

British public attitudes to onshore wind

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Executive summary

- Only a tiny minority are strongly opposed to onshore wind, and opposition is falling.
- Rejection of the scientific consensus on climate change is strongly associated with opposition to onshore wind.
- Opposition is concentrated in the oldest age groups, but is also falling fastest in these groups. Almost no young people are opposed to onshore wind.
- NIMBYism is at a record low, with British people now over five times more likely to strongly support than to strongly oppose large scale renewables developments in their area.

Introduction

The UK government has now been running the Public Attitudes Tracking Survey since March 2012, monitoring the British public's views on matters relating to energy and climate change through a succession of 'waves' each year.

To mark the publication of Wave 25, 10:10 Climate Action worked with our friends at the New Economics Foundation to analyse the full dataset of hundreds of thousands of responses, in order to understand more about the British public's support for onshore wind energy. This briefing note summarises our findings.

Overall attitudes to onshore wind

- Support since the survey began has remained fairly steady, with a large majority - 70% - in favour across the whole dataset.
- Only 10% opposition in total since the survey began.
- A tiny minority - just 3.5% - are strongly opposed to onshore wind.
- Support for onshore wind is growing - now at a record high of 76%.
- Strong support for onshore wind has jumped to a record 30% since 2017.
- Opposition to onshore wind is shrinking - currently at a record low of 8%.
- The British public in general are now 15 times more likely to strongly support rather than strongly oppose onshore wind.

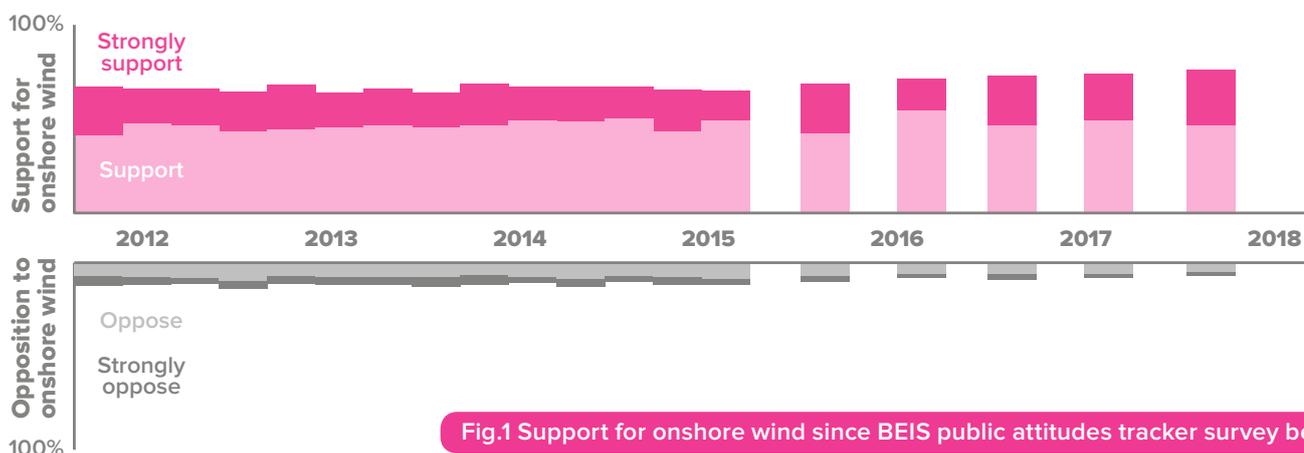


Fig.1 Support for onshore wind since BEIS public attitudes tracker survey began.

BEIS Public Attitudes Tracking Survey: WAVES 1-25, bespoke analysis for 10:10 Climate Action.

Onshore wind remains much less controversial than other energy technologies

A key argument often put forward by the government for blocking deployment of onshore wind is that the technology has proven to be too controversial. But the data is clear that other energy technologies which the government favour remain far more contentious.

Attitudes towards climate change correlate strongly with support for onshore wind

The Public Attitudes Wave Tracker Surveys relate to subjective opinions, but there is one question in the surveys which is a little different, as it asks for respondents' opinions about objective facts - namely, the causes of climate change.

