# Public scepticism over climate change causes slows progress despite high concern in Northern Ireland



Recent findings from the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey reveal a concerning reality regarding public perceptions of climate change in Northern Ireland. The poll indicates that only 59% of respondents acknowledge human activity as the primary cause of climate change, a figure notably lower than the UK average of 90% and Ireland's 88%. Additionally, while a significant 86% believe that human actions contribute to climate change to some extent, this still places Northern Ireland among the lowest in Europe, only ahead of Slovakia and Lithuania.

Despite these sceptical views, public concern about climate change remains pronounced. Approximately 80% of participants perceive climate change as a serious threat to human civilisation. This dichotomy illustrates a complex relationship between awareness and belief. While there is a high level of concern, a substantial portion of the population continues to question the overwhelming scientific consensus regarding the causes of climate change.

The survey highlights demographic differences in attitudes towards climate change. For instance, men are found to be less likely than women to feel personally responsible for addressing the issue, while younger individuals (ages 18 to 34) exhibit a diminished sense of personal obligation. Additionally, voting preferences appear to influence perceptions: leave voters tend to exhibit more scepticism compared to their remain counterparts. Notably, there were no significant differences in attitudes between urban and rural populations, although rural dwellers demonstrated a lower level of trust in scientific experts.

Professor Katy Hayward from Queen’s University Belfast emphasized the role of public sentiment in shaping political action, stating that the implementation of the Climate Change Act (2022) in Northern Ireland hinges on the extent to which the public demands accountability from their elected officials. In her view, the survey results indicate a robust desire among constituents for local politicians to prioritise climate action. Dr Jonny Hanson added that tackling climate change is fundamentally a societal challenge, requiring collective commitment as much as technological solutions.

The NILT survey serves as an essential tool for understanding public attitudes on critical social issues, having been conducted annually for over two decades. Dr Paula Devine, Director of the NILT survey, pointed out that insights into public opinion will be vital for effectively addressing the climate crisis going forward. The research reinforces the idea that as societal understanding evolves, it will influence the urgency and nature of the policy responses to climate change.

Public sentiment towards climate change remains a prominent theme across the UK and Ireland, with various surveys indicating high levels of concern. For example, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's Public Attitudes Tracker reported that 80% of the UK population is concerned about climate change, with a significant portion feeling a personal capacity to effect change. Similarly, an Environmental Protection Agency study found over 80% of Irish citizens alarmed or concerned about climate impacts. These broader findings position Northern Ireland’s views in a wider context, suggesting that while local attitudes may vary, there is a continual push across the region for urgent climate action and cooperative efforts.

Addressing these attitudes is crucial, particularly as environmental changes continue to affect local weather patterns. Research indicates that the climate crisis has already altered winter conditions in Northern Ireland, demonstrating the tangible consequences of climate change on everyday life. As the region grapples with these changes, fostering a more profound understanding of climate science amidst public discourse will be essential for building consensus and motivating action.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/59-in-ni-believe-human-activity-is-primary-cause-of-climate-change-JAW7NXUL3NFCZGKZ6OMZ5Q6A7Q/), [[5]](https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/climate-crisis/2024/07/30/survey-shows-80-per-cent-of-irish-people-are-alarmed-or-concerned-about-climate-change/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/59-in-ni-believe-human-activity-is-primary-cause-of-climate-change-JAW7NXUL3NFCZGKZ6OMZ5Q6A7Q/), [[2]](https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/nilt/), [[6]](https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2024/public-support-for-climate-action-remains-high-across-ireland.php)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/59-in-ni-believe-human-activity-is-primary-cause-of-climate-change-JAW7NXUL3NFCZGKZ6OMZ5Q6A7Q/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-winter-2024/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-net-zero-and-climate-change-winter-2024-uk), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-summer-2024/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-net-zero-and-climate-change-summer-2024-uk)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/59-in-ni-believe-human-activity-is-primary-cause-of-climate-change-JAW7NXUL3NFCZGKZ6OMZ5Q6A7Q/), [[6]](https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2024/public-support-for-climate-action-remains-high-across-ireland.php), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crrwqyz4kzqo)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/59-in-ni-believe-human-activity-is-primary-cause-of-climate-change-JAW7NXUL3NFCZGKZ6OMZ5Q6A7Q/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/nilt/> - The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey is an annual study that records the attitudes, values, and beliefs of adults in Northern Ireland on a wide range of social policy issues. Established in 1998, the survey provides valuable insights into public opinion and is a joint initiative between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. The latest publications and datasets are available on their website, offering comprehensive data on various topics, including climate change, education, and social issues.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-winter-2024/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-net-zero-and-climate-change-winter-2024-uk> - The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's Public Attitudes Tracker for Winter 2024 provides insights into the UK's public concern about climate change. The survey indicates that 80% of people are very or fairly concerned about climate change, with 37% being very concerned. The report also highlights demographic variations, such as higher concern among individuals aged 65 and over and those with a degree. The data underscores the UK's ongoing public engagement with climate change issues.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-summer-2024/desnz-public-attitudes-tracker-net-zero-and-climate-change-summer-2024-uk> - The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's Public Attitudes Tracker for Summer 2024 reveals that 80% of the UK public are very or fairly concerned about climate change, with 37% being very concerned. The survey also explores attitudes towards climate change, noting that 84% agree that collective action can help reduce climate change, and 72% believe they have the ability to make changes to help mitigate it. The report provides a comprehensive overview of public sentiment on climate issues.
5. <https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/climate-crisis/2024/07/30/survey-shows-80-per-cent-of-irish-people-are-alarmed-or-concerned-about-climate-change/> - A survey conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Yale University Programme on Climate Change Communication found that over 80% of Irish people are either 'alarmed' or 'concerned' about climate change. The study identified four distinct audiences based on their beliefs and attitudes towards climate change: alarmed, concerned, cautious, and doubtful. The findings highlight a high level of public concern and awareness regarding climate change across Ireland.
6. <https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2024/public-support-for-climate-action-remains-high-across-ireland.php> - The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released updated interactive maps showing that public support for climate action remains high across Ireland. The data indicates near nationwide agreement on the reality of climate change and strong support for climate action policies. The study also highlights regional variations, noting that in some counties, less than half of the population understands that climate change is human-caused, compared to about six in ten in other areas.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crrwqyz4kzqo> - A study published by the US-based non-profit Climate Central found that in the last decade, Northern Ireland has lost eight days of wintry weather due to man-made climate change. The research analysed long-term weather data, revealing that the number of days in December, January, and February when the minimum temperature remained above freezing has increased. This trend reflects broader climate change impacts on the UK's winter weather patterns.