

Research Note

**Did extreme weather change
European public opinion in
summer 2026?**

Research Findings

The extreme weather experienced across Europe during the summer of 2026 significantly elevated climate change as a dominant public concern, driving salience—the level of importance placed on particular issues—back to levels unseen in recent years, even if not back to the peak of 2019-2021.

Climate change became a top 5 issue between June and August in all but one of six countries surveyed (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK). The climb in issue rankings was particularly evident in harder hit countries like France, where the share of people choosing climate as a top 2 issue doubled to 28%—sending the issue overall to third. Salience also doubled in Spain to 10% and almost doubled in both the UK (15%) and in Germany (18%). In contrast, concern stayed flat in Denmark (28%), which was less affected by extreme weather. This underscores the direct role of localized severe weather in shifting public concern.

Voters intuitively connected extreme heat to climate change, with 7-8 in 10 respondents (68-83%) across all surveyed countries identifying the summer's heatwaves as a likely consequence of climate change while explicitly rejecting dismissive framing. The "it's not serious, it's called summer" frame was rejected everywhere. Climate change subsequently rose in priority.

This heightened concern translated into increased support for policy action. Net support increased on all 13 policies tested—achieving an average increase of +4 points—driven almost entirely by expansion in the "strongly support" category. However, willingness to make personal lifestyle adjustments remained unchanged.

The summer's extreme weather did not notably push up fatalism. Support for the idea that it's already too late to tackle the worst effects of climate change rose only modestly; a majority (56%) still believes the worst is avoidable with drastic change. Anti-climate narratives still find relatively little widespread purchase, outside a committed core. Only 13 to 24% blame green policies for rising energy bills, far behind gas prices and import dependence or profiteering. Support for EU-level action rose in all EU countries surveyed except Spain.

Consequently, political positions opposing climate action carry severe disapproval. Post-heatwave, climate denial became politically toxic. A politician saying climate change isn't happening scores a net -58 to -71 in every country; whereas candidates advocating for accelerated climate action achieved net positive support. The primary point of political debate appears to remain centred on the pace and economic costs of transition rather than the necessity of intervention itself.

Methodology

The research was conducted through public opinion polling commissioned via YouGov in late August 2026, incorporating questions from YouGov's Eurotracker series alongside custom survey items. The baseline wave—for comparison—was YouGov's April 2026 wave for all questions except the issue salience question, for which it was June 2026. The analysis focuses on population-level shifts across six European markets—the United Kingdom (Great Britain), Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and Denmark—enabling a comparative assessment between regions exposed to extreme weather events and those that were not. Sample sizes ranged from 1,000 to 2,000 respondents per wave per market.

About CORE

The Climate Opinion Research Exchange (CORE) shares high-quality opinion research related to climate change and the energy transition. We believe in accurately measuring trends in opinion and sharing this information openly with the public, researchers, civil society and the media, so we can all better understand the social, community, policy and business dynamics influencing opinion around these issues.

[CORE](#) is an initiative of the Meliore Foundation.

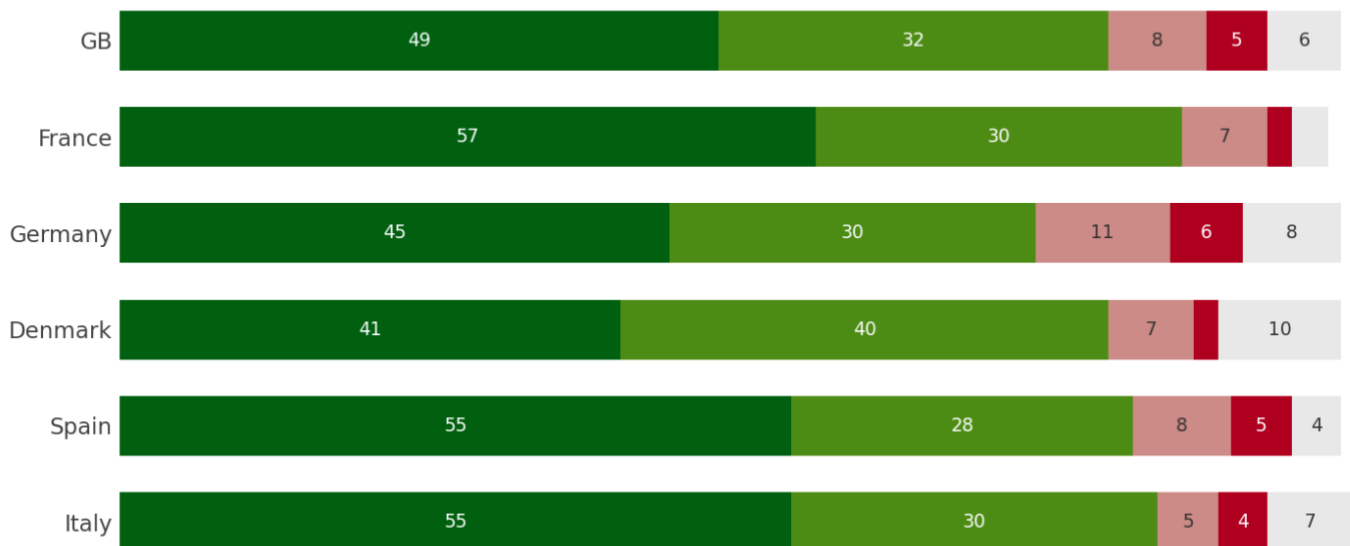
Finding 1: Voters clearly linked extreme weather to climate change

A clear majority of voters think it is likely that the summer 2026 heatwaves were caused by climate change. The proportion of respondents “very certain” was highest in France, Spain and Italy, three countries most impacted by this summer’s extreme weather.

A clear majority of voters think it's likely or very likely that recent heatwaves were caused by climate change

“How likely or unlikely do you think it is that each of the following is a result of climate change? — The recent heatwaves in Europe” August 2026

Very likely Fairly likely Fairly unlikely Very unlikely Don't know



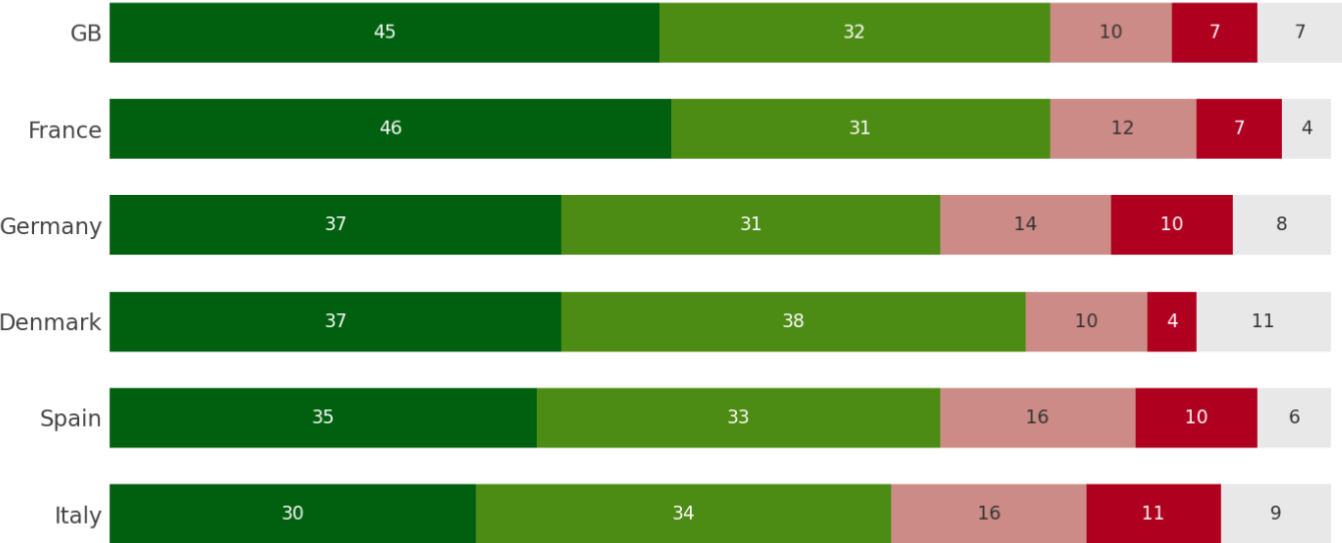
YouGov for Climate Opinion Research Exchange, tracking YouGov Euro tracker questions on climate.
Sample (August 2026 wave): GB n=2,334; France n=1,025; Germany n=1,022; Denmark n=1,076; Spain n=1,049; Italy n=1,060. Baseline waves (April/June 2026): n=1,008-2,352 per country

While wildfire attribution is softer than heatwave attribution, a clear majority across all six countries found it likely that the wildfires Europe experienced in summer 2026 were the result of climate change. Although Spain and Italy demonstrated the highest level of conviction that climate change was the driver of the summer 2026 heatwaves, they expressed the least certainty about its role in the wildfires. This divergence points to differences in how political discussions about wildfires unfolded within those countries. Conversely, support for this connection reached its highest level in Great Britain and France.

Wildfire attribution is softer than heatwave attribution — but still majority “likely”

“How likely or unlikely do you think it is that each of the following is a result of climate change? — The recent wildfires in Europe” August 2026

Very likely Fairly likely Fairly unlikely Very unlikely Don't know



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Respondents explicitly rejected dismissive framing present in some parts of the media.

