



NET ZERO POLICIES

**Ahead of COP26, how do the UK
public view net zero policies?**

IPSOS KNOWLEDGEPANEL

Research by the Climate Engagement Partnership



Centre for Climate Change
and Social Transformations

Ipsos MORI



There is a clear sense of urgency among the public about the need for the UK to reach net zero

In the run-up to November's COP26 summit in Glasgow, over half want the UK to achieve net zero earlier than the 2050 target, and a majority agree the UK is already feeling the effects of climate change. Climate change is seen as the third most important issue facing the country, after coronavirus and the NHS, and levels of worry about climate change are high. Travel, home energy and consumption are seen as important areas in which governments, businesses and individuals all need to take action.



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The UK public say they support a range of net zero policies which mean far-reaching changes to how we travel, what we eat, what we buy and how we heat our homes

These areas have proven challenging for behaviour change, however, and our findings point to an important reason why. While the public support these policies when they are outlined initially, that support usually falls dramatically when they are presented with the possible lifestyle and financial cost implications for them personally. Just one policy remains more popular and is the exception to the rule: changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are, which is still supported once the lifestyle and cost implications are outlined.

Support for net zero policies is lower among those who voted Conservative at the last election than it is among those who voted Labour, Liberal Democrat or SNP, which represents a challenge for Boris Johnson's Government

Before the lifestyle and cost implications are mentioned, more Conservative voters say they support each policy than oppose it, with the exception of higher taxes on red meat and dairy. Once the lifestyle and cost implications are outlined, though, Conservative voters oppose 7 of the 8 policies: the only policy that remains popular is changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are.





Support for net zero policies (before being asked to consider trade-offs) is typically higher among certain groups in society:

Higher income households, owner occupiers, those not impacted financially by COVID-19, those who identify politically on the left and those who are already engaged with and knowledgeable about climate issues. For most policies, support was lower among those living in the most deprived areas of the UK and higher among those living in the least deprived areas – with the exception of ensuring access to sustainable pensions.

Older and younger people differ in some of their policy preferences

Support for creating low traffic neighbourhoods, frequent flyer levies and changing product pricing is higher among older age groups. In contrast, support for electric vehicle subsidies, increasing vegetarian/vegan options in public food provisioning and phasing out the sale of gas and coal boilers is higher among young people.



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Travel and mobility policies

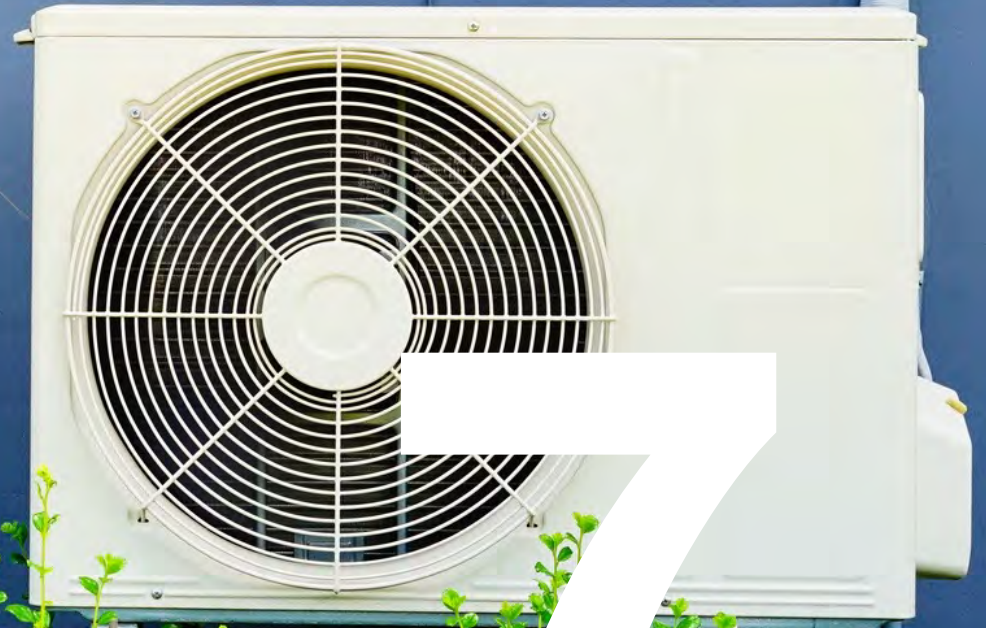
Frequent flyer levies are popular among the UK public, although as with other policies support decreases once people are asked to consider the personal trade-offs

Electric vehicle subsidies receive a high level of public support initially, but more would oppose than support this policy if it meant they personally had to pay more to drive their petrol or diesel car. Low traffic neighbourhoods, which have attracted much controversy, are supported by a majority of the UK public initially, although a significant minority are opposed. Once it is outlined that this policy could mean they personally would need to pay more council tax, however, three in five oppose it.

Home heating policy

More support phasing out the sale of new gas and coal boilers than oppose it, even if it means they personally are not able to install a new gas or coal boiler at home

If this means that they would have to pay more to install an alternative heating system, however, opinion shifts so that more of the public are opposed to than support the policy.





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Food and diet policies

A third of the public are opposed to higher taxes on red meat and dairy products, the highest level of opposition to any of the net zero policies covered

While policies aimed at changing our diet and food system receive more support than opposition initially, if these policies mean they personally need to pay higher taxes or pay more for certain products then a majority of the public would be opposed. This is the case both for increasing vegetarian and vegan options in public sector food provisioning and for introducing higher taxes on red meat and dairy products.

Material consumption policy

Three in five of the public support changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are

Unlike the other policies, on balance more of the public still support than oppose this policy once they are asked to consider the lifestyle and cost implications.





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Green finance policy

Over half of the UK public support ensuring access to sustainable pension funds

Yet once people are asked to consider the lifestyle and cost trade-offs of this policy – including that it may mean smaller returns on pension savings – it becomes the most opposed policy on balance.

The UK public see achieving net zero as an urgent priority

83%

are extremely, very or fairly worried about climate change

54%

feel the UK needs to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero sooner than 2050

68%

think the UK is already feeling the effects of climate change

Awareness of the UK's 2050 net zero target is high

Four in five of the UK public have heard of the UK's target of reaching net zero by 2050.

- Smaller majorities in Scotland and Wales are aware of the Scottish Government's and Welsh Assembly's net zero targets respectively.
- Awareness is lower in Northern Ireland, where a net zero target is not yet enshrined in law – a Climate Change Bill is currently progressing through the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Before today, had you heard of this target of achieving 'net zero' in the UK by 2050/ in Scotland by 2045/ in Wales by 2050/ the Climate Change Bill and the proposed target of achieving 'net zero' in Northern Ireland by 2045?

Had heard of it | Not heard of it

UK new zero target

79%

20%

Scotland net zero target

60%

39%

Wales net zero target

62%

37%

NI Climate Change Bill and net zero target

38%

62%

Base: 5,665 UK adults aged 16+; 1,051 Scottish adults aged 16+; 215 Welsh adults aged 16+; 150 Northern Irish adults aged 16+. 19 – 25 Aug 2021



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Knowledge gap on climate action



Despite this clear desire to take action to reach net zero, the UK public's understanding of what they and the Government will need to do to reduce the UK's carbon emissions is relatively low. They want to act but are not fully empowered with the knowledge to do so.



Only 13% feel they know a lot about what they personally would need to do to reduce the UK's carbon emissions, while half (55%) only know a little and one in four (24%) realise they need to do something but don't know what.



Public understanding of what the UK Government will need to do is even lower. Just 9% feel they know a lot about what the Government will need to do to reduce the UK's carbon emissions, while half (52%) only know a little and three in ten (31%) realise it needs to do something but do not know what.

