



# PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CLIMATE & COP26: VIEWS FROM FRANCE, GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN & THE U.S.

/ 27 Oct 2021  
// COP-26 Insights Deck  
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# DEL KEY INSIGHTS 1

- **Awareness and indeed knowledge of the COP-26 climate conference is low across countries**, but highest in Britain, where more than one-third (35%) say they have heard and know what it is about.
- Less than half of the public in each of the four countries know what 'net-zero' means, but this is highest in Britain with 48% of the public knowledgeable of net-zero.
- Overall, there is greater awareness and knowledge shown in Britain; possibly influenced by being the COP host country.
- Organisations should not assume language around climate/COP is familiar to the public. Make sure terms are defined clearly & succinctly & that jargon is avoided.



## DEL KEY INSIGHTS 2

- Overwhelmingly, the public say that **governments should do more to tackle climate change than individual citizens.**
- Individuals struggle to see how individual action is adequate in responding to the climate crisis, or do not feel that it is their responsibility as much as governments. Individual action, and personal action especially, remains a lower preference.
- This finding is consistent across various question and experimental designs.
  - It's also telling and important that individuals perceive that the worst effects of climate change either happen elsewhere or will happen in the future. Whether this is driven by denial or lack of lived experience is unclear, but clearly climate change is something that still happens 'elsewhere'.



## DEL KEY INSIGHTS 3



- The U.S. is an outlier in many different ways.
- The U.S. public is more likely to deny the impact of climate change compared to European counterparts.
- The U.S. is the only country where less than a majority agree that the government needs to make big changes. In fact, only a quarter of the U.S. public (23%) that thinks that the government does not need to make big changes.
- The U.S. public is more likely to want to prioritize the economy over sustainable development and fewer respondents want a balanced approach between the two.
- The U.S. public thinks that climate change will have a lower impact on future generations than citizens in other countries.
- One important finding is that U.S. citizens are more likely to recognise the negative impacts of climate change on people's health. This offers a potentially useful and powerful frame for messaging in the U.S.

# ABOUT THIS DECK

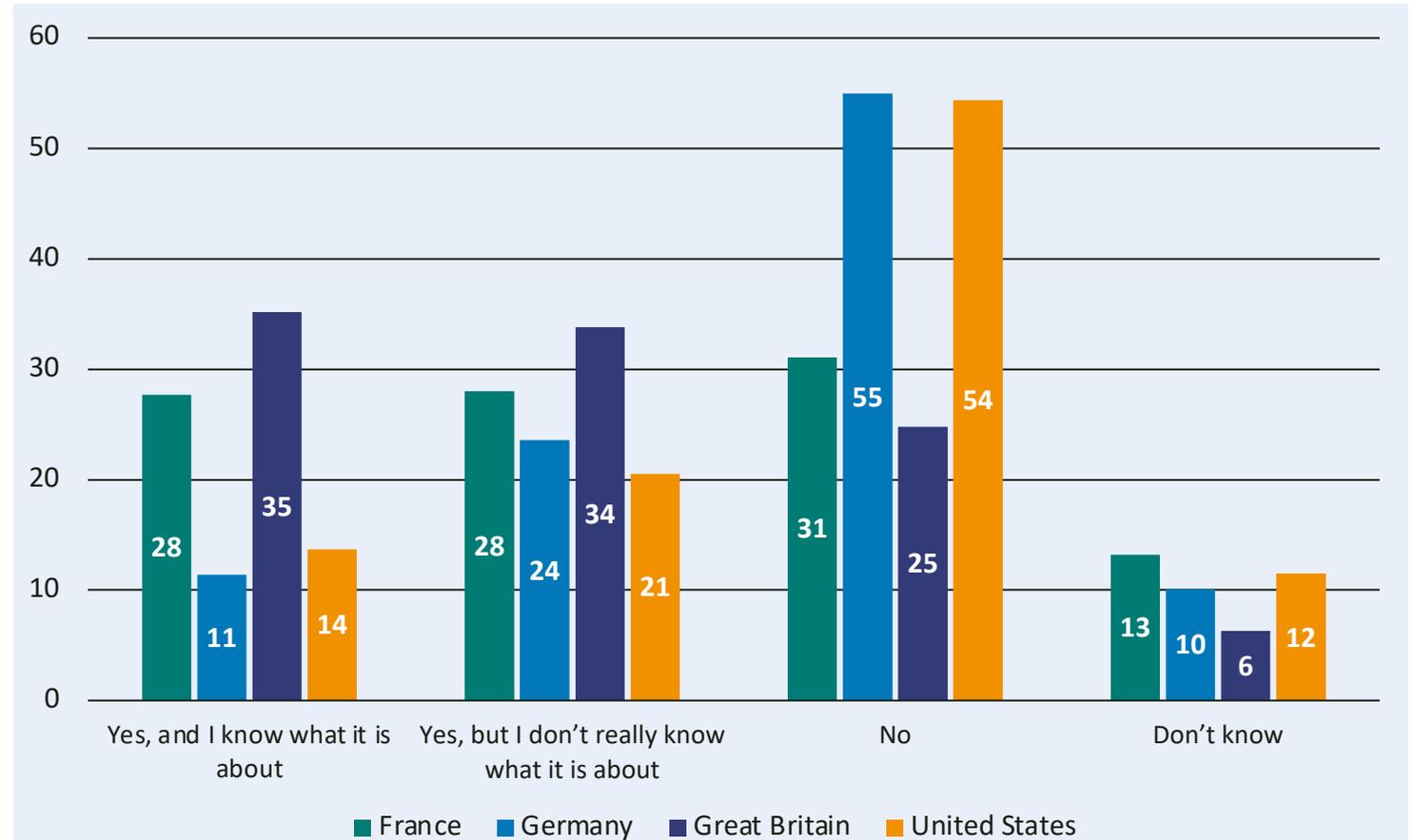
- Each Autumn, the [Development Engagement Lab](#) runs a large-N panel survey of adults in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States.
- This deck presents the key insights from a subset of the panel on public perceptions of climate change and the upcoming COP26 conference.
  - For a quick summary of the key insights, go to slides 18-20.
- You can find out more about [DEL](#) from our website or follow us on Twitter [@DevEngageLab](#).
- Questions about this deck can be directed to [Molly Anders](#) or to the authors.

# KNOWLEDGE OF THE COP26 CONFERENCE IS LOW ACROSS COUNTRIES

Among the four countries which DEL surveys, we find that awareness and knowledge of the COP26 conference is highest in Britain (35%) and in France (28%). In these countries, nearly the same percentage say they are aware of COP, but don't really know what it is about.