The scientific consensus is clear: climate change is happening, and it is overwhelmingly a result of human activity. But the survey data shows that this is not well understood by the British public, with the most common position being that climate change is caused by both natural processes and human activity. Meanwhile, a significant minority hold beliefs which are explicitly at odds with the scientific consensus: that either climate change does not exist, or that it is mainly or entirely natural.

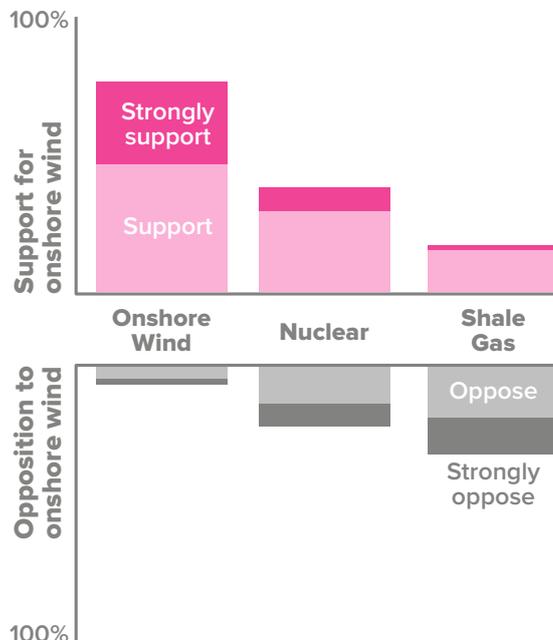
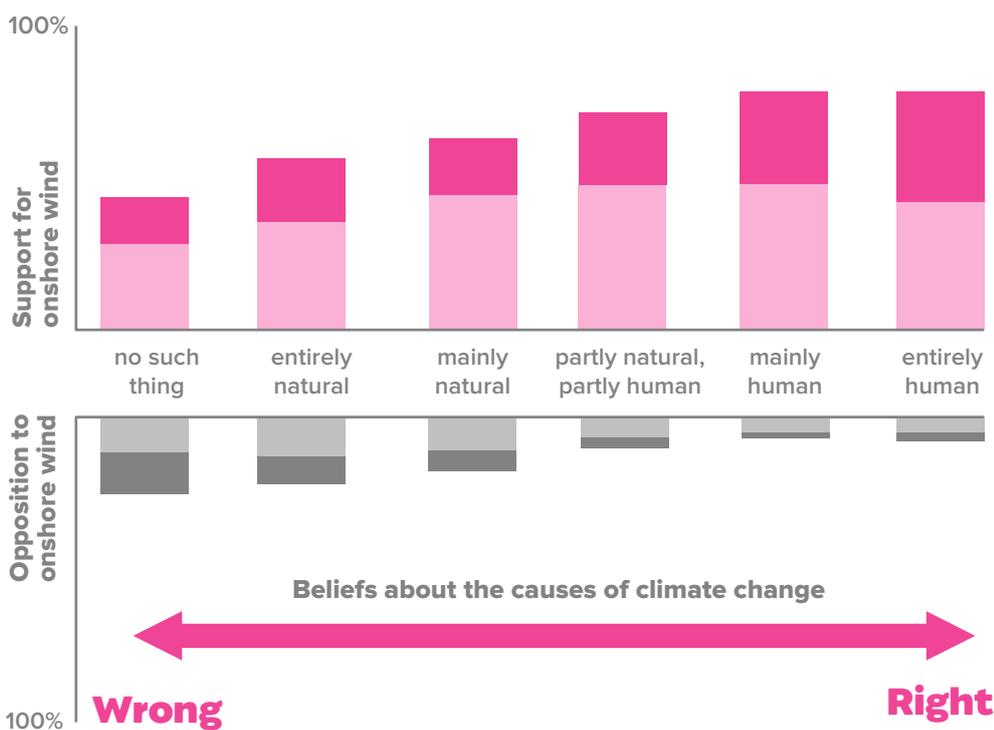


Fig.2 Public support for different energy technologies.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these beliefs have a strong correlation with support for onshore wind: people who strongly oppose onshore wind are 2.5X more likely than the general population to reject the scientific consensus on climate change; and those who deny the existence of climate change are, as a group, 3.5X more likely to oppose onshore wind than those who understand that climate change is primarily caused by human activity.



