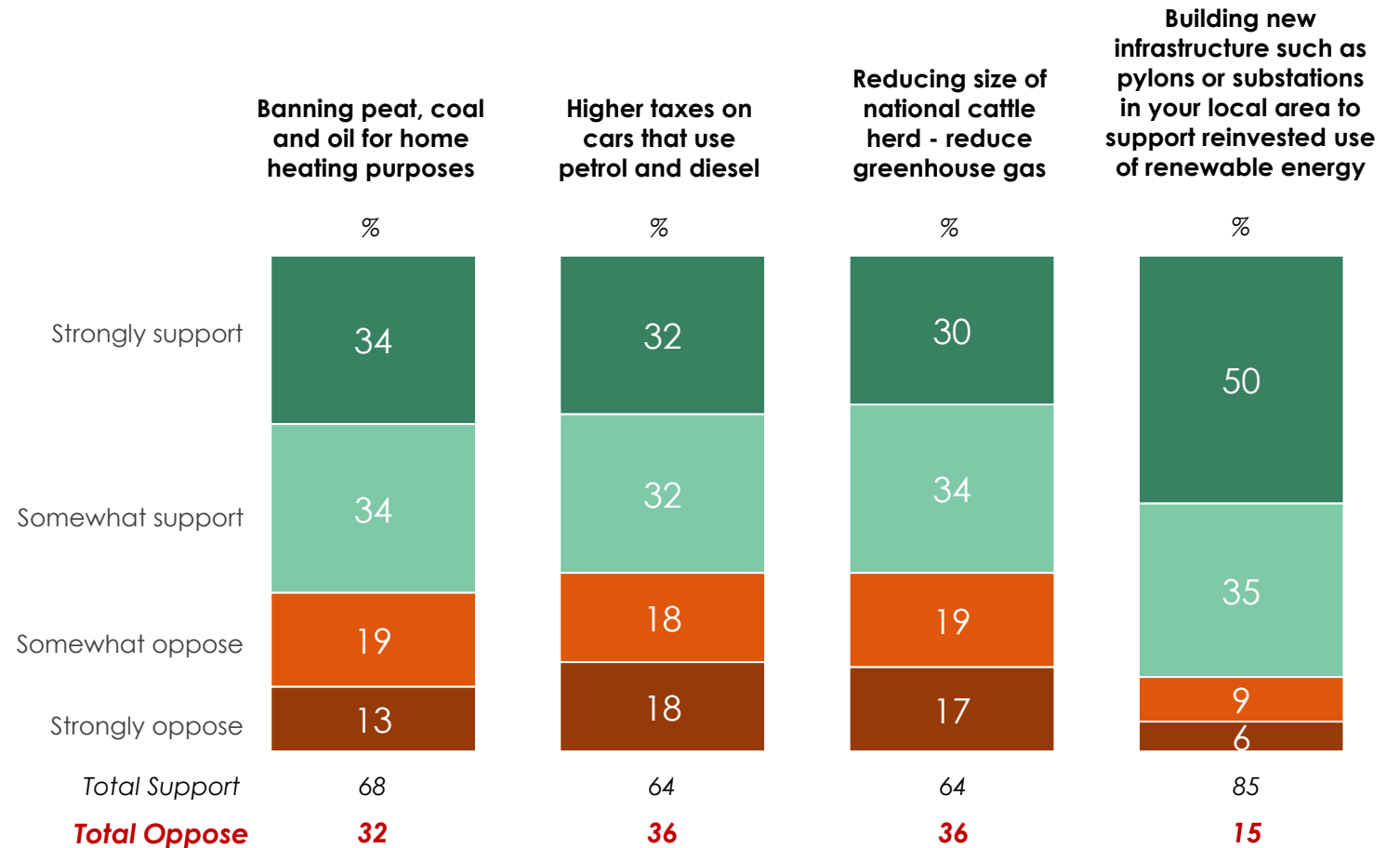
While a majority of Irish people typically support climate action policy across a range of criteria, any lessening of support focussed on a discrete set of questions and exhibited a consistent demographic pattern.