Germany and the US are outliers with a majority of the population in both countries saying they have not heard of the conference. The high percentage in Germany may be driven by nomenclature – COP is typically called the UN-Klimakonferenz – rather than its English name.

Don't assume the public know what COP is. Organisations risk talking past the public if they assume knowledge: offer a short sentence on the conference's aims and goals to ensure the public are part of the conversation.



# WHICH GOALS SHOULD THE COP26 CONFERENCE PRIORITISE?

We asked respondents in each country: Which of the following aims, if any, should the COP26 conference prioritise? Please rank which of the following you think should be the first, second, and third priorities to achieve.

The next slide shows the top three ranked priorities, with curtailing deforestation and degradation top, followed by protecting and restoring ecosystems.

Finalising rules to make the Paris Rulebook operational was the third ranked priority.



# THE PUBLIC'S TOP PRIORITIES FOR THE COP26 CONFERENCE

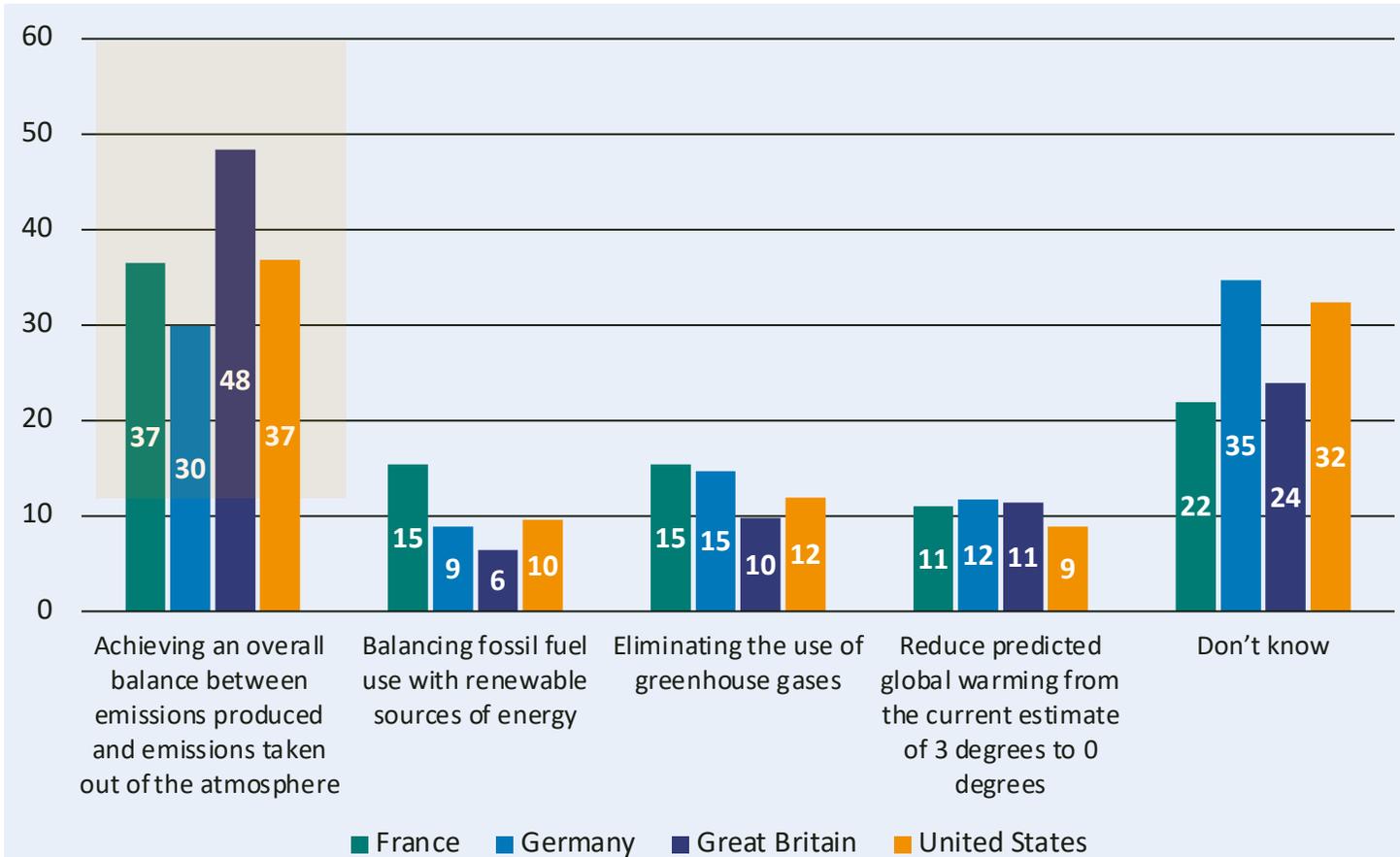
	FRANCE	GERMANY	GREAT BRITAIN	UNITED STATES
1	 <p>Curtail deforestation and forest degradation</p>	 <p>Curtail deforestation and forest degradation</p>	 <p>Curtail deforestation and forest degradation</p>	 <p>Protect and restore ecosystems to boost resilience to climate change</p>
2	 <p>Protect and restore ecosystems to boost resilience to climate change</p>	 <p>Protect and restore ecosystems to boost resilience to climate change</p>	 <p>Protect and restore ecosystems to boost resilience to climate change</p>	 <p>Encourage investment in renewable energies</p>
3	 <p>Finalise a set of rules to make the Paris Agreement operational</p>	 <p>Finalise a set of rules to make the Paris Agreement operational</p>	 <p>Finalise a set of rules to make the Paris Agreement operational</p>	 <p>Finalise a set of rules to make the Paris Agreement operational</p>

Question: Which of the following aims, if any, should the COP26 conference prioritise? Please rank which of the following you think should be the first, second, and third priorities to achieve.