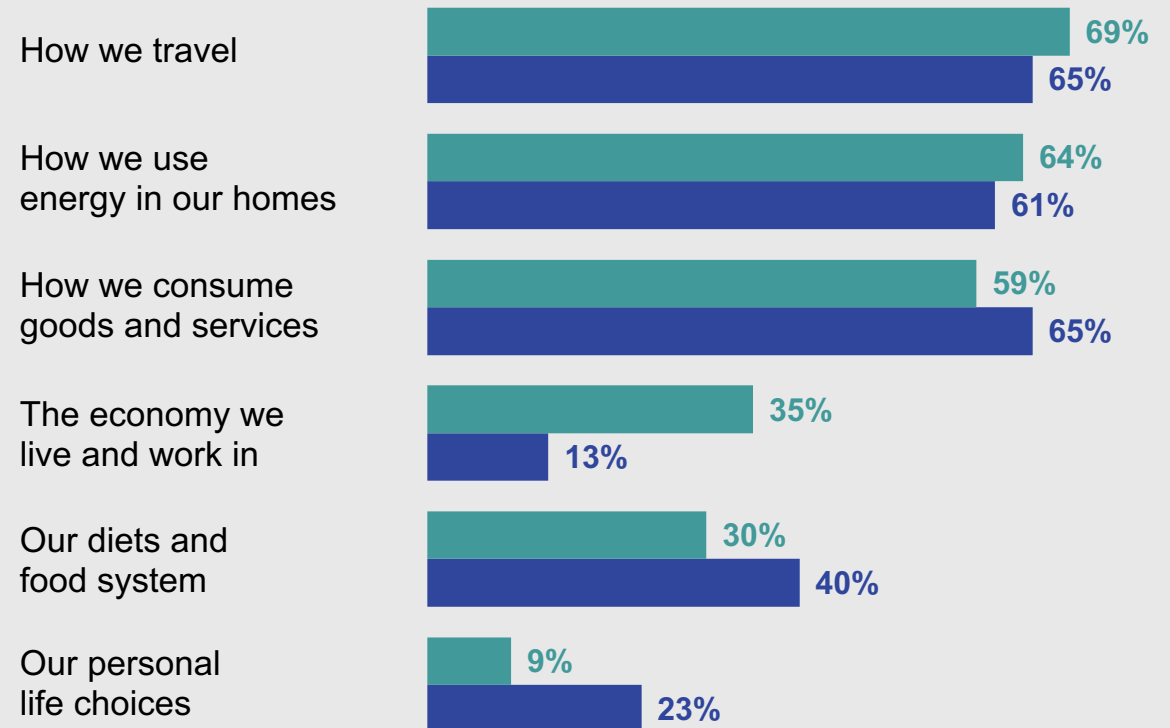
Areas requiring action from government, business and individuals

Travel, home energy and consumption are felt to be the three most important areas where both governments and businesses and individuals should take action.

- Around a third select the economy we live and work in as one of the three most important areas for government and businesses to take action, while fewer see this as an area for individual action.
- The public see our diets and the food system as a more important area for individual action than for action from government and businesses.
- Similarly our personal life choices, such as family size and whether we have pets, are seen as a much less important area for government/business action than for individual action.

In which, if any, of the following areas do you think it is most important for [government and businesses/individuals] to take action to reduce carbon emissions?

Important for government and business to take action
Important for individuals to take action



Base: 5,665 UK adults aged 16+, 19 – 25 Aug 2021



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Ipsos MORI and CAST asked the UK public for their views on 8 net zero policies that would help to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions.

These policies relate to how we travel, what we eat, what we buy, and how we heat our homes.



Description presented for each policy

Mobility and travel

Creating low traffic neighbourhoods

The government may want to reduce the number of vehicles on the road by creating low-traffic neighbourhoods. This is where cars, vans and other vehicles are stopped from using residential roads as shortcuts. This is done by putting some road closures in place using measures such as bollards or planters. Residents are still able to drive onto their street but it is made more difficult or impossible to drive straight through the area from one main road to the next.

Electric vehicle subsidies

The government may want to subsidise the purchase of electric vehicles for consumers in order to reduce the number of petrol and diesel cars on the road. The government is ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030 and encouraging a shift to electric vehicles. Putting in place subsidies, would mean electric vehicles become less expensive to buy than they are now. The money to do this may come from increasing fuel duty on petrol and diesel cars.

Frequent flier levies

The government may want to replace current tax on flights (Air Passenger Duty) by a tax that increases as people fly more often. People who only fly once in a year could pay no tax, while people who fly several times per year could pay a large amount of tax. This could mean people replace some flights with alternatives, like trains or ferries, or with videoconferencing instead of some business travel.

Description presented for each policy

Home heating

Phasing out the sale of gas and coal boilers

The government may want to cut down on the use of fossil fuel energy by banning the sale of new gas boilers in the next few years, for example by 2030. This would mean that when homeowners come to replace their boilers, they would need to buy a different sort of heating system, such as an electric heat pump or hydrogen boiler. This may cost more initially but is likely to be cheaper to run in the longer term.

Material consumption

Changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are

The government may want to replace current tax on products by a tax that will vary according to the negative environmental impacts of different products. This would mean products that are produced using high amounts of resources such as energy, water or scarce metals, or products that travel long distances before being sold in a shop, would be more expensive than products that are manufactured in more environmentally-friendly ways.

Green finance

Ensuring access to sustainable pension funds

The government may want to increase the public's access to sustainable pension funds. This means that they would increase regulations to ensure that all pension providers include a pension fund option for people to choose from that only used sustainable investments that do not harm people or the planet. This would be the default pension option for the general public, unless they chose to opt out of it.

Description presented for each policy

Food and diet

Increasing vegetarian/vegan options in public food provisioning

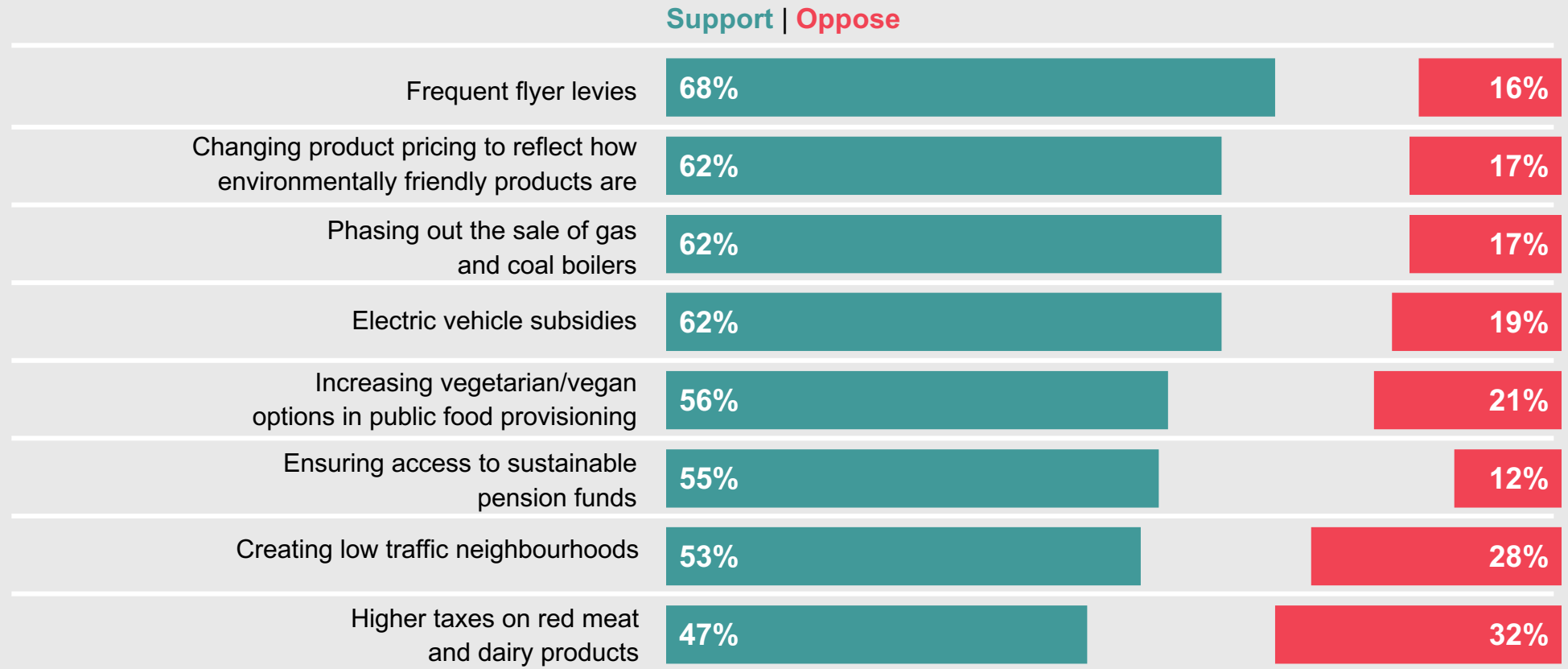
The government may want to reduce the amount of red meat and dairy products people eat, by increasing vegetarian and vegan options in all public sector catering. This would mean that meals served in hospital cafés, school canteens, prisons, police and fire stations, council offices, and across the public sector, would need to include a significant proportion of meat-free and plant-based options. It would reduce but not remove meat and dairy from menus, while it would increase the choice of meat/dairy-free alternatives.

Higher taxes on red meat and dairy products

The government may want to replace current tax on food products by a tax that will vary according to the negative environmental impacts of different foods. This would increase the price of red meat and dairy products, and reduce the price of certain other foods (e.g., vegetables, bread).

There is widespread support for net zero policies – at least initially

To what extent do you support or oppose this?



