PERITIA

Policy, Expertise and Trust

The role of trust and engagement on public support for climate action

D8.6 Briefing Notes

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1 SUMMARY

Context

Historically, much attention has been given to explaining differences in levels of trust. In doing so, high trust has been presented as a self-evident 'good thing'. However, over the past decade more attention has been given to the consequences of lower trust levels, leading to an important question: if people don't trust the government or experts, what outcomes (if any) are affected?

One possibility is that differences in levels of trust are associated with policy preferences (Hetherington and Husser, 2012), with people less inclined to support policies involving personal risks or sacrifices if they lack trust in the government or experts. This is clearly important for actors looking to mitigate the impacts of climate change; large-scale action requires both government and scientists to be seen as trustworthy to implement effective policies.

There are also concerns that attentiveness to climate change is declining, impacting support for responses as competing risks intensify. It is therefore important to examine the relationship between trust, engagement and support for responses to help mitigate climate change to understand how effective policies can garner support.

In PERITIA, we developed a survey that enables us to look at trust in expertise in the context of specific issues – namely, climate change and COVID-19 – as well as in reference to a range of other explanatory factors. These factors include: concern and knowledge about the issue, and awareness of what's being done to address it; perceptions of key policy actors and what motivates them; support for big policy ideas; and what people personally are doing to contribute, along with a range of demographic traits.

The breadth of the questionnaire has enabled us to build a better awareness of **how attentiveness to climate change and trust in individuals and institutions working to address it, relate to public support for action to address climate change**.

By analysing questions around levels of awareness, engagement, worry and knowledge around climate change, we find four distinct profiles in terms of how engaged people are on the issue of climate change:

- Disengaged and disinterested;
- Informed but unworried;
- Concerned but complacent;
- Engaged and alert.

In this report, we focus on the **UK and Ireland**, which have a different balance of engagement types, but both have a large group who are engaged and alert, and a small but meaningful group who are disengaged and disinterested.

We use these different profiles of how people engage with climate change to understand the links between trust and support for structural reforms to address climate change. We find that:

- Higher levels of trust in climate scientists are associated with higher support for structural actions on climate change among both the most disengaged and most engaged with climate change.
- Higher trust in government is also associated with higher support for structural reforms in some groups across the UK and Ireland.
- Fatalism is associated with lower support for structural reforms in both the most disengaged and most engaged groups: people with a highly engaged and alert mindset to climate change are less likely to support structural reforms if they have a high sense of fatalism.

These results signal:

- The need to consider different engagement profiles within countries to understand how to tailor communication to engage different audiences;
- The importance of trust in government and scientists in encouraging people to support structural reforms, even in those who are already highly alert;
- The need to directly address fatalistic views about whether actions taken would actually have an effect, as they can form a barrier for support across a range of groups in society – not just those who are the most disengaged and disinterested.

2 THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE ANALYSIS

Summary of the approach

We have developed a series of statistical models to estimate the extent of different engagement profiles with climate change, based on levels of awareness, personal worry, attentiveness and knowledge about climate change within a given country.

We then link engagement profiles with support for policy outcomes by constructing two sets of measures using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):

1. Support for different actions on climate change;
2. Levels of trust in government and climate scientists.

We then estimate the links between trust, engagement and support for structural actions using Latent Class Analysis (LCA). In this report, we present detailed findings from two of the seven countries included in the PERITIA survey – the **UK and Ireland.**

How engaged are people on the issue of climate change?

Using Latent Class Analysis (see method box), we identified clusters of people who show similar mindsets to climate change based on their responses to a series of variables. We used the following questions to understand individual's mindsets to climate change:

- **Personal Worry** – How concerned people are about climate change
- **Attentiveness** – How much attention people pay to the issue in the news
- **Awareness** – How they feel about actions taken to address climate change
- **Appetite for knowledge** – Whether they want to know more

From these measures, we see four distinct mindsets when it comes to engagement with climate change (summarised in Figure 1).[1] The size of these groups differs between countries, yet latent classes in each country show the same properties.

[1] Our models have entropy scores of 0.64 in the UK and 0.61 in Ireland. An entropy score of 1 indicates that there is 100 per cent certainty of allocating all individuals into one specific latent class.

