

# THE FAIRNESS INSTINCT



## HOW WE CAN HARNESS PUBLIC OPINION TO SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

With chapters by Tom Crompton, Lord Deben, Huw Irranca-Davies,  
Caroline Lucas, Ben Page and Baroness Worthington.

New Research by the Fabian Society

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## About WWF-UK

WWF-UK is committed to developing positive solutions to our most pressing environmental challenges. If we are to stand a chance of reducing our carbon emissions to the levels recommended by the UK's Committee on Climate Change it is clear that there needs to be clear path to decarbonisation, in our energy production, transport, food supply and buildings. Part of this path will require some changes to how we live our everyday lives, and yet, so far, these have been too slow. WWF-UK has supported this work by the Fabians as part of the crucial debate about how best we achieve this.



## About the Fabian Society Environment and Citizenship programme

This Fabian Ideas pamphlet is part of the Fabian Society's Environment and Citizenship programme. The programme looks at environmental policy challenges and the role of citizenship: both democratic consent and personal behavioural change. It considers the interaction between environmental issues, fairness and social justice and how public support can be built for sustainability measures affecting personal consumption. The programme seeks to influence the ideas, policies and arguments of government, political parties and the corporate sector through a series of publications, lectures and seminars.

## About the authors

**Tom Crompton**, Ph.D., is Change Strategist at WWF-UK. For more information on the work of a wide range of non-governmental organisations on cultural values, see [www.valuesandframes.org](http://www.valuesandframes.org).

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## Key points from the Fabian research

This pamphlet examines research undertaken by the Fabian Society which was commissioned and supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The work, through a series of focus groups, explored ways that people's sense of fairness around sustainable consumption and climate change could be used to build public support for behaviour change and sustainability policies.

The full report, *Climate Change and Sustainable Consumption: What do the public think is fair?* by Tim Horton and Natan Doron, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is available as a free download from [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

The key lessons for policymakers and advocates from this work were:

1. Fairness and citizenship can drive support for sustainable consumption – but only if people understand the social context of behaviour.
2. Ensuring everyone co-operates is key for perceptions of fairness – so regulation and enforcement can sometimes be crucial for sustaining public support for behaviour change.

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3. People want to feel that they are co-operating in an endeavour. Even if compulsion is used, people want measures to target the product or activity rather than the individual.
4. People think sustainability policies should be progressive: the greatest burdens of behaviour change should be on those with the greatest ability to reduce their consumption or to finance reductions in their consumption.
5. 'Economic' approaches, and specifically taxation, are often seen to fail the fairness test although they are supported in some contexts.
6. It is important to understand the difference between people liking a policy and supporting a policy because they see it as legitimate.

## Summary of responses to the Fabian research

**Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI:** there is a cycle of public acceptability and most successful examples of behaviour change involve a combination of initiatives. Popular legislation is usually preceded by years of softer interventions like communications campaigns, price mechanisms and more targeted bans. Leaders need to combine subtlety with courage, and to know which is needed when.

**Lord Deben, former Secretary of State for the Environment:** despite the efforts of climate sceptics, the vast majority of people in Britain will accept the need to act on climate change if they feel that the cost is fairly and universally borne. Achieving this involves taxation as well as regulation – but taxation as a means of changing behaviour will only be acceptable if the tax is simple and distinct and its revenues go directly towards a clearly delineated environmental goal.

**Caroline Lucas MP, leader of the Green Party:** our sense of fairness tends to stop at national boundaries and this is undermining our response to the crisis over sustainability. The core problem is that people in the UK are largely unaware of the impact of their decisions on the lives of others in the world. There is a moral imperative to challenge any suggestion that some people are worth more than others; we also need to stress how much stronger we are collectively.

**Baroness Worthington, Labour peer and Founding Director of Sandbag:** the current policy landscape is littered with well-intentioned policies that lead only to confusion in the

minds of industry and the public. We should resist the temptation to keep stacking policy atop of policy and focus on making the minimum number of interventions work. Too much ambition can be as damaging as too little if it makes people doubt the policy will be sustained in the long term.

**Tom Crompton, Change Strategist at WWF-UK:** communication strategies which appeal to 'extrinsic' values – such as the desire for wealth or social status – to promote pro-environmental behaviour are likely to erode public commitment to adopt difficult and significant behavioural change. Those campaigning about climate change must begin to frame their work in ways that move beyond inadequate appeals to short-term self-interest.

**Huw Irranca-Davies MP, Shadow Food and Farming Minister:** politicians and policymakers should be optimistic that people want to take responsibility for carbon emissions and have an appetite for inventive, clever and well-articulated ways to make carbon reduction progressive. But all this needs to be underpinned by fairness and a blindingly clear narrative.

In recent years, 'fairness' has become the politician's weapon of choice. What they mean by it is sometimes oblique however: on the left, fairness is often used as a more palatable proxy for equality; on the right, fairness has been adopted as a symbolic totem that 'we're all in it together' during a period of economic hardship. After every Budget, the coalition government waits with bated breath for the Institute of Fiscal Studies to pronounce on the fairness or otherwise of its public spending cuts, such is the political importance of 'fair shares'. Recently, David Cameron welcomed the passage of the benefit cap through parliament in exactly this language: "It's a fair principle: a family out of work on benefits shouldn't be paid more than the average family in work."

The reason that this territory is so contested is clear: 'fairness' as a concept holds a deep public resonance and getting your policies accepted by the electorate often depends on going with the grain of a powerful popular 'fairness instinct'.

However, one sphere of public policy where governments often shy away from the language of fairness is environmental policy. Here the narrative has been focused on the individual consumer: politicians sell their environmental policies not on the basis of how fair they are, but how financially rewarding or easy to comply with. Whereas voters are left in no doubt

that the deficit places the nation on the cusp of national calamity and that measures to reduce it will involve tangible sacrifice, we are told that we can save the planet simply by changing our light bulbs or insulating our roofs. These things are offered to us as 'win-win': save the planet whilst saving money.

These are the easy pickings of public policy, and are necessary but not sufficient for the challenge we face in getting global emissions down to a manageable level. So how do we get people onside with the changes they are going to have to make? And how do we persuade politicians it won't be electorally toxic to talk about this?

Politicians need not fear public opinion when it comes to designing policy; they just need to understand it. People are prepared to act to change their behaviour and consume more sustainably, but this is dependent on the co-operation of others. People need to feel everyone is pulling their weight. The public may not like the idea of having to make lifestyle changes, but are prepared to do so once they understand the broader social issues at stake. Politicians need to recognise this and use the power of the state to set a wide and credible policy framework that can foster a shared sense of environmental citizenship.

As the new Fabian research explored in this collection makes clear, the type of information that is presented to people and the language it's communicated in – how it's 'framed' – can trigger different sets of values. Appealing to individual self-interest will make people respond self-interestedly; this allows for isolated steps in the right direction but is not a frame that can sustain big changes to people's lifestyles. The research shows that the fairness instinct that politicians already rely on in other policy areas needs to be harnessed to tackle issues of consumption and climate change. Appealing to

people as citizens rather than consumers will provide policy-makers and campaigners a more powerful route to motivating the behaviour change we need.

This is not an argument for turning policymaking into a moral crusade, despite the clear issues of social justice involved in climate change. The argument here is that fairness and reciprocity will be a more *effective* way of changing behaviour than appeals to rational self-interest.

Why? As Tom Crompton explains in chapter five, people motivated by consumerist values tend to be less concerned about social and environmental problems. As Crompton writes, appealing to these values is “likely to erode public commitment to adopt more difficult and significant behavioural change, and to undermine support for government policy where this is predicated on concerns for people living elsewhere, future generations or other species”.

The research approaches the issue of consumption as a ‘co-operation dilemma’ – where doing the rationally self-interested thing (continuing to live a carbon-intensive lifestyle) causes harm to the group as a whole (by contributing to dangerous climate change). But how people view this dilemma is open to influence, depending on how it is presented in the first place. This suggests that there is an opportunity for politicians to change minds. But with this power comes the responsibility not to make things worse: Caroline Lucas notes in chapter three the example of redistributive tax, where public support “is not immovable and when politicians and the media spend time attacking those in need – as during the Victorian age, and more recently from the 1980s onwards – the public’s views can be shifted in the wrong direction.”

Two particularly important conclusions can be drawn from the research, which show how politicians and campaigners



can shift public views in the right direction and sustain support for policies to tackle climate change.

The first is about the issue of scarcity. The focus groups found people tended to step out of narrow individual concerns and focus on wider social context once information had been presented about the limited give we have left in the earth's atmosphere before dangerous climate change becomes unavoidable. This enabled people to engage with the idea that everyone had to work together. This doesn't mean we can just educate people of the facts and sit back as they fall in line – as George Lakoff's *Don't Think of an Elephant* or Drew Westen's *The Political Brain* made clear to US Democrats, facts may be sacred but they're also boring: they don't win arguments on their own. But awareness of resource scarcity triggers concerns about justice and is an important precondition to getting people to think that excessive and unequal consumption is a collective problem that everyone is responsible for dealing with.