This variation in support was concentrated on the following questions:

- The Irish Government has set a renewable electricity target of 70% by 2030. New infrastructure such as pylons and substations are needed to meet this target. **How much would you support or oppose building new infrastructure such as pylons or substations in your local area to support the increased use of renewable energy?**
- How much do you support or oppose the following policies to help Ireland achieve its greenhouse gas reduction targets?
 - o **Banning peat, coal and oil for home heating purposes**
 - o **Higher taxes on cars that use petrol and diesel**
- Agriculture is an important industry for Ireland and its rural economy. Agriculture is also a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and now accounts for over one-third of Ireland's total emissions. With this in mind, how much do you support or oppose the following policies?
 - o **Reducing the size of the national cattle herd to reduce greenhouse gas emissions**

Where national opposition peaks

Across these four specific policy areas, the level of national opposition was significant, being between 32 and 36% for ‘banning peat, coal and oil’, ‘higher taxes on petrol and diesel cars’, and reducing the size of the national herd. Opposition to ‘pylons or substations in local areas’ was less apparent but still relevant at 15% of all adults.

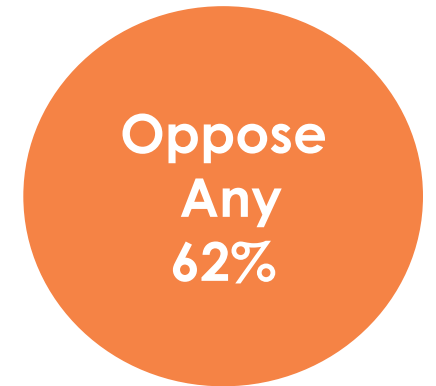


Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.21/22)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 4,000

Where national opposition peaks

One hypothesis was that a core group of adults were commonly in opposition to all of these policies. However, when responses were cross analysed, it emerged that any opposition was broader than one may have suspected. In total, 62% of Irish adults were opposed to at least one of the policy areas; indicating that rather than being a function of a broad negativity, opposition was driven by the individual issues.

	Total Oppose	Banning peat, coal and oil for home heating	Higher taxes on cars that use petrol/diesel	Reduce size of national cattle herd	Building pylons/sub-stations in your local area
	%	%	%	%	%
Banning peat, coal and oil for home heating	32	-	57	53	53
Higher taxes on cars that use petrol/diesel	36	64	-	56	60
Reduce size of national cattle herd	36	59	55	-	56
Building pylons/substations in your local area	15	25	25	24	-



Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.21/22)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 4,000

Policy opponents are not climate deniers

More broadly, national adults who oppose any of the selected policies do not show a consistent pattern of attitudes which differentiate them from the national average. Their opposition to the highlighted policies does not appear representative of general underlying concerns or suspicions around climate change. Rather their concerns are specific to the referenced policies and may reflect perceived practical issues in enacting these policies.

	All Adults	Oppose selected policies (62%)
How much do you think climate change will harm... people in your community? (answer - a great deal or a moderate amount)	76%	71%
When do you think climate change will start to harm people in Ireland? (answer - they are being harmed now)	47%	43%
Do you think climate change should be a very high, high, medium, or low priority for the Government of Ireland? (answer - very high or high)	79%	72%
'We have a responsibility to act on climate change, and Ireland should do what it can to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions.'	90%	87%

Climate Change in the Irish Mind National Survey (Q.13/14/15/19)
Base: All adults aged 18+; N – 4,000

Key Learnings

The Climate Change in the Irish Mind survey found that Irish people support climate change policies. As an example, a large majority (79%) of Irish people say that climate change should be either a “very high” or “high” priority for Government.

However, a lessening of support was evident for a specific set of policies relating to ‘banning peat, coal and oil’, ‘higher taxes on petrol and diesel cars’, ‘reducing the size of the national cattle herd’, and building pylons or substations in local areas.

In total, 62% of Irish adults were opposed to at least one of these policies; and when reviewed demographically, it became apparent that this opposition exhibited a strong, and statistically significant pattern.

Separately, the pattern of national opposition to the policies was not reflective of underlying concerns or suspicions around climate change overall; rather it was specific to the issues.

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