Sample size FR n=6,106 DE n=6,000 GB n=8,281 US n=5,189 | Base: DE/FR/GB/US adults | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Fieldwork by YouGov, 22 Sep - 25 Oct 2021



# LESS THAN 50% OF THE PUBLIC KNOW WHAT THE 'NET-ZERO' TARGET MEANS



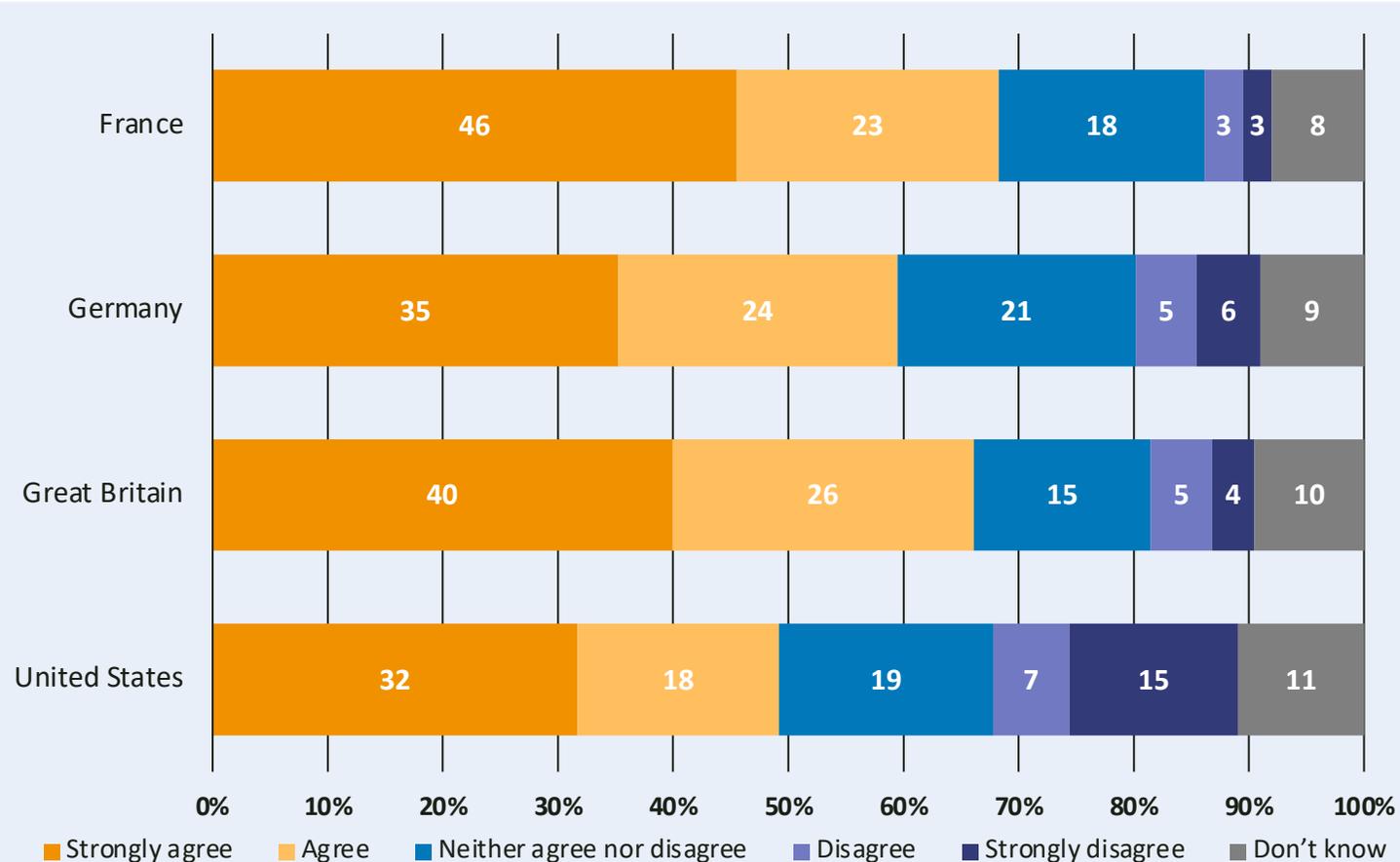
Knowledge of 'net-zero' is highest in Britain, where 48% of the public can identify what the net-zero target means, followed by 37% in the U.S. and France, with just 30% able to correctly identify it in Germany.

More than 2 in 10 respondents in Britain and France said 'Don't know' and more than 3 in 10 people in Germany and the U.S. said 'Don't know' suggesting that knowledge on key climate change policies is low.

Organisations can increase knowledge and awareness by ensuring that 'net-zero' is defined and made clear in communications. There is work to do to make climate policies part of everyday language and conversation among donor publics.

Question: The next question asks what you think "net zero" means. Please select the item you think describes it best. What do you think 'net zero' means?  
 Sample size FR n=6,106 DE n=6,000 GB n=8,281 US n=5,189 | Base: DE/FR/GB/US adults | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Fieldwork by YouGov, 22 Sep - 25 Oct 2021

# THE U.S. PUBLIC IS MORE LIKELY TO DENY THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE COMPARED TO THEIR EUROPEAN COUNTERPARTS



In the United States, 22% of the public deny the impact of climate change having seen recent heat waves and flooding across the globe; this compares to just 9% in GB, 11% in Germany and 6% in France.

Unsurprisingly, in the U.S. these views are very much split by party support and 2020 presidential vote. 69% of Democrats and 78% of Biden voters agree the recent floods and fires are evidence of the devastating consequences of climate change. Just 25% of Republicans and 17% of Trump voters agree.

There is much more consensus in Europe about the impact of climate change, with two-thirds of the public in France and Britain agreeing with the statement, with 59% agreeing in Germany.

Question: Recent fires in Siberia, Turkey and Greece, heat waves on the U.S. West Coast, and floods in Europe is evidence that it is no longer possible to deny the devastating consequences of climate change.  
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# THE PUBLIC'S VIEW OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

We provided respondents a list of 7 consequences of climate change and asked them to rank the three most important consequences for the world. The next slide shows the similarity of rankings across the four countries.

Ranked top in France, Germany, GB and the U.S. is food and water shortages.

Loss of biodiversity and flooding were the next two most important consequences.

Negative impacts on people's health was ranked third in the U.S. only.