Very few buy the “it’s called summer” dismissal of recent extreme weather

“Which of these comes closest your view, even if neither captures it exactly?” — “We should take be taking heat waves seriously as they threaten our transport systems and our health, especially that of vulnerable people.” / “The recent heat waves are not serious and we should not be worried - we have had high temperatures in the past. It’s called summer.” August 2026

■ Take heat waves seriously — they threaten transport systems and health
■ Not serious — we’ve had high temperatures before, “it’s called summer” ■ Neither ■ Don’t know



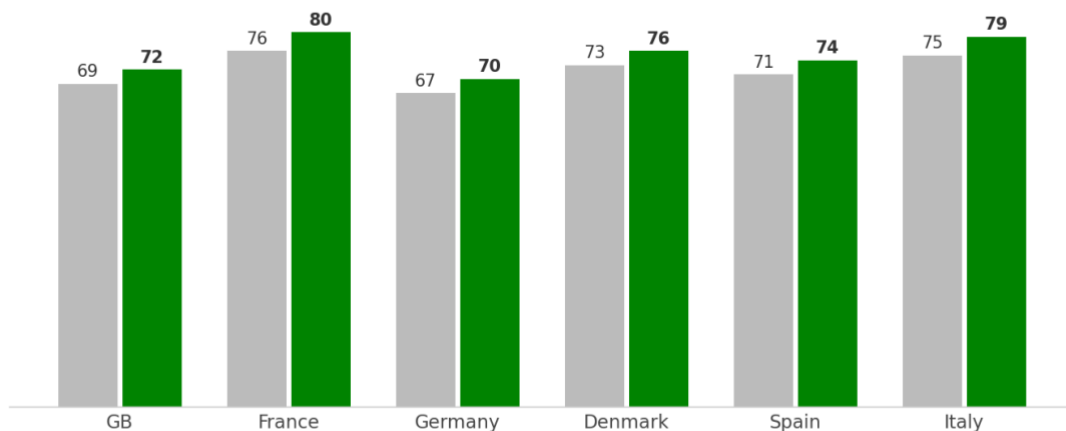
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The share of respondents believing that climate change is caused by humans increased in all six countries surveyed, albeit mostly within the margin of error. In aggregate, it suggests a slight increase in climate change being human-caused.

A slight aggregate increase in belief that climate change is human-caused

“On the subject of climate change do you think:” — % choosing “The world’s climate is changing as a result of human activity”. Individual country changes (+3 to +4 points) are within the margin of error on these samples

■ April 2026 ■ August 2026

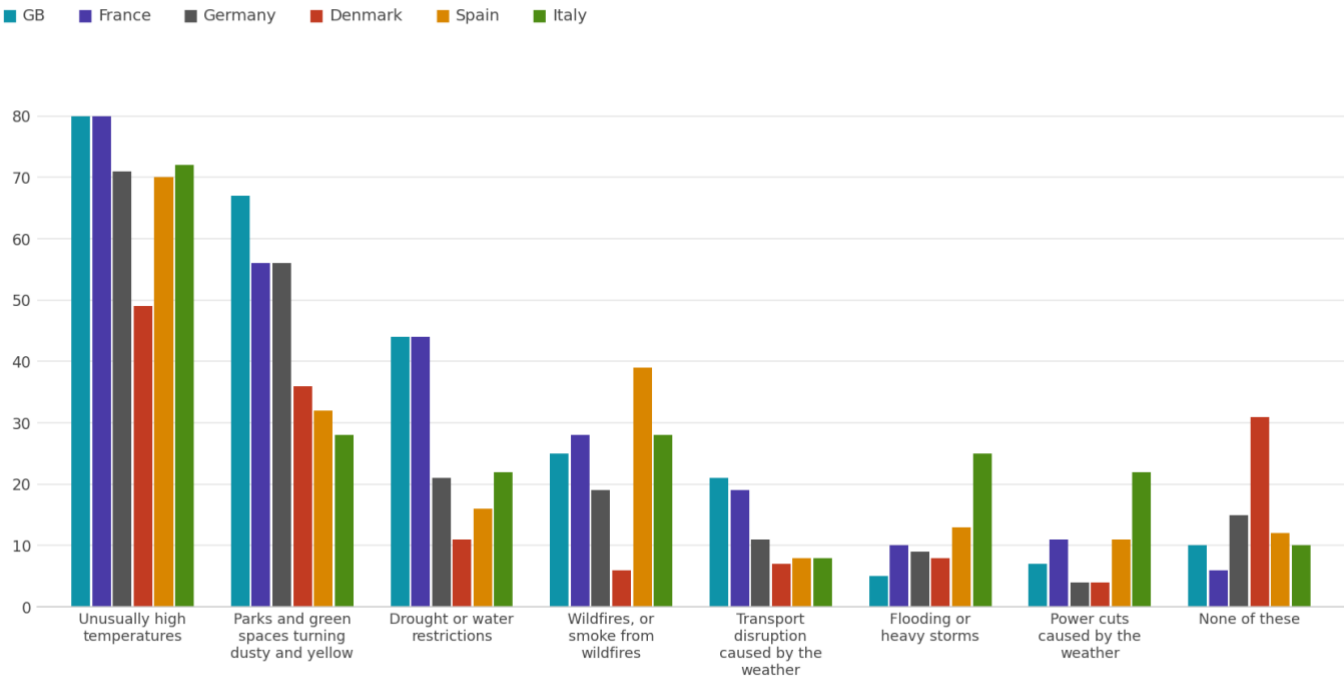


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Europe directly felt the impact of severe weather during summer. Every European country included in the survey reported direct exposure to the effects of this summer's heatwaves. Unusually elevated temperatures were personally felt by 80% of respondents in France and Britain, and 40% of Spanish participants directly experienced wildfires or wildfire smoke.

What people personally experienced this summer

"Which of the following, if any, have you personally experienced locally where you live this summer? Tick all that apply." August 2026

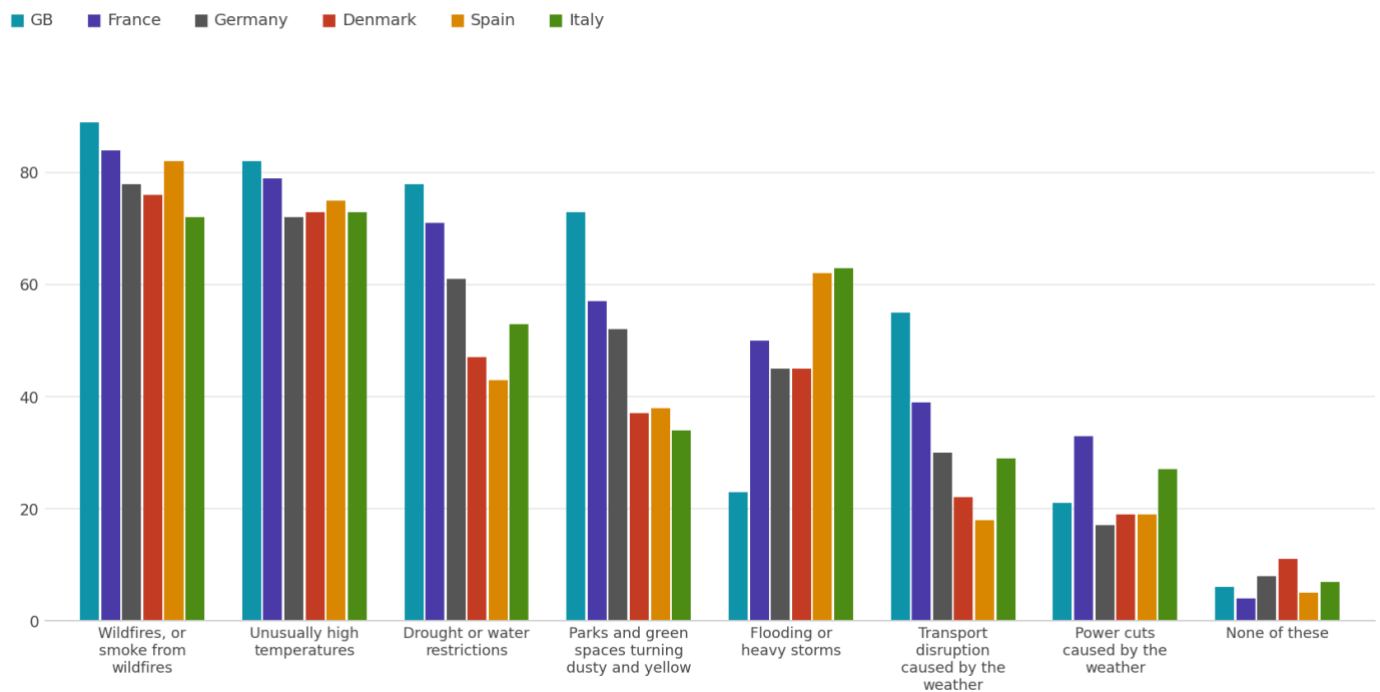


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This exposure was reinforced by the prevalence of extreme weather imagery across news and social media platforms. In all surveyed countries, more than 7 in 10 respondents reported seeing images of smoke, wildfires, or reporting of unusually high temperatures. The prevalence of these images for such a wide share of Europeans provides a rare shared social experience.