The second is the notion of 'free-riding'. If there is one thing that will undermine any collective endeavour to reduce consumption, it's the idea that some individuals can, by nature of their income or inclination, carry on regardless. We see this in public outrage at tax evaders or benefit 'scroungers'. When responding to material about high-emitters, participants in our focus groups often engaged in an environmental version of banker bashing, with groups slipping very easily into the language of responsibility and fairness. In chapter two, Lord Deben reports a similar conclusion from a different constituency, during his time working on an EU directive: "I hoped we could get agreement for a voluntary system that would enable us to reach our recycling target. The reaction from business, small and large, was the

same: we need regulation, otherwise there will be free-riders. And they hated free-riders.”

Throughout the discussion groups, participants naturally evoked wartime phraseology when considering the duty to take on personal burdens. Older participants gave a sense of something lost – that today’s consumer generation were profligate with money and disposable goods, and people would no longer ‘make do and mend.’ Analogies between climate change and war are

often made, but the point that emerges from the research is a little more subtle. Wartime makes obvious the need for people to make sacrifices for the greater good; such conditions do not presently exist when it comes to climate change, even if they one day might (by which time it will be too late to do anything about it, what Anthony

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*The research suggests that inculcating a strong sense of solidarity and collective responsibility is not only crucial for policy success, but possible if approached in a new way*

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Giddens calls ‘Giddens’s paradox’). But the research suggests that inculcating a strong sense of solidarity and collective responsibility is not only crucial for policy success, but possible if approached in a new way.

Whether to campaign on ‘hope’ or ‘fear’ is a key strategic question, with the left instinctively inclined to ‘the hopey changey thing’ and the right more comfortable pushing national or personal security concerns. What is important in this instance is a consistent message, to alleviate the current cognitive dissonance created by the suggestion you can plausibly fend off a pending global catastrophe armed with only a smart meter. Technological solutions and personal behaviour

changes are often pitted against each other, whereas the research shows that they are probably going to have to work together in order to create the shared sense of endeavour needed to sustain the collective will to act. All sides have to add up to bring the public into the equation.

This requires a coalition of government, campaigners, media and business. Government needs to recognise that so-called 'nudges' – attempts to make it easier for people make virtuous choices – while useful, don't go far enough on their own. What is required is a framework that binds everyone in and fosters a sense of environmental citizenship, and gives people the confidence that if they act, others will act too. Huw Irranca-Davies suggests in chapter six that sometimes policy should be "less about 'nudging', more about 'pushing' 'kicking' and 'shoving'." Most people now accept that Labour was too quick in government to look for state solutions to problems that would have been better dealt with elsewhere. But in the ongoing debate about the legitimate use of state power, the research makes clear this is an area where government has to take a strong lead.

Prime ministers get into trouble when they make bold claims about how they anticipate their administrations will be perceived. Tony Blair was haunted by his declaration his government would be 'whiter than white'. Such statements set governments up for a fall, raising unrealistic expectations that can only undermine public trust when they are inevitably unmet. David Cameron wanted to be greener than green, but his aspiration to lead the 'greenest government ever' feels increasingly incredible, an ambition sacrificed on the altar of austerity. No real attempt has been made to show you can be green in a recovery; politicians of all parties have decided that action on the environment is incompatible with the rock-ribbed politics of recession. Baroness Worthington

worries in chapter four we will “miss the opportunity for investment in new, cleaner infrastructure to contribute to a return to growth for the economy as a whole.”

But allowing the environment to yo-yo in and out of the political spotlight depending on the state of the public finances is hugely damaging to long-term policy success, and not just because of the timescales required for policies to have any impact: it undermines public will, and makes tackling climate change feel optional rather than compulsory. In future years, will David Cameron’s (in)famous ‘hug-a-husky’ moment be of most interest to students of political branding or be seen as a real shift in the emphasis of public life? Let’s hope it’s the latter: all politicians need to maintain the trust of people that their commitment to the environment goes beyond the cosmetic. The Fabian research shows bold action need not be seen as a political hand grenade if policymakers and campaigners engage with the evidence about what the public really thinks in order to frame arguments and develop policies.



*This research examines how people's sense of fairness about sustainable consumption and climate change can build support for behaviour change and sustainability policies.*

Climate change and sustainable consumption involve huge issues of justice and fairness. Despite this, prevailing approaches to motivating sustainable consumption both by government and non-governmental organisations rarely talk about these issues of justice and fairness – indeed, they often actively avoid them. Instead, the dominant approach is to address behaviour within a ‘consumer’ paradigm. The result is that current behaviour-change strategies tend to be quite ‘individualised’, often focusing on the choices individuals make in isolation, and they seek to appeal primarily to self-interested concerns, such as financial self-interest.

But focusing solely on self-interested motives precludes the opportunity to appeal to other motives that may be more effective. Indeed, this reluctance to talk about fairness in behaviour-change strategies could be considered surprising given a variety of evidence suggesting beliefs about fairness can be powerful drivers of pro-social behaviours. There are numerous areas of life where citizens routinely comply with cooperative schemes that require them to bear burdens or make sacrifices – such as obeying laws, paying taxes and (in

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some countries) doing national military service – and where they are even willing to have such co-operation enforced. Evidence suggests that people are co-operating in these contexts not because they enjoy it, but because they recognise the collective benefits achieved through the scheme (or the harms avoided) and because they think it is *fair* to co-operate (and unfair to free-ride).

This evidence suggests that encouraging people to look at sustainable consumption and climate change in terms of fairness could help build public support for behaviour change and sustainability policies.

### **Fairness can drive support for sustainable consumption – but only if people understand the social context of behaviour**

The research found that most participants did naturally look at consumption and emissions in normative terms when presented with information about the social and environmental context of consumption – though many of them preferred the language of ‘responsible’ and ‘irresponsible’ to ‘fair’ and ‘unfair’. Most participants had an intuitive notion of *excessive* consumption (for example, drawing distinctions between ‘necessary’ and ‘wasteful’ behaviours, or between ‘necessary’ and ‘luxury’ behaviours), and most participants viewed both excessive consumption and widely unequal levels of consumption as problems.

*People who are on higher incomes and are polluting are acting socially irresponsibly and therefore in a sense being unfair to their fellow citizens*

*(Male, Glasgow)*

In addition to information about emissions from personal consumption and information about the impacts of climate

change, the key bit of information that seemed to trigger these fairness instincts was a notion of *resource scarcity* (in this context, limitations in the earth's capacity to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> while avoiding dangerous climate change). Participants tended to feel excessive consumption and unequal consumption were problems in the context of resource scarcity, but not otherwise. This makes sense as it is the notion of scarcity that allows people to understand an environmental resource as a *rival* good, and to connect personal behaviour (over-consumption) with harmful social consequences (resource depletion). Indeed, for some of our participants, the idea of scarcity led explicitly to a notion of 'fair shares' of resources.

*If you give everybody ten pounds' worth [of emissions] each, or whatever, and it's up to them how they use it, that's better than me going off and using everybody else's ten pounds' worth... It isn't fair – just because I'm rich and I can afford to, like, leave my telly on for a week – well, nicking your share of it doesn't seem fair*

*(Female, Coventry)*

### **A concern with others' behaviour**

Crucially, it was often a focus on the behaviour of others that brought this fairness dimension to life for participants. When the earth's absorptive capacity for CO<sub>2</sub> was seen as scarce, participants generally viewed excessive CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as 'free-riding' – and they often expressed concern about the prospect of other people free-riding.

*I think for self-gratification I'd be happy to know I've done my bit, but I'd be dead annoyed to know that my next door neighbour didn't try*

*(Male, Central London)*



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So the groups suggest that a desire to 'crack down' on what is perceived to be free-riding and unfair consumption by others can be a powerful source of support for sustainability policies and for behaviour change. This was reflected in the fact that participants supported compulsion over voluntarism in many scenarios. While there was no particular desire among our participants to change their behaviour, and while no-one especially liked the idea of regulation in itself, there was nevertheless a strong feeling that if households were going to have to make sacrifices in order to reduce consumption, then everyone should be required to do so. This has implications for policy: while 'nudging' techniques might be effective at influencing individual behaviour, evidence suggests it is hard to sustain co-operation when others are seen to be free-riding.

*Everyone's main concern is that it has got to be one rule, it has got to be one rule for everybody*

*(Female, Coventry)*

### **The basis of these views about fairness**

In this context, participants viewed free-riding as unfair or wrong for several different reasons. One was an issue of causing environmental harm: over-consumption made it more likely we would suffer dangerous climate change. A second reason was an unequal distribution of burdens: if we did reduce our carbon emissions to avoid dangerous climate change, then over-consumption by some would mean others would have to reduce their consumption even further to compensate. A further issue was that people viewed free-riding as disrespectful, quite aside from the inequities or harms it caused.

However, while participants viewed the potential impacts of dangerous climate change as very bad and serious, there were two key factors that reduced the role these impacts played in participants' reasoning about fairness. First, participants found it hard to 'relate' to information about the most severe potential climate impacts: they reported a sense of 'detachment' due to the large-scale nature, temporal distance, complex causes and uncertainty of these impacts. Second, the difficulties of enforcing collective action internationally made it hard for participants to view the challenge of sustainable consumption in a global context in the same way as more standard dilemmas involving the consumption of 'common-pool resources' within a domestic community.