# SHORTAGES, FLOODING AND BIODIVERSITY THE MOST VISIBLE ISSUES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

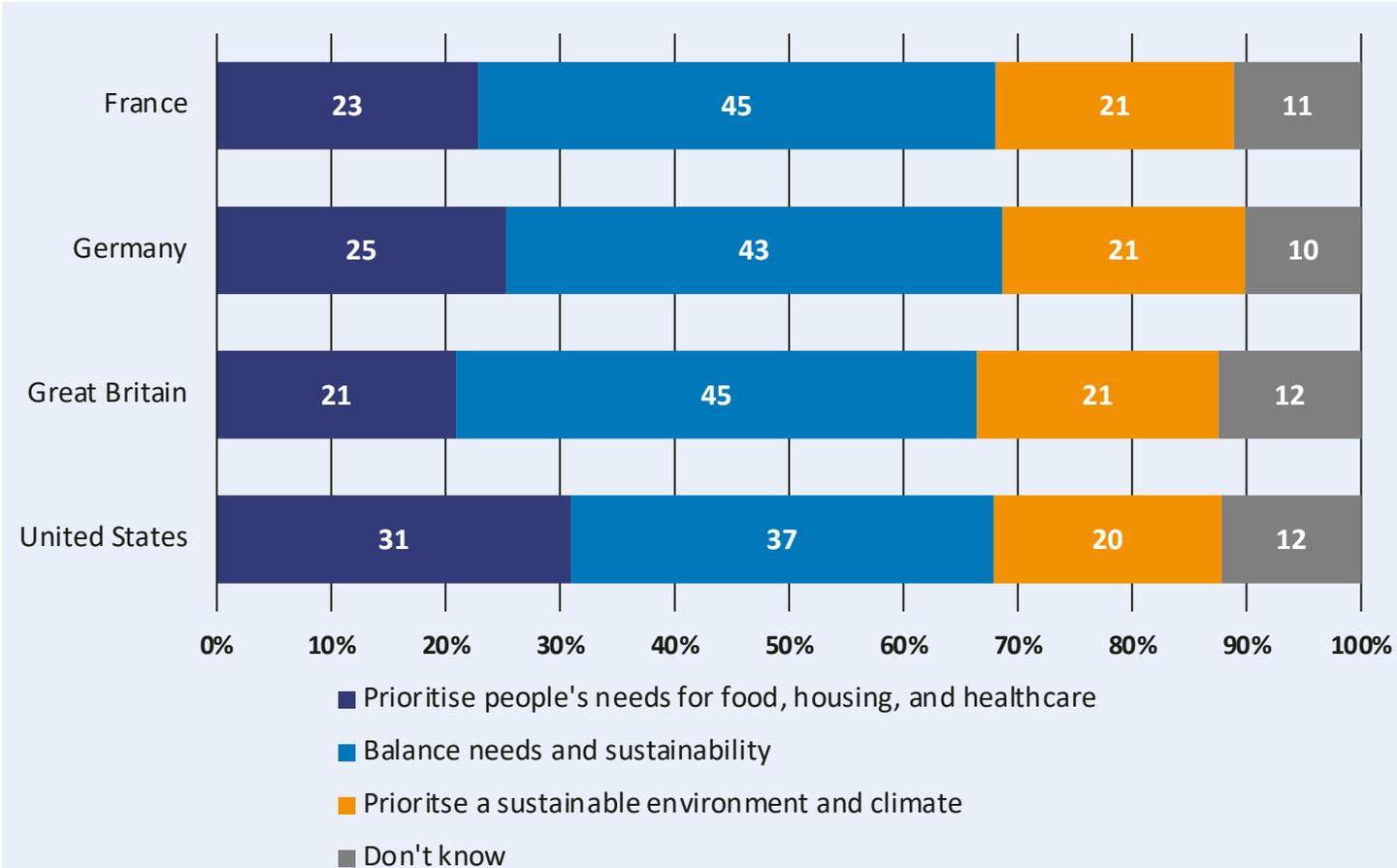
	FRANCE	GERMANY	GREAT BRITAIN	UNITED STATES
1	 <p>Food and water shortages</p>	 <p>Food and water shortages</p>	 <p>Food and water shortages</p>	 <p>Food and water shortages</p>
2	 <p>Loss of biodiversity and wildlife</p>	 <p>More flooding in low-lying and coastal regions</p>	 <p>Loss of biodiversity and wildlife</p>	 <p>Loss of biodiversity and wildlife</p>
3	 <p>More flooding in low-lying and coastal regions</p>	 <p>Loss of biodiversity and wildlife</p>	 <p>More flooding in low-lying and coastal regions</p>	 <p>Negative impact on people's health</p>

Question: Thinking about the list of possible consequences of climate change below, please rank the three most important consequences of climate change for the world.

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# THERE IS NO CONSENSUS ON WHETHER WE SHOULD PRIORITIZE THE NEED FOR FOOD, HOUSING, AND HEALTHCARE OR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT



For the past three years, DEL has asked respondents about priorities – whether we should prioritise people’s needs for food, house and healthcare (the economy) or a sustainable environment.