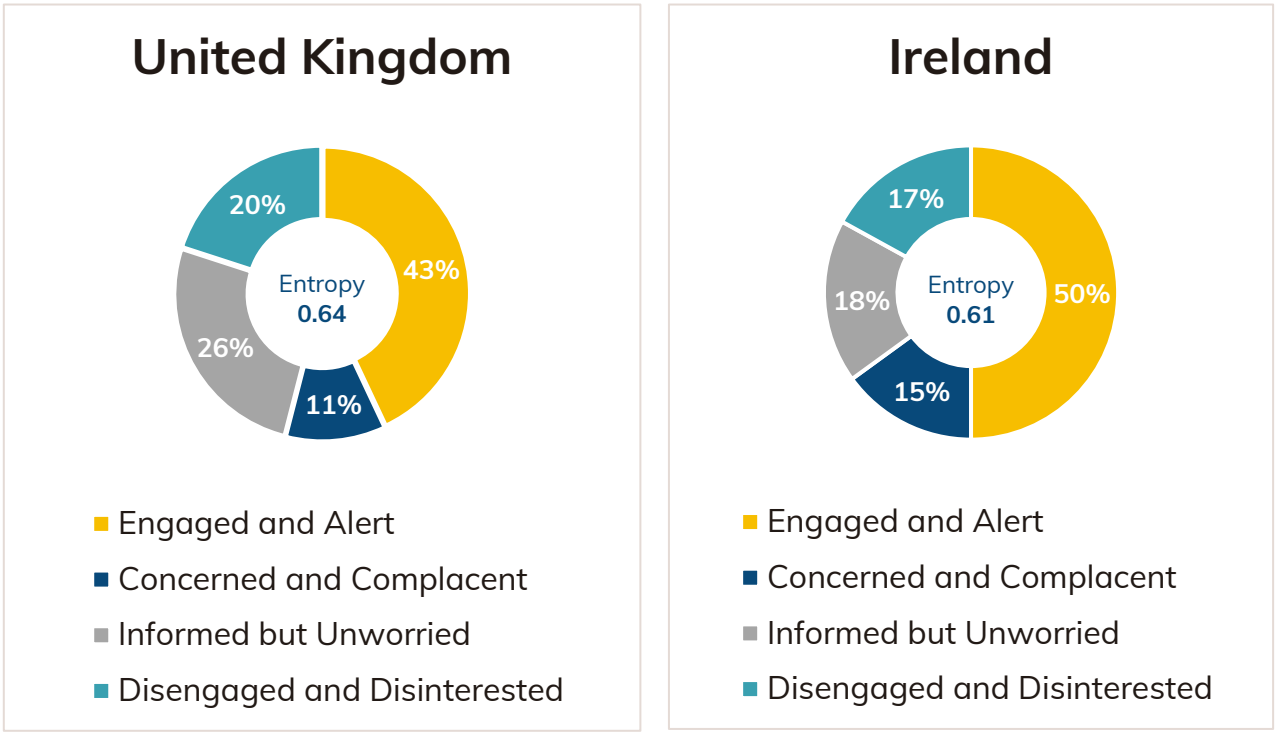
Figure 1: Engagement mindsets on climate change

(1) **Disengaged and Disinterested** – Are not worried or informed about climate change, and do not want to know more.

(2) **Informed but Unworried** – Feel informed about climate change but are not worried and don't want to know more.

(3) **Concerned but Complacent** – Are worried about climate change and want to know more but lack awareness or attentiveness.

(4) **Engaged and Alert** – Are concerned about climate change, are paying attention and want to know more.



There is no agreed critical value for entropy (B.O. Muthén, 2008), but convention is to be sceptical of solutions with entropy values 0.6 or below.

Method: Latent Class Analysis (LCA)

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is a **respondent-driven technique that allows us to segment people into different groups**, who respond in a similar way across a range of variables.

Our LCA procedure has two main stages:

(1) Estimating latent classes predicted by **attentiveness**, **engagement** and **knowledge** on climate change and **trust** in the government and climate scientists.

(2) Explaining the **factors which form different latent classes**, and/or **how being a member of a certain latent class impacts support for different actions** on climate change.

