

## The Political Space for George Osborne to act on climate change

*Based on our Environmental Choices<sup>1</sup> public opinion data, this article describes the 'political space' that British politicians have to act on specific types of climate change policy. This document is part of a series - we will shortly be releasing equivalent discussions for Canada and the USA.*

**Montreal & London, December 9, 2009**

**UPDATED**

### Targets and Policies

The climate change meeting at Copenhagen (COP15) is providing an extra incentive for political parties to clarify where they stand on climate change, and what policies they support.

A recent poll<sup>2</sup> suggests that, globally, public opinion is generally behind a strong deal at Copenhagen. However, this seems to be based on the general agreement that strong action should happen; it tells us little about how people feel about the policies that could credibly achieve these greenhouse gas reductions, and how politicians might engage citizens with their policies. Just as one example, policy-makers believe that a significant price on carbon<sup>3</sup> is an essential instrument for effective action on climate change. But what proportion of the public would support the higher fuel bills, and higher petrol prices, that would follow from implementing policies (such as cap-and trade or carbon taxes) which put a significant price on carbon?

Policies are created by individual politicians, and individual political parties. In this article we would like to consider the policy choices facing one particular politician - George Osborne, the UK shadow chancellor. We made this choice since there is a realistic chance George Osborne will be in the next government, and he has just made a speech on Conservative climate change policy. On November 24, 2009, George Osborne described the Conservatives plan to 'Green the Economy' should they win the next election. As reported in the press, the focus of their plans is stimulating green innovation<sup>4</sup> with little mention of regulation or carbon taxes. Yet, what would be the public opinion implications of implementing all these policy issues?

Before addressing this question, some background on the UK is relevant. Through the 2008 Climate Change Bill, the UK is legally committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 compared to a 1990 baseline<sup>5</sup>. The government has also set an interim target of reducing emissions by 34% by 2020 as stipulated in the 2009 Low Carbon Transition Plan<sup>6</sup>. The need to tackle climate change is well aligned with energy security in the UK; a recent Ofgem<sup>7</sup> report anticipated rising consumer energy prices would be required over the next decade to stimulate investment and avoid an energy crunch. The next UK general election is due by mid-2010, and current opinion polls favour the Conservatives to win.

<sup>1</sup> For Interim Highlights of this study, visit [http://www.haddock-research.com/EC2008\\_interim\\_highlights](http://www.haddock-research.com/EC2008_interim_highlights)

<sup>2</sup> World first: global climate poll, November 24, 2009 <http://www.gmagazine.com.au/news/1736/world-first-global-climate-poll>

<sup>3</sup> The IEA on the carbon price: CO2 has to cost much more, FT, November 10, 2009

<http://blogs.ft.com/energy-source/2009/11/10/the-iea-on-the-carbon-price-the-cost-of-emissions-has-to-be-higher-than-the-kerry-boxer-bill-suggests/>

<sup>4</sup> Conservatives pledge to 'green the economy' if elected, New Energy Focus, November 24, 2009

[http://www.newenergyfocus.com/do/ecco/view\\_item?listid=1&listcatid=32&listitemid=3256&section=Policy](http://www.newenergyfocus.com/do/ecco/view_item?listid=1&listcatid=32&listitemid=3256&section=Policy)

<sup>5</sup> 'The Politics of Climate Change', Anthony Giddens, p.81 (2009)

<sup>6</sup> The UK transition plan, DECC, June 2009, [http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/publications/lc\\_trans\\_plan/lc\\_trans\\_plan.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/publications/lc_trans_plan/lc_trans_plan.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> UK Consumers Forecast to Face a Huge Energy Bill, WSJ, October 12, 2009

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125507745898975611.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125507745898975611.html?mod=googlenews_wsj)

