

Detailed Findings

The UK, Canada, and Kenya are the countries whose citizens are keenest for their governments to play leadership roles in setting ambitious targets at the summit (UK 62%, Canada and Kenya each 61%). Otherwise, developing countries are generally more cautious in the approach they are looking for their government to play—only around a third in countries like Pakistan and the Philippines (each 36%), or India (33%), and even fewer in Indonesia (23%), support their governments seeking ambitious targets in Copenhagen.

Outright opposition to a deal is limited to small minorities in all survey countries. The countries with the highest proportions of those opposing any international agreement are the United States (14%), Brazil (12%), and Pakistan (12%).

In 19 of 23 countries polled, including all developed nations, there is majority support for government investments to address climate change, including investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency and public transport, even if these hurt the economy. The exceptions are Pakistan, where only 19% would support such investments in these circumstances, the Philippines (32%), Indonesia (38%), and Turkey (49%). After China (89%), the countries where the largest majorities support government investments to address climate change, even where these would cause economic harm, are Kenya (77%), France (75%), Mexico (71%), Australia (70%), and the UK (70%).

The countries with the largest proportions supporting government action are not always those with the highest proportions regarding climate change as very serious. Brazil (86% “very serious”), Costa Rica (83%), the Philippines (83%), and Turkey (81%) appear to be most convinced of the magnitude of the climate change problem. Despite Kenyans’ enthusiasm for government investment, a lower than average proportion (52%) regard climate change as a “very serious” problem.

The survey also finds that concern about climate change continues on an upward trend, even in a recession year. Thirteen of the countries in this year’s survey have been polled regularly by GlobeScan over the last eleven years on their views of climate change: since 1998, the proportion rating it as a “very serious” issue for the world has climbed from 44% to 63%.

Key Country and Regional Findings

CHINA

A lower than average proportion in China regard climate change as a “very serious” problem (57%). Chinese people are also less likely than average to support their government playing a leadership role in setting ambitious targets to address climate change, with only 37% backing such an approach, and 49% favouring a more moderate strategy involving only gradual action. However, the Chinese are by some distance the most enthusiastic nation in calling for government investments to address climate change even if these hurt the economy, with 89% in favour and only 8% against.

USA AND CANADA

Along with India, the US is the nation least likely to regard climate change as a “very serious” problem, with only 45% of Americans viewing it in that light. One in four (25%) regards it as “not very” or “not at all” serious—again, the highest proportion of all countries polled. The USA is also the country with the highest proportion opposing any international agreement at Copenhagen (14%)—although the proportion looking for a leadership role from their government is also slightly above average (46%), though lower than in most other developed nations. Americans are third only to Pakistanis and Filipinos in their level of opposition to government investments to address climate change that might hurt the economy (42%).

In Canada, while relatively few (compared to the USA) consider climate change not to be a serious problem (11%), the number regarding it as “very serious” is below average at 58%. Despite this, Canada is among the countries most supportive of a strong leadership role for their government in setting ambitious targets to address climate change at Copenhagen, with 61% in favour. The level of opposition to the government making investments to address climate change even if these damage the economy is also much lower than in the USA, and below the international average, at 26%, with 69% supporting such investments.

EUROPE

Europeans are broadly in line with the international average in terms of their assessment of climate change as a “very serious” problem, with 77% of Spanish, 68% of Italians, 65% of French, 61% of Germans, and 59% of British seeing it that way. However, a relatively high number of Germans (16%) do not see climate change as a serious problem.

Turks are among the nationalities most convinced of the gravity of the issue—more than four in five (81%) view it as a “very serious” problem. Russians are well below average in considering climate change to be a “very serious” problem, with fewer than half (46%) viewing it in this light.

Europeans are well above average in their propensity to look to their governments to play a leadership role in the Copenhagen negotiations. Here, expectations are highest in the UK (where 62% want their government to play a leadership role), but are also elevated in France (57%), Italy (56%), and Germany (55%). The exception here is Spain, where one of the lowest proportions in any country (25%) wants their government to help set ambitious targets at Copenhagen, despite the Spanish people’s strong perception that climate change is “very serious.”

Except for Germans, Europeans are also more likely than most other nations to support government investments to address climate change that might harm the economy, with 75% of French, 70% of British, 68% of Italians, and 67% of Spanish backing them.

ASIA PACIFIC

Outside the Philippines and Japan, the proportions of those in the Asia Pacific region regarding climate change as “very serious” is below average—while 83% of Filipinos and 65% of Japanese feel this way, only 60% of Indonesians, 58% of Australians, 57% of Chinese, and 45% of Indians feel likewise.

When it comes to the role that governments should play at Copenhagen, Australia and Japan show higher than average support for a leadership role in setting ambitious targets to address climate change. While 57% of Australians and Japanese—well above average—would support such an approach from their government, only 37% favour this strategy in China, 36% in the Philippines, 33% in India, and 23% in Indonesia. In Pakistan, the proportion opposed to any international agreement addressing climate change is relatively high (12%).

There is a clear split between the Asia Pacific nations in their willingness to contemplate government investments in fighting climate change that might harm the economy. A very large proportion of Chinese would back them (89%), as well as sizable majorities of Australians (70%) and Japanese (68%). But elsewhere support is below average—in India (56%), Indonesia (38%), and the Philippines (32%).

AFRICA

A lower than average proportion of those in Kenya (52%) and Nigeria (48%), the two African countries polled, regard climate change as a “very serious” problem. However, the two countries are divided when it comes to the strategy they want their governments to adopt at the Copenhagen summit. Opinion in Kenya is clearly in favour of their government seeking to play a leadership role and helping to set ambitious targets, with 61% favouring this approach. Opinion is divided in Nigeria, however, with more backing a moderate approach (46%) than favouring an ambitious approach (43%). Kenyans (77%) are also more likely than Nigerians (68%) to favour their government making climate change investments even if these harm the economy—though in both cases the proportions backing this are above the global average of 61%.

LATIN AMERICA

Of all the regions, it is in Latin America where the greatest number see climate change as a “very serious” problem, with 86% of Brazilians and Chileans seeing it in that light, as well as 83% of Costa Ricans, 81% of Mexicans, and 72% of Panamanians.

There is a distinct split between the Central American countries in the region, which have a cautious attitude towards their governments’ strategies at Copenhagen, and the South American countries, where above-average proportions want to see their governments play leadership roles. Only 38% in Mexico, 37% in Costa Rica, and 25% in Panama would prefer their governments to seek to set ambitious targets. In Chile, 54% favour this approach, and 53% of Brazilians would also favour an ambitious strategy from their government.

Despite this split, all populations in the region show average or above-average willingness in wanting their government to make investments to address climate change, even if these harm the economy. Seventy-one per cent of Mexicans support these investments, as do 67% of Chileans, 62% of Brazilians, and 60% of Costa Ricans and Panamanians.