



Institute for Public Policy Research

Maintaining the momentum of progressive thought

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**Start with the politics, not the
science (or the economics)**

ZERO10! Conference

Session on “From climate justice to climate realism”

Oslo, November 23rd 2010

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Why start with the politics?

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- The science is clear – urgent and radical action to avoid $>2^{\circ}\text{C}$ rise
- The economics says mitigation should be cheap
- But little has been achieved
 - Failure to reach an effective, binding agreement at Copenhagen
 - Weakness of Kyoto protocol targets
 - Increase in CO₂ emissions in USA, Japan, Canada, Australia (and of course in non-Annex II countries) since 1990
 - In EU, KP target largely met not due to climate policies but rather to unrelated factors (collapse of ex-communist economies, German unification, UK ‘dash for gas’, 2009-2010 recession)

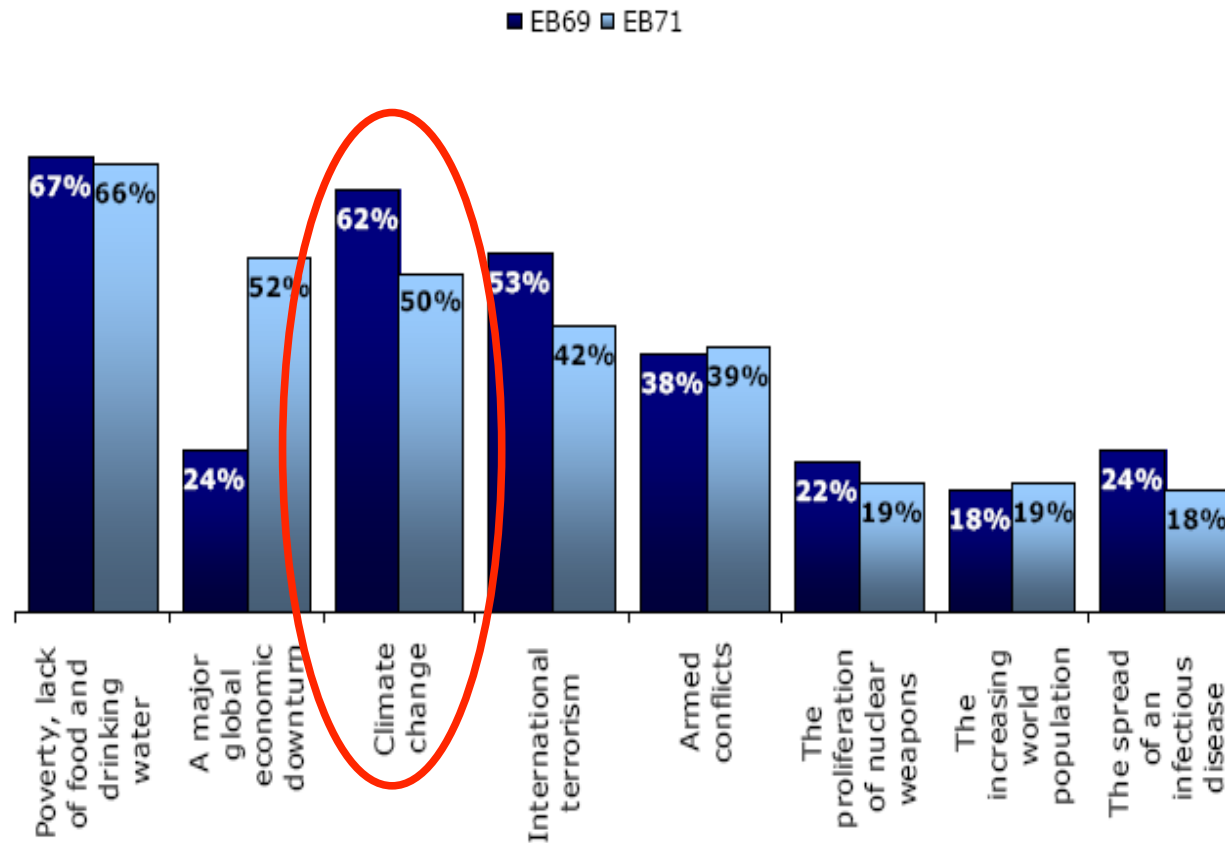
➤ **Why is the politics so hard?**



Concern about climate change is widespread...