**Haddock Research and Branding, Inc**

**5764 Monkland Ave., Suite 13, Montreal (QC) Canada H4A 1E9**

**+1 514 835 3013**

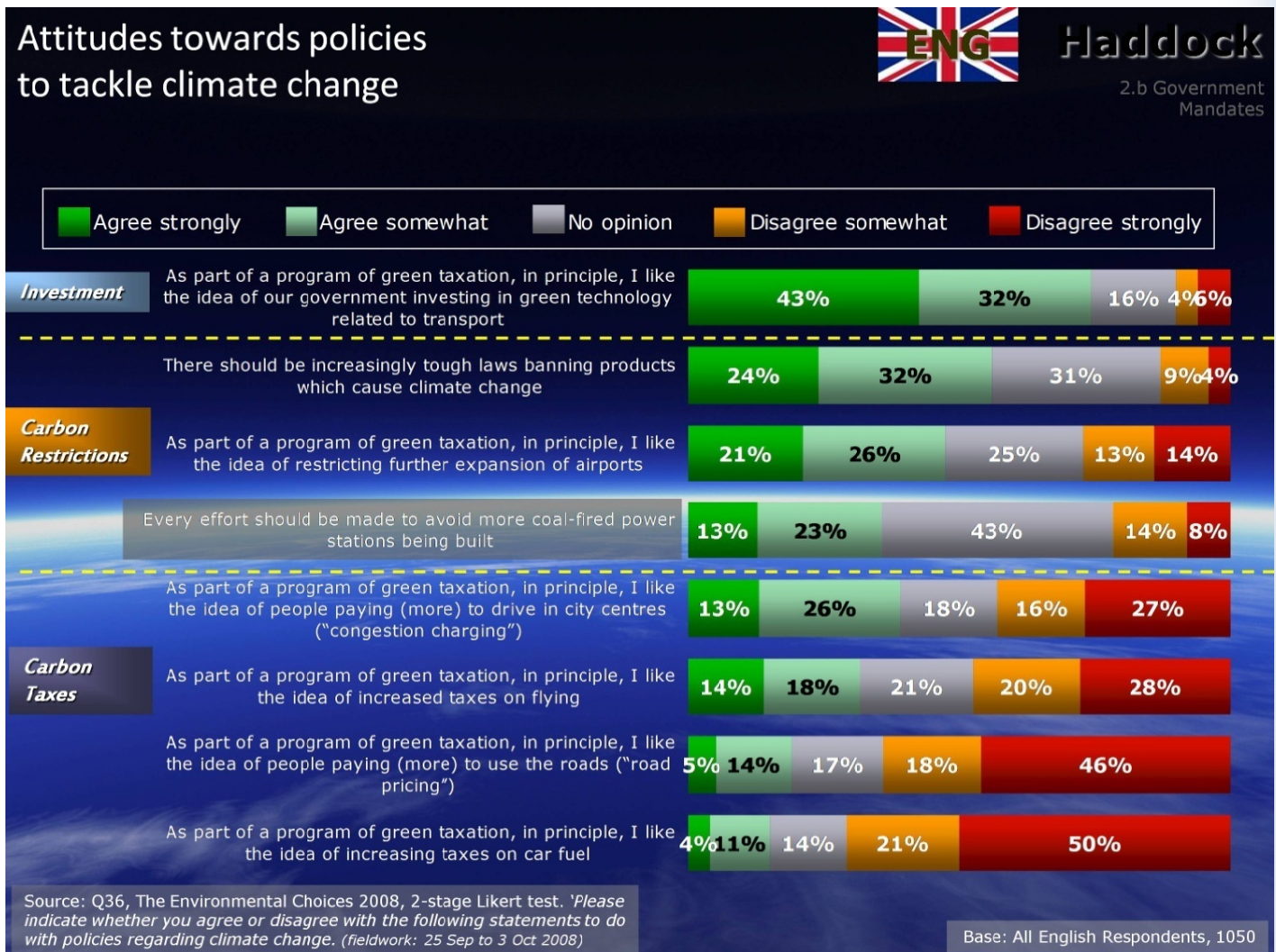
**info@haddock-research.com**



### Overall attitudes to climate change policies

In the Environmental Choices study, we asked people’s level of agreement, or disagreement, with a range of policy options ‘as part of a program of green taxation’. The results are shown in the chart below, and the overall picture is that many people are supportive of policies which ‘invest in green technology’, there is more mixed support for regulation which limits high-carbon industries, and considerable resistance to ‘carbon taxes’.