What people saw images of this summer

“And which, if any, of the following have you seen images of in the news / on social media this summer? Tick all that apply.” August 2026



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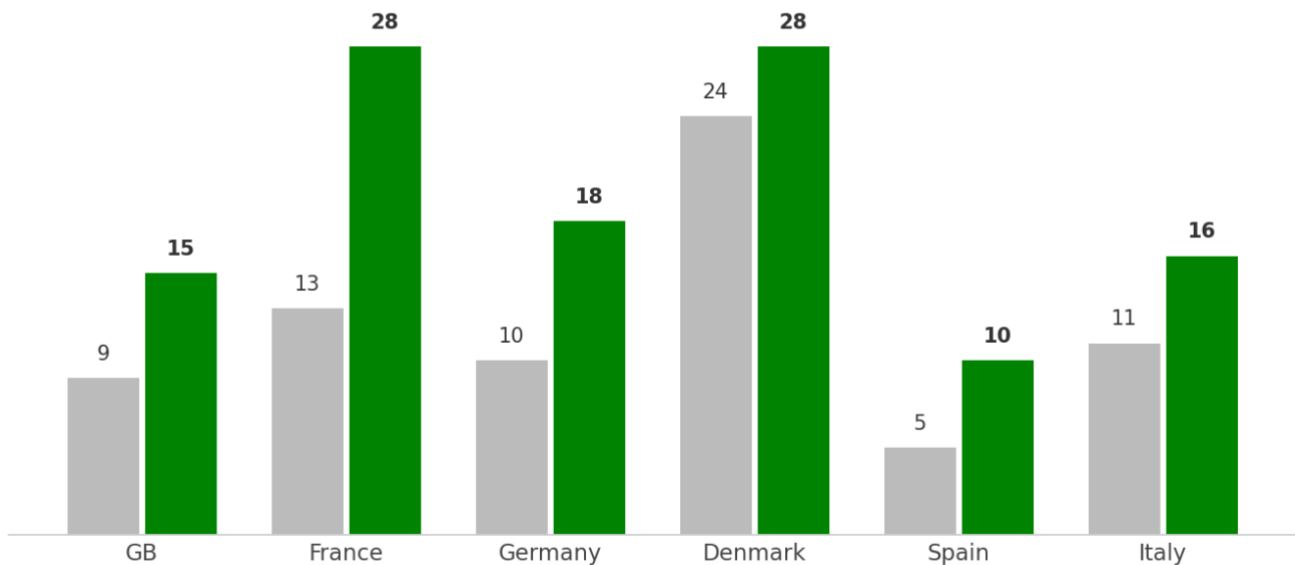
Finding 2: Prolonged coverage of climate change increased the salience of climate change

Prolonged coverage of climate change in news, social media, and culture led to it rising in priority for Europeans, becoming a top-5 issue in all but one of the six studied countries.

Climate salience jumped across Europe over the summer

“Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?” — % choosing “Pollution, the environment and climate change”

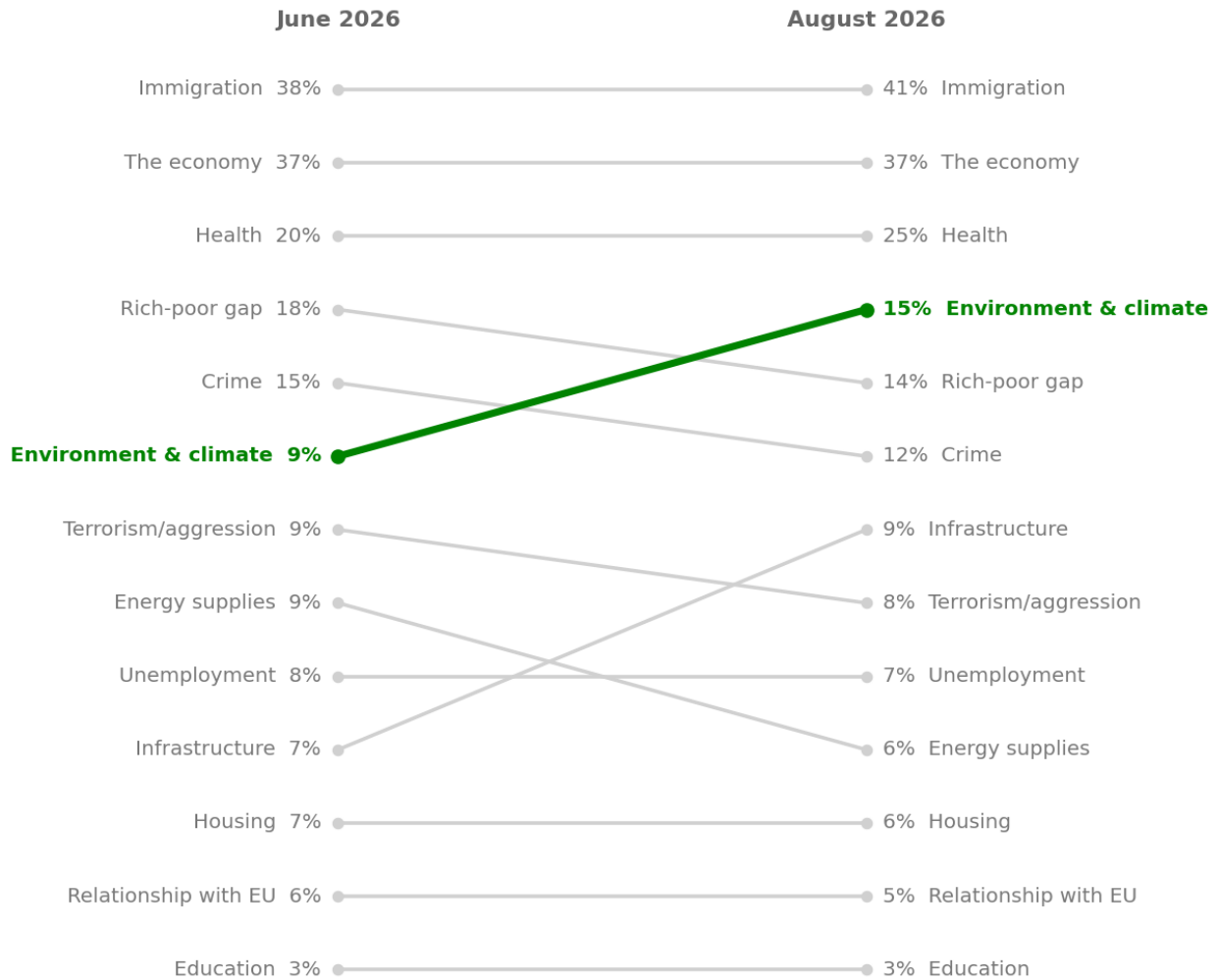
■ June 2026 ■ August 2026



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Where climate ranks among GB's problems: 6th → 4th

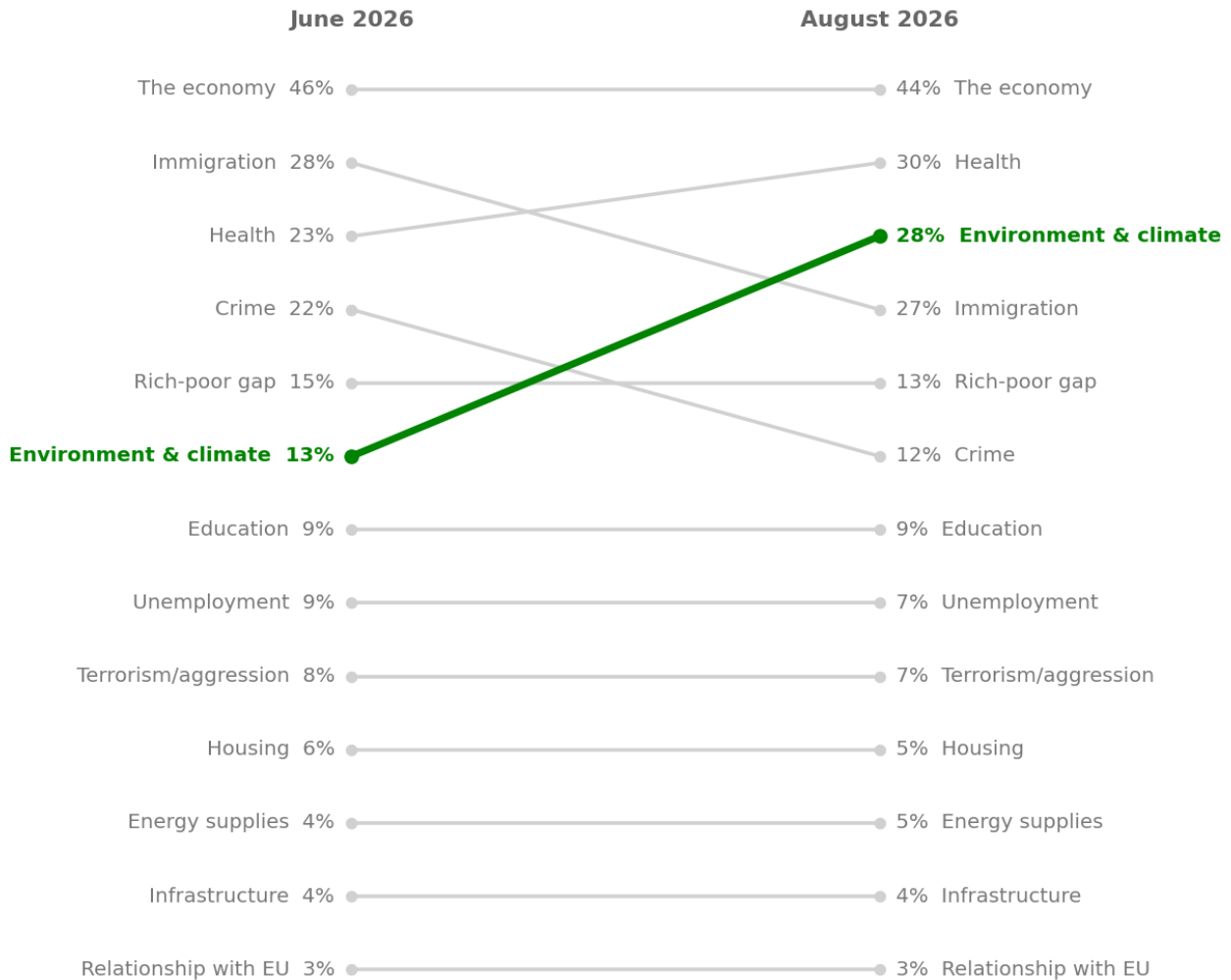
Issues ranked by % choosing each: "Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?"
Environment & climate ("Pollution, the environment and climate change"): 9% in June → 15% in August