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In your opinion, which of the following do you consider to be the most serious problem currently facing the world as a whole?
Firstly? Any others? - % EU

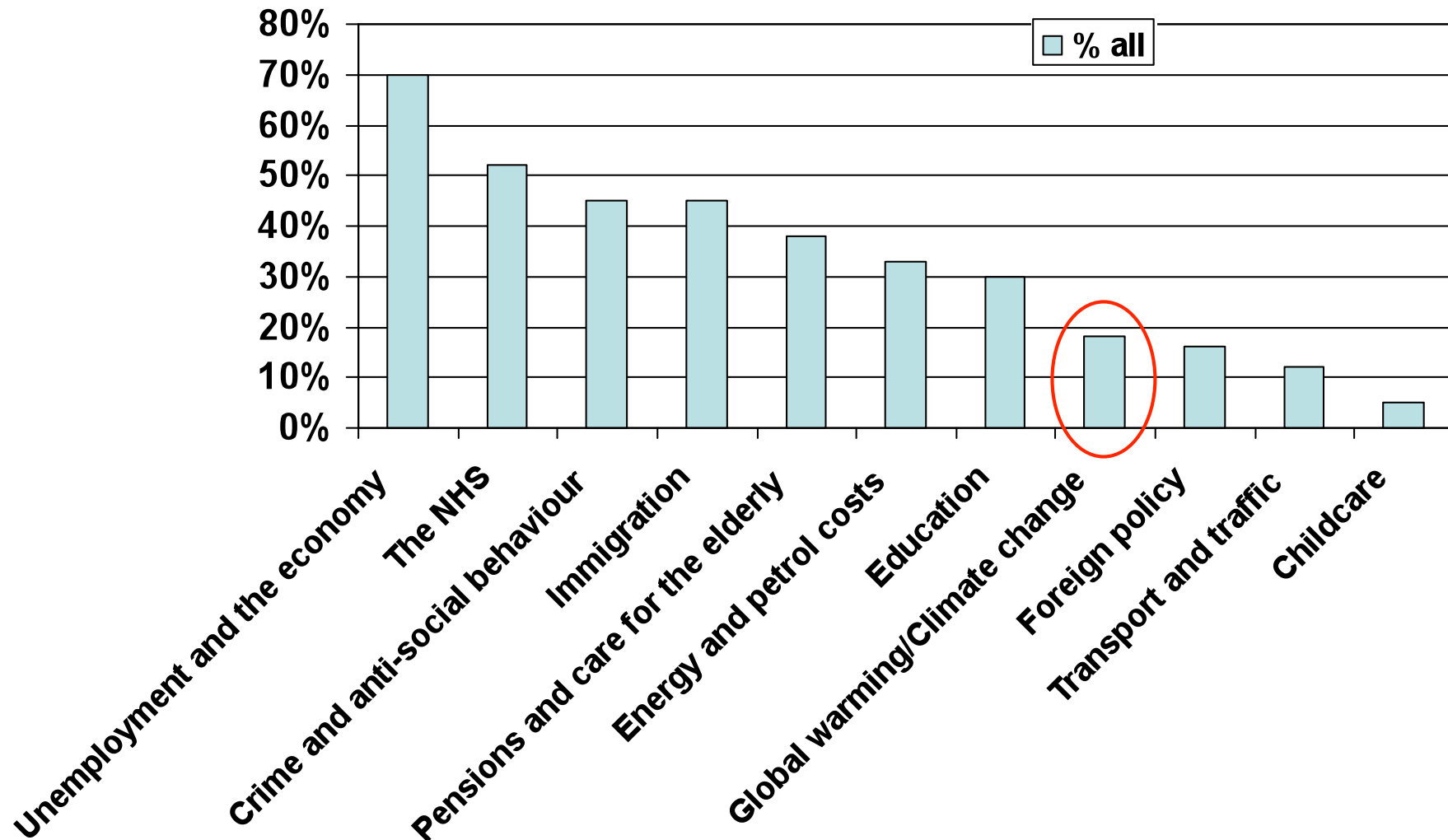


Source:
Eurobarometer 2009



...but not very deep

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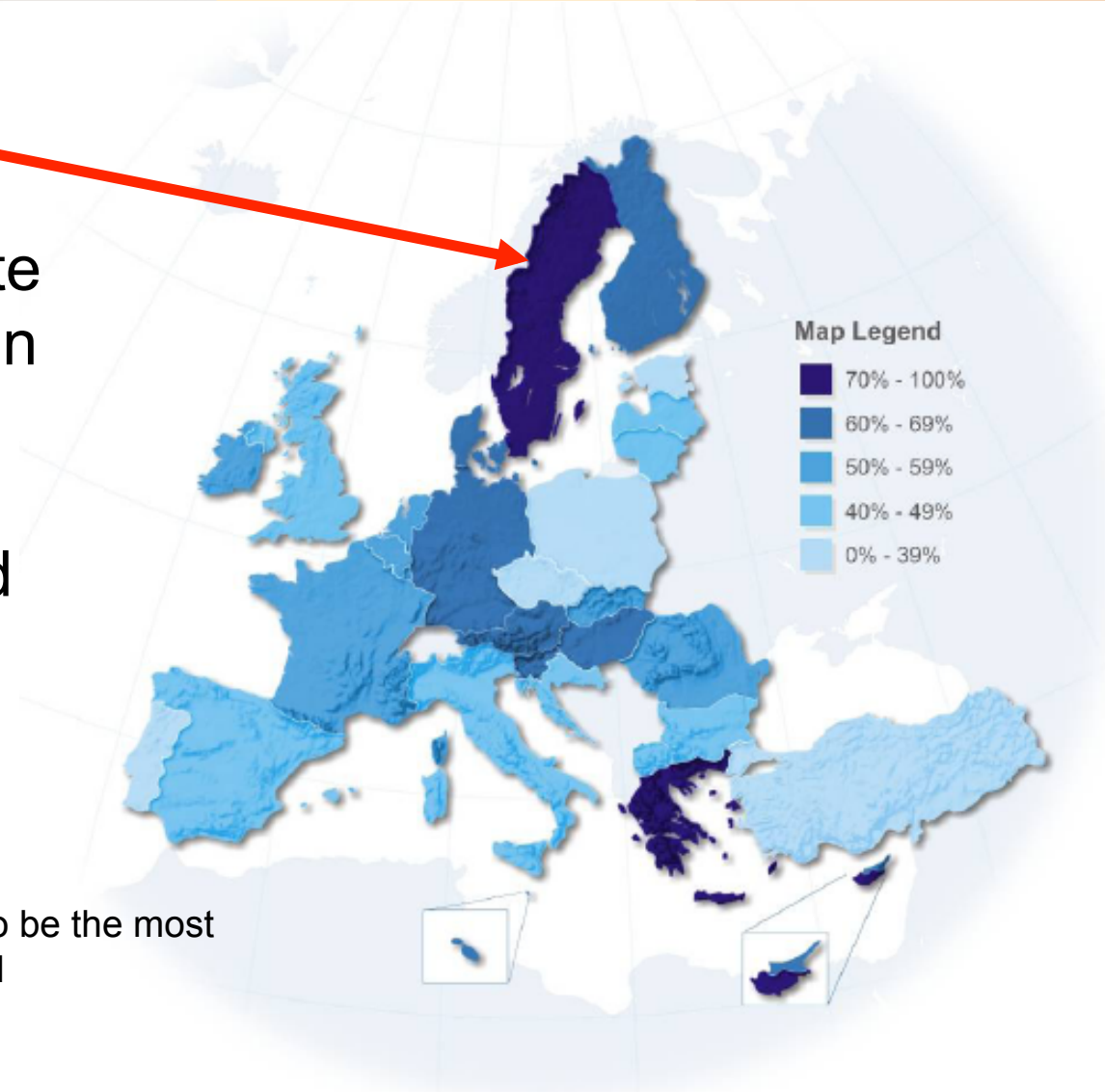
Thinking about the next general election, which three or four of the following issues do you think will be most important to you in deciding who to vote for? Base – All (2,291)

Source: ippr



...but not very deep

The Swedes are amongst the most concerned about climate change in Europe, but in the 2010 elections the Green Party obtained only 7% of the vote and its coalition with the Social Democrats collapsed



Percentage considering climate change to be the most serious problem currently facing the world

Source: Eurobarometer 2010



Why is the politics so difficult?