Base: c. 2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy, 19 – 25 Aug 2021



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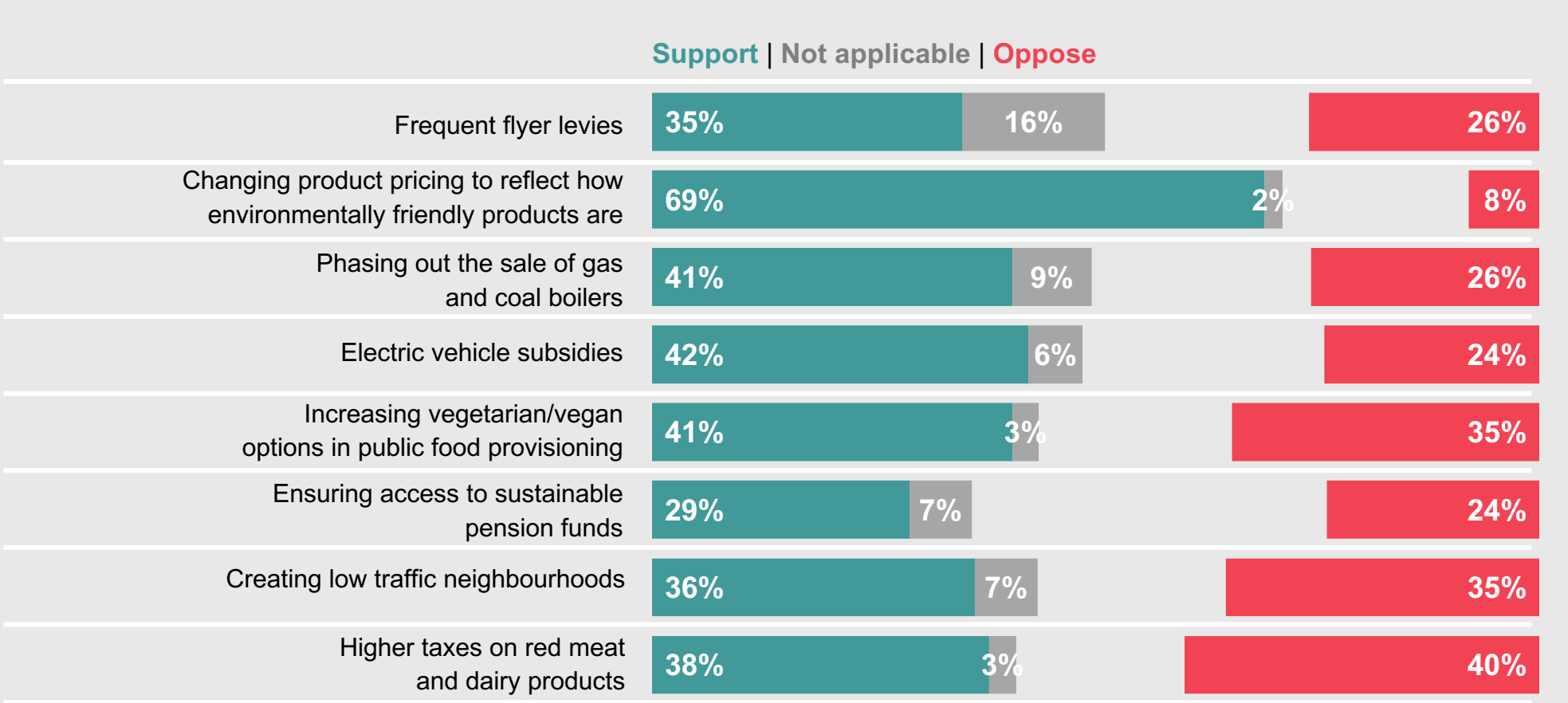
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Support for policies typically falls when people are made aware of the lifestyle changes required – with the exception of changing product pricing

If this policy meant that you personally ... to what extent do you support or oppose it?

[were not able to take flights abroad very often/ were not able to buy as much of certain products e.g. single-use plastics as you do now/ were not able to install a new gas or coal boiler in your home/ had a more limited range to choose from when buying a car/ were not able to eat as many meat and dairy products in these settings/ had to opt out of a sustainable pension fund if you wanted to save in a regular pension fund/ were not able to drive in certain areas unless you lived or worked there/ were not able to eat as many meat and dairy products as you do now],

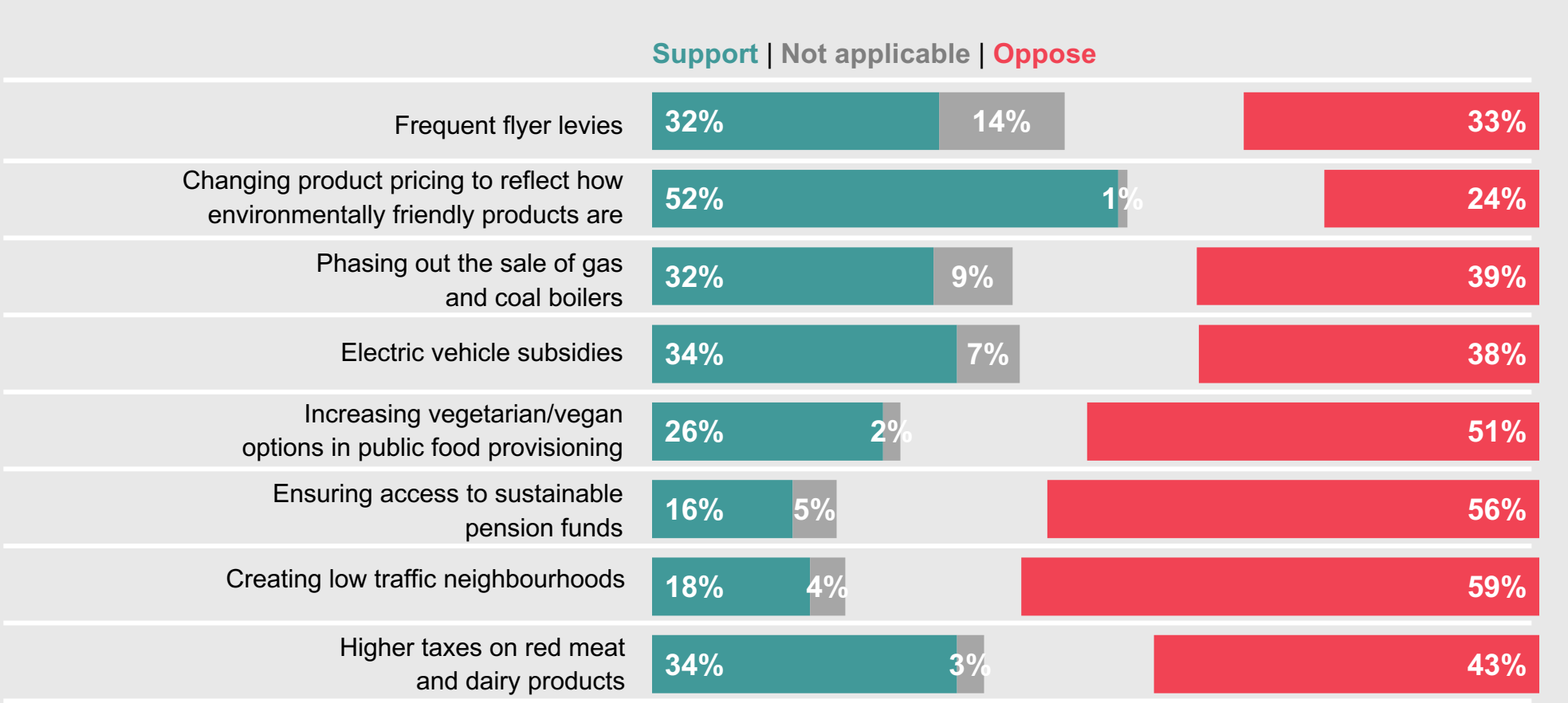


Base: c. 2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy, 19 – 25 Aug 2021

Support for policies typically falls even further when people are made aware of the potential financial implications for them personally

If this policy meant that you personally ... to what extent do you support or oppose it?

[had to pay more to take a flight/ had to pay more for some products/ had to pay more to install an alternative heating system in your home/ had to pay more to drive your petrol or diesel car/ had to pay higher taxes to fund this policy/ may get a smaller return from your pension savings/ had to pay more council tax/ had to pay more for meat and dairy products]



Base: c. 2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy, 19 – 25 Aug 2021

Support for net zero policies is higher among some key groups...



Homeowners



Those living in the least deprived areas, and those not financially impacted by COVID-19



Those who identify as 'left' and hold communitarian views



Those who voted for Labour, the Liberal Democrats or the Scottish National Party in 2019



Those who are already engaged with and feel knowledgeable about climate issues

Support for certain policies is higher among older people aged 55 and over, namely: creating low traffic neighbourhoods, frequent flyer levies and changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are.