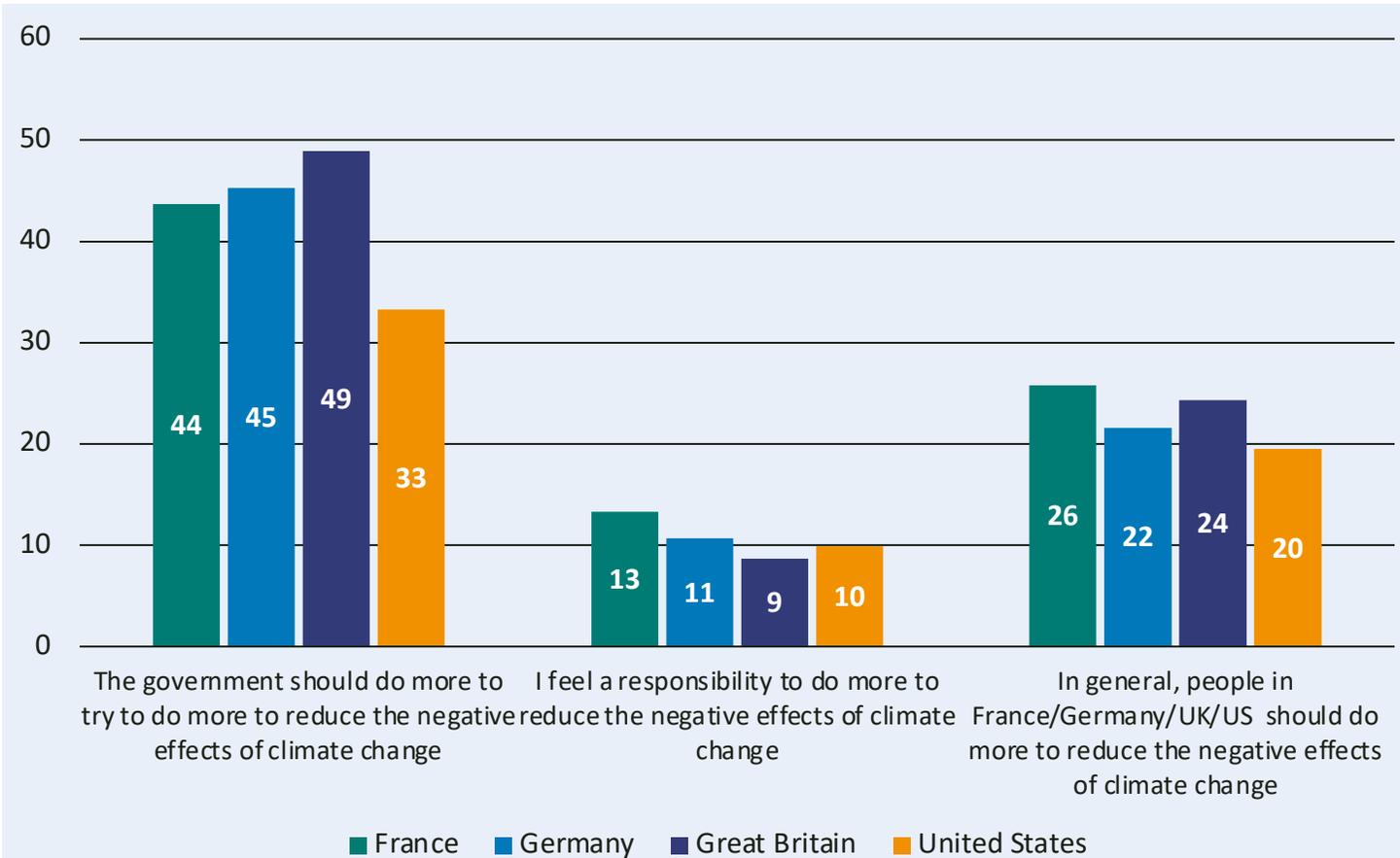
There is striking similarity across the four countries in the patterns of priorities. In France, Germany and GB, more than 4 in 10 people would like to prioritise both equally with roughly equal proportions wanting to prioritise the economy or the environment.

The U.S. public differ from the other countries with 31% wanting to prioritize the economy and fewer wanting a balanced approach.

Organisations advocating prioritizing the environment will want to consider the public’s desire to balance needs and sustainability and devise strategies that meet the public where they are at.

Question: For the following question, please think about the world as a whole and not individual countries. Some people say that there is a trade-off between prioritising economic growth to meet people’s needs for food, housing, and healthcare versus prioritising a sustainable environment, climate, and fertile soils. Using a 0 to 10 scale please indicate which statement comes closer to your view.  
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# THE PUBLIC SAY GOVERNMENTS SHOULD DO MORE TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE



We presented respondents with three statements on action on climate change and show the percentage of respondents who (strongly) agree with each.

The results tell us overwhelmingly that the public think country governments should do more to reduce the negative impacts of climate change. This is lowest in the U.S., where just 1/3 say the Government should do more. In Britain, nearly half (49%) of respondents say the UK government should do more.

The results also show that at least 2 in 10 say people in their country should do more, but this falls to 13% in France, 13% in Germany, 10% in the U.S. and 9% in Britain when referring to individual action.

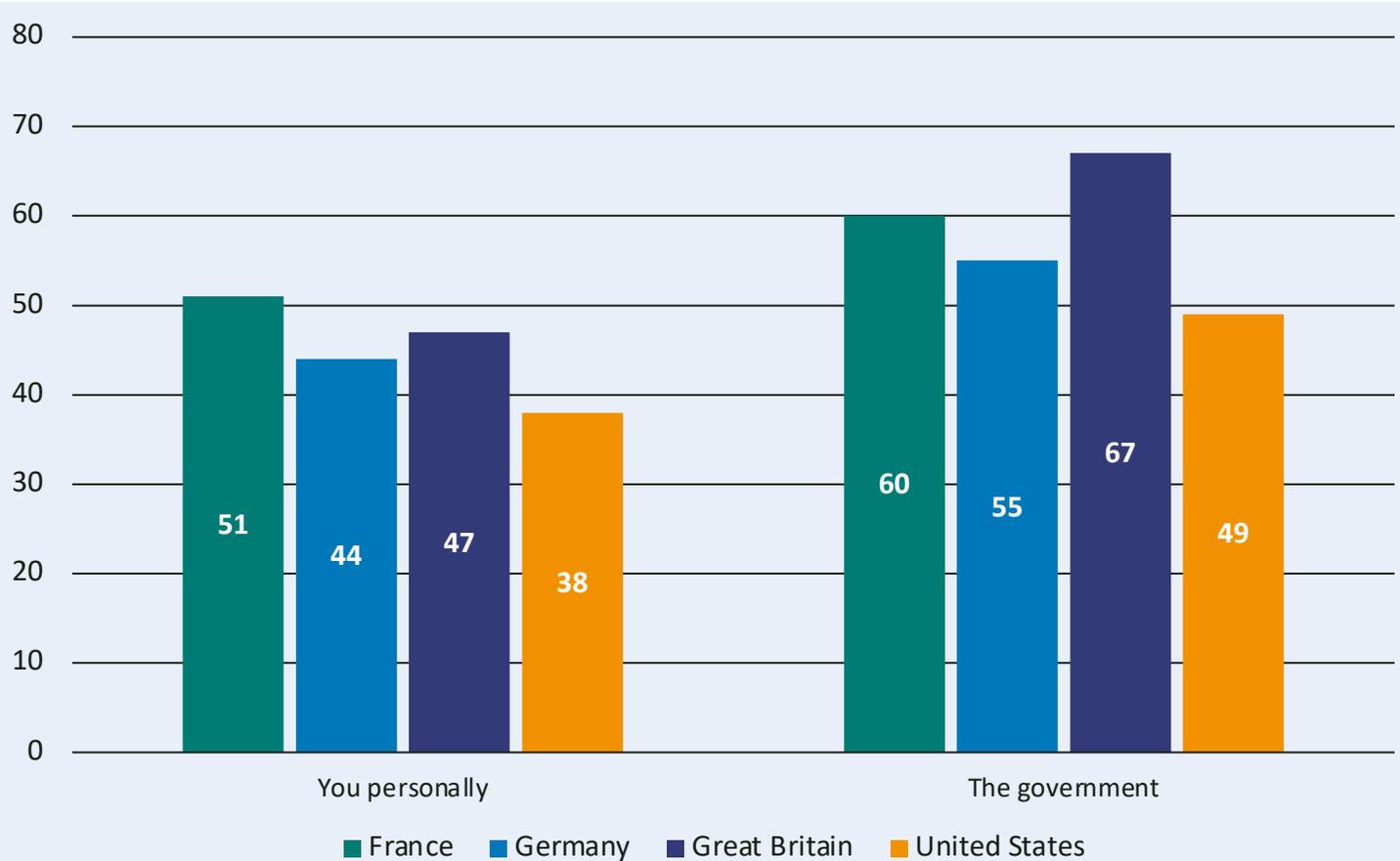
In this and other DEL data we see a clear preference for action at the national (or supra-national) level. Individuals either struggle to see how individual action is helpful or ideal in responding to the climate change crisis, or it is an indication of the scale of the problem and scale of response required. Regardless, individual action, and personal action especially, remains a lower preference.