In practice, this means we can simultaneously estimate different mindsets towards climate change, and how these mindsets impact support for different actions on climate change.

To understand the effects within the context of each country, we conducted analysis separately within each country. This means that different numbers of classes might be detected in different countries.

Method: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

- EFA helps to reduce the complexity of a range of variables that capture similar or distinct concepts. We use EFA to simplify people's responses to a wide range of questions that focus on actions to address climate change as well as their efficacy.
- By reducing the complexity of data to a series of dimensions, we provide a clearer view of the types of activities and policies individuals are likely to support over single-item measures.
- EFA started by exploring a series of questions relating to different policy responses, then removing any variables which explain little variation in understanding response patterns to actions around climate change. This provides us with cross-country comparable measures, and a discrete set of variables to use in modelling.

What kinds of action do people support when it comes to climate change?

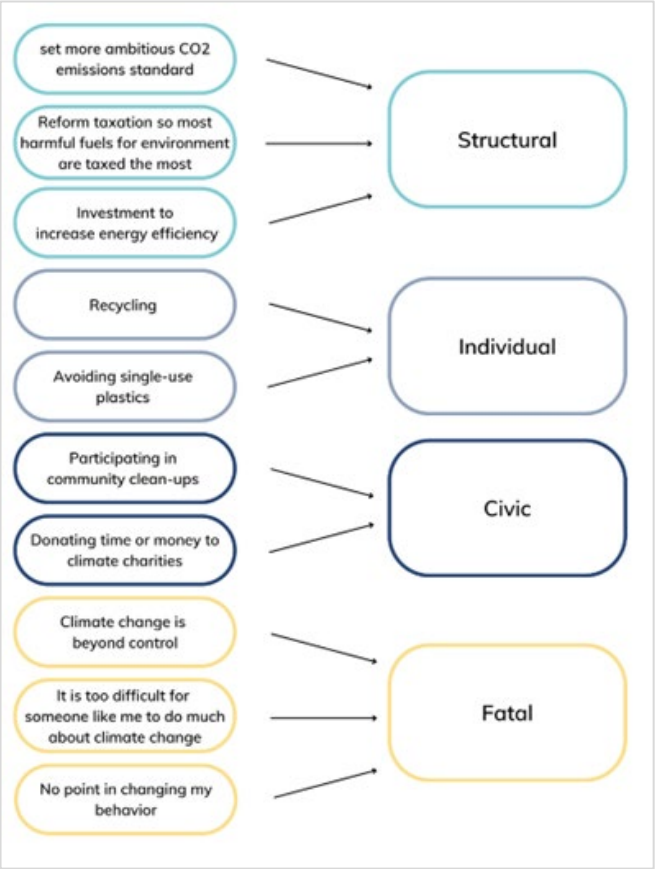
The PERITIA survey contains a wide range of variables that seek to capture what actions people support to respond to climate change. These range from ambitious policy initiatives, such as taxing the biggest emitters more or investing in energy efficiency, to individual actions, such as recycling or using more sustainable modes of transport – as well as questions about whether these actions would be effective in addressing the crisis.

As shown in Figure 2, responses tended to cluster into four main areas:

1. **Structural** – Supports structural actions on climate change, such as setting more ambitious CO2 targets, reforming taxation, and increasing investment in energy efficiency.
2. **Individual** – Engages in pro-environmental behaviours, such as recycling and avoiding single-use plastics.
3. **Civic** – Takes part in civic and community-based actions such as participating in community clean-ups and donating to climate charities.
4. **Fatalistic** – Agrees that climate change is beyond control, it's too difficult to do anything about, or that there is no point in changing behaviours.

Average levels of support for each type of response differ across the countries studied in the PERITIA survey. These results demonstrate there are significant country-level factors that influence the different types of policies that people are willing to support. This is important to consider when modelling support for policy responses: rather than fitting one model across multiple countries, given differences in policy support profiles we model policy support *within* each country to account for the specific context of each nation.

Figure 2: Different dispositions towards action on climate change



Who do people trust when it comes to climate change?

In PERITIA, we have identified several dimensions that are important when assessing trust in policy and decision makers. This ranges from the reliance individuals have on someone to do something for you, assessment of their competence to perform a certain task and the normative expectations you might have around their motives, moral character and shared values.