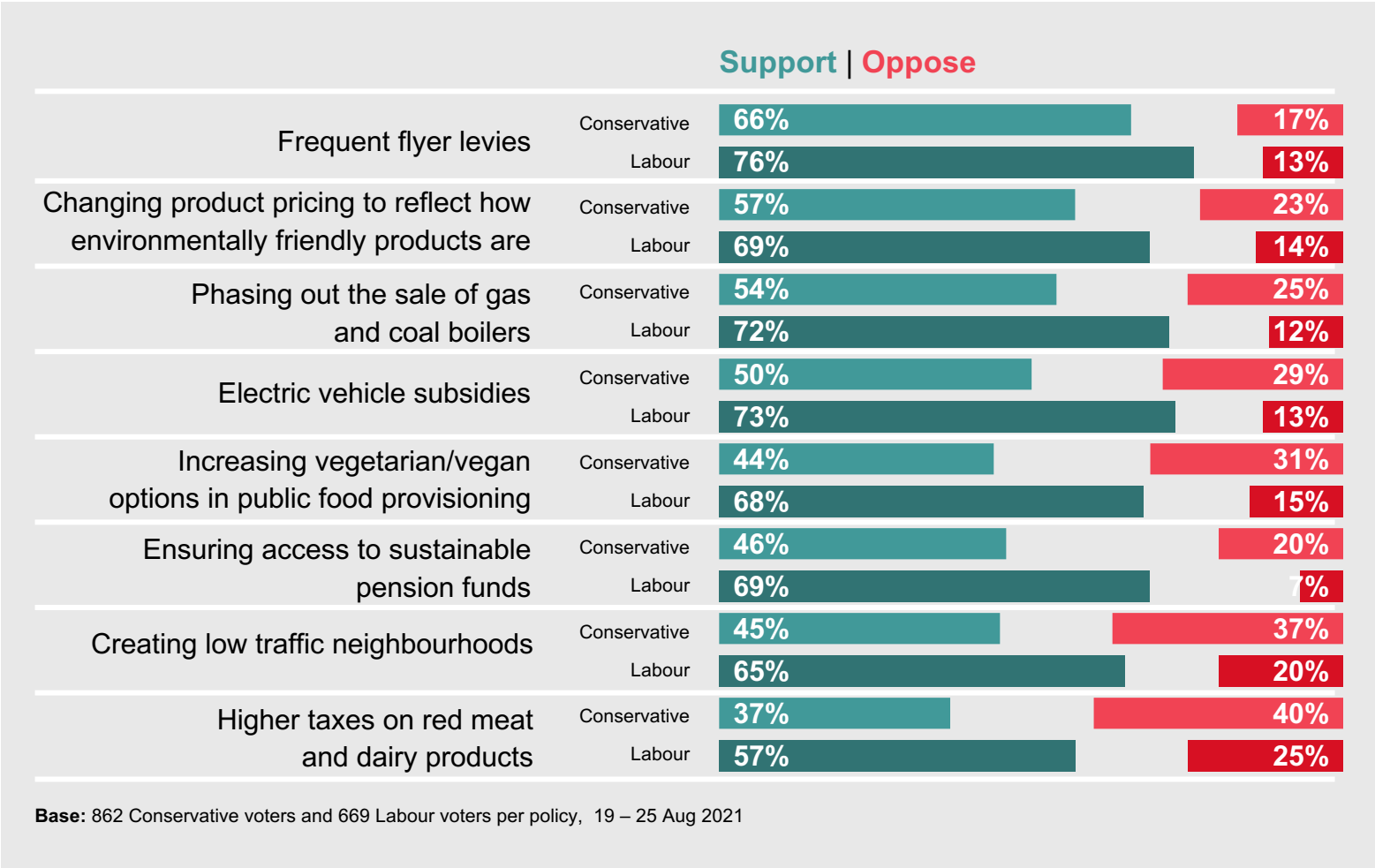
In contrast, support for electric vehicle subsidies, increasing vegetarian/vegan options in public food provisioning and phasing out the sale of gas and coal boilers is higher among younger people.

Before trade-offs are introduced, Conservative voters support the majority of net zero policies, with the exception of higher taxes on meat/dairy

To what extent do you support or oppose this?

Conservative voters are less likely to support any of the net zero policies than UK adults overall are, which represents a challenge for Boris Johnson’s Government.

- For the most part, however, more Conservative voters support each policy than oppose it, with the exception of higher taxes on red meat and dairy.
- In contrast, Labour, Liberal Democrat and SNP voters are more likely to support than to oppose all of the net zero policies initially.



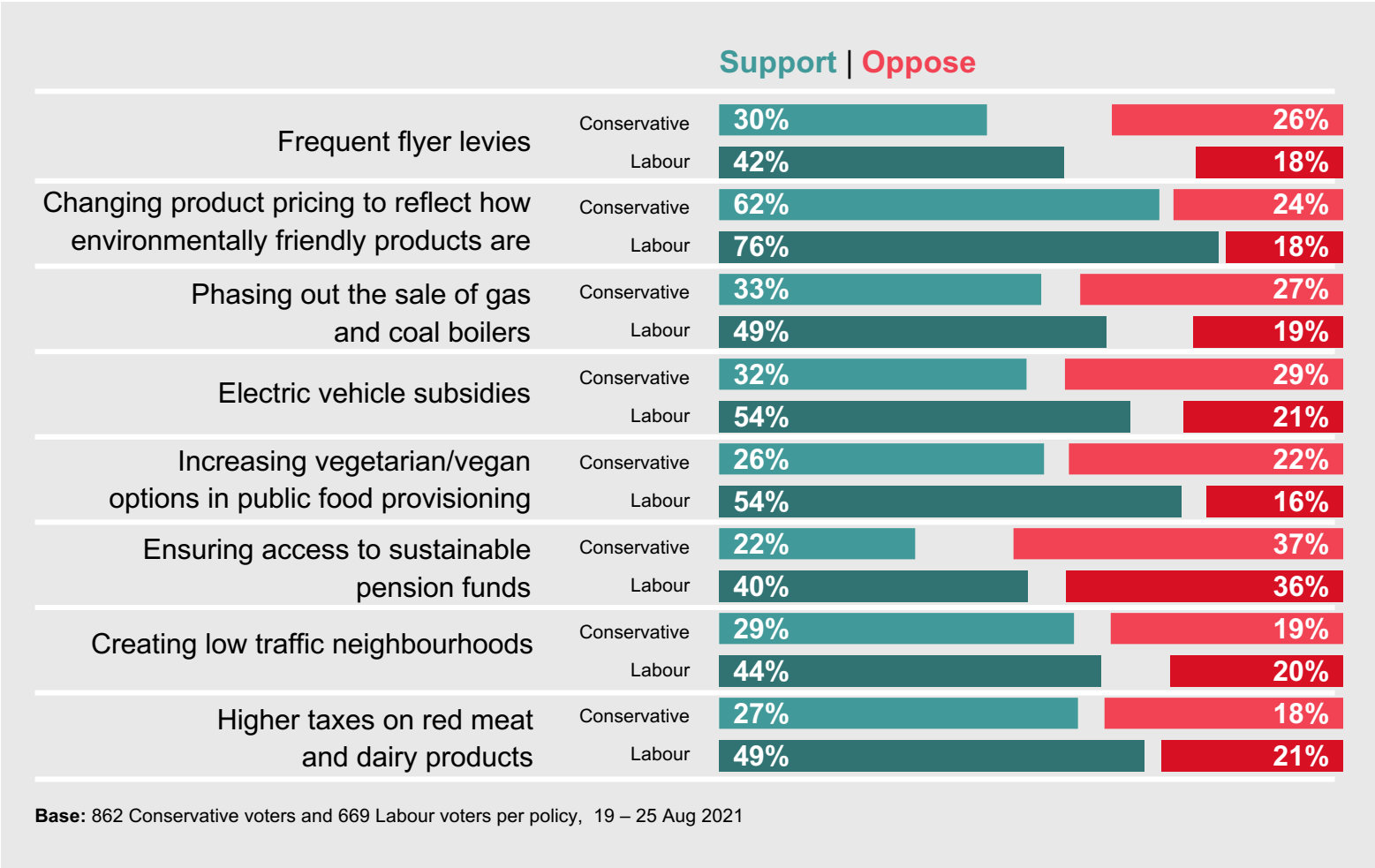
Once presented with the lifestyle trade-offs, Conservative voters are split on some net zero policies and opposed to those relating to food and diet and green finance

If this policy meant that you personally ... to what extent do you support or oppose it?

Exposure to the lifestyle trade-off shifts those who voted Conservative at the 2019 General Election towards opposing certain net zero policies: those to do with food and diet, and personal finance.

- Once the lifestyle implications for them personally are mentioned, Conservative voters become more likely to oppose than to support increasing vegetarian/vegan options in public food provisioning and higher taxes on red meat and dairy. This may reflect a reluctance for the state to intervene in people’s personal food and dietary choices.
- After the lifestyle trade-off is introduced, Conservative voters are split on some key policies: low traffic neighbourhoods, frequent flyer levies, electric vehicle subsidies and phasing out the sale of gas and coal boilers. Labour voters remain more likely to support than to oppose each of these four policies.