For this reason, it tended to be less notions of environmental harm that motivated support for sustainable consumption than the idea of

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*While 'nudging' techniques might be effective at influencing individual behaviour, evidence suggests it is hard to sustain co-operation when others are seen to be free-riding*

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an unequal distribution of burdens – specifically, the unfairness of widely unequal consumption in the context of collective efforts to reduce emissions. Importantly, this could be considered simply within a domestic context: if the UK government had committed to reduce carbon emissions as part of some international framework, then participants wanted to ensure that the burden of reducing household emissions would be fairly shared *within* the UK. This suggests that the problems of co-ordinating and enforcing international action need not be a barrier to public support for behaviour change and sustainability policies.

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This was seen strongly in participants' justification of compulsion: while some justified compulsion in terms of preventing climate change, for most it was driven by a desire to prevent unfair free-riding. And while the former reason was susceptible to concerns about enforcing international action on climate change ("we can't stop climate change unless America and China take part too"), the latter could be applied purely within a UK context ("if the government is getting me to change my behaviour, they should be doing that across society").

### **A concern with progressivity**

Participants saw the progressivity of policies to reduce consumption as key to ensuring fairness. They believed that everyone should be subject to the same requirements, but that the greatest burden for reducing consumption should fall either on those with the greatest ability to reduce their consumption (high consumers with lots of non-essential consumption) or on those with the greatest ability to pay for reductions in their consumption (high-income

households). Here, taxation was rejected by many participants as unfair as they felt it would impose a greater proportionate burden on those with lower incomes. They also felt that those on high incomes would simply be able to accommodate the extra costs without changing behaviour.

*I think it's unfair on pensioners and students because they're not in a position to pay. If you're on low income you haven't got the ability to make a choice, which is different to if you've got the money and you decide*

*(Female, Barnet)*

Participants were also sensitive to the fact that some households had specific requirements that should be accommodated within any framework to reduce consumption – for example, those with medical conditions requiring high energy use or those with large families. They were also sensitive to households' capability to adjust their behaviours; many participants commented that low-income or disadvantaged households would face particular barriers to behaviour change.

*Well, the thing is, richer people can afford to have treble glazing. Poorer people, who have those landlords, I mean, forget it – they're not going to put treble glazing in any windows. My landlord isn't going to, so your heat loss is so much more and it's hugely poorer people who are going to be living in those sorts of conditions*

*(Female, Central London)*

While it seems that, in some circumstances, non-participation by some will be seen as free-riding and undermine cooperative instincts, it also seems that people are prepared to recognise a range of legitimate exceptions for those facing disadvantage or other barriers to behaviour change.

### **Conclusion**

There is an important lesson here about linking the argument for behaviour change to the actual reasons why we want to prevent climate change. Government approaches to behaviour change often bypass these concerns and are generally aimed at addressing people as consumers and appealing to self-interest. However, these focus groups show that fairness issues can be an important factor in building support for action.

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It should be noted that, despite the strong support expressed for behaviour change and environmental policies during the focus groups, there was no great *desire* to change behaviour among participants – certainly no sense that people would enjoy having to make lifestyle changes. This is not inconsistent, but testament to an important distinction: that between liking a policy on the one hand and supporting a policy because you think it is necessary and legitimate on the other. The way in which the UK and many other countries have created widespread public acceptance of, and compliance with, frameworks like tax systems and speed limits is not by trying to make paying tax or driving slower to seem attractive, but by ensuring people understand the broader social issues at stake and see the behavioural requirements as necessary and legitimate. Similarly, attempts by government, industry and NGOs to encourage behaviour change, or to build support for measures to ensure sustainable consumption, may well be more effective if they seek to generate a sense of public legitimacy.

*Well, I wouldn't like doing it. I would have to make changes that I wouldn't like, but I feel that it's necessary and it seems fair to me*  
(Female, Glasgow)

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### ***About the project***

*The research comprised:*

- *an analysis of fairness and obligation in the consumption of common-pool resources, along with a brief literature review of public attitudes and behaviour in such contexts;*

- *eight three-hour deliberative focus groups, undertaken between November 2010 and February 2011 in six locations around the UK. Participants were aged between 18 and 70, split equally between male and female, and drawn from the full range of socio-economic groups; hardened climate sceptics and committed green activists were filtered out to ensure we were working with those most relevant to the project objectives.*

*The research was originally published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as part of a programme of work on climate change and social justice, which seeks to ensure that people or places facing poverty and disadvantage are not disproportionately affected by climate change, or by policy or practice responses to it.*

*See [www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice](http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice)*

*The full report, 'Climate change and sustainable consumption: What do the public think is fair?', by Tim Horton and Natan Doron, is available as a free download from [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk).*



## RESPONSES

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## 1. Public Acceptance is a Process Not a State

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Ben Page

*The research found that it is important to understand the difference between people liking a policy and supporting a policy because they see it as legitimate.*

*Ben Page writes that there is a cycle of public acceptability and most successful examples of behaviour change involve a combination of initiatives. Popular legislation is usually preceded by years of softer interventions like communications campaigns, price mechanisms and more targeted bans. Leaders need to combine subtlety with courage, and to know which is needed when.*

If one accepts what most scientists believe, that climate change is a real and present danger – and is caused by man-made emissions – then one needs billions of people to change their habits. What is most likely to make this happen in parliamentary democracies where, in theory at least, government has to have the consent of the governed to make change happen?

My view, based on extensive polling and original research, is that we need strategies that use a careful mixture of targeted activities. Assuming that we can get to the level of change required by any *single* approach – like incentives – is hopelessly optimistic. Ipsos MORI analysis suggests that government will need to use a five strand approach:

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1. **Informing** people ‘why’ they need to change their behavior and what the benefits are of, for example, emitting less carbon
2. **Enabling** changes in consumption through policy, such as travel
3. **Incentives** – making it cheaper to pollute less and easier to save money on energy consumption, for example through tax breaks for green energy
4. **Enforcement** – measures including fines for polluting or banning of CFCs

And coupled to the four strands, a fifth: ‘**influence**’. ‘Nudge’ theory, or ‘behavioural economics’, has been widely discussed over the last five or six years – the idea, popularised by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, that it is possible to influence public behaviour simply by modifying the environment in which people conduct their actions and make their decisions. This is what Thaler and Sunstein call the “choice architecture” of behaviour. Such modifications might range from changing the wording of a letter (in order to elicit better responses – as the UK government is now doing on tax returns) to painting road markings closer together before a bend (to get drivers to slow down). These are subtle alterations, aimed at encouraging more desirable behaviour without coercing the individual.

Not that behavioural economics is anything new: Daniel Kahneman received a Nobel prize for his pioneering work in the area, which he began in the 1970s. Kahneman summarises behaviour change very simply, as addressing one key question: *‘if we want people to change, how do we*

*make it easy?*' However, this is not just about making something economically easy, but also psychologically so. Given the public policy context of the debt crisis, unaffordable public services, escalating health costs, insufficient saving to support ourselves in old age, as well as environmental threat, it is no surprise that behaviour change has become a mainstream discussion for governments around the world.

Of course, governments have always sought to influence the behaviour of their citizens – but traditionally policymakers have used legislation, regulation, or a financial imperative, such as taxation, in an attempt to change public behaviour. This approach – sometimes known as 'shoving' – can be characterised as a more obviously interventionist and paternalist approach than nudging.

For those concerned with changing behaviour, the choice between shoving and nudging is often positioned as a no-brainer:

*...[nudging] proposes a set of seemingly simple, low cost solutions that do not require legislation and can be applied to a wide array of problems arising from our behaviour.<sup>1</sup>*

At the same time, most successful examples of behaviour change involve a combination of initiatives. Drink driving provides a case study of how both shoves of legislation and the nudges of communication campaigns have, as a Cabinet Office/Institute for Government report said, "combined to change behaviour quite significantly" over a period of two decades.<sup>2</sup>

Climate change is another area where almost certainly government will need hefty shoves and nudges. The public generally acknowledge that climate change is happening,

and will generally say they support action on it. However, in our surveys few feel they themselves can have much impact, and most people massively over-state their willingness to act.

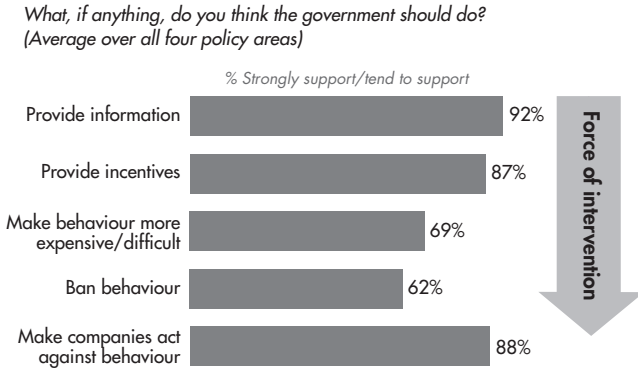
### **Broad support for behaviour change**

We asked over 20,000 citizens across the world about their attitudes to government intervention of various types, and there is a lot of common ground with the messages of the Fabian focus groups. One of the more striking findings is the high levels of *stated* support for behaviour change policies across the 24 nations. There is exceptionally strong public support for being provided with information about how to change their behaviour, such as how to eat more healthily or how best to save for retirement: an average of 92 per cent support these policies. But more surprisingly, perhaps, an average of six in ten individuals in the 24 countries polled (62 per cent) also approve of legislation that prohibits the behaviour altogether, such as outright bans on unhealthy foods. It's the same with climate change – the public often feels that as an individual one can do relatively little (4 per cent think they can in one study), and that government should take responsibility (65 per cent) – and *de facto* – force individuals to all do something.