However, we need to explore the data further to be able to help create ‘political space’ for George Osborne’s climate change policies.





**Six degrees of support for climate change policies**

Using cluster analysis on attitudes towards these 8 climate change policies (see chart on previous page) amongst the full international sample, we can identify six groups with distinctly different sets of attitudes towards government policy. These groups can be considered to be on a spectrum of support for government 'green' policies. Below is a description of these groups, leading with the most supportive, and ending with the least supportive.

	All England respondents n=1050	Conservative Party supporters n=315
1. Supporters	15.8%	10.5%
2. Regulators	26.5%	24.4%
3. Investors	17.5%	21.9%
4. Undecided	21.1%	17.5%
5. Not my problem	9.5%	11.4%
6. Opposers	9.5%	14.3%

**1. SUPPORTERS (16%)**

**Supporters of all climate change policies**

The most 'green' group, representing 16% of all English adults, is generally supportive of all policy types – investment, regulation and carbon taxes. They are mainly *Climate Citizens*<sup>8</sup> (10% of total sample), with some *Mild Greens* (5%) and a very limited number of *Sceptics/Uninvolved* (1%).

**2. REGULATORS (27%) - Supporters of strong regulation and green investment; against car taxes**

The second most 'green' group is also the largest. 27% of English people believe that green policy should focus on strong regulation supported by green investment - but are resistant to higher car fuel taxes, and road pricing. This group are mainly *Climate Citizens* (13%) and *Mild Greens* (11%), but there are also some *Sceptics/Uninvolved* (4%).

**3. INVESTORS (18%) - Supporters of green investment; strongly against car taxes or air taxes**

The third most 'green' group, representing 18% of English people, believe that green policy should focus on green investment – and are particularly strongly resistant to extra car taxes and flying taxes. They are mainly the *Mild Greens* (9%) with others split between *Sceptics/Uninvolved* (5%) and *Climate Citizens* (4%).

**4. UNDECIDED (21%) - Mostly undecided; mildly pro-investment and mildly anti-car taxes**

This fourth most 'green' group is currently not engaged with any of the different policy options tested. Without a reason to believe, in reality, people in this group are perhaps likely to resist regulation and carbon taxes. They are *Mild Greens* (11%), *Sceptics/Uninvolved* (7%) and *Climate Citizens* (4%).

**5. NOT MY PROBLEM (10%) - Anti car taxes; ambivalent of investment; some support for regulation**

This fifth most 'green' group disagrees with car taxes, and is ambivalent about green investment. There is some agreement that airports should be restricted and coal stations should not be built; perhaps because they see climate change as really a 'business problem'. They are *Sceptics/Uninvolved* (5%), *Mild Greens* (4%) and *Climate Citizens* (1%).

**6. OPPOSERS (10%) - Disagreement with all climate change policies**

The least 'green' group disagrees with all policy options – and they unanimously strongly resist the idea of road pricing! They are *Sceptics/Uninvolved* (6%), *Mild Greens* (3%) and with no *Climate Citizens* (0%).