[were not able to take flights abroad very often/ were not able to buy as much of certain products e.g. single-use plastics as you do now/ were not able to install a new gas or coal boiler in your home/ had a more limited range to choose from when buying a car/ were not able to eat as many meat and dairy products in these settings/ had to opt out of a sustainable pension fund if you wanted to save in a regular pension fund/ were not able to drive in certain areas unless you lived or worked there/ were not able to eat as many meat and dairy products as you do now],



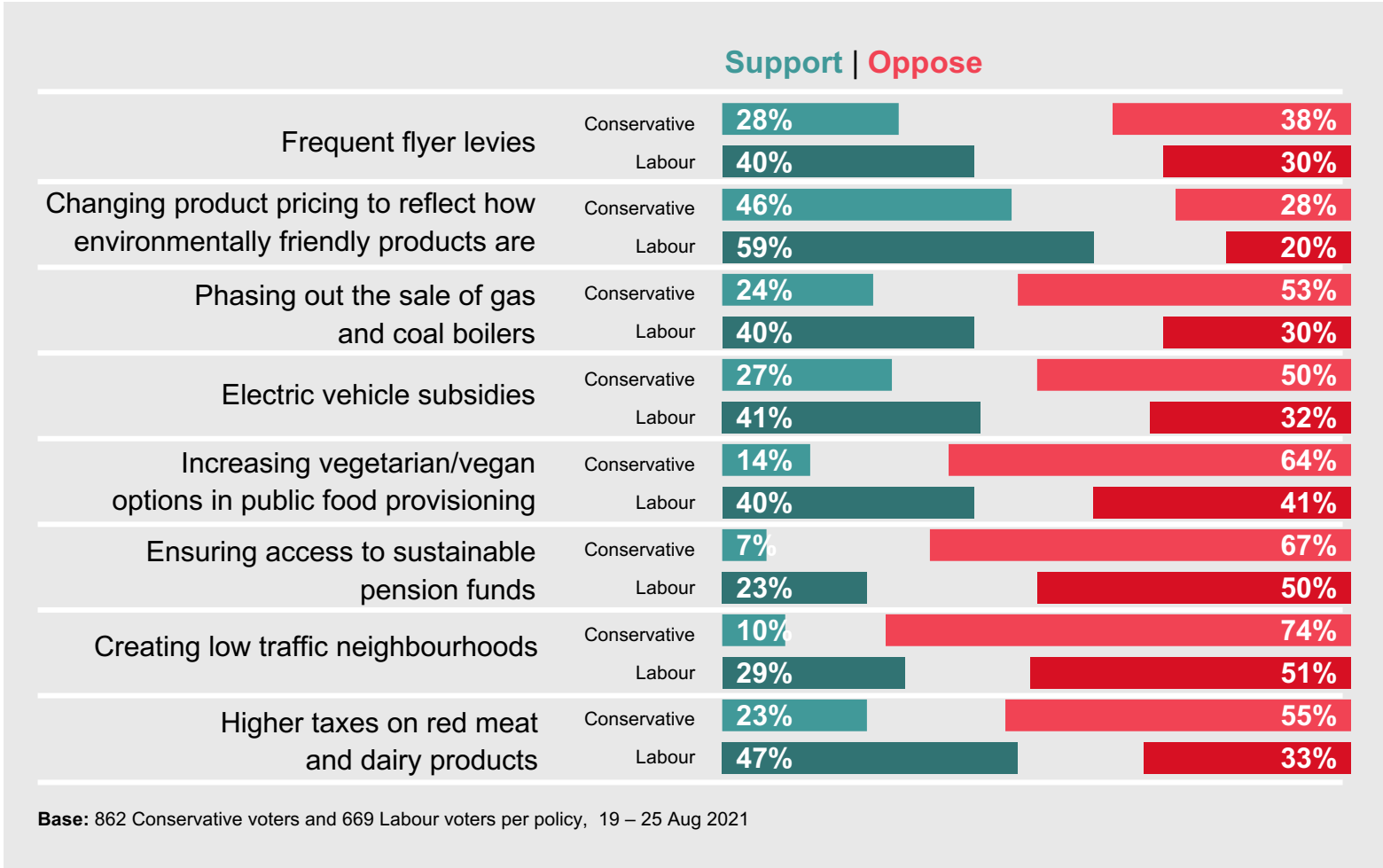
Once presented with the cost trade-offs, Conservative voters oppose most net zero policies – with the exception of changing product pricing

If this policy meant that you personally ... to what extent do you support or oppose it?

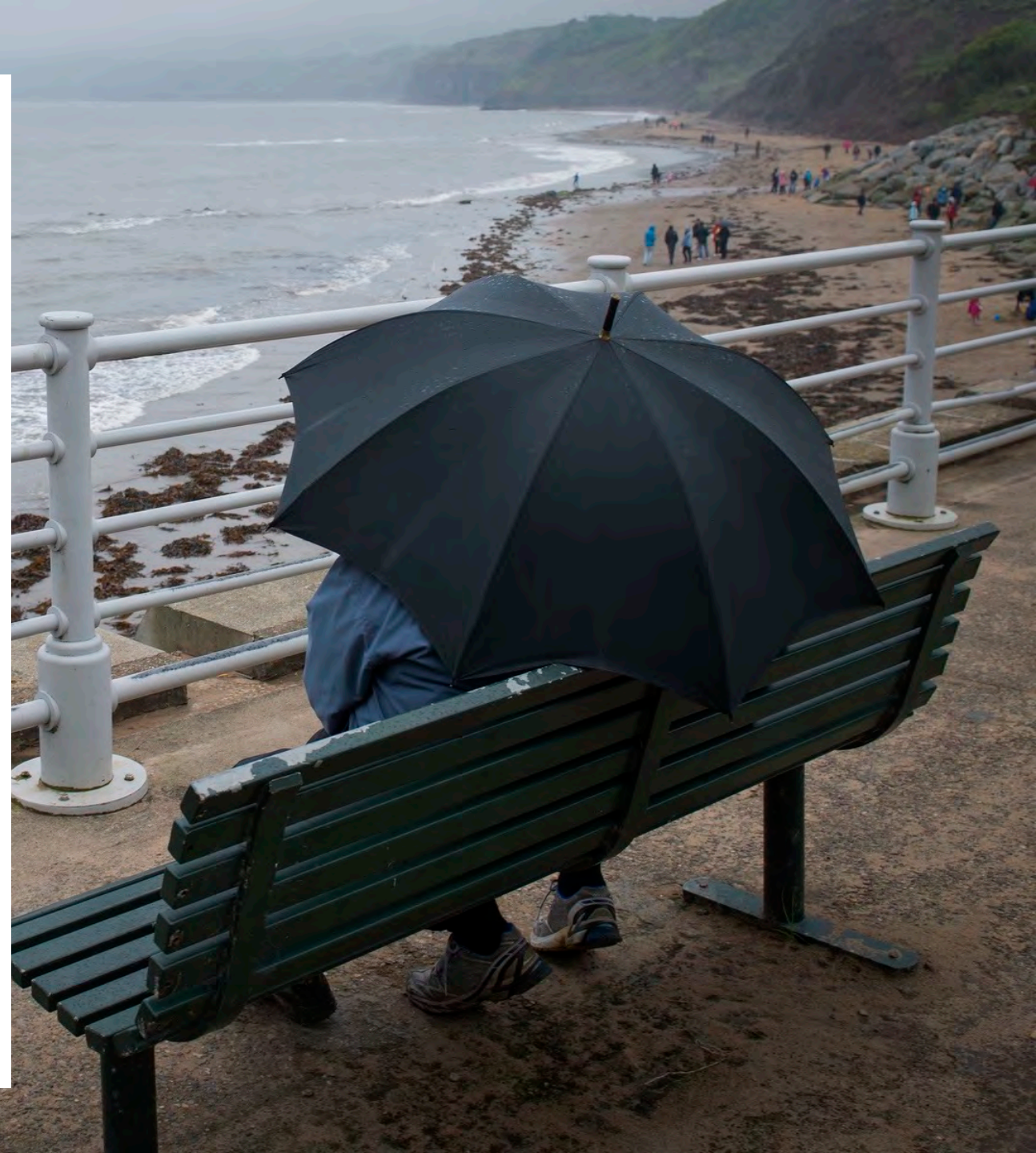
Exposure to the cost trade-off shifts Conservative voters towards opposing all except one of the net zero policies.

- Changing product pricing is the only policy that remains more supported than opposed by those who voted Conservative at the 2019 General Election once the cost trade-off is introduced.
- The rise in opposition to certain net zero policies is particularly marked: low traffic neighbourhoods and ensuring access to sustainable pension funds.
- Five of the eight policies are still supported by Labour voters once they are exposed to the potential cost implication of the policy for them personally. This is the case for changing product pricing, higher taxes on red meat and dairy products, frequent flyer levies, electric vehicle subsidies, and phasing out the sale of gas and coal boilers.