Whereas we generally see higher support for partially-restrictive legislation than for outright bans, in some cases we find the opposite trend, and the environment is one of them. Fewer support making it more expensive to use environmentally unsustainable products (63 per cent) than approve of the simple banning of such products (68 per cent). Some aspects of this pattern seem straightforward to explain: measures which include an increased cost for people are particularly unattractive, and they may marginally prefer having the option of acting 'badly' taken away rather than be penalised by having to pay more.

## Public Acceptance is a Process Not a State

Figure 1: There is support for intervention across the board, although people are warier of decisive legislation



Source: Ipsos Mori

Base: c.500–1,000 residents aged 16–64 (18–64 in the US and Canada) in each country  
November 2010

It is another confirmation that for government to make a difference, hoping that nudges or even incentives will be enough on their own is likely to be wrong. Dealing with the behaviour changes required to reduce carbon emissions substantially will need all the levers government can muster.

Despite the relatively high levels of stated support for behaviour change interventions, there is still a significant reaction against a ‘nanny state’ in the UK and elsewhere. Across all the areas we asked about – diet, retirement saving, sustainable living and smoking – around half believed government should ‘not get involved’ in people’s decisions about how to behave.

This contrast between support for intervention and dislike of government interference is very stark and it seems

unlikely to be driven by the complexity of the questions or concepts themselves. Hence a second, possibly more persuasive explanation is that this is a striking example of 'cognitive polyphasia,' which is where people can hold two opposing views about an issue, without them being conscious of the contradiction or suffering from any dissonance. The finding that 36 per cent of people agree both that government shouldn't get involved in what people save for retirement and that the government should change the law so that everyone has to enrol in a pension makes the point very clearly.

We see this phenomenon a lot across our qualitative and quantitative studies, and it tends to be most prevalent, firstly, where we are looking at issues people don't normally give a lot of active thought to (few spontaneously see climate change as a major threat – only doing so on reflection), and secondly where there are emotional responses that may lead to different conclusions than rational responses (which includes anything related to 'government' intervention for many people). This reflects psychology's theory of dual processes, recently popularised by Kahnemann's discussion of 'fast' (System 1) and 'slow' (System 2) thinking, which in turn result in either more intuitive or more reflective responses.<sup>3</sup>

We frequently observe this dynamic in deliberative workshops when considering issues of government intervention in citizen behaviour. Even over the course of a short discussion an initial, automatic response tends to be tempered through deliberation and debate, leading to a more reflective, and often different, response. This might seem to suggest that if people are not really sure what they think, and can be swayed by a few hours in a workshop, then public acceptability cannot really matter. Or, as the Fabian

research concludes, that public opinion is open to influence by politicians.

There are seemingly plenty of examples where bold moves by government that go against the grain of public opinion have been successful, not just in terms of affecting the behaviour, but also in shifting public views of acceptability. To take just one example, opinion tracking studies on public space smoking bans in countries such as the UK and Ireland show opposition declining significantly as people experience the benefits.

However, this misses the point: these smoking bans were preceded by years of softer interventions from communications campaigns, price mechanisms, more targeted bans on smoking on transport, seeing public space bans introduced in other countries and so on (in other words all the classic informing, enabling, incentivising and enforcing actions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter).

There are in fact a number of studies that show a 'cycle of public acceptability', where public support changes significantly before, during and after any intervention. In particular, the increased acceptance of interventions *after* their introduction can be explained in a number of ways. In a study of opinion on the introduction of congestion charging in Stockholm, for example, explanations for increased acceptance included the realisation that the benefits were greater than anticipated and the fact that people have a tendency to 'accept the inevitable,' since it takes significant energy to maintain their opposition. This acceptance is

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*A number of studies that show a 'cycle of public acceptability', where public support changes significantly before, during and after any intervention*

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accommodated through a corresponding shift in the underlying belief system of the individual that had previously made them reluctant to lose what they saw as a 'free good' (travel into the city).

So it is true, as a recent House of Lords report on behaviour change noted, that "a measure which does not have public support is, in general, less likely to succeed." But this also implies acceptability is absolutely not the whole story: public acceptance is a process rather than a state.

Considering whether an intervention has 'passed the public acceptability test' potentially confuses the likely effectiveness of an intervention with the possible political cost of introducing unpopular measures. That's not to say that political considerations are unimportant. In particular, when referendums are required or elections are likely to be heavily influenced by the issue, acceptability and political considerations are clearly linked. For example, a comparison of the introduction of congestion charging in four cities across Europe points to the importance of where people were in the 'acceptability cycle' when key elections and referendums happened.<sup>4</sup> In these instances, politicians and governments need to be aware of the low points in the public acceptability cycle, which tend to be when the idea is first mooted, or just before implementation. However, in most cases when considering the actual likely success of any intervention, a better concept is how 'prepared' the public are for it. This will include acceptability of the action, but also further measures such as recognition of the issue, understanding of the potential benefits of dealing with it, and belief in the effectiveness of the actual measure proposed. As our analysis has shown, these need to be measured carefully and with a close understanding, not just of the issue itself, but also of the cultural context of the people affected.

A clear message here is that there are no magic bullets or single levers to pull that will result in a desired change in a specific behaviour. But by drawing on a broader notion of public preparedness, that understands public acceptability as part of a cycle of change and not simply as a static indicator of support, politicians and policymakers can enrich their understanding and increase the effectiveness of behaviour change interventions. Leaders need to combine subtlety with courage, and know which is needed when. This is where understanding what the public really think is vital.

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### Footnotes

- 1 Marteau et al. (2011) *Judging nudging: can nudging improve population health?* *BMJ* 2011; 342:d228
- 2 Dolan, P., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., King, D. and Vlaev, I. (2010) *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy*. Cabinet Office/Institute for Government: p.13.
- 3 Lewis, M. (2011) *The King of Human Error*, Vanity Fair <http://www.vanityfair.com/business/features/2011/12/michael-lewis-201112.print>, accessed 14.11.2011.
- 4 International Transport Forum (2011) *Public Acceptability of Sustainable Transport Measures: A Review of the Literature* – <http://www.internationaltransportforum.org/jtrc/DiscussionPapers/DP201120.pdf>



## 2. Where the Money Goes

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Lord Deben

*The research found that ensuring everyone co-operates is key for perceptions of fairness – so regulation and enforcement can sometimes be crucial for sustaining public support for behaviour change.*

*Lord Deben writes that despite the efforts of climate sceptics, the vast majority of people in Britain will accept the need to act on climate change if they feel that the cost is fairly and universally borne. Achieving this involves taxation as well as regulation – but taxation as a means of changing behaviour will only be acceptable if the tax is simple and distinct and its revenues go directly towards a clearly delineated environmental goal.*

The often unspoken factor in the climate change debate is social justice. Curiously, it is often the deniers who have understood that more clearly than the rest. They have seen that acceptance of the fact of climate disruption not only demands a global solution but also, that that solution does not permit a world in which the rich continue to consume and emit so disproportionately. No wonder the equation most hated by US deniers is that America, with only 4 per cent of the world's population, produces 25 per cent of the world's emissions. The fundamental concern of the neocons in the US and their camp-followers in the UK, is that combating climate change inevitably removes privilege and enforces greater

equity. It is that inevitability that makes it essential that they deny the premise in order to avoid the outcome. So, behind all their rhetoric about economic cost and the need for growth, the real driver is their determination to keep and extend a privileged lifestyle which would otherwise have to be shared.

They are aided in this analysis by the more extreme of green campaigners, whose penchant for misery is unbounded. Their puritan belief that we would all be better off colder and less well fed fuels the proposition that a low-carbon future will mean considerable and extensive self-denial. From both ends, we, who seek to convince of the need for urgent and sustained action to stem climate change, are assaulted by those who believe that it will inevitably lead to a much more restricted lifestyle for the fortunate.'

Such a diagnosis is, of course, entirely unfounded, but it will only remain so if we move fast and effectively to stem the speed of climate change. The measures that we have to take are difficult and will be controversial. We need therefore to consider what will both work and be acceptable. There are some fundamental realities that have to be faced.

First, the concept of fairness is integral to any solution to the problem of climate change. Lifestyles have to change, even if the changes are nothing like as painful as the extremists paint. Change is always hard and usually resented. If it can be presented as unfair then even those actions that are obviously necessary can be opposed. In the current economic crisis, this mechanism is clearly displayed. Protesters don't often deny the need for fiscal retrenchment; they simply propose that the government's cuts are unfair and should fall on others. It is the natural human response – legitimate if true, destructive if contrived.

We, therefore, have to learn that measures to reduce emissions will only be acceptable if they are seen to be fair. So it is

axiomatic that the rich, who have benefitted from pollution, must pay the price and the poor, who have been denied those benefits, must share in the success. I am not suggesting that the world that emerges will be without its inequalities. It will not be Utopia but it will have shared resources more fairly and it will not have reinforced today's intolerable injustice.