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Where climate ranks among **France's** problems: 6th → 3rd

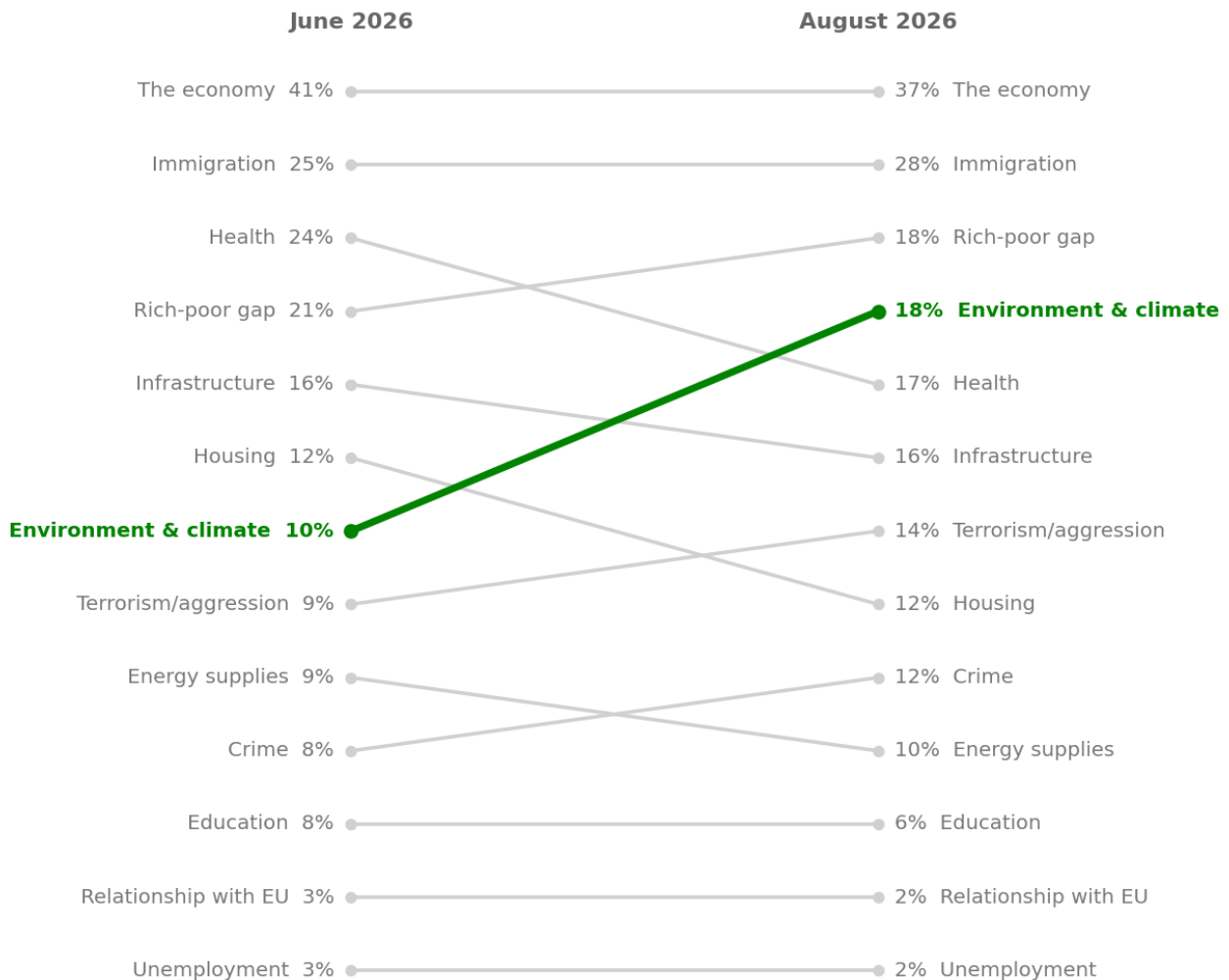
Issues ranked by % choosing each: "Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?"
Environment & climate ("Pollution, the environment and climate change"): 13% in June → 28% in August



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Where climate ranks among **Germany's** problems: 7th → 4th

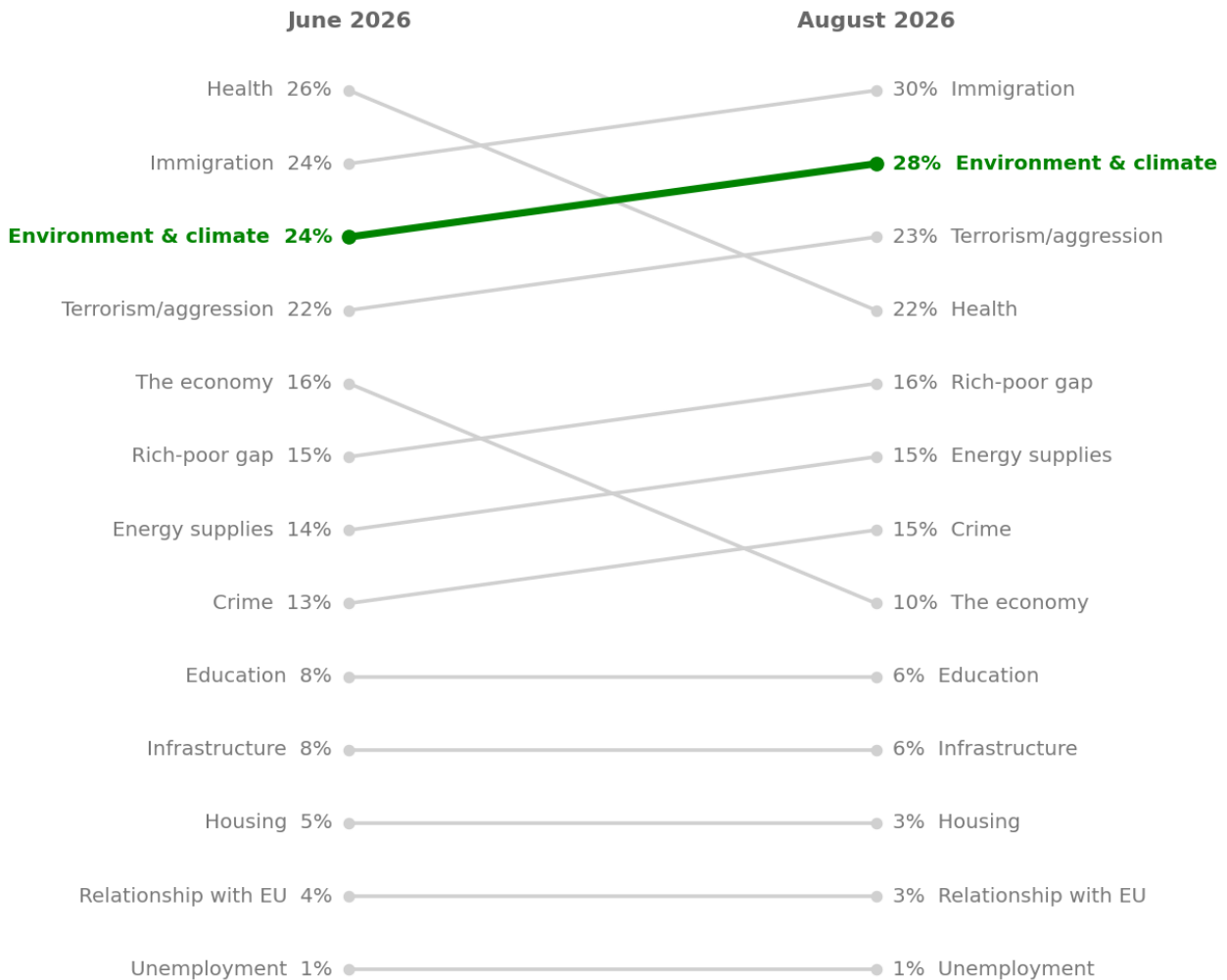
Issues ranked by % choosing each: "Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?"
Environment & climate ("Pollution, the environment and climate change"): 10% in June → 18% in August



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Where climate ranks among **Denmark's** problems: 3rd → 2nd

Issues ranked by % choosing each: "Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?"
Environment & climate ("Pollution, the environment and climate change"): 24% in June → 28% in August

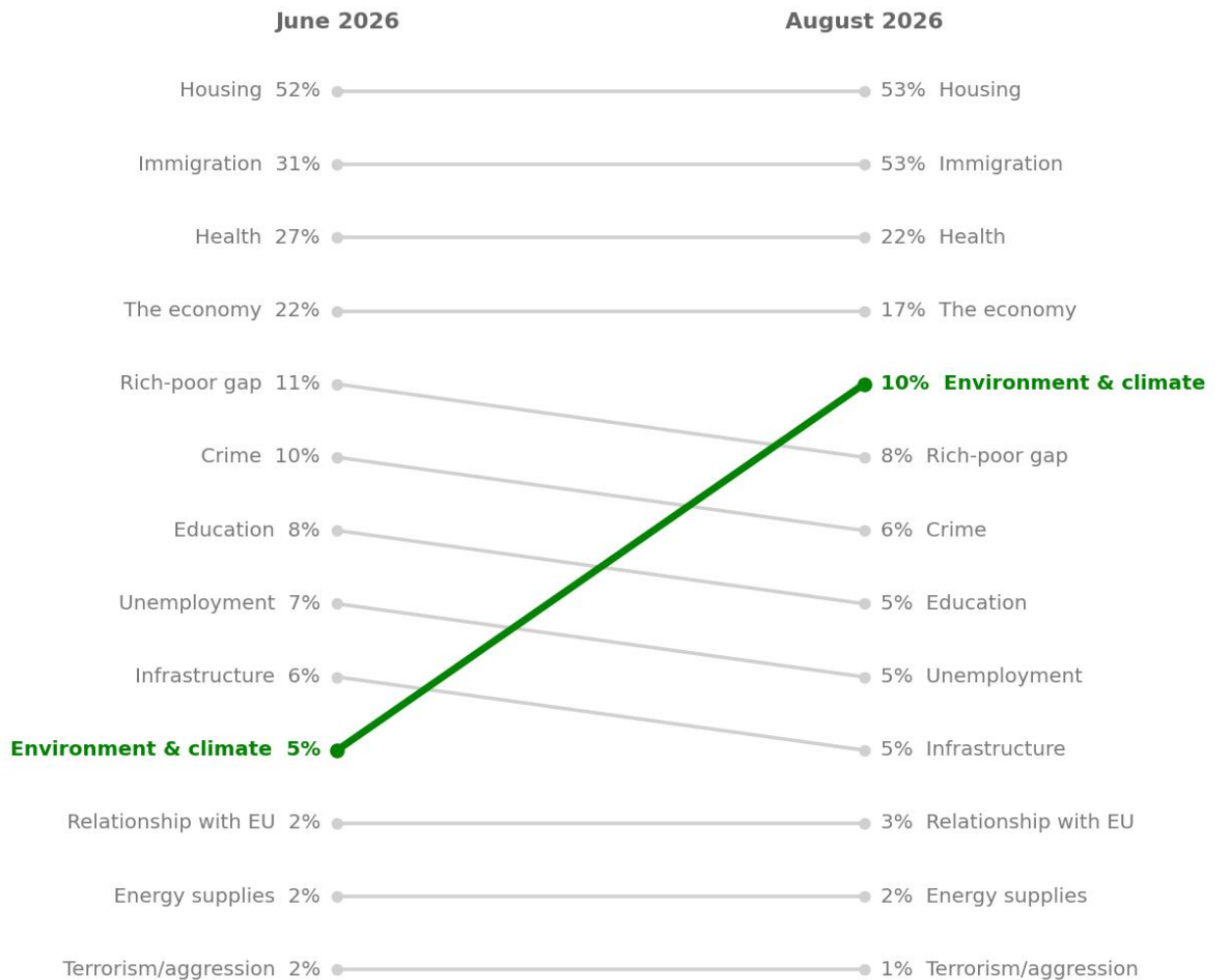


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Where climate ranks among **Spain's** problems: 10th → 5th

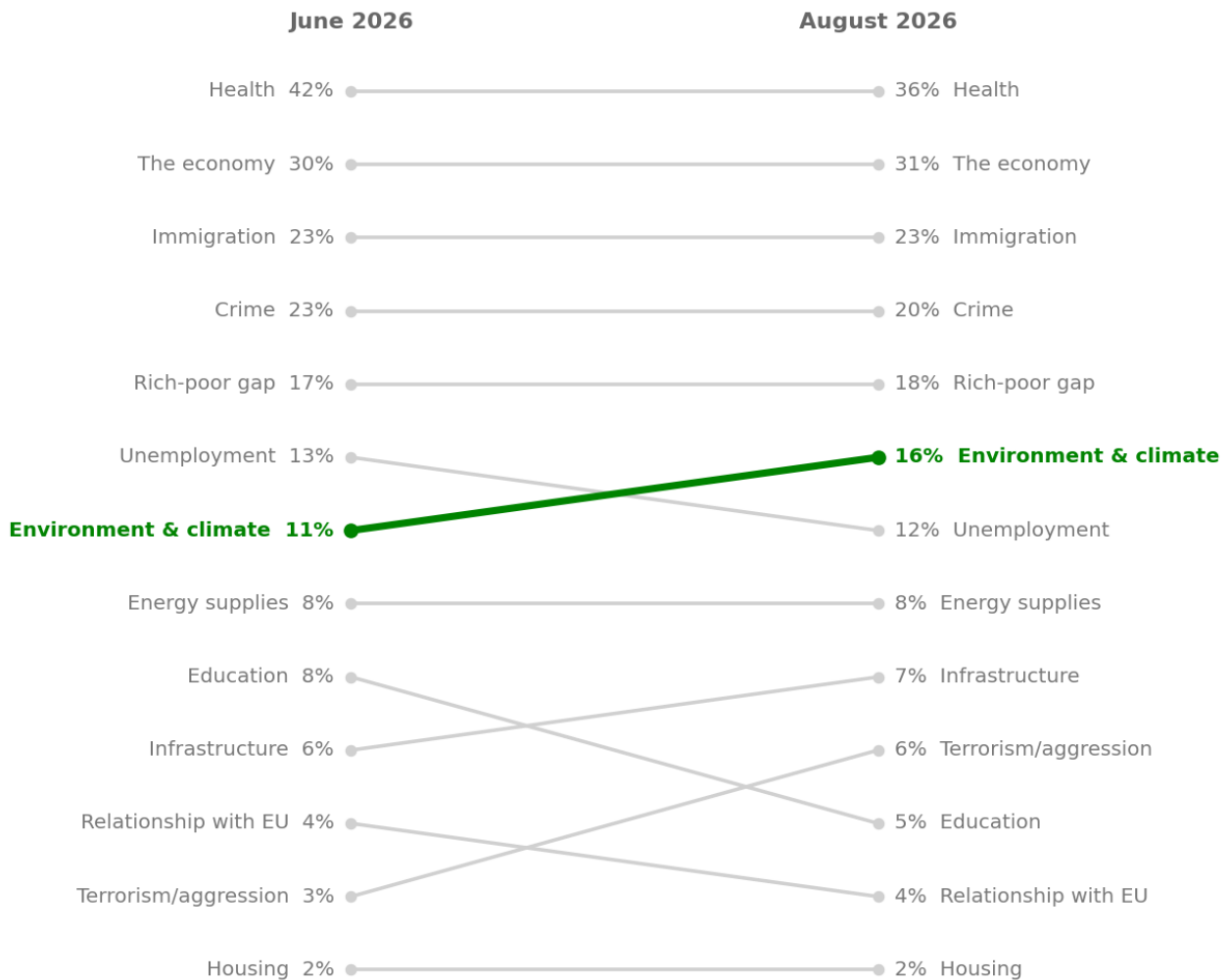
Issues ranked by % choosing each: "Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?"
Environment & climate ("Pollution, the environment and climate change"): 5% in June → 10% in August



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Where climate ranks among Italy's problems: 7th → 6th

Issues ranked by % choosing each: "Which two of these problems are most important facing COUNTRY just now?"
Environment & climate ("Pollution, the environment and climate change"): 11% in June → 16% in August



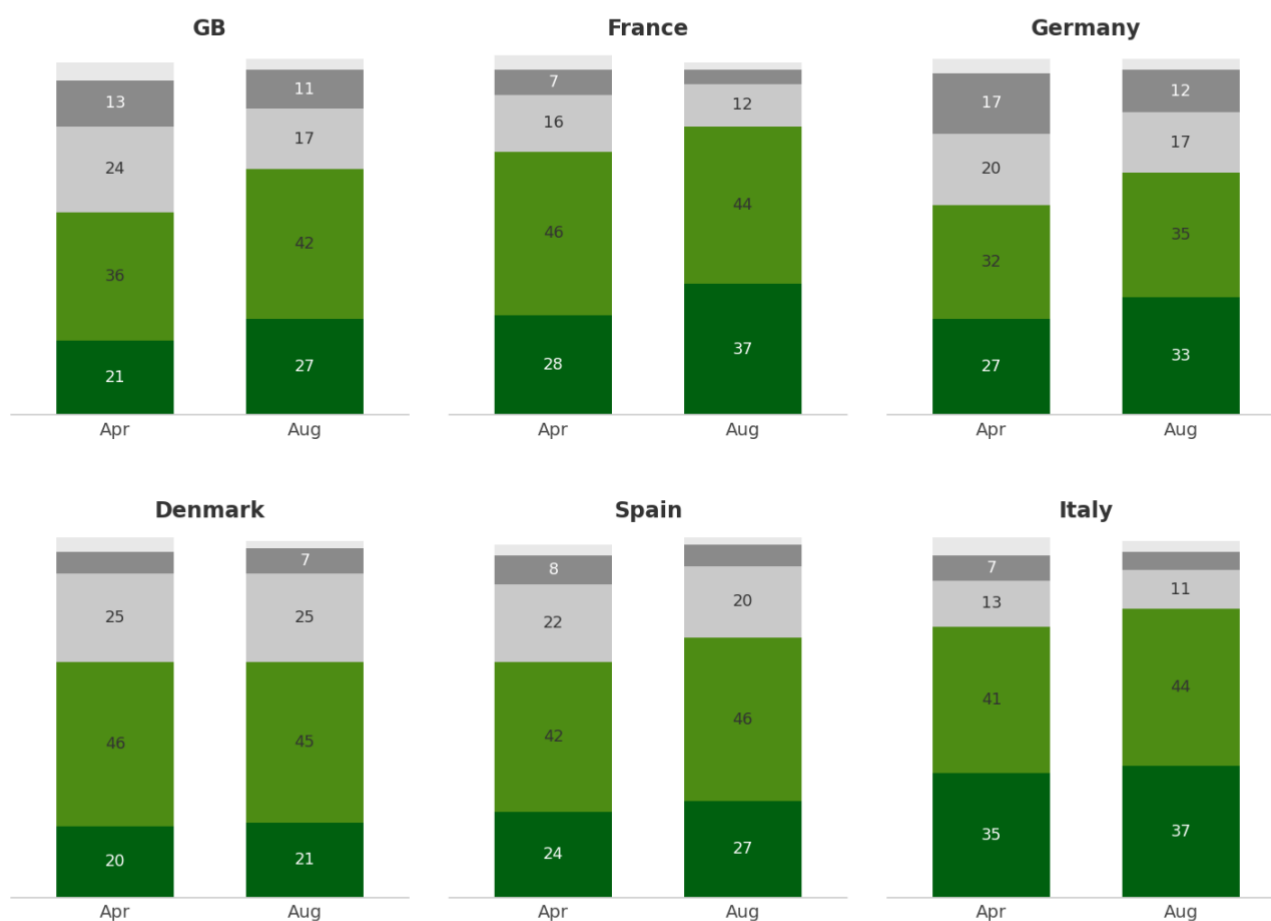
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Worry rose in every country the heat hit, while staying flat in Denmark, which largely escaped extreme heat this summer. This indicates direct experience of extreme weather and the reporting around it have a significant role in shifting public concern.

Worry about climate change rose everywhere the heat hit — and stood still in Denmark where there was no heat wave this summer

“Thinking about how you feel TODAY about climate change and its effects, which of the following comes closest to your view?” — April vs August 2026

Very worried Fairly worried Not very worried Not worried at all Don't know



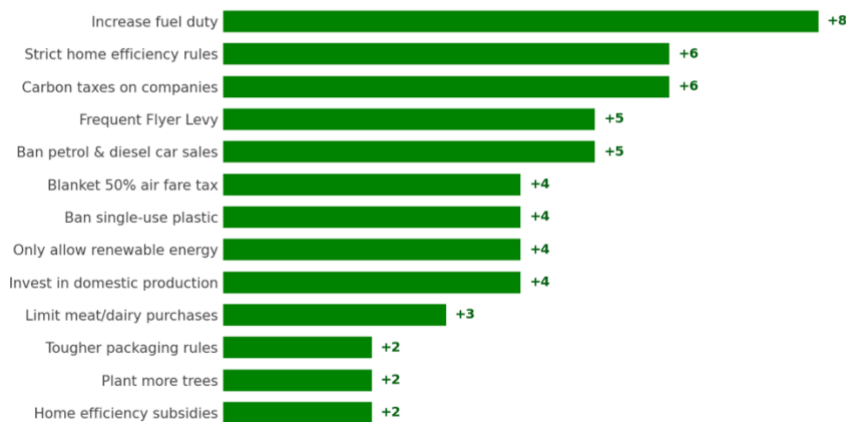
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Finding 3: Support for policy increased but was slightly more modest than the rise in salience.

Summer 2026's extreme weather translated into increased support for policy action, though primarily by activating existing passive supporters rather than converting more sceptical respondents. Net support increased on all 13 policies tested—achieving an average increase of +4 points—driven almost entirely by expansion in the "strongly support" category. The biggest increases in policy support were for raising fuel duty (+8 points), stricter home efficiency rules (+6 points), and carbon taxes on companies (+6 points).

Policy support rose modestly on all 13 policies between April and August — albeit by different amounts

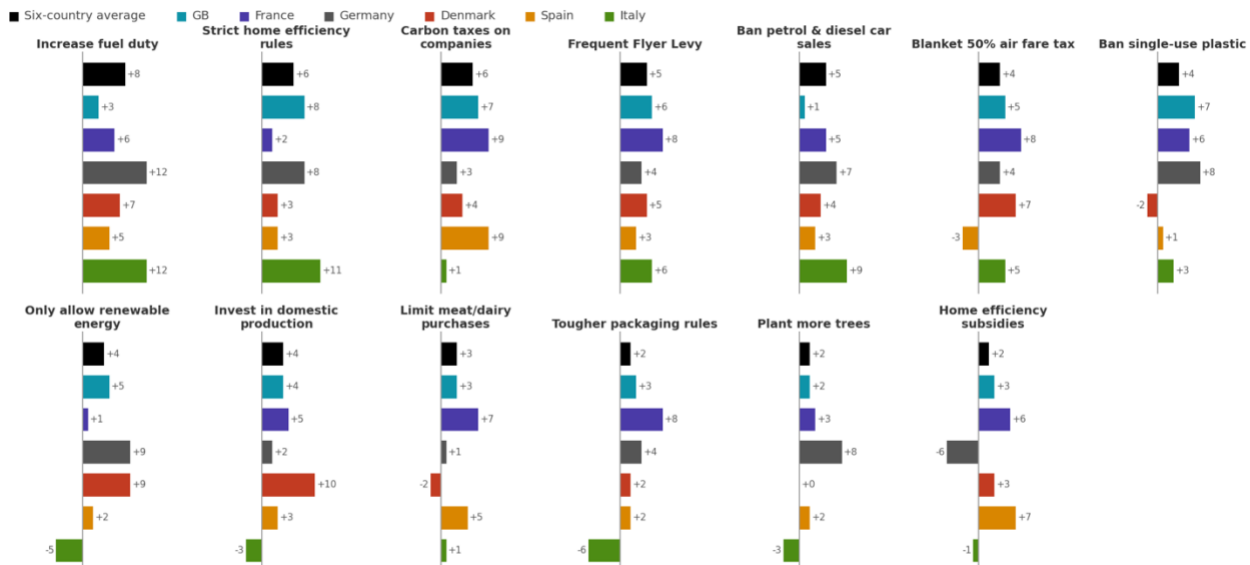
Change in net support (% support minus % oppose) April → August 2026, averaged across the six countries and rounded to whole points. "Taking into account the costs involved and possible disruption, to what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose the Government bringing in each of the following policies to tackle climate change?" Every policy tested gained ground; the biggest gains came on the most contested, cost-imposing policies (fuel duty, efficiency rules, carbon taxes)



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Change in policy net support by country

Change in net support (% support minus % oppose) April → August 2026, by country, with the six-country average (rounded to whole points) in black. Policies ordered by average change. Most country readings rose; single-country dips (e.g. Germany on subsidies, Italy on packaging) are within normal sample variation



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A majority of people in all six countries think climate action is good for the public.

Majorities everywhere think climate action can be good for the public

"Which of these comes closest to your view?" — "We can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the worst impacts of climate change in a way that is also good for the general public" / "We cannot ... — we have to choose". August 2026

■ Can be done in a way good for the public ■ Cannot - have to choose ■ Neither ■ Climate change not happening ■ Don't know



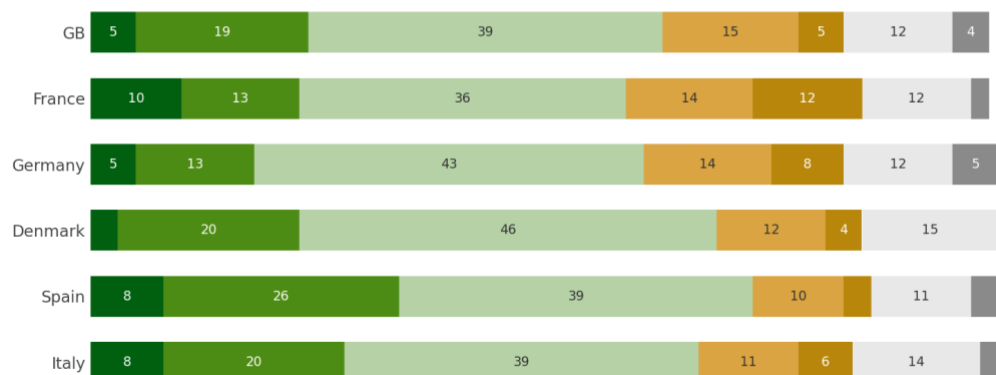
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And clear pluralities that believe their country should prioritise adapting to climate change and reducing emissions equally.

Mitigate, adapt — or both? "Both equally" is the plurality view everywhere

"When it comes to climate change, some people argue that COUNTRY should focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the impacts of climate change getting worse in future. However, others say we should just focus on adapting to climate change, through things like flood defences. Other people say we should do both equally. Which comes closest to your view on how COUNTRY should respond?" August 2026

■ Entirely reduce emissions ■ Mostly reduce emissions ■ Both equally ■ Mostly adapt ■ Entirely adapt ■ Don't know ■ Not happening



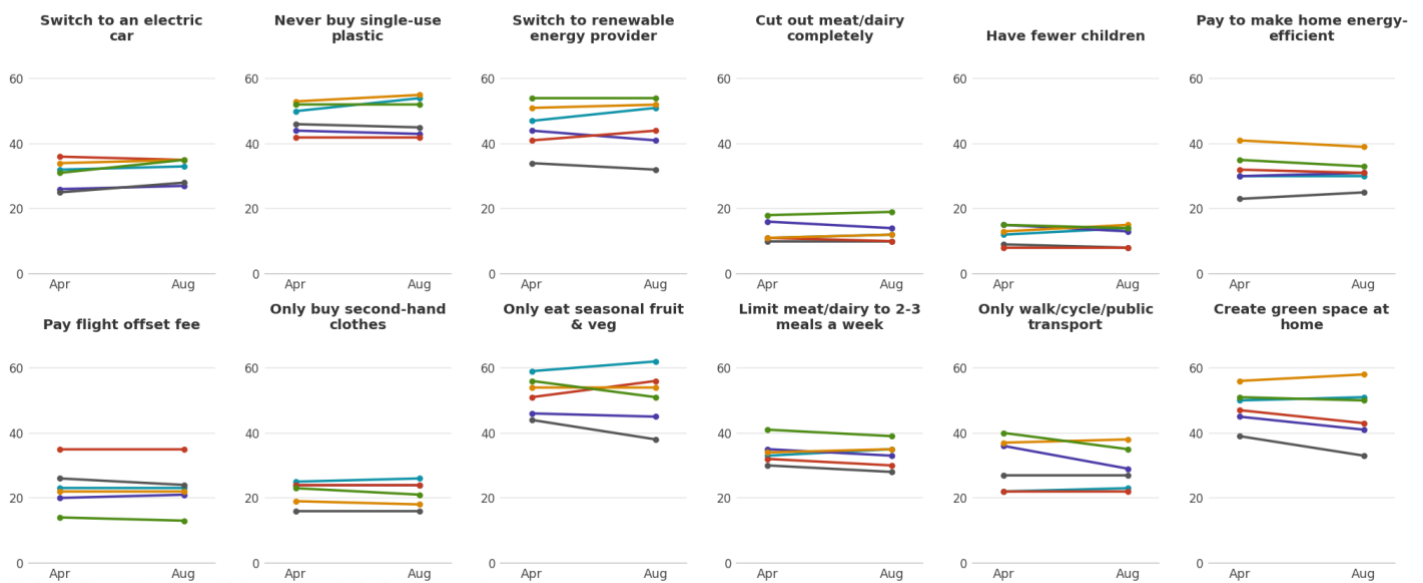
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However, this modest increase in support for more government policy did not necessarily translate into a willingness to undertake key personal environmental actions, such as switching to an electric car or switching energy provider.

Willingness to act did not meaningfully move over the heatwave summer

"Taking into account the personal costs or changes to lifestyle that would be required, please say whether you would or would not be willing to do each of the following to address climate change." % "would be willing to do this". Panels ordered by average April→August change, largest rise first

■ GB ■ France ■ Germany ■ Denmark ■ Spain ■ Italy

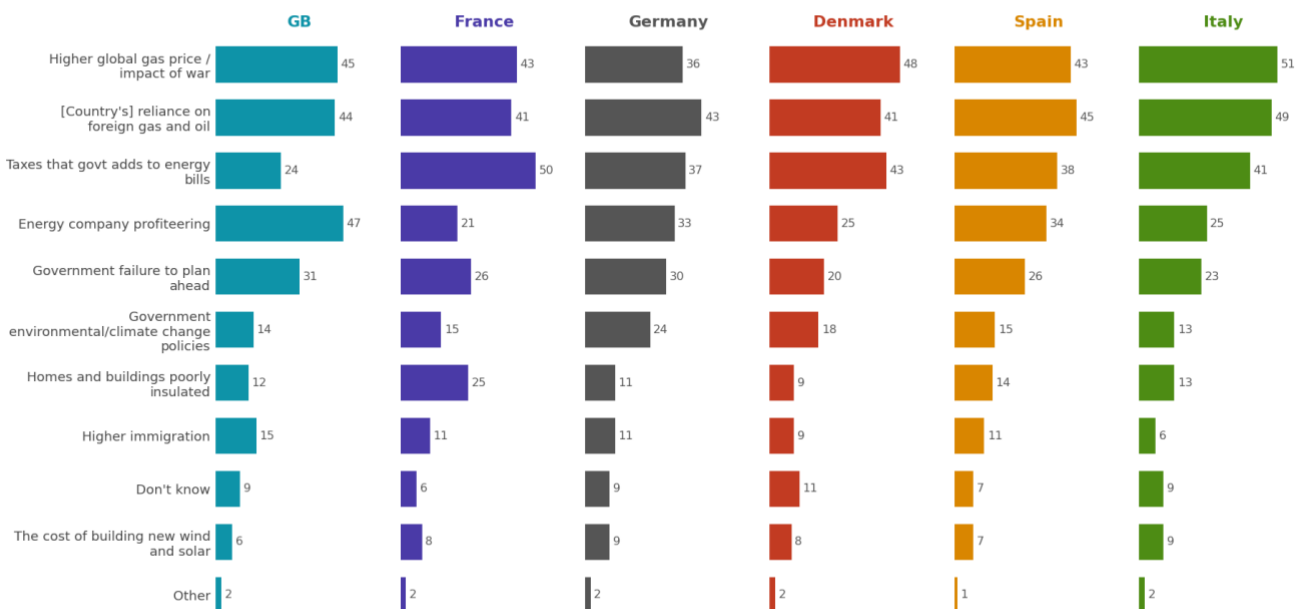


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European voters at large don't tend to blame climate policy for rising energy bills with respondents considering gas prices, import dependence or profiteering more convincing reasons for high energy bills.

People don't tend to blame net zero for rising energy bills, instead usually blaming high global gas prices, wars or energy company profiteering.

"Which of these, if any, do you find most convincing as reasons for rising energy bills in COUNTRY? Please select up to 3." August 2026

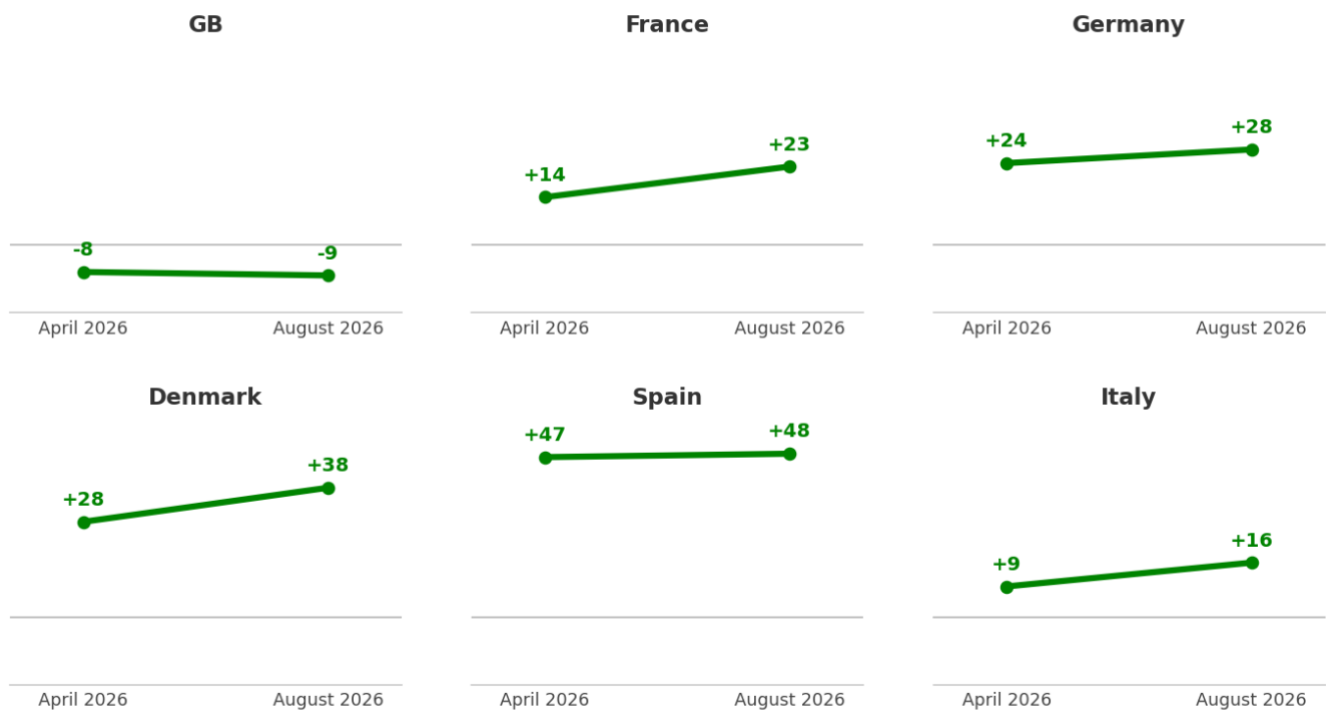


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Over the summer of 2026, support for collective action at the EU and a global level rose modestly in four out of five surveyed EU countries.

Support for EU-level climate decision-making rose in four of the five EU countries surveyed

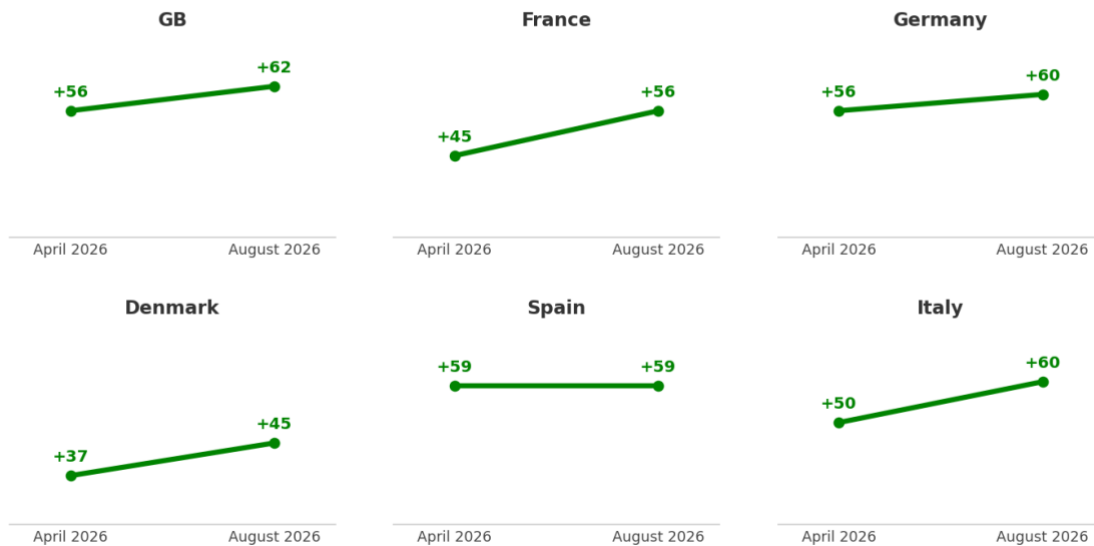
"Which of the following comes closest to your view?" Net: % "The EU should make decisions about how to tackle climate change on behalf of all its member nations" minus % "Each nation's government should make decisions about how to tackle climate change, independently of the EU". GB shown for reference; its change is within the margin of error



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“All countries should work together” strengthened its lead over “wealthy countries should carry the burden”

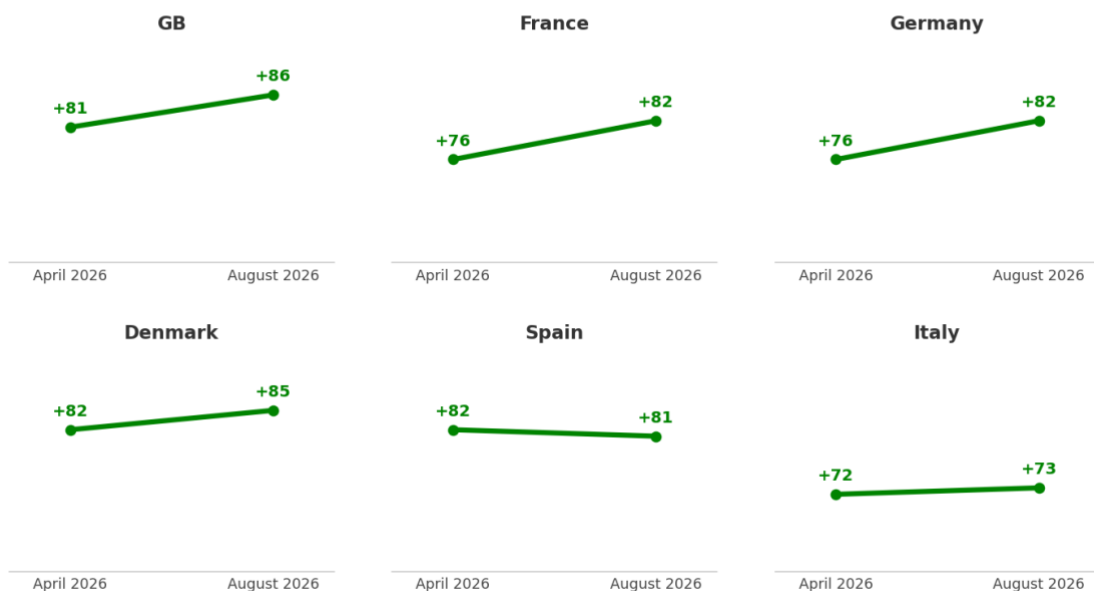
“Some people argue that climate change is a global issue, and can only be effectively tackled if every country works together. Others argue that wealthy countries have caused the most damage to the environment, and should therefore take on the responsibility for tackling climate change. Which of the following comes closest to your view?” Net: % “All countries should work together and share the responsibility of tackling climate change” minus % “Wealthy countries should take on most of the responsibility of tackling climate change”



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Overwhelming — and growing — preference for tackling climate change with other countries

“And which of the following comes closest to your view?” Net: % “We will be more effective in tackling climate change if we work together with other countries” minus % “We will be more effective in tackling climate change if we work independently”

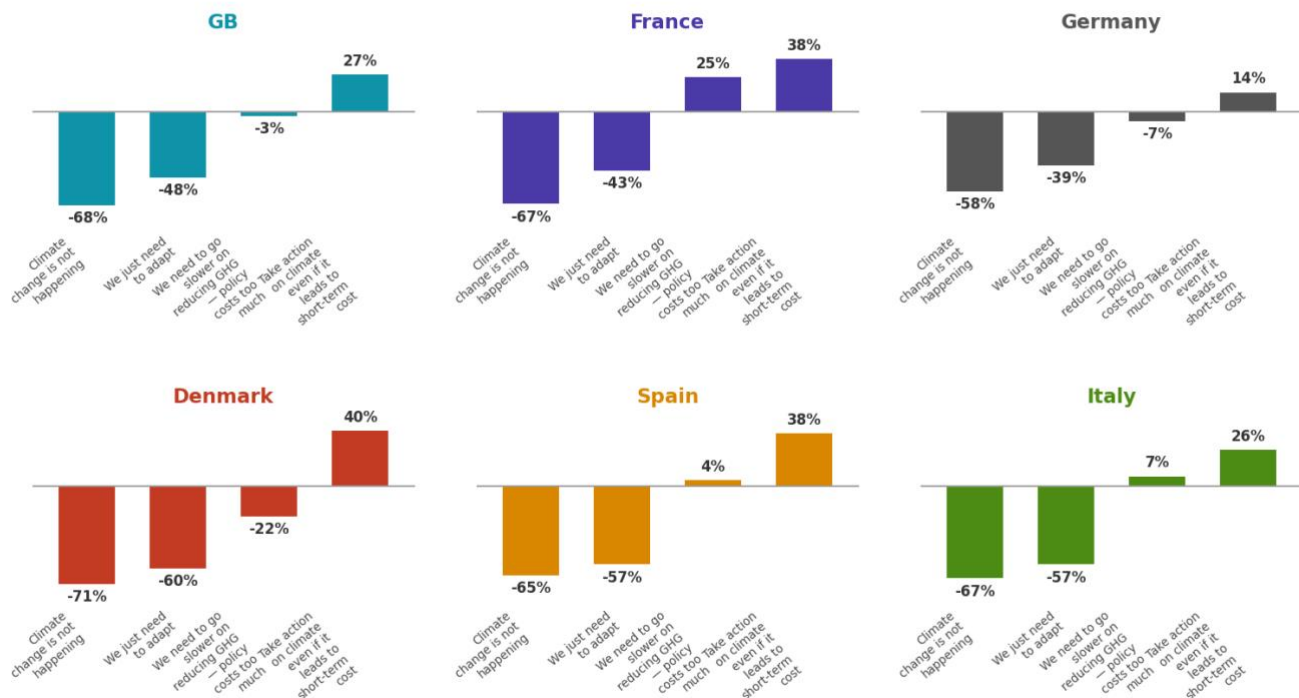


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Politicians who take climate denying positions are viewed unfavourably in the current post-heatwave environment.

Climate denialism - and even delay in some places - is a damaging position for politicians to adopt

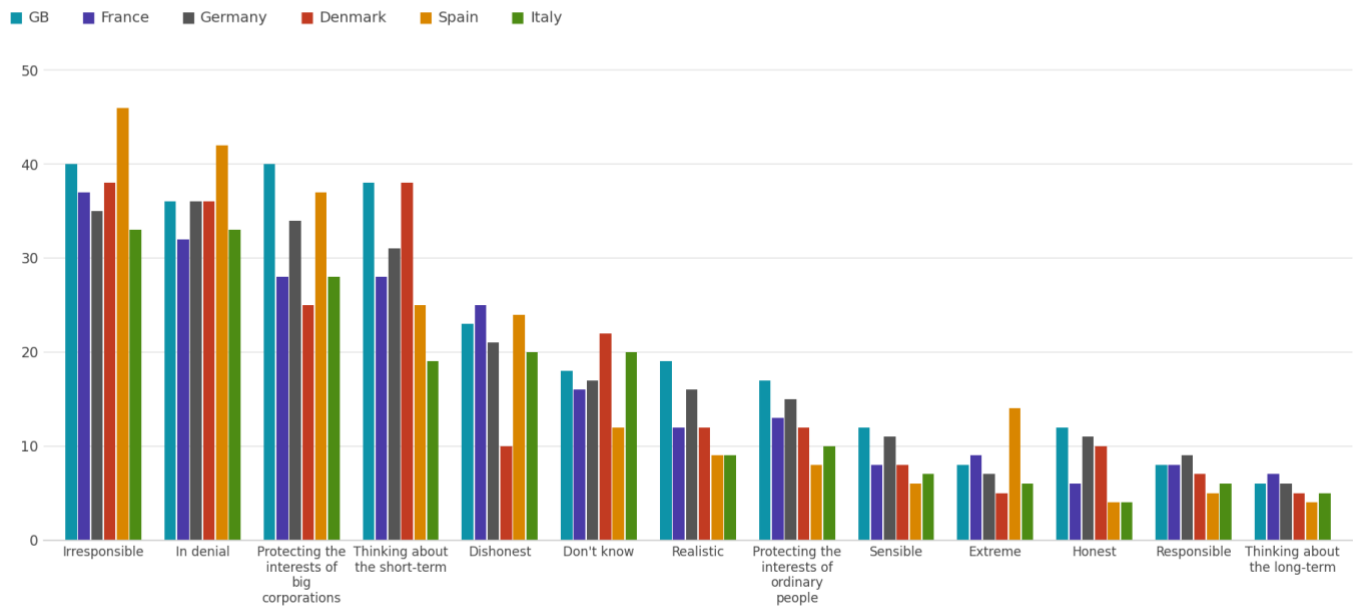
"Would you have a positive or negative impression of a politician or party who take the below positions? A politician or party who says that..." Net impression (% positive minus % negative). Full statements: "Climate change is not happening and we do not need to take any action" / "Climate change is happening but there is nothing we can do, we just need to adapt" / "Climate change is happening but we need to go slower in reducing greenhouse gas emissions because environmental policy is costing people too much" / "Climate change is happening and we need to go faster in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, even if it means some short-term cost or inconvenience for people"



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What people call politicians who oppose climate action

"As you may know, some politicians and parties oppose action nationally or internationally to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They argue that policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are too costly for consumers and businesses, although others disagree with this. What words / phrases would you associate with politicians or parties that take this position? Tick all that apply." August 2026. Ordered by cross-country average



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