[had to pay more to take a flight/ had to pay more for some products/ had to pay more to install an alternative heating system in your home/ had to pay more to drive your petrol or diesel car/ had to pay higher taxes to fund this policy/ may get a smaller return from your pension savings/ had to pay more council tax/ had to pay more for meat and dairy products],



Public support typically falls when the possible impacts of each net zero policy on them personally are considered – both the impact on their lifestyle and the financial cost



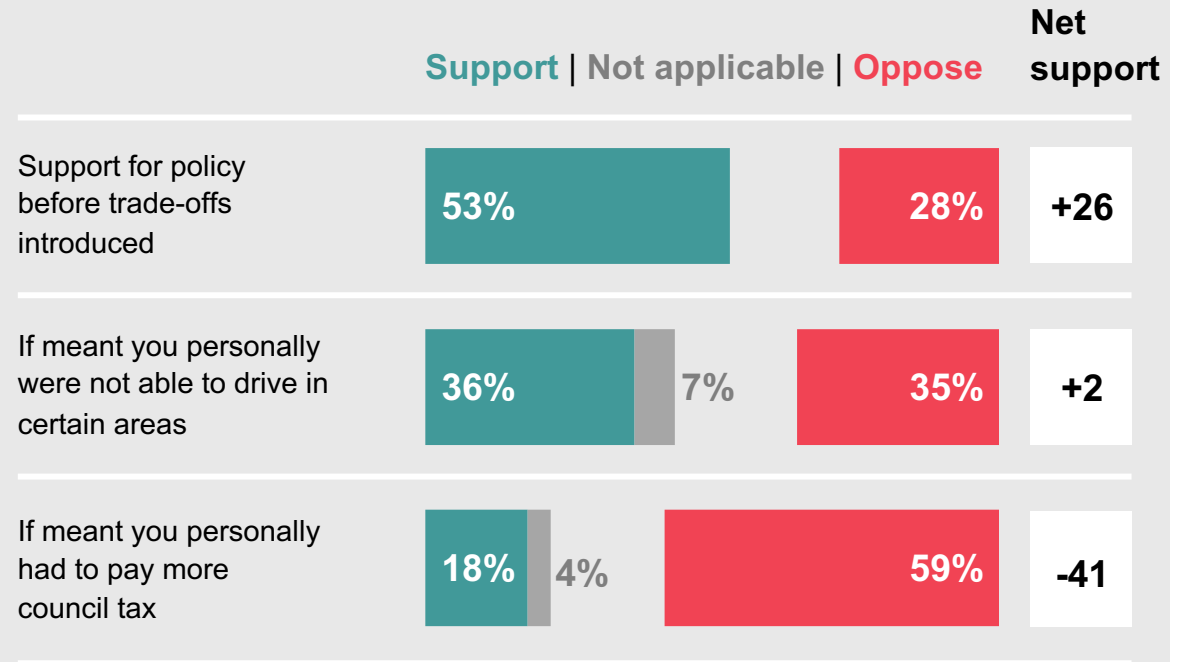
Transport and mobility policy: low traffic neighbourhoods

Before any lifestyle and cost implications for them personally are mentioned, a majority of the UK public support low traffic neighbourhoods. Once both trade-offs are introduced, however, almost three in five oppose the policy.

- Low traffic neighbourhoods have attracted much controversy. They have been rolled out most widely in London, but have also been introduced in Manchester, Birmingham and other cities.
- When this policy is introduced initially, over half of the UK public support it, although a significant minority are opposed.
- Once the public are presented with the implication of them personally not being able to drive in certain areas, support falls and they become split on the policy.
- There is considerable opposition to the idea of the policy meaning that they personally would need to pay more council tax; just under three in five say they oppose the policy once this financial trade-off is mentioned.

If this policy meant that you personally were not able to drive in certain areas – unless you lived or worked there – to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay more council tax, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

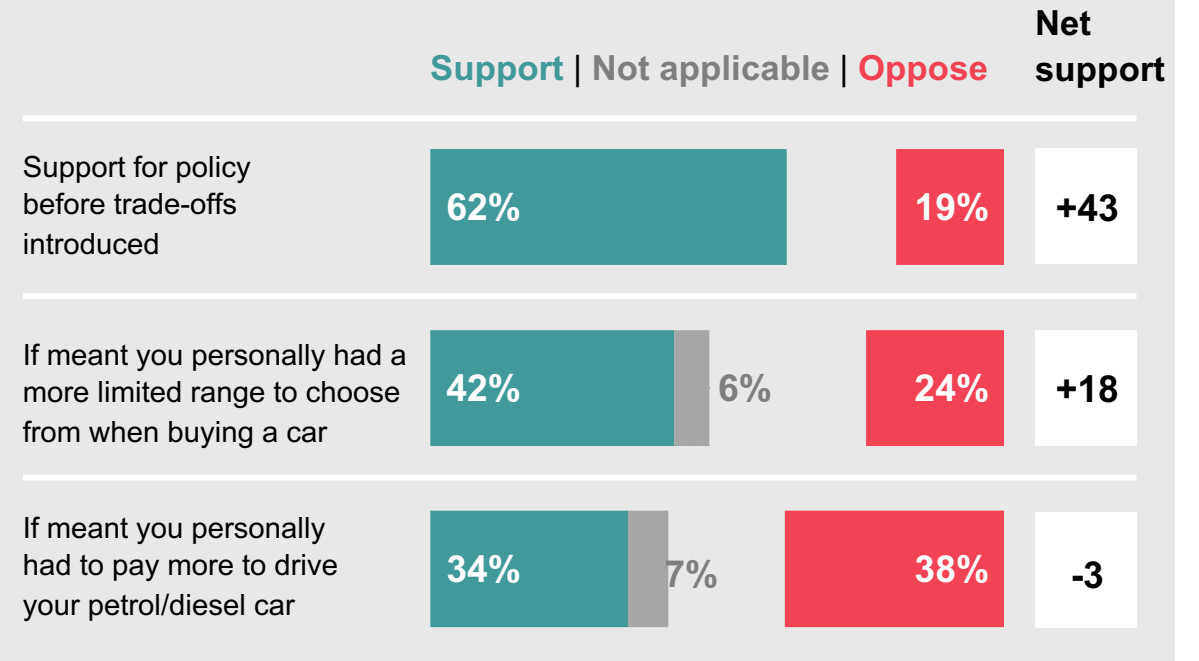
Transport and mobility policy: electric vehicle subsidies

Electric vehicle (EV) subsidies receive a high level of public support initially before trade-offs are introduced. However, more would oppose than support this policy if it meant they personally had to pay more to drive their petrol or diesel car.

- The public's preference for 'pull' (supportive) policy measures, such as financial incentives, over 'push' (restrictive measures), such as higher taxes on high-carbon products, is well established, and reflects the importance of perceived fairness and personal cost in shaping public support for policies.
- Reflecting this, a majority of the UK public support EV subsidies even if they mean that they personally have a more limited range to choose from when buying a car.
- Once the cost trade-off of them personally having to pay more to drive their petrol or diesel car is introduced, however, slightly more oppose than support this policy.

If this policy meant that you personally had a more limited range to choose from when buying a car, to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay more to drive your petrol/diesel car, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

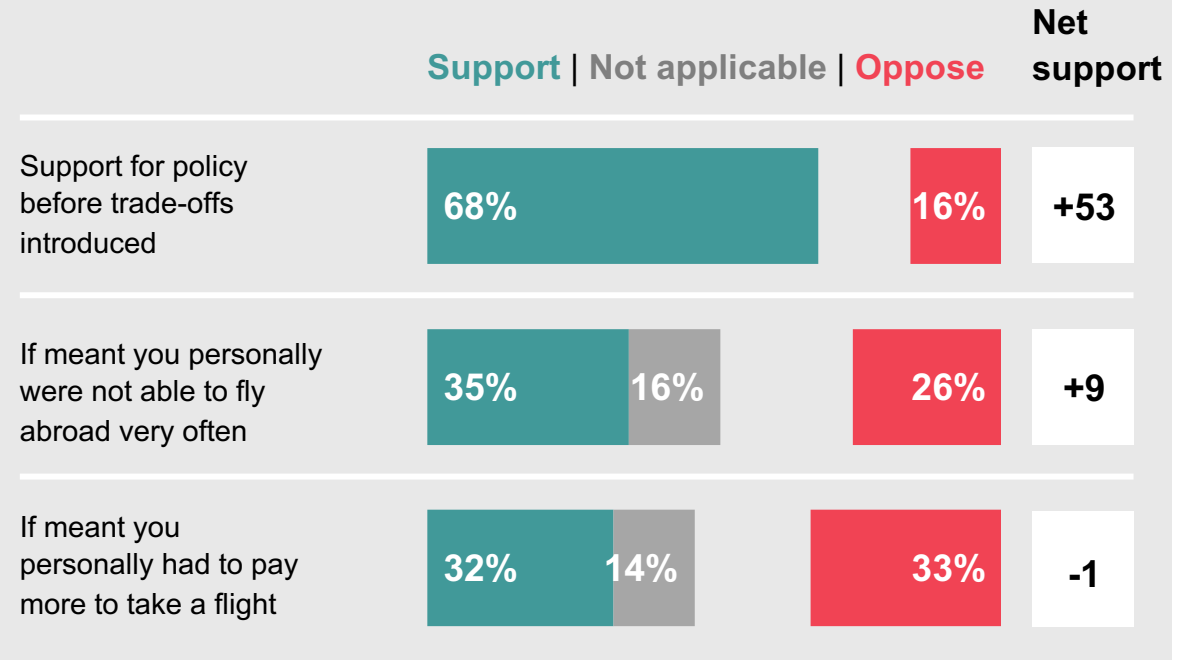
Transport and mobility policy: frequent flyer levies

Frequent flyer levies is the net zero policy which receives the highest level of public support overall. This may reflect its perceived effectiveness and fairness.