That, in itself, is a huge challenge to all of us in the developed world – because we are all rich. Our public services, lack of corruption, education, stability, state health and welfare, and pervasive charities all mean that the least well off are rich in the context of the real poor in developing countries. Yet, at home, the concept of fairness is never expressed in that international context. Combating climate change may be set within a global framework but the fairness of individual measures is seen in the context of the nation. I compare the cost of taxation and regulation as it applies to me. I compare it with others in my own society. I don't jump to reminding myself of how fortunate I am as compared with a rural Bangladeshi. If I feel penalised or unfairly treated as compared with bankers or company directors, then I will not be willing to bear burdens, even if I know them in principle to be necessary burdens and recognise that I am much better off than most people in the world. Some kind of rough equity must be present if I am to co-operate willingly.

This is true even if I resent the whole thing. There are many who object to all sorts of uses of taxation but who continue to pay because, overall, they accept the basis upon which it is levied. The evidence is that – and the Fabian research adds to this – despite the efforts of climate sceptics, the vast majority of people in Britain will accept the need to act on climate change if they feel that the cost is fairly and universally borne.

That is of course the other caveat. Fairness is not just tied to the idea that the burden should be equitably distributed. It

is also very much linked with the concept that everyone should be involved. Free-riders are destructive of the desire to see us all in this together. The universality of the threat of climate change is accepted and so therefore is the belief that we should all be doing our bit.

On the international scene, awakening this concern has been a powerful tool in the hands of the sceptics. When Australia's Julia Gillard introduced her very modest emission taxation measures, the opposition of the populist Liberal-Country party was supported by the very general feeling that no-one else was doing anything. There had to be huge efforts to express the amount that China, the EU, the UK, and many developing countries were achieving before this damaging impression was even partially overcome.

However, such action on the wider international level does not address the internal concerns. People in Britain want to feel that we are all in the same boat. Tuition fees are much more likely to be controversial if taxpayers in England understand that they are supporting students in Scotland who don't pay them, while their children in English universities are being stung. Similarly, faced with additional costs to counter climate change, British taxpayers want to know that there are no exceptions. It's not so much the noble 'we are all in this together', it's the resigned 'we're all in the same boat'.

This is a real issue for de-regulatory governments. I remember trying to introduce the arrangements for the EU 'Packaging Directive' some fifteen years ago. Its structure had been designed by the British, and I hoped we could get agreement for a voluntary system that would enable us to reach our recycling target. The reaction from business, small and large, was the same: we need regulation, otherwise there will be free-riders. And they hated free-riders. That's the reason for our present successful structure which, although

the lightest in Europe, is compulsory, simply in order that there shall be no free-riders.

So, as the Fabian research highlights, fairness and universality are the necessary preconditions for successful climate change legislation. More difficult to fathom is the public's attitude to the methods by which that universality should be enforced. Do we drive behaviour by taxation or enforce it by regulation? Although the real answer is 'both...and' rather than 'either...or', we know that the usual response from the public is to prefer regulation – which they perceive as having a lesser cost implication than taxation. They also see it as fairer because many are too rich to bother about the tax hikes and in any case the poor are affected proportionately more by the extra pressures.

Even more important is that taxation reawakens discussion as to where the money is to go.

People assume that green taxes are mere excuses. It's all to put more money into George Osborne's coffers. The Treasury's reactionary opposition to hypothecation makes this even more believable a response. Indeed, it was one of the key successes of the original landfill tax to use hypothecation to justify taxation. People knew that many of the receipts from this tax could go to environmental ends and it was therefore widely accepted as a truly green tax. However, it took the personal determination of Ken Clarke to achieve that end and, sadly, the arrival of Gordon Brown enabled the Treasury largely to reclaim its territory. As a result none of the later 'green taxes' have been recognised as such because the receipts have all ended up in the Treasury's general funds.

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*Faced with additional costs to counter climate change, British taxpayers want to know that there are no exceptions*

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Taxation as a means of changing behaviour will only be acceptable if the tax is simple and distinct and its revenues go directly towards a clearly delineated environmental goal. If the commuter pays their £5 congestion charge and sees the tramway being built beside the traffic-ridden road on which they are driving, the point is made and acceptance, and sometimes even support, is achieved.

It is also true that a taxation model can be acceptable if it is seen to be a means of including costs which are proper for the producer and consumer to pay instead of their being left for the general taxpayer or ratepayer to pick up. The producer responsibility levies are a case in point. Charging packagers and retailers to ensure recycling is pretty defensible if people understand that otherwise their local councils would have to use ratepayers money to do it. Internalising costs, as long as it is properly explained, is accepted as fair. The people who produce, sell, and use packaging, batteries, or electronic goods, are seen to pay the full cost of them and don't leave it to others to pick up the bill. Again transparency, competitiveness, and probity are essential.

However, failing hypothecation or the internalising of real costs, the public would prefer regulation. The *Daily Mail* will continue to campaign against it and to blame the EU, usually erroneously, but people remain less opposed to sensible rules than to the idea of taxation driving behavioural change. They think regulation is fairer and more universal. Mandating energy standards, raising building regulations to make new-build carbon neutral, enforcing ever tougher efficiency on the internal combustion engine, phasing out water-wasting loos and white goods – all these are the subject of general acceptance. Even the properly managed levies on fossil fuels to accommodate renewables can be achieved with public consent if seen in the context of energy security as well as climate change.

We need not be downcast at the difficulties of using regulation and even taxation because the evidence, borne out in the work this pamphlet discusses, is that people will accept what is properly explained. If we leave it to UKIP and the *Sunday Telegraph's* Christopher Booker to manipulate and distort the truth, then we have only ourselves to blame if the public rebels. Better regulation is vital, but better expressed and better explained regulation is just as important. There is no more effective way of explaining such regulation than the hypothecation of the associated costs, levies, and taxes. Sadly, the Treasury is not yet convinced.



### 3. Building Solidarity at Home and Abroad

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Caroline Lucas

*The research found that fairness and citizenship can drive support for sustainable consumption – but only if people understand the social context of behaviour.*

*Caroline Lucas writes that our sense of fairness tends to stop at national boundaries and this is undermining our response to the crisis over sustainability. The core problem is that people in the UK are largely unaware of the impact of their decisions on the lives of others in the world. There is a moral imperative to challenge any suggestion that some people are worth more than others; we also need to stress how much stronger we are collectively.*

Fairness is so often on the lips of politicians because it matters so much to people. We all want to live in a society in which what you get out is related to what you put in; but which also recognizes that not everyone starts with the same advantages or can make an equal contribution.

There's inevitably a tension between opportunity and equality, but there's also broad consensus that we should try and strike the right balance – and that current society is manifestly unfair. We may disagree about exactly how much senior managers in large companies should be paid, yet very few people argue it should be fifteen, thirty or even a hundred times that of the lowest paid.

Suggesting that someone's worth is only a hundredth that of another human not only offends against our sense of social justice, it comes close to denying our shared humanity.

Yet substitute 'world' for 'society' and views seem to shift. Many people seem content to live in a world which by any measure is vastly unfair. We have millions of people living on a dollar a day in countries with vast natural wealth. We have millions working on poverty wages in appalling conditions to produce goods that customers in the developed world will soon tire of and throw away.

Inequality in disease, nutrition and life expectancy are stark. With life expectancy in some countries double that in others, we are a long way from living in a 'fair' world. Yet this raw inequality is something that we as a country seem prepared to tolerate.

Those of us who have worked in international development are sharply aware of this difference in attitudes. People in Britain are often extremely generous in providing help to those in other countries affected by war, disease or natural disaster. There have been successes in building awareness of our responsibilities to fellow human beings in other countries, such as the Fairtrade movement.

But the idea that inequality between Britain and, say, Mozambique is of the same importance as that between RBS bosses and the rest of us would still be seen as odd by many people; let alone any thought that ordinary people in Britain benefit from or even contribute to that inequality.

The effect whereby our sense of fairness or equality stops at – or at least is distorted by – national boundaries is also undermining our response to the crisis over sustainability. The Fabian research bears this out. The authors report that:

*Participants often reflected on the international nature of climate change and the futility of the UK acting if other countries did not. All participants felt strongly that action had to be global; inaction by other countries was seen to weaken the link between changing our behaviour and preventing climate harms, thereby removing an important moral justification for compulsion.*

Fairness, or the lack of it, is central to sustainability. But we are not all consuming equally. In Britain we each use on average around ten barrels of oil; in India, the equivalent is less than one barrel a head. Nor do we create the same amount of pollution. On average, people in Britain produce around 8.5 tonnes of carbon emissions a year, compared to 1.4 tonnes in India and just 0.1 tonnes in Mozambique.

The core problem is that people in the UK are largely unaware of the impact of their decisions on the lives of others in the world. International trade is complicated and most businesses have no interest in making those connections – often quite the opposite.

The more that the products we use are manufactured far away from our shores, the less the chance we have to know what the consequences are for those who make them, who suffer the resulting pollution, or who are pushed aside to extract the raw materials.