BEIS Public Attitudes Tracking Survey: WAVES 1-25, bespoke analysis for 10:10 Climate Action.

As Fig.3 shows, the more accurate people's views about climate change are, the less likely they are to oppose onshore wind.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that opposition to onshore wind is a minority position in all groups - regardless of their beliefs about climate change.

A related question pertains to concern about climate change, where

Fig.3 Onshore wind support versus beliefs about climate change.

the same pattern of correlation with support for onshore wind is repeated. Concern about climate change is now at a record high of 74%, while lack of concern is falling steadily and is now at a record low of 23%. The number of people saying they are very concerned about climate change is rising steeply and now stands at 27%; for the first time ever, this group is larger than those saying they are not concerned or not very concerned. This a trend we should expect to continue as the negative impacts of climate change become increasingly visible.

Age correlates strongly with support for onshore wind

The most striking demographic predictor of opposition to onshore wind is age, with over-65s more than seven times more likely to strongly oppose onshore wind than under-45s.

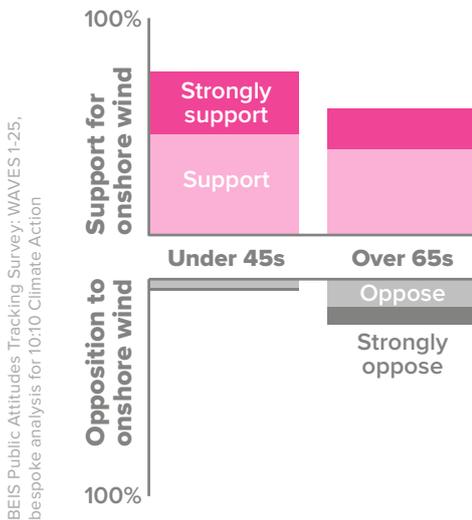


Fig.4 Onshore wind support by age group.

Whilst opposition to onshore wind remains highest in the 55-64 and 65+ age brackets, it has also fallen fastest in these groups over recent years. Again, it should be noted that opposition to onshore wind is a minority position in all age groups.

Onshore wind in my backyard?

Finally, it is important to note that NIMBYism around onshore wind has plummeted to a record low, with just 12% of respondents saying they would not be happy to have a large scale renewable energy development in their area. This is against a record high of 66% support. Strong support has leapt to 30% while just 6% of us are now strongly opposed to living alongside new large scale renewables developments.

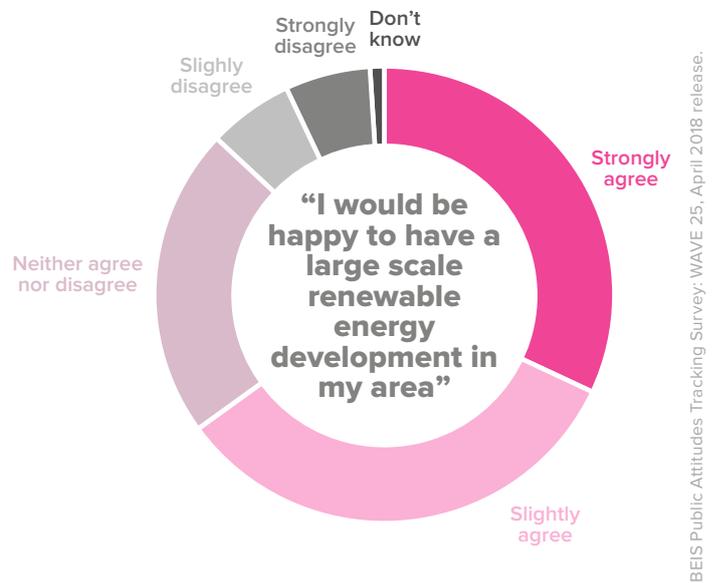


Fig.5 NIMBYism: large scale renewables.



We're 10:10. We help people tackle climate change.

Whether we're installing solar panels, cooking up a vegan feast, celebrating the power of onshore wind, or lighting up our favourite places with LEDs, we're positive, inclusive and dedicated to cutting carbon.

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