- Perceived fairness is an important predictor of policy support. It may be that the public implicitly associate the frequent flyer levy with the 'polluter pays' principle (i.e., people who fly more should pay more), or recognise that frequent flyers are those on the highest incomes and can therefore afford to pay more.
- Once trade-offs are introduced, however, the level of public support for the policy drops. Support drops to only 35% if the policy means that individuals themselves are not able to fly abroad very often.
- When the financial cost implication is mentioned – i.e. if the policy means that they personally have to pay more to take a flight – public opinion shifts to being split on frequent flyer levies, with 32% supportive of the policy and 33% opposed to it.

If this policy meant that you personally were not able to take flights abroad very often, to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay more to take a flight, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



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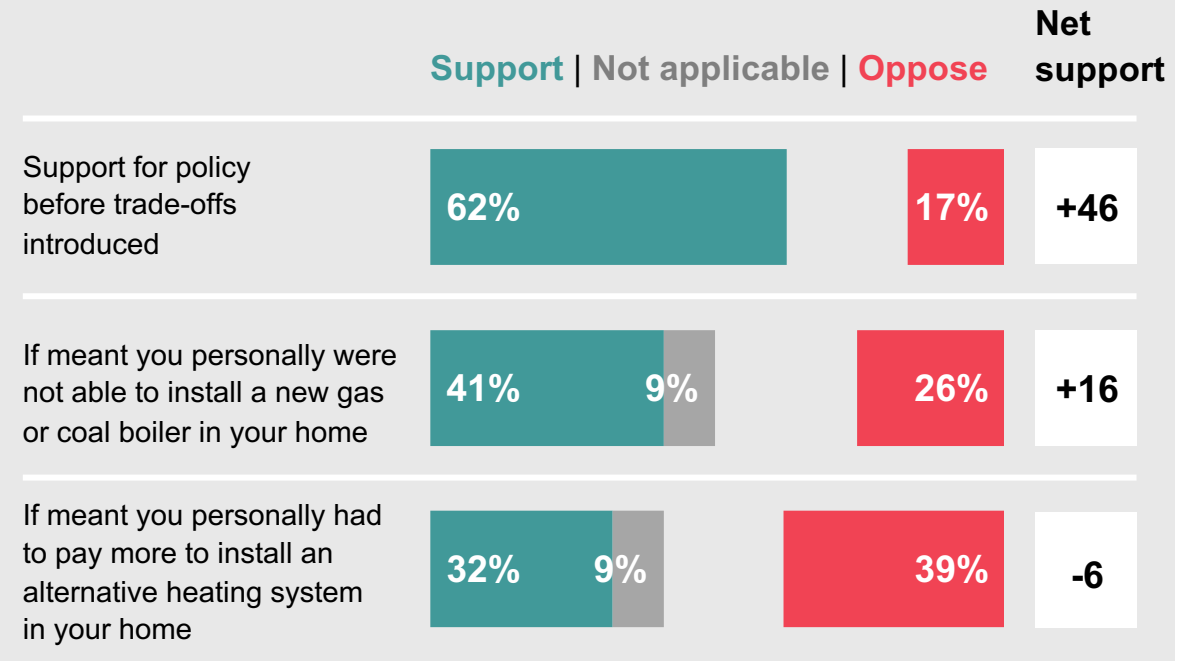
Home heating policy: phasing out the sale of gas and coal boilers

The public initially support phasing out the sale of new gas and coal boilers. Once the financial cost trade-off is introduced, however, more oppose than support the policy.

- There is strong support for this policy before any trade-offs are introduced.
- Although support drops once the personal lifestyle implication is introduced – i.e. that the policy would mean they personally were not able to install a new gas or coal boiler in their home – the public are on balance willing to make this trade-off. More still support the policy than oppose it.
- Once the cost trade-off is introduced, however, more of the public oppose this policy than support it. This is likely to reflect public concern about the costs of home heating in future and the rising costs of energy.

If this policy meant that you personally were not able to install a new gas or coal boiler in your home (and had to install an alternative heating system instead), to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay more to install an alternative heating system in your home, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

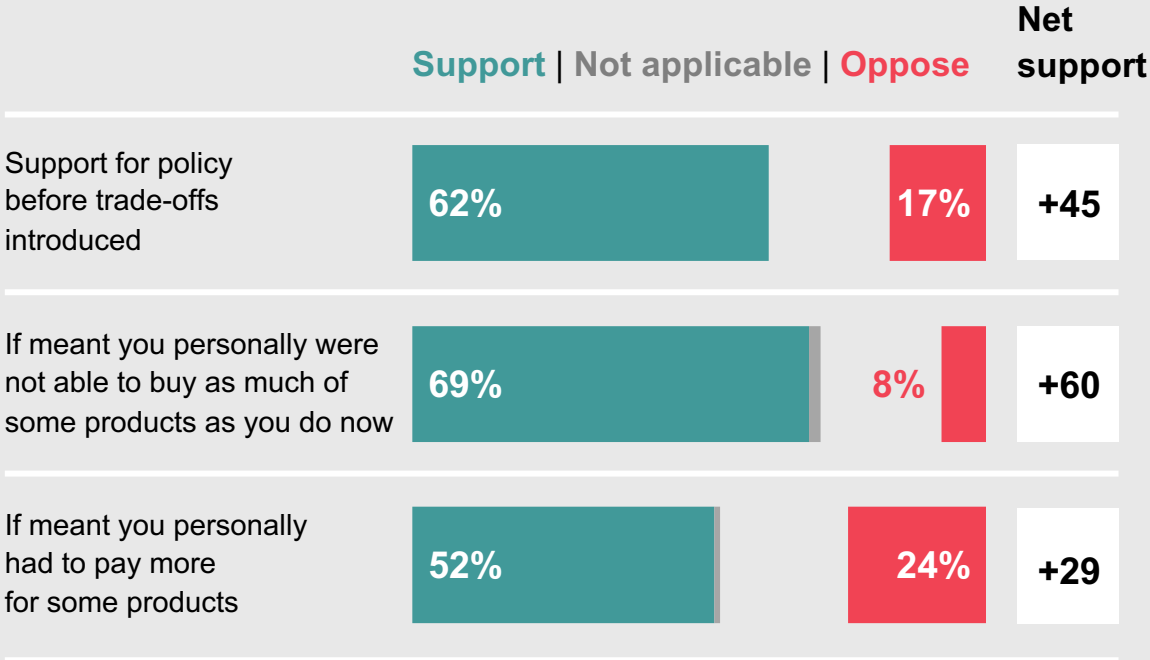
Material consumption policy: changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are

Changing product pricing to reflect an item’s environmental impact is the only policy that is still supported by a majority of the UK public once they have considered the lifestyle and cost implications.

- Three in five support changing product pricing to reflect how environmentally friendly products are.
- Public support rises further when the implication that they personally would not be able to buy as much of certain products (e.g. single-use plastics) as they do now is outlined, which is likely to reflect public awareness of and desire to tackle the problem of plastic waste.
- This policy enjoys majority support among the public even if it means that they personally have to pay more for some products.