And even when these links do become clear – or where we see the end results of exploitation and environmental degradation – there is a tendency to blame the victim. So Africa is written off as a ‘basket-case’, incapable of improvement, and by implication responsible for its own sufferings: with no thought for the effects of the imperial aggression of the past or the economic exploitation of the present.

Perhaps this is a legacy of Empire: the mindset that the rest of the world is a kind of larder that we can raid whenever we

feel like it. Whatever the causes, this inequality is at the heart of our collective failure to agree an international response to international problems such as climate change.

In Britain, we fear that if less developed countries raise their levels of consumption and pollution to match ours, then the chances of avoiding catastrophic climate change will be dashed. But people in developing countries see the West enjoying the supposed benefits of consumption while seeking to deny those benefits to others.

While we in the West decry the loss of the rainforests and the threat to biodiversity, people in Brazil or Indonesia can point out that Britain has already cut down many of its forests and let many species become extinct to satisfy its economic demands, and shows no sign of reversing this loss.

One of the participants in the Fabian research reasoned: "You think of a country like us, which is quite small, compared to a country like America or China. If they don't do anything, what's the point?" Too often, this impasse is reinforced by political leaderships on both sides. In the UK, successive governments have blamed the lack of agreement on other countries, rather than spelling out to the public that agreement is only possible if we make difficult choices that reflect our privileged position.

Meanwhile, in countries like China the elite have sought to cement their grip on power by creating a superficially attractive yet fundamentally unsustainable consumerist society, despite having the clearest possible evidence of how this will lead their people to disaster.

Most troublingly, the worst impact will fall not on the elites or decision-makers, or on the mega-consumers in the US or UK. It will fall on the very people who already have least. No doubt that as storms, floods, droughts and epidemics become

more common, so will the tendency to blame the third world for its own ills, and so excuse us from responsibility or even sympathy.

In a way, we have the same unfortunate combination of inequality and victimisation of those at the bottom as we see in the UK itself. It has always been tempting to just blame the poor for their plight, rather than to question whether 'society' has treated them fairly, let alone ponder our personal responsibility to others.

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Whether it is telling the unemployed to 'get on their bikes and look for work' or whipping up synthetic outrage over supposed armies of benefit scroungers, politicians have succumbed to that temptation all too often, and the media have been prepared to amplify it.

*In the UK, successive governments have blamed the lack of agreement on other countries, rather than spelling out to the public that agreement is only possible if we make difficult choices that reflect our privileged position*

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We should all have within us a tension between admiring those who succeed and sympathising with those left behind. It emerges in attitudes towards, for example, the use of the tax system to ensure the better-off transfer some of their income to support those in greater need.

There is strong underlying support for this idea – and the Fabian research suggests that people want environmental policies to be progressive – but that support is not immovable and when politicians and the media spend time attacking those in need – as during the Victorian age, and more recently from the 1980s onwards – the public's views can be shifted in the wrong direction.



The parallels between attitudes to fairness within the UK and internationally also show how people's generosity is affected by their perceptions of their own security and their prospects.

Britain often seems like a country lacking confidence in international affairs, particularly over its economic performance. Once the workshop of the world, the UK can seem obsessed by the supposed threat of being overtaken by other countries, rather than reflecting that having others catch up does no harm to British interests.

But with this mind-set, it is no surprise that as a nation we have been wary of making concessions – for example, on sharing the burden of tackling climate change – to countries we also see as competitors.

We are not alone in this: the United States, Canada, Australia and Germany are just a few countries who have lost sight of their enormous wealth and vast potential in refusing to contemplate short-term measures that would secure long-term gains for them and for the rest of the world.

Within the UK, there was once a different mood. When the economy seemed destined to grow, and standards of living to grow with it, it was easier for politicians to put forward policies that included some modest redistribution of wealth. If the national cake was getting larger each year, it was easier for the slice that each received to be adjusted to help out those who would otherwise get less.

But the collapse of 2008 has brought in a period of austerity that shows no sign of retreating, and the environmental realities we now face mean that we in the wealthiest countries have reached the limit to growth.

People are experiencing real-term falls in income, and are also seeing the public services on which they rely being eroded through cuts in funding and the inefficiencies of restructuring and semi-privatisation.

As a nation, we have become much less forgiving about the rip-off culture at the top, whether it is MPs or company directors. The risk is that we are also becoming much less tolerant of those at the bottom, or at the margins.

So we have the troubling experience of seeing the very concept of 'fairness' distorted in the mouths of politicians and commentators. It becomes a matter of 'fairness' that people's benefits are capped, whatever their circumstances; or that their services are cut, whatever their needs.

In some ways, therefore, we face a depressing picture. Yet we should not forget that the reason that fairness remains a common point of reference in political debate, even in a form that is often distorted, is because it matters to people. We have a basic sense of fairness, or right or wrong. It may be misdirected, it may be losing ground, but it is there. Our task is to restore its positive power.

I suggest that the central challenge is that we must accept that some people are not more equal than others, that national boundaries do not make others any less deserving of equal treatment, and that our lives should not be enriched at the expense of future generations.

The Fabian Society research offers a new insight into how we can put arguments for fairness and shared responsibility at the heart of the way that the public view climate change. This involves people understanding more about the collective harms as well as benefits of co-operation. For centuries, humanity has struggled with the implications of this simple concept of equality and fairness for all. In our generation, that struggle must centre on the fair allocation of resources.

Central to this is the moral imperative to challenge any suggestion that some people are worth more than others. The claim that 'charity begins at home' is an odious one when

used to reject the claims of those who are further away, or who we think are 'undeserving' or 'different'.

We also need to stress how much stronger we are collectively. National borders can give us comfort, but also divide us from others and create rivalries that threaten our security. We should be bold in showing how our actions have consequences far beyond these shores, and how those consequences can and will come back to haunt us unless we move beyond fear and immediate self-interest.

And most of all, we need our politicians to give us a more positive vision of how we can become a society – or a world – at ease with itself. By making changes to the way we live now, we can build solidarity at home and abroad that will allow us to tackle the threat of climate change and share our resources more fairly within society, between different nations, and between our generations and those to come.

## 4. Fair and Simple Policy is the Way to Win Public Trust

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Baroness Worthington

*The research found people want to feel that they are co-operating in an endeavour. Even if compulsion is used, people want measures to target the product or activity rather than the individual.*

*Baroness Worthington argues the current policy landscape is littered with well-intentioned policies that lead only to confusion in the minds of industry and the public. We should resist the temptation to keep stacking policy atop of policy and focus on making the minimum number of interventions work. Too much ambition can be as damaging as too little if it makes people doubt the policy will be sustained in the long term.*

Fairness, or rather unfairness, is at the heart of the climate change challenge. The impacts of fossil fuel consumption will be most felt by those who have done least to cause them: the most marginalised in today's society and future generations yet to be born. A sense of injustice permeates the discourse of the poorest developing countries as they negotiate for international agreements that will force wealthy, developed and rapidly developing nations to take action. And within those developed economies there is a general correlation between levels of wealth and size of carbon footprint. On the whole richer people emit more carbon than poorer people, although there are exceptions at

both ends of the spectrum – poverty can lock people into relatively high carbon lifestyles, while those who can afford it can take advantage of low carbon technologies, such as hybrid vehicles, which are currently beyond the reach of the majority. This adds a layer of complexity to policymaking but should not be used as an excuse for inaction.

The findings of the Fabian Society research into what people think about climate change and sustainable consumption confirm that there are many pitfalls in relying on individuals to respond to calls to tackle climate change. Whilst a fairly large proportion of our emissions can be attributed to households and individuals, their ability to make significant reductions is restricted. Choices about how our electricity is generated largely take place ‘upstream’ in the boardrooms of private companies, influenced by European and UK policy. The range of transport options open to us is also largely out of our control – you can choose a smaller more efficient car but the penetration and cost of zero emissions vehicles has yet to reach an accessible level for the majority, and public transport infrastructure is hard to influence. Relying on voluntarism and the conscience of those willing to act is also fraught with danger since it can be easily eroded if the majority do not follow suit for fear that personal sacrifices will prove to be in vain. As the Fabian research explores, concern that others aren’t doing their bit is often the biggest barrier to behaviour change. It is also very difficult to inspire action in individuals if they do not perceive that industry is also being required to act. Try telling someone living next to a big industrial complex that their personal actions matter when they can see activities carrying on in front of them which clearly have a far greater impact.

This all points towards the need to focus attention on those with the greatest agency to act. Interventions at the right points

in the economy can stimulate change but those interventions must also be perceived as fair and they must be credible: too much ambition can be as damaging as too little if it makes people doubt the policy will be sustained in the long term.

There is a range of policy options available and these can be applied at different points in the economy; the challenge for government is to craft a coherent set of policies that overcome barriers to action without descending into micro-management.

In trying to achieve this balance it is always helpful to take a look at the fundamentals. The main sources of carbon dioxide, the most significant greenhouse gas, break down into three main sectors of the economy: electricity generation, transport fuels, and fuels used to generate heat in industrial processes and in buildings. Within each of these three markets there are both domestic and commercial consumers. The only ways to reduce emissions in all of these segments of the economy is to either consume less energy or make the energy we consume cleaner.