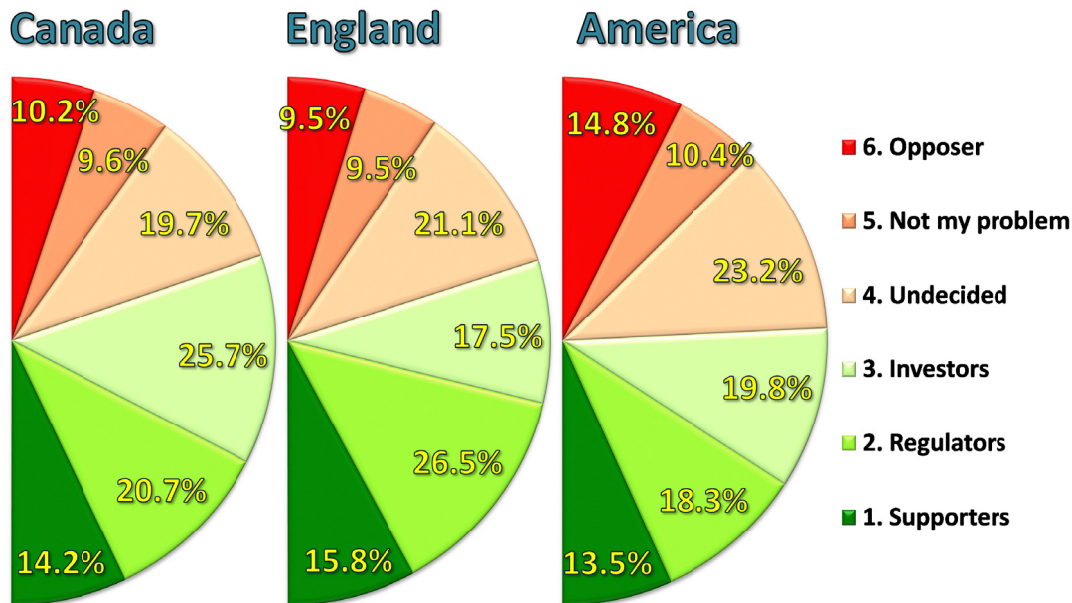
<sup>8</sup> A segmentation, developed within the Environmental Choices 2008 study, has classified people into 3 types according to their attitudes towards climate change – from *Climate Citizens* (who are most engaged with climate change), to *Mild Greens* (who are moderately engaged) to *Sceptics & Uninvolved* (who are least engaged). For more information, visit [www.haddock-research.com/segmentation](http://www.haddock-research.com/segmentation)



### How George Osborne could 'green the economy'

In designing Conservative policy towards climate change, George Osborne needs to take account of the opinions of Conservative party supporters, his key constituents, who tend to be somewhat less supportive of climate change policies than other English people. And selling a compelling election campaign plan is rather different than implementing government policy.

However, if the Conservatives do form the next government, in the UK, and they are seriously about tackling climate change, they will need to put a price on carbon. 'Supporters' and 'Opposers' look set in their attitudes, the key 'swing groups' would appear to be the 'Regulators' and the 'Investors'. Careful citizen engagement and communications, taking particular account of fuel poverty and home improvement support, would likely be required to bring a reasonable number of them on-board with an integrated climate change plan. If that can be done, along with the 'Supporters' and a few from the other 'swing groups', they could be in a position to have majority support behind a coherent set of strong climate change policies.



Base: All Canadian respondents, 1060

Base: All English respondents, 1050

Base: All US respondents, 1046

Source: Q36, The Environmental Choices 2008, (fieldwork: 25 Sep to 3 Oct 2008)

'A price on carbon will be crucial if people are to be faced with the true costs of their actions. Public investment, financial support for poorer households and regulations will all be necessary too. The Government should make clear that consumers and taxpayers will pay higher prices and taxes in the coming decade, particularly for energy, flying and driving. All political parties must be honest about it.' ~ Lord Stern, April 21, 2009<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 'Enough green talk. Now Make it Happen', The Times, Lord Stern, April 21, 2009  
[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article6135687.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6135687.ece)



**About Haddock Research & Branding, Inc.**

Haddock Research & Branding Inc. is a full-service market research agency focusing on climate change and the low-carbon economy. Making use of the latest advances in survey design, Haddock advises businesses on how best to develop profitable low-carbon opportunities; and provides governments with the vital information they need to mobilize people to take action on climate change. For further information, visit our website - [www.haddock-research.com](http://www.haddock-research.com)

For enquiries, please contact either of the founding directors of Haddock Research and Branding - Peter Winters [peter.winters@haddock-research.com](mailto:peter.winters@haddock-research.com) or James Ambler [james.ambler@haddock-research.com](mailto:james.ambler@haddock-research.com). The Environmental Choices™ survey is entirely self-funded. Full international reports, free summaries and associated commentaries are available to download from our website. Additionally, national level reports, additional analysis or data mining are available on request.<sup>10</sup>

Information from this press release comes from section report 2b. 'Government Mandates for action on climate change'. More detailed analysis may be found within this report.

*Any comments in this press release are solely the responsibility of Haddock Research and Branding, Inc.*

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<sup>10</sup> [www.haddock-research.com](http://www.haddock-research.com) A quick registration is required to download the free reports. More detailed results are available in the published reports section.