Question: Below are three statements about who needs to take more action to reduce the negative effects of climate change. Please indicate which one you agree with the most, second most and third most. (% ranked first)

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# ONLY IN FRANCE DO MAJORITIES THINK THAT BIG CHANGES ARE REQUIRED FOR BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE THE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT



In another way of getting at individual vs. government effort to reduce the negative consequences the climate crisis, we split the sample asking half a question about the need for respondents themselves to make big changes or their government to make big changes to reduce the impact on the environment. The figure shows the % who agree or strongly disagree.

Only in France does a majority agree or strongly agree with the statement for both individuals and the French government. 67% of Britons say the UK government needs to make big changes compared to 47% of individuals.

In the U.S. the only country where less than a majority agree that their government needs to make big changes, just 38% of individuals say the U.S Government needs to make big changes.

When we look at this by ideology – left, centre, and right – we find that majorities on the left in all countries favour big changes by both individuals and government.

But for those on the right, 56% in France, 53% in G.B., and 44 in Germany say their government should make big changes. In the U.S. only 21% say the government needs to make big changes.

Question: The climate crisis means that I personally/ theUK Government will need to make big changes to society to reduce the impact on the environment.  
 Sample size FR n=6,106 DE n=6,000 GB n=8,281 US n=5,189 | Base: DE/FR/GB/US adults | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Fieldwork by YouGov, 22 Sep - 25 Oct 2021

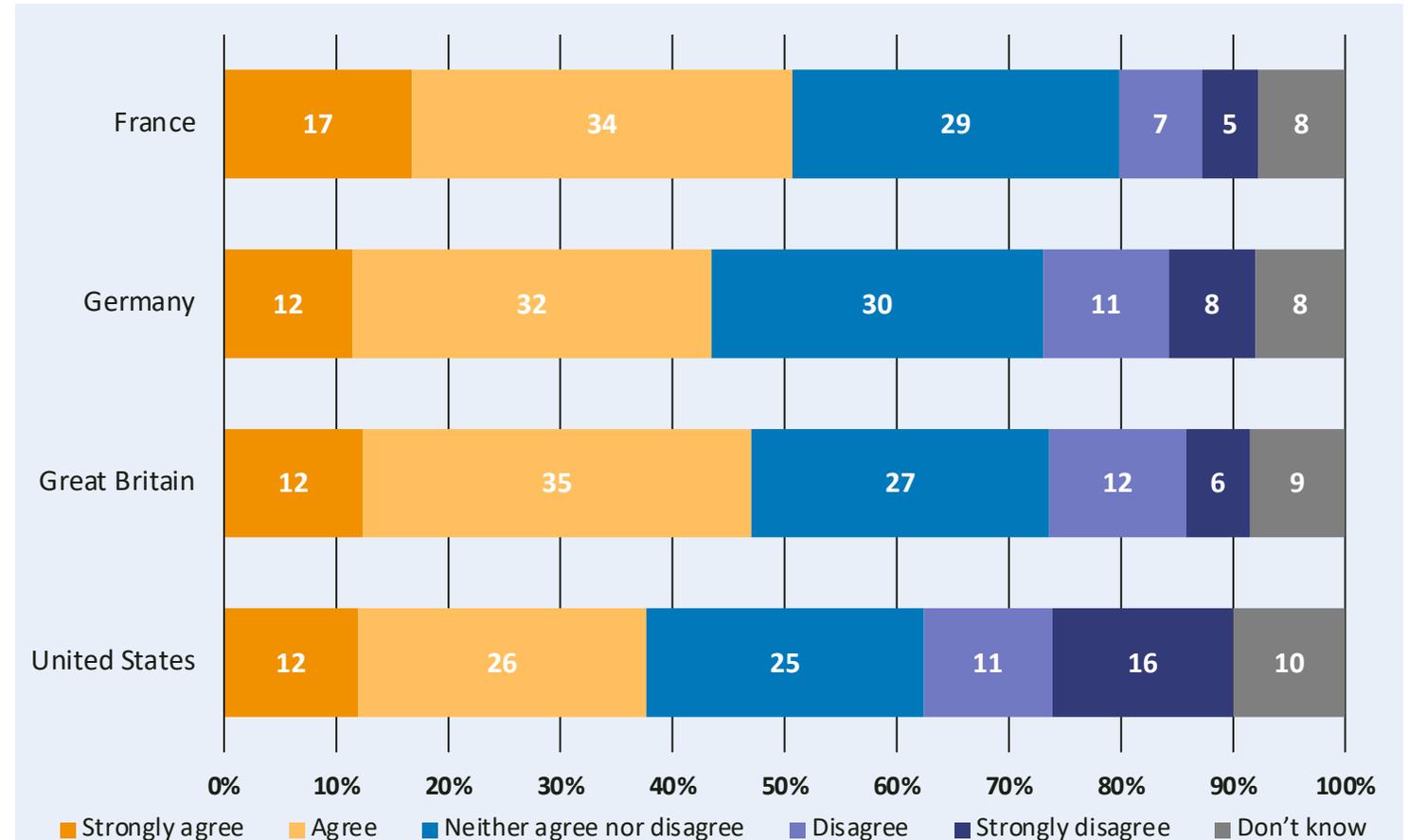
# ATTITUDES TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS MAKING BIG CHANGES TO REDUCE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Using a split sample design (see next slide for the question to the other half of the sample), we asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement that they would need to make big changes to their lifestyle to reduce their personal impact on the environment.