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*Too much ambition can be as damaging as too little if it makes people doubt the policy will be sustained in the long term*

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The biggest portion of carbon dioxide emissions in the UK still comes from the generation of electricity so this is the sector where we must focus our attention and where we need the greatest ambition. If we can achieve full decarbonisation here, and there are lots of options that mean we stand a good chance, then low carbon electricity can be used to decarbonise the other sectors through electrification and the production of hydrogen and synthetic fuels. This need to

focus on the electricity sector has been advocated by the Committee on Climate Change, but the degree and success with which this strategy has been integrated into government policy is still not clear. The will may be there but so far there has been insufficient progress on the delivery front.

This is not for the want of policy initiatives. The power sector is affected by a plethora of policies, with more soon to be introduced in another Energy Bill expected this year. But more policies do not necessarily guarantee success, especially if they result in increased complexity and uncertainty because the rules are continually tinkered with. In an ideal world just one policy would suffice – a properly implemented cap and trade scheme on emissions from the power sector. Sadly, though this policy exists at a European level, thus far it has been plagued by low ambition, which erodes the price signals necessary to stimulate changes in behaviour. This has led, in the UK, to an ever more complex policy environment, as the government seeks ways to compensate for the failure of the EU policy. This is currently having the undesirable effect of choking off investment as companies wait to see what the new framework will look like. Sadly, if past performance is anything to go by, the new policies will take much longer than anticipated to be implemented and, in the meantime, we risk losing what little momentum we have. We will also miss the opportunity for investment in new, cleaner infrastructure to contribute to a return to growth for the economy as a whole.

Despite the fact that the power to significantly reduce emissions in the main rests beyond the individual, there are of course exceptions. Increasingly some consumers are opting to generate their own low carbon power, like the solar feed-in tariff scheme, encouraged by generous subsidies created by government policy. Abrupt changes in the rate of

those subsidies, however, have recently caused an outcry, as companies in the expanding market for solar cells had the rug pulled from beneath them. Justifying a sudden and dramatic change in the rules, the government argued that it was not fair that largely middle class households and communities were benefiting from very high rates of return on their investments while the cost of the subsidy was being borne by all consumers, including those struggling to pay rising fuel bills. Critics of the policy change have been quick to point out that no one was arguing that the subsidy shouldn't be adjusted, but that there is another kind of fairness that matters: how government treats companies and investors who commit money and resources in good faith, only to be given six weeks' notice of an abrupt and dramatic change in policy.

The government's invocation of the fairness rule in this instance smacks of hypocrisy, since it is by no means the only policy in which consumers are being asked to shoulder the burden of paying for low carbon investment. Take for example George Osborne's carbon floor price, which artificially raises the price of carbon for electricity producers by imposing a top-up tax on fossil fuels. The sums involved in this policy are far more significant than those which caused the government to balk at the solar feed-in tariff scheme. The current beneficiaries are shareholders in the energy companies, who are set to receive a windfall for low carbon generation that has already been built and paid for, often as a result of public subsidy. The difference here seems to be that the recipients include the mighty lobby of the nuclear industry rather than the dispersed representatives and beneficiaries of the fledgling solar industry. The real reason why the feed-in tariff policy had to be changed with such speed was the Department for Energy and Climate Change was running out of money and had insufficient flexibility or will to reapportion



funds from elsewhere. This a good example of why governments must not become embroiled in micro-management but should instead focus on policies which dictate desired outcomes but not necessarily the means to meet them. The ‘renewables obligation’ – which requires producers to source an increasing proportion of electricity from renewable sources – was a good example of such a policy and so is the EU emissions trading scheme.

In the race to tackle climate change we need clear and ambitious interventions by governments to cause polluters to change behaviour and redirect investments – not just because this is the way to generate the biggest reductions in emissions, but to win public trust for the whole endeavour. Technologies already exist and will only improve in efficiency and cost effectiveness through increased deployment. There are currently too many interventions, either in existence or planned. The administrative overhead is consequently too high and ambition levels are too low. So far they are not collectively delivering the necessary outcomes. This is a dangerous road to continue down, as the tolerance of consumers for footing the bill for all of these measures will quickly be eroded if they feel their money is being wasted, along with their tolerance for making any changes to their own lifestyles.

I know from experience that the regulatory impact assessments that accompany major policy proposals have largely become tick-box exercises, with little influence over the initial proposal. In one recent case it is rumoured that the lead official hadn’t even read the impact assessment for their policy, which resulted in a failure to spot important unintended consequences. This cannot be allowed to continue. In considering each policy, questions need to be asked about whether any change unnecessarily adds to complexity,

diminishes investor confidence, requires too much micro-management by the government, results in too high an administrative burden for the intended outcome, is ambitious enough to materially contribute to the task in hand, and whether it will be considered fair by the taxpayers and consumers who will ultimately foot the bill.

The current policy landscape is littered with well-intentioned policies but many would fail these tests. We should resist the temptation to keep stacking policy atop of policy and focus on making the minimum number of interventions work. This may involve patience and more lobbying and co-ordination at a European level but far better that we focus and get the framework right than keep chopping and changing with a new energy bill every year. That leads only to confusion in the minds of industry and the public and will not get us where we need to be. As a consequence the more fundamental injustices in climate change will go unaddressed and the global poor and future generations will be robbed of the opportunities we have enjoyed. This would be the greatest unfairness.



## 5. The Values that Drive Behaviour Change

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Tom Crompton

*The research found that it may help to link the argument for behaviour change to the moral and policy arguments for sustainability.*

*Tom Crompton writes that communication strategies which appeal to 'extrinsic' values – such as the desire for wealth or social status – to promote pro-environmental behaviour are likely to erode public commitment to adopt difficult and significant behavioural change. Those campaigning about climate change must begin to frame their work in ways that move beyond inadequate appeals to short-term self-interest.*

Today's dominant and piecemeal approaches to 'changing behaviour' do not seem to offer a proportionate response to the profound challenge that climate change presents. Often such approaches rely upon identifying specific steps that, if adopted, would contribute to reducing an individual's carbon footprint – turning down one's central-heating thermostat, or insulating one's loft, for example. Attempts are then made to promote widespread uptake of these steps, on a behaviour-by-behaviour basis, and through appealing to some motivation that serves as a proxy for concern about mitigating climate change.

So, for example, this may be by framing particular behaviours as socially desirable (such as the campaign, run by

'Global Cool', to encourage people to 'turn up the style, turn down the heat' by wearing 'refashioned' jumpers and turning down their thermostats), or by drawing attention to the money that can be saved through increased energy efficiency (the basis of the Department of Energy and Climate Change's approach to encouraging loft insulation).

The rationale for such approaches seems compelling: many people who are unconcerned about environmental issues are motivated by other concerns – in the examples above, fashion or financial savings. But there is growing recognition of the problems inherent in such approaches. Most obviously, these include the well-known problems of rebound (if I insulate my house in order to save money, will I experience any reluctance to spend this money on another cheap weekend flight to the continent?) But an understanding of cultural values suggests that these problems run far deeper.

Social psychologists have examined the influence that people's values have on the attitudes which they hold towards social and environmental problems, and the motivation which they experience to take steps to help mitigate these problems. Studies repeatedly find that particular values predict the tendency to behave in less co-operative ways. People who attach relative importance to 'extrinsic' values – including the desire for image, social status, physical attractiveness and wealth – are found, on average, to care less about a wide range of social and environmental problems, to have higher environmental footprints, and to be less motivated to engage in political activity.<sup>1</sup>

The problem is that communication strategies which appeal to extrinsic values in order to promote pro-environmental behaviour are likely, over time, to serve to reinforce the importance that an audience attaches to these values.

Such strategies are thus likely to erode public commitment to adopt more difficult and significant behavioural change, and to undermine support for government policy where this is predicated on concerns for people living elsewhere, future generations, or other species.

An elegant piece of research, conducted by a team led by Greg Maio, a social psychologist at Cardiff University, illustrates the potential costs of appeals to extrinsic values.<sup>2</sup> Maio received an email listing reasons for joining a local car-share scheme. Most reasons highlighted economic incentives – saving money on petrol, for example – but the last focused on the environmental benefits of reducing the number of cars on the road. It prompted Maio and his colleagues to speculate on how the ways in which such a scheme was promoted might influence other aspects of a person's behaviour. Based upon their understanding of values and the way in which these motivate behaviour, Maio's team predicted that promotional materials which activate extrinsic values will be likely to have negative impacts on people's motivation to behave in pro-environmental ways, and they devised an experiment to test this. Participants in this study were invited to read information about lifestyle choices, including, briefly, car-sharing. Some participants read a sentence about the financial benefits of car sharing. Others read a sentence highlighting the environmental benefits. A third group, serving as a control, read the same information about various lifestyle choices, but

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*People who attach relative importance to 'extrinsic' values – including the desire for image, social status, physical attractiveness and wealth – are found, on average, to care less about social and environmental problems*

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with no mention of car-sharing. Afterwards, the participants were given an unrelated task that involved them writing on pieces of paper. Then they were instructed to dispose of the paper and leave the room. In the corner of the room, Maio had placed two waste bins – one for general waste, the other for recycled paper.

