

Annex 2: Public perceptions of climate change

Two recent polls are of main interest

Populus poll for BBC

- Populus interviewed a random sample of 1,001 adults (aged 18+) by telephone on 3-4 February 2010.
- Answers to key three questions were compared to those given in November 2009.
- Findings were released on 5 February 2010.

Ipsos MORI poll for Guardian

- Ipsos MORI interviewed 1043 adults (aged 16-64 years) across Great Britain.
- Answers were compared to those given 9-12 January 2009.
- Findings were released on 24 February 2010.

Both polls showed a drop in people believing climate change is taking place, with the majority still believing that it is

Populus (Nov 09 – Feb 10) documented:

- A swing of 9% towards people **not** believing that global warming/climate change is **taking place** (25%).

Ipsos MORI (Jan 09 – Jan 10) documented:

- The proportion of adults who believe climate change is "definitely" a reality dropped from 44% to 31%.
- The poll explored different levels of certainty:
 - 31% of adults believe climate change is 'definitely' a reality
 - 29% agreed 'it's looking like it could be a reality'
 - 31% thought it was 'a bit over-exaggerated'
 - 6% said climate change was not a reality at all
 - 3% said they did not know
- Overall around nine out of 10 people questioned still appear to accept some degree of global warming.

Both polls show dwindling certainty that humans are the main agent of climate change, but little outright dismissal

Populus (Nov 09- Feb 10) found:

- Of those who believe climate change is taking place, there was a 16% drop in people thinking that it is an **established scientific fact** that climate change is largely man-made (34%).

- 50% of people think this is a **widespread theory** but not conclusively proved (11% up since November). 14% think this is environmentalist propaganda for which there is little or no evidence (5% up since November).
- Allowing for those who believe climate change is not happening, the total number of the general public who believe it is a scientific fact that climate change is largely man-made has dropped from 41% to 26%.

Ipsos MORI (Jan 09 – Jan 10) found:

- Of those who believe climate change is happening to some degree, 19% said climate change was "man-made" (down from 22% in 2009); 10% said it was the result of "natural causes" (up from 8% in 2009); 68% said it was caused by a mixture of the two (same as 2009).

Shifting opinions are likely influenced not only by science controversy but cold winter and perceptions of political action

Populus found:

- More people had seen news stories about the exceptionally cold winter (83%) than stories about 'flaws or weaknesses in the science of climate change' (57%). More people had also seen stories about the Copenhagen Summit (61%).
- Of the 57% of people who had seen stories about climate science, only 11% said they were less convinced of the risks of climate change **as a result** – this seems unlikely to fully explain the swings in opinion seen.
- Neither study attributes the swings in public perceptions entirely to one cause.

Most people have not changed their views...and some are more convinced

Populus found:

- Of those who have heard stories about flaws or weaknesses in the science of climate change, 75% say that the stories have not changed their view of the risks of climate change.
- Only 11% say they are now less convinced of the risks of climate change.
- 16% actually say they are now more concerned about the risks of climate change.
- This could potentially be because recent news coverage has brought climate change more 'front of mind' – despite the controversy, people have been reminded of the risks of climate change as a result of the coverage.
- Alternatively, this heightened level of concern could have resulted from a greater sense of confusion resulting from these events: we know that even before these issues, many people found climate change confusing, and this in turn can be distressing or concerning.