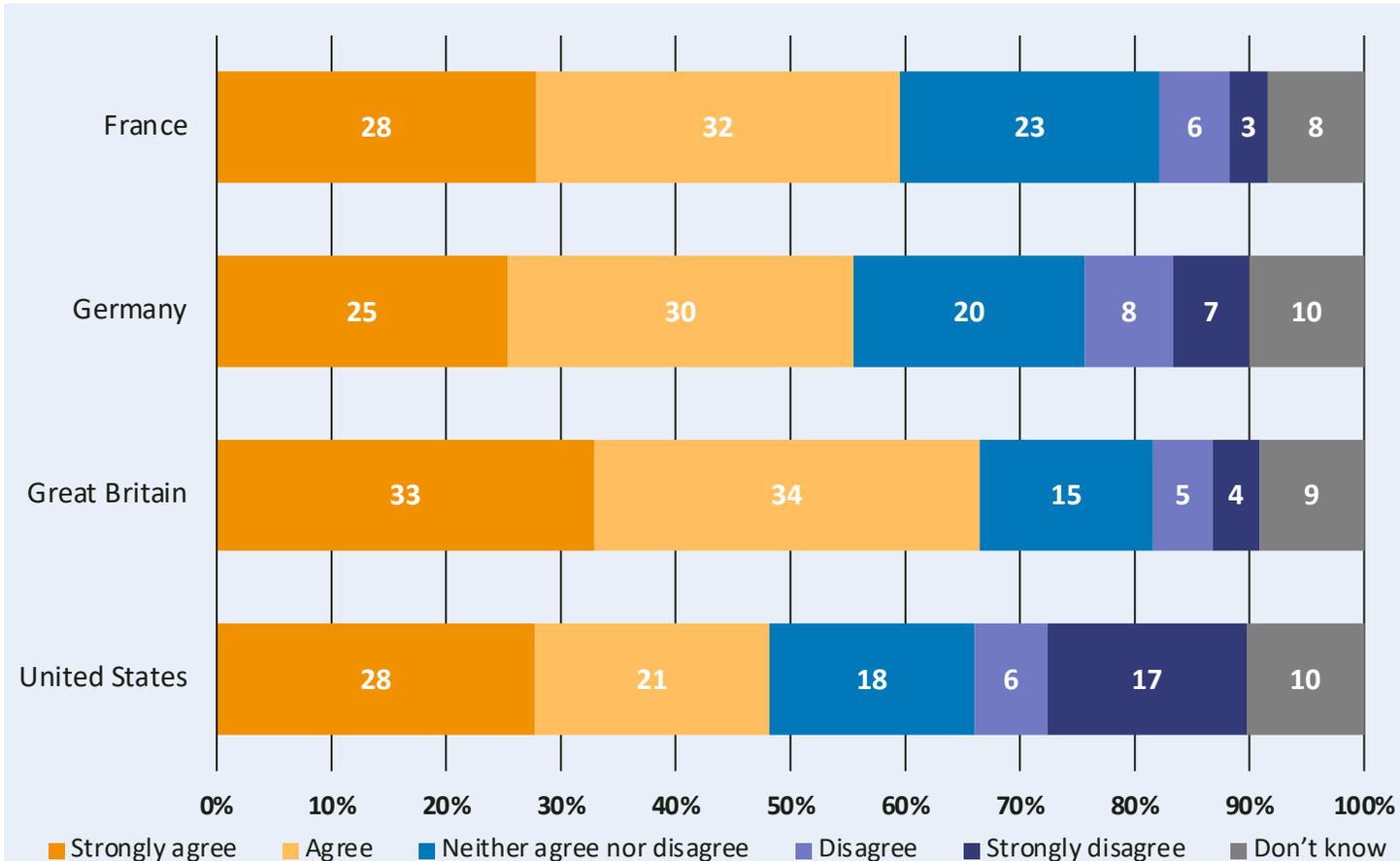
Only in France does a majority of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement (51%), followed by 47% in Britain and 44% in Germany.

The U.S. public is less likely to agree with just 38% agreeing. The U.S. also has the highest percentage of respondents who (strongly) disagree with the statement at 27%.

Comparing the responses to the half of the sample that received the government option (see next slide), again we see attitudes favour government over individual action.



# ATTITUDES TOWARDS GOVERNMENT MAKING BIG CHANGES TO REDUCE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT



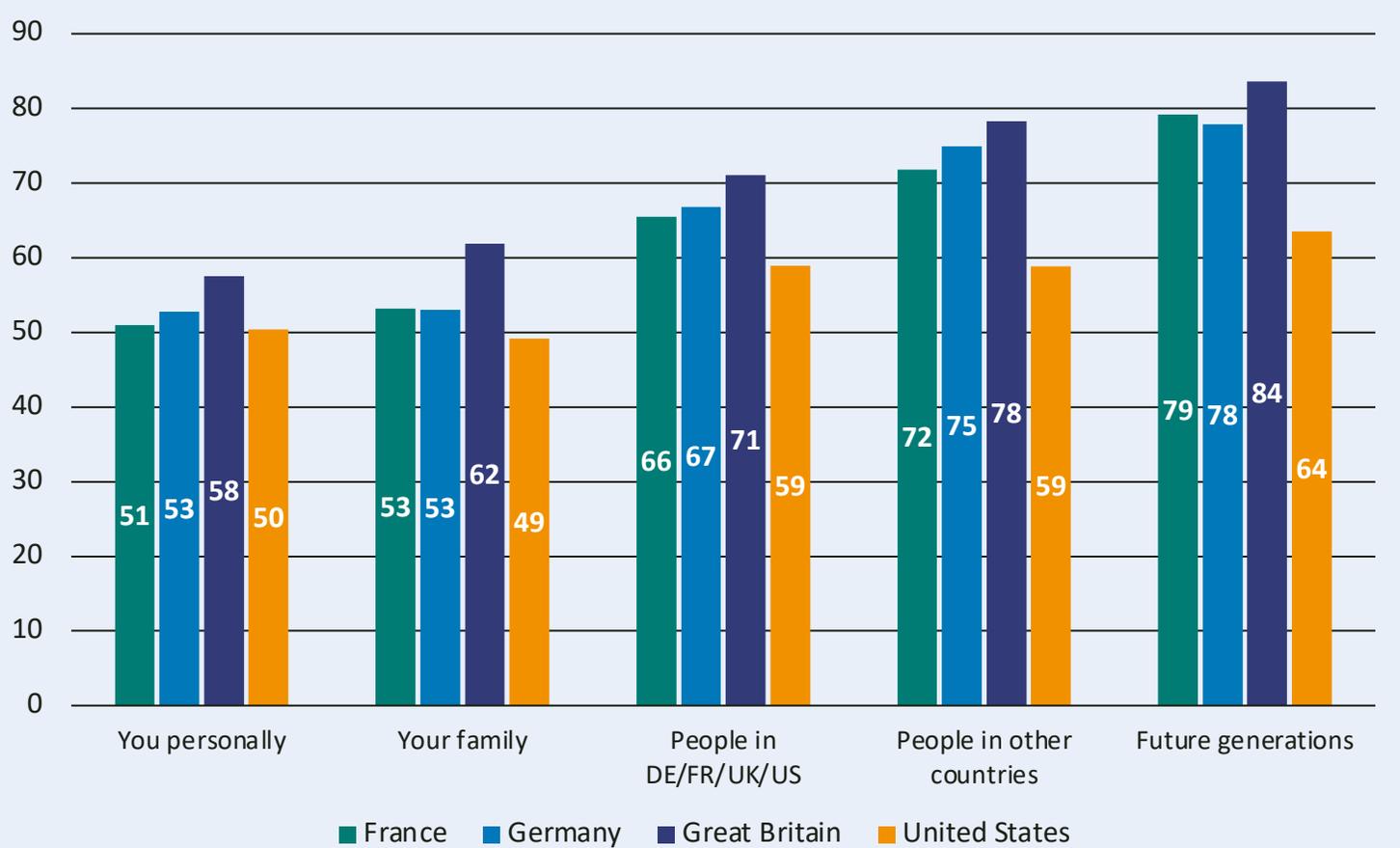
Using the split sample design – see above slide for the other half of the sample’s responses – we asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement that their government would need to make big changes to society to reduce the impact on the environment.