Those participants who read about the financial incentives for joining the car-share scheme were less likely to recycle their paper than either the participants who read about the environmental reasons for joining the scheme, or the control group. Maio suggests that reading information about saving money was sufficient to temporarily activate extrinsic values associated with financial success. This apparently reduced the extent to which participants were then guided by concerns for the environment. So while appeals to extrinsic values *may* prove to be effective as ways to motivate particular behaviours, such as joining a car-share scheme, the important point is that such strategies also seem to entail ‘collateral damage’. This damage may be apparent across a large number of people – all those who are exposed to a communication, irrespective of whether or not they act in line with this – and across a wide range of socially and environmentally relevant behaviour. For example, one would predict that people who read the information that focused on the financial incentives for joining a car-share scheme would also be, temporarily, less likely to engage in civic activism in support of more ambitious political engagement on climate change. Cumulatively, such collateral damage may therefore far outweigh any positive effects of a campaign which makes appeal to extrinsic values. More importantly still, other work suggests that the repeated activation of particular values in this way is likely to lead individuals to attach greater importance to them in a durable or ‘dispositional’ way.

Of course, it is also important to ask whether uptake of the car-share scheme itself is best promoted by drawing attention to the financial savings that might be made. Maio did not test this here, but other studies show that when motivated to adopt pro-environmental behaviour in line with intrinsic values, people tend to be more committed to such behaviour. So there may well be disadvantages to framing appeals for uptake of pro-environmental behaviours in terms of extrinsic values, even when narrowly focussing on assessing success of a campaign in encouraging uptake of the *particular* behaviour of interest.

While the positive impacts of a campaign to encourage uptake of a particular behaviour may be fairly easy to estimate, the negative 'collateral damage' will admittedly be difficult – or impossible – to assess. But this difficulty shouldn't entail that such inconvenient effects are simply ignored. Appealing to individuals to join a car-share scheme for intrinsic reasons (making new friends, or reducing environmental impact, for example) is likely to: firstly, minimise collateral damage; secondly, lead to more durable commitment to continue with the new behaviour; and thirdly, engage – and over time strengthen – a set of values which must underpin any systemic commitment to reducing one's carbon footprint.

Why, then, are appeals to extrinsic values so prevalent in communications and campaigns aimed at encouraging uptake of pro-social or pro-environmental behaviour? One probable reason is the widespread perception that most people are motivated by extrinsic concerns. Studies find that while a large majority of people in the UK report that, as individuals, they hold intrinsic values to be the most important, they are also generally convinced that most of their compatriots hold extrinsic values to be the most important. This is a misconception that seems to hobble those social marketers



who insist that, to be effective, behaviour change strategies must appeal to short-term self-interest.

Yet recent research commissioned by UK NGOs examined the attitudes of individuals who attached unusual importance to extrinsic values (those in the top 10 per cent of extrinsically-oriented people). This study found that, after these individuals had been asked to reflect for a few minutes on the importance of intrinsic values such as 'broadmindedness' or 'affiliation', even they then came to express a significantly stronger conviction that action should be taken to tackle climate change. They also expressed a stronger sense of personal responsibility to undertake such action. This was found to be the case even though no mention was made of the environment during this 'priming' process.<sup>3</sup>

So the Fabian research can be located in a growing body of work which fundamentally challenges the perception that any effective strategy for motivating the uptake of pro-social or pro-environmental behaviour must appeal to extrinsic values. As the Fabian report's authors note: "It is our contention in this report that pro-social instincts based on fairness and reciprocity could be especially strong drivers of attitudes and behaviour in relation to sustainable consumption. However, these instincts cannot be harnessed by using individualised, consumer-based narratives." There is an extensive body of evidence, drawn from many social psychology studies, to support this assertion.

Nonetheless, there are some areas where caution is needed in interpreting the results of the Fabian research. One such area is the way in which 'fairness' is construed by the report's authors.

In relating this work to the large body of research on cultural values and the way that these motivate pro-social

and pro-environmental concern, it is important to be precise about what is meant by 'fairness', and the obligations that this implies.

The authors cite Herbert Hart's 'principle of fairness' which invokes a clear obligation to reciprocate:

*When a number of persons conduct any joint enterprise according to rules and thus restrict their liberty, those who have submitted to these restrictions when required have a right to a similar submission from those who have benefited by their submission.*

Such obligation to reciprocate is 'external' – it stems from a pressure to fulfil a social expectation – here framed as 'submission'. This is an extrinsic motivation – it derives from a person's perception of the expectations or demands of others. This construal of fairness seems to have been dominant in the focus group discussions, as the report states: "Perhaps the most passionate sentiment expressed by the vast majority of participants was that if action was needed to reduce emissions, then everyone *should be required* to take part. Anxiety that some people would dutifully co-operate while others avoided doing so was a recurring theme in all the groups" (emphasis added).

By comparison, a motivation to reduce one's carbon footprint in response to a concern for future generations, or those in poor countries who are most affected by climate change, is more likely to be intrinsically motivated – stemming from an 'internal' desire to express empathy for others. As one participant observed: "you need to look at what is best for the greater good not what is best for the individual, or what is best for my mate, but what it best for the human race as a whole."

In the current situation, wider expression of such intrinsic motivations seems likely to be key – both for widespread uptake of voluntary private-sphere behaviour changes, and, more importantly, for the creation of political pressure for ambitious legislative intervention.

As we have seen in the current UK government's response to the financial crisis, politicians can take very bold action, and they are not oblivious to the possibility of building public support for such action on the basis of rhetoric about fairness – or 'everyone pulling together'. The authors of the Fabian report argue that a similar approach might be taken to building public acceptance for ambitious action on climate change. And yet the necessary interventions on climate change will remain mired in political intransigence until far greater political pressure is brought to bear.

An insistence upon reciprocity seems to present a barrier to early and voluntary acceptance of inconvenience or expense in the course of an individual reducing his or her own carbon emissions. It seems to present a still bigger barrier to people making bold demands of their decision-makers. The corollary to 'I will if you will' is the paralysis implied by 'I won't until everyone else does'.

So a desire for fairness, construed as reciprocity, may not provide a good basis for building political pressure for urgent and ambitious action on climate change.

Overall, therefore, viewed from a social psychology perspective, the new Fabian research does too little to differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as these relate to people's concepts of fairness. But, such issues notwithstanding, the research clearly provides further evidence that those campaigning and communicating about climate change must begin to frame their work in ways that move beyond inadequate – and probably counter-productive – appeals to short-term self-interest.

### Footnotes

- 1 For a full overview of this research, see Crompton, T. (2010). *Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values*. Godalming, UK: WWF-UK. (Available at [www.valuesandframes.org](http://www.valuesandframes.org)) or Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R and Wakeford, T. (2011) *The Common Cause Handbook*, PIRC: Machynlleth, Wales. (Available at [www.valuesandframes.org](http://www.valuesandframes.org))
- 2 Evans, L., Maio, G. R., Corner, A., Hodgetts, C. J., Hahn, U., and Ahmed, S. (2012). Saving Money While Saving the Environment? Self-Interest and Pro-Environmental Behaviour. Manuscript under review.
- 3 COIN, CPRE, Friends of the Earth, Oxfam and WWF commissioned research from the School of Psychology at Cardiff University. See Chilton, P., Crompton, T., Kasser, T., Maio, G. and Nolan, A. (2012) Communicating Bigger-than-self Problems to Extrinsically-oriented Audiences. Godalming, UK: WWF-UK. (Available at [www.valuesandframes.org](http://www.valuesandframes.org))



## 6. Hearts and Minds, Not Just Pockets and Purses

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Huw Irranca-Davies

*The research found people think sustainability policies should be progressive: the greatest burdens of behaviour change should be on those with the greatest ability to reduce their consumption or to finance reductions in their consumption.*

*Huw Irranca-Davies writes that politicians and policymakers should be optimistic that people want to take responsibility for carbon emissions and have an appetite for inventive, clever and well-articulated ways to make carbon reduction progressive. But all this needs to be underpinned by fairness and a blindingly clear narrative.*

I often have to rise very early in cold, dark winter mornings, put on layers of clothing and light-reflective materials, then dodge the traffic and inhale the toxins (you can actually taste the pollution most days) for thirty minutes before arriving at the safe harbour of Westminster. Surely a car journey, safe in my warm metal and air-bagged cocoon, with the reassuring tones of John Humphrys on Radio 4, washed and scrubbed and ready to go after the first cappuccino of the day would be better in so many ways?

Without trying to make the particular the general, I'll try and make sense of this personal paradigm: why would an otherwise sensible person like me choose a vulnerable scrap of two-wheels and a bare skeleton of (pink) aluminium over

a luxurious triumph of 21st century automotive engineering and a wrap-around steel safety-cage? What makes me behave so madly?

My motivations for using a bike in London and (occasionally) public transport – the green modes – are complex. I'm not some extremophile, relishing surviving in conditions that would be toxic to most of God's creations. It's not even – or just – because I'm tight with money. I do it because I feel good about it. Not just the healthy feel-good, although that's certainly true as well, but the feel-good factor that comes from knowing I'm doing something small towards the greater social good. Being on the side of the angels is not a bad place to be, and you glow a little inside when cycling, as you perspire a little outside. And (I'm no angel myself) it helps make up for the petrol used in the constituency and the odd flight abroad.

**To nudge, or not to nudge? That is not the (whole) question.** Policymakers need to be a whole