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- The worst impacts of climate change are:
 - uncertain
 - in the future
 - going to fall first and mostly on other people
- Low carbon transition has costs but does not offer new products or services
- Climate policy as a “compliance” issue
- Driven by pressure groups
 - Green campaigners
 - High-carbon industry lobby
- Politicians nervous of going too far too fast and alienating wider electorate

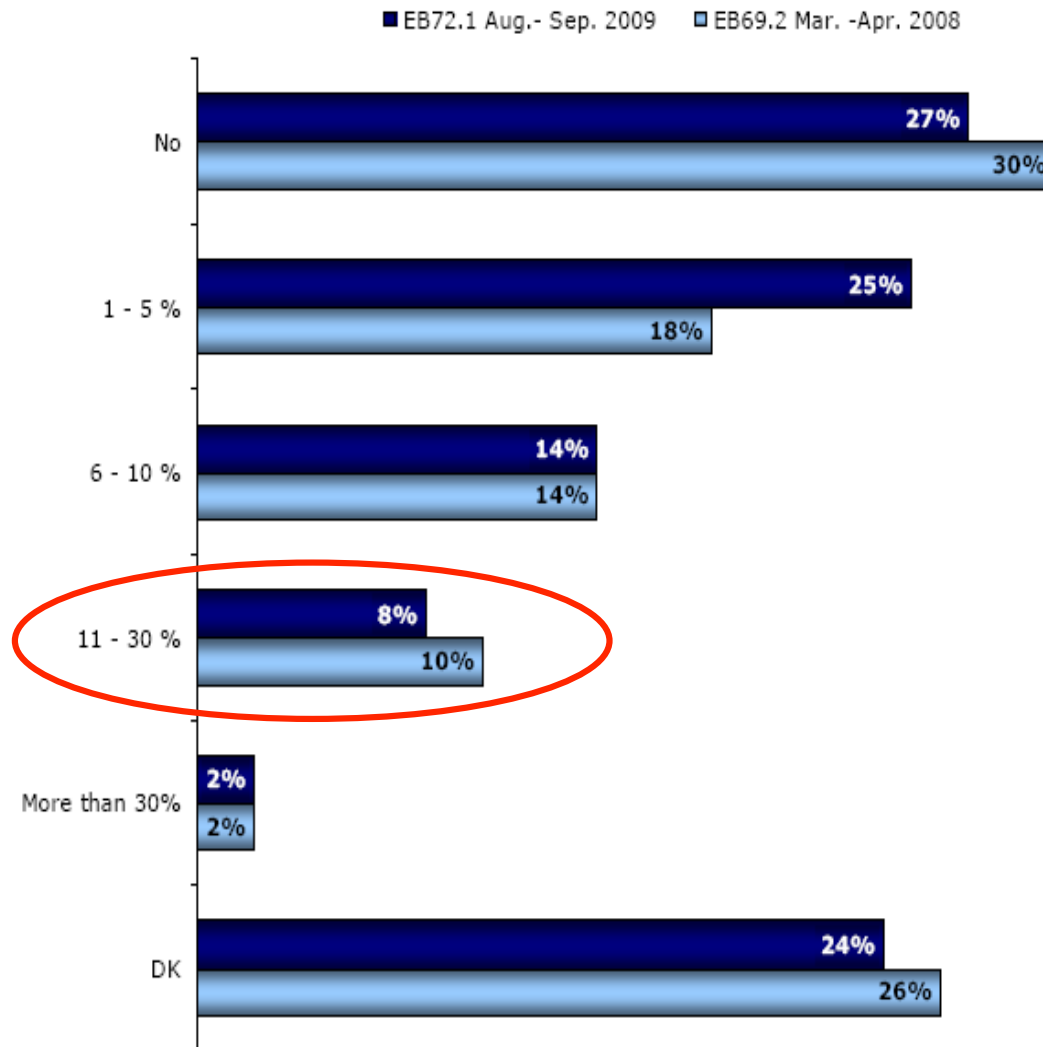


Implications for policy

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- Renewable energy is popular in both USA and EU, whereas carbon pricing is not.
- But even in Europe there is still limited willingness to pay a lot more for low carbon energy