Contrary to the half of the sample that received the individual prompt, majorities in France (60%), Germany (55%) and Britain (67%) (and strongly) agree with the statement. The U.S. once again doesn’t reach majority support, but is only just shy at 49%.

More striking is the near-quarter of the U.S. public (23%) that thinks that the government does not need to make big changes.

Question: The climate crisis means that the UK Government will need to make big changes to society to reduce the impact on the environment.  
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# EVERYONE IS IMPACTED, UNLESS YOU ARE IN THE US, THEN YOU ARE (MORE) FINE



We asked respondents how much they think climate change will impact each of the following: you personally, your family, people in your country, people in other countries or future generations. The figure shows the % of respondents who say the impact will be moderate or a great deal.

There is a clear spatial (and temporal) relationship to these findings in that the impacts that are furthest away from the individual are felt to be the strongest!

The findings suggest that future generations are perceived to be impacted more than individuals today, but also that people living in other countries are more impacted than people living in my country. Moreover, people see their families as slightly more likely to be impacted than themselves.

It's not clear what drives these perceptions. One hypothesis is denial: people are in denial about the immediacy and universality of expected impacts. A second hypothesis is experience: while people see and hear stories about climate change in the news, it is not yet sufficiently part of their lived experience and this makes it something that still happens 'elsewhere'.

Again, the U.S. public is an outlier in its perceived impacts, particularly on future generations.

Question: How much do you think climate change will impact each of these categories? (% who say a great deal/moderate)  
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# WHICH ACTIONS ARE INDIVIDUALS WILLING TO TAKE TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE?

- Across all four countries, reducing waste by recycling or choosing products with less wasteful packaging was the top ranked action.
- This was followed by buying more local produce.
- Turning down heating by 1 degree was ranked third in France, Britain and the U.S. with taking more journeys by public transport ranked third in Germany.



# RECYCLING, BUYING LOCAL ARE TOP ACTIONS ACROSS ALL FOUR COUNTRIES

	FRANCE	GERMANY	GREAT BRITAIN	UNITED STATES
1	 <p>Reduce my waste by recycling, repairing or choosing products with less packaging</p>	 <p>Reduce my waste by recycling, repairing or choosing products with less packaging</p>	 <p>Reduce my waste by recycling, repairing or choosing products with less packaging</p>	 <p>Reduce my waste by recycling, repairing or choosing products with less packaging</p>
2	 <p>Buy more local produce</p>	 <p>Buy more local produce</p>	 <p>Buy more local produce</p>	 <p>Buy more local produce</p>
3	 <p>Turn down your home heating by 1 degree</p>	 <p>Take more journeys by public transport, bike or walking rather than driving</p>	 <p>Turn down your home heating by 1 degree</p>	 <p>Turn down your home heating by 1 degree</p>

Question: Below are some actions that could reduce the causes of climate change. Not all will necessarily be possible for you, or you may not want to do them. Please indicate the first, second, and third action you would be willing to take to reduce the impact on the global climate  
 Sample size FR n=6,106 DE n=6,000 GB n=8,281 US n=5,189 | Base: DE/FR/GB/US adults | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Fieldwork by YouGov, 22 Sep - 25 Oct 2021



# DATA AND USE

## DATA

The data for this deck come from the DEL Panel (France n=6,106; Germany n=6,000; Great Britain n=8,281; U.S. n=5,189). Data are weighted to be nationally representative. Fieldwork conducted by YouGov (France 24 Sep – 22 Oct 2021; Germany 22 Sep-22 Oct 2021; Great Britain 23 Sep – 25 Oct 2021; U.S. 23 Sep – 25 Oct 2021).

## USE

DEL data and analysis are a public good and can be used and shared with the appropriate citation.

## CITATION

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**DEVELOPMENT  
ENGAGEMENT  
LAB**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM**

The Development Engagement Lab (DEL) is a five-year study of public attitudes and engagement with global development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States (2018-2023).

DEL is a partner focussed research programme, convening and co-producing research and insights with over 30 international development NGOs and government agencies to understand the drivers of engagement and inform development communications.

Fieldwork is carried out by YouGov and surveys are weighted to be a nationally representative of the adult population. DEL is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by Professor Jennifer Hudson (University College London) and Professor David Hudson (University of Birmingham).

(Aid Attitudes Tracker Phase 2) has three goals:

1. Co-production of an evidence base for development campaigning
2. Enabling collaboration across the sector
3. Increasing advocacy capacity through the sharing of research and strategic insights

You can find out more information about DEL research at [www.developmentcompass.org](http://www.developmentcompass.org), follow us on Twitter [@DevEngageLab](https://twitter.com/DevEngageLab) or by contacting [del@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:del@ucl.ac.uk).

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