To accurately understand different views on decision makers and levels of trust placed in them, we conducted exploratory factor analysis on a series of questions focused on the government and scientists handling climate change. This includes:

- **General trust measures** – How much you personally trust the government or climate scientists.
- **Competence measures** – Whether groups are considered to be competent, knowledgeable, open to new ideas, etc.

- **Measures of moral character, motives and values** – How much groups are motivated by the thought people are counting on them, whether groups are honest, politically motivated etc.

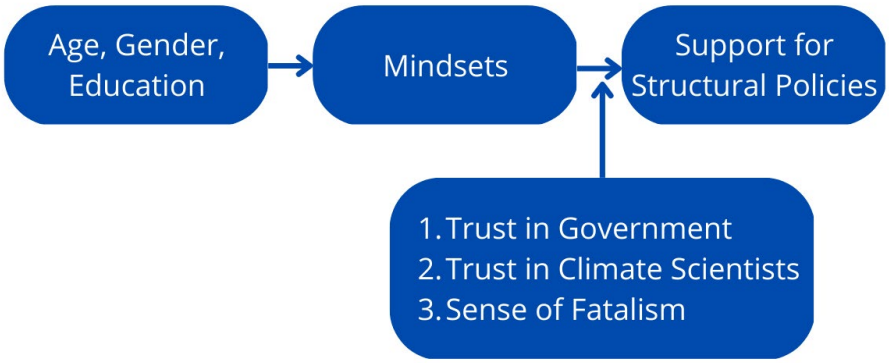
We find a high level of correlation between these different aspects of trust. For example, if a respondent said they had a high level of general trust in climate scientists, they are also likely to believe they are competent, knowledgeable and open to new ideas. We therefore use a variety of questions around trust to create two key index scores, one measuring **trust in government** and another trust in **climate scientists.** This gives us two reliable, comparable estimates to model the role of trust in determining support for policy actions across the UK and Ireland.

3 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN TRUST, ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR ACTION

Now we have estimated our mindsets to climate change, and have robust measures of trust and support for climate change policies, we can model the relationship between trust, attitudes to climate change and support for policies – specifically, we:

- Explore how well mindsets to climate change predict a person's support for structural actions to resolve climate change;
- Assess membership of latent classes, accounting for key factors such as age, gender and education, allowing us to estimate any additional influence of mindset whilst taking these factors into account;
- Assess the moderating role of trust and fatalism in understanding support for structural policies, in particular.

Figure 3: Structural model



Higher trust in climate scientists is associated with higher support for action among most groups, including the most engaged and alert

We find a consistent moderating relationship between levels of trust in climate scientists and support for structural policies across different mindsets, including those who are the most engaged and alert.

In both the UK and Ireland, **both** people who are disengaged and disinterested as well as those who are engaged and alert are more likely to support structural

actions when they have a higher level of trust in scientists. We also find the same moderating effect in the UK for those who are informed but unworried, and those who are concerned and complacent in Ireland.

These results suggest that trust in climate scientists is important in predicting support for structural reforms regardless of individual levels of awareness, engagement, worry and knowledge about climate change.

Some mindsets are also affected by trust in government when it comes to structural support for climate action

We find a similar relationship between trust in government and support for structural actions on climate change, although the impact is limited to only a few attitudinal groups.

In the UK, those with the most disengaged and disinterested attitude to climate change were found to be more likely to support structural reform if they have a higher level of trust in the government. Meanwhile in Ireland, we find that people who have a concerned but complacent mindset to climate change are more likely to support structural responses to climate change with higher levels of trust in government.

Again, these results demonstrate levels of trust in government may also be a significant factor in predicting levels of support for structural reforms.