If this policy meant that you personally were not able to buy as much of certain products e.g. single-use plastics as you do now, to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay more for some products, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

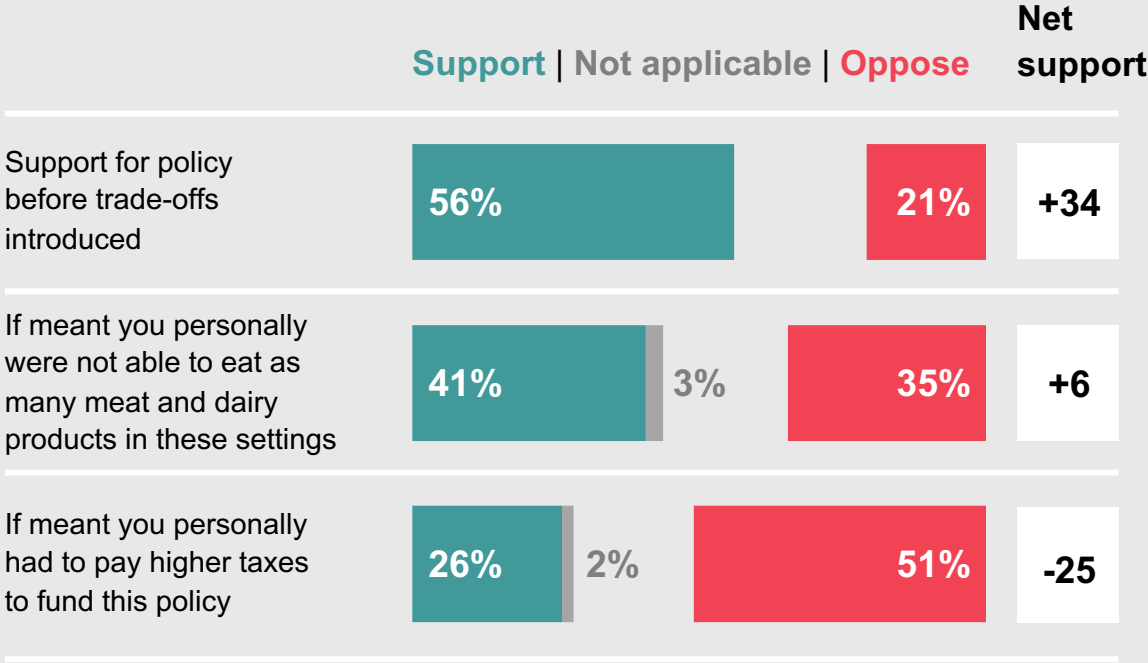
Food and diet policy: increasing vegetarian/vegan options in public food provisioning

While policies aimed at changing our diet and food system receive more support than opposition initially, if these policies mean they personally need to pay higher taxes then a majority of the public would be opposed.

- Previous CAST research has shown that there is lower public awareness of the need for dietary change to reduce carbon emissions, compared with other perceived priorities such as transport, energy and consumption.
- The public support this policy before being asked to consider the personal lifestyle and cost implications. There is also some willingness to make the lifestyle trade-off of not personally eating as many meat and dairy products in these settings: more still support than oppose the policy once this implication is put to them.
- If this policy meant they personally need to pay higher taxes, however, a majority of the public would be opposed.

If this policy meant that you personally were not able to eat as many meat and dairy products in these settings, to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay higher taxes to fund this policy, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

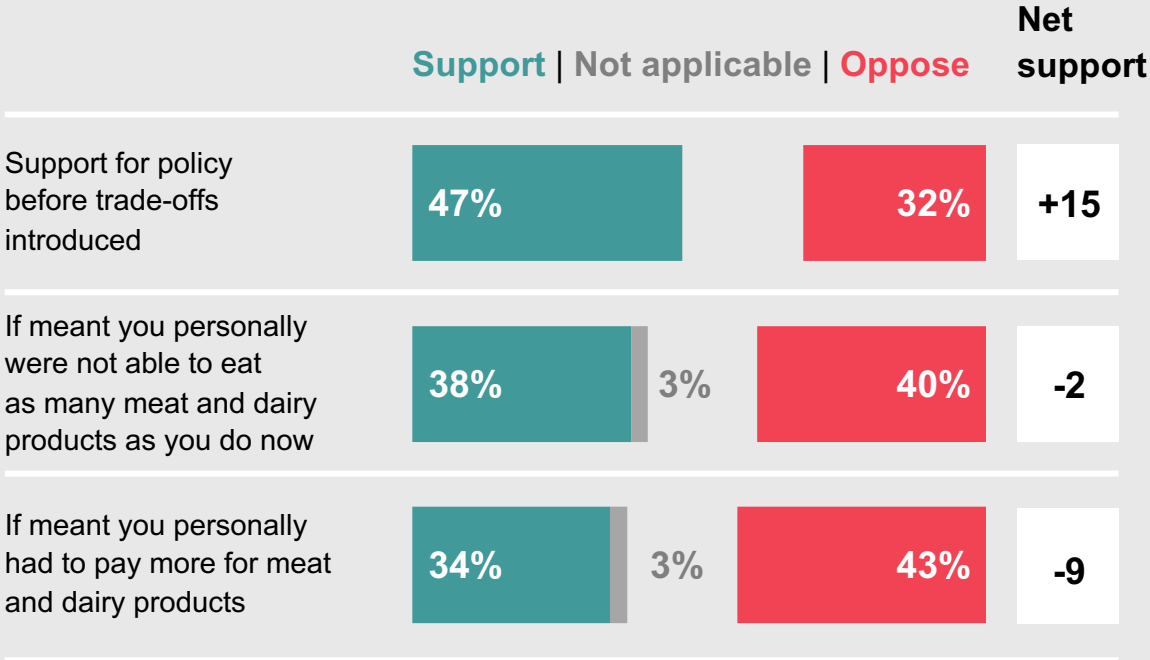
Food and diet policy: higher taxes on red meat and dairy products

A third of the public are opposed to higher taxes on red meat and dairy products, the highest level of opposition to any of the net zero policies covered.

- Public opposition to the policy rises further once the lifestyle and cost implications are mentioned.
- However, there is less of a drop in support for higher taxes on red meat and dairy than for other policies when considering trade-offs, probably because the policy itself (i.e. a tax) already implies a cost to the individual.

If this policy meant that you personally were not able to eat as many meat and dairy products as you do now, to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally had to pay more for meat and dairy products, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

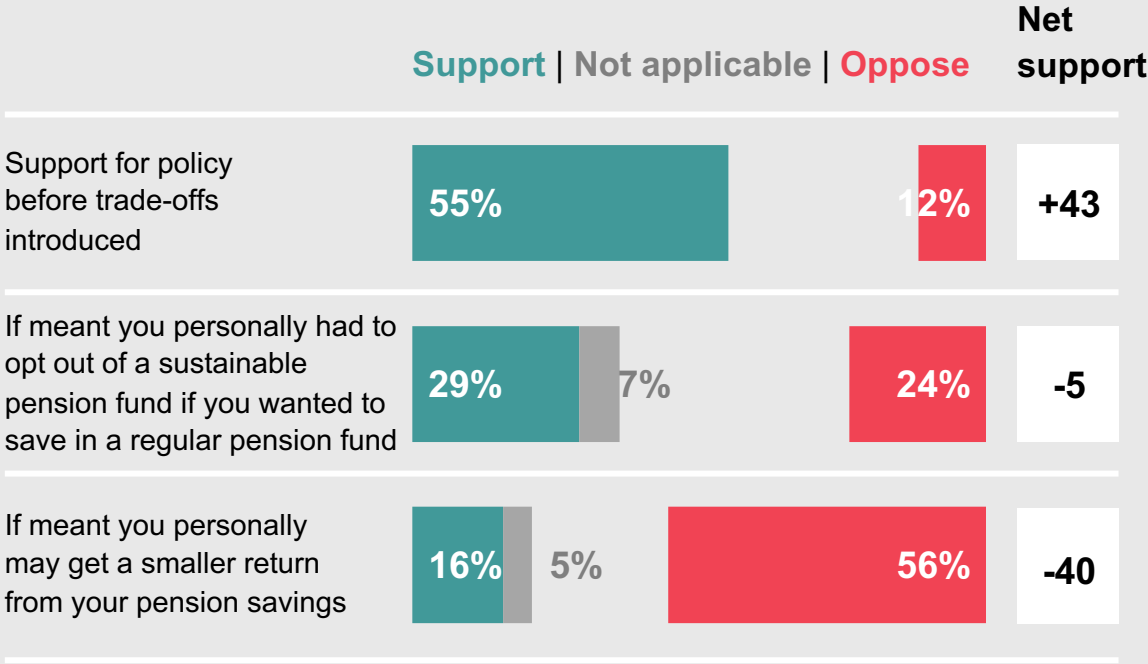
Green finance policy: ensuring access to sustainable pension funds

Over half of the UK public support ensuring access to sustainable pension funds initially, before trade-offs are introduced.

- Support falls dramatically once people are asked to consider the lifestyle and then the cost trade-offs of this policy, however.
- Once the trade-off is introduced that it may mean smaller returns on pension savings, it becomes the most opposed policy on balance.

If this policy meant that you personally had to opt out of a sustainable pension fund if you wanted to save in a regular pension fund, to what extent would you support or oppose it?

If this policy meant that you personally may get a smaller return from your pension savings, to what extent would you support or oppose it?



Base: c.2,830 UK adults aged 16+ per policy

Technical note

Survey data has been collected by Ipsos MORI's UK KnowledgePanel, an online random probability panel which provides gold standard insights into the UK population, by providing bigger sample sizes via the most rigorous research methods. Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative sample of 5,665 adults aged 16+ in the UK between 19th and 25th August 2021.

Data are weighted by age, gender, region, Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile, education, ethnicity and number of adults in the household in order to reflect the profile of the population of the UK. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error.

Where percentages do not sum to 100 this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple answers.

Questions are asked of the total sample of n=5,665 unless otherwise stated.

CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

This is the first public release by the new Climate Engagement Partnership, a collaboration between Ipsos MORI and the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST). Look out for more expert analysis and results coming soon.

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