Source: Eurobarometer 2009





Implications for policy

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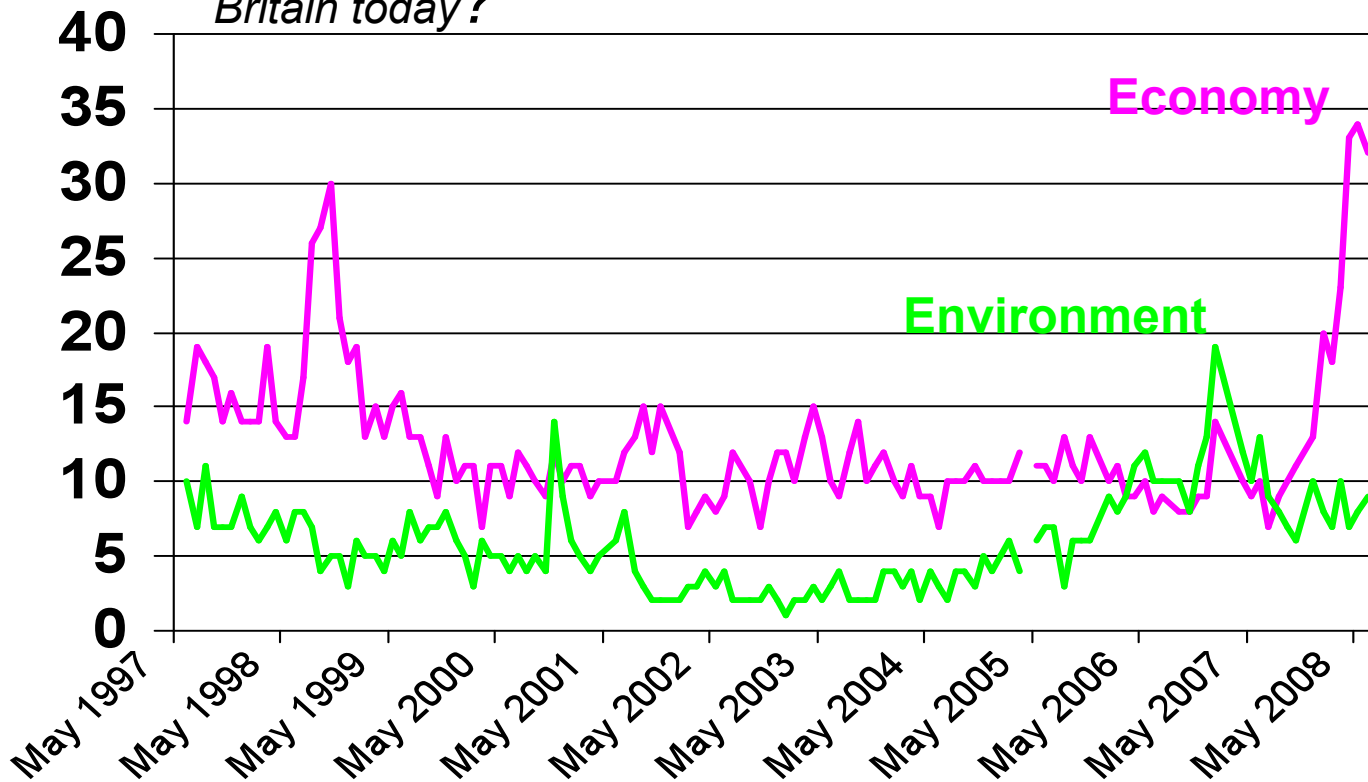
- No strong support in UK for financial transfers to developing countries for adaptation and mitigation
- The historical responsibility argument is unpopular, especially with older and poorer people
- Issues are very similar to those for international aid – perceptions of corruption influence opinion



Will more science change the politics?

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Q *What do you see as the main/other important issues facing Britain today?*



Despite major developments in climate science and huge growth in media coverage, concern about the environment no higher in 2009 than in 1997

Source: Ipsos MORI



Alternative approaches

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- Increase perceived benefits
 - Link to priority issues (jobs/investment, energy security)
 - Tell people more about the human impacts
 - Change social values
- Bring the costs down
 - Prioritise low carbon technology innovation
- Tell a more positive story