Higher levels of fatalism towards our ability to act on climate change also decreases support for action among many groups, including the most engaged and alert

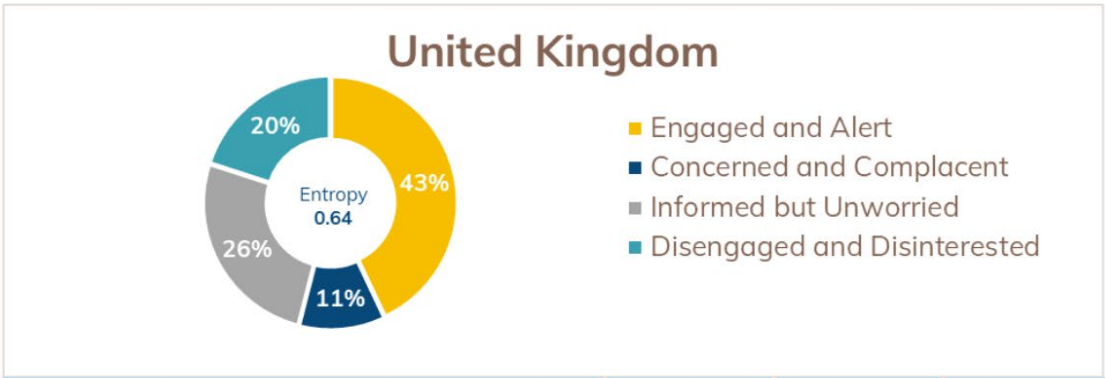
Having a fatalistic view towards climate change is also shown to have a significant impact in support for structural policies across mindsets.

In the UK, we find that people who are disengaged and disinterested in climate change and who also have a strong sense of fatalism towards our ability to solve climate change are significantly less likely to support structural actions to address it. However, we also find in the UK that the most engaged and alert are also less likely to support reforms while they have a higher sense of fatalism.

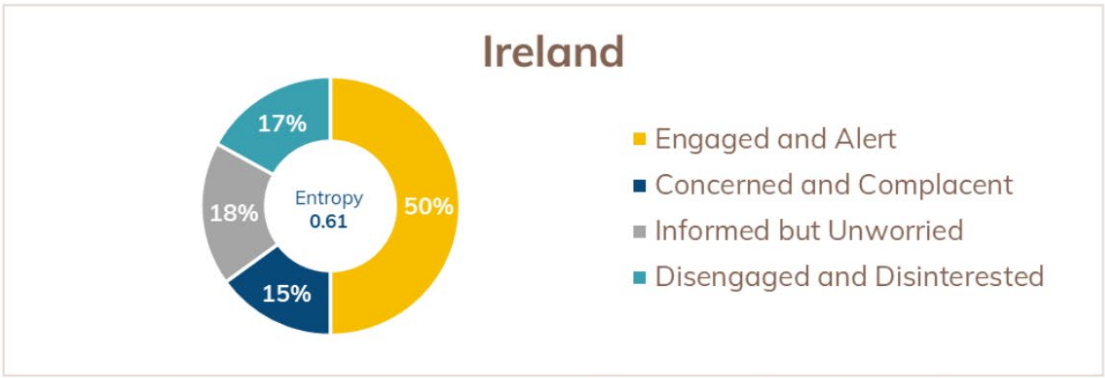
In Ireland we see comparable results. The most disengaged and disinterested again show a negative relationship between a sense of fatalism and support for structural actions, whilst the concerned and complacent group also show the same relationship.

Our results therefore indicate that fatalism is not just a barrier to support for those who are the most disengaged and disinterested in society, but also an important factor even for those with high levels of engagement.

Figure 4: LCA modelling results



	Gov Trust	CC Trust	Fatal
Disengaged and Disinterested	**0.241***	**0.204***	**-0.640*****
Informed but Unworried	0.069	**0.313****	0.117
Concerned but Complacent	-0.054	-0.065	0.105
Engaged and Alert	0.015	**0.136****	**-0.146*****



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4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND ENGAGEMENT

Overall, the analysis points to five key conclusions for policy and engagement:

1. There are identifiably distinct mindsets when it comes to engagement with climate change that apply across countries, in different proportions.
2. These mindsets affect the impact that trust in government has on support for more active steps on climate change: some mindset groups are more affected by trust levels in government than others.
3. But higher trust in climate scientists is associated with increased support for action among nearly all groups, which points to a clear area for focus.
4. On the other hand, higher fatalism decreases support for action among just about all mindset groups and therefore should also be a key area of focus.
5. And, more generally, the analysis emphasises that there is no one public opinion or belief around climate action: tailored and targeted approaches will be key to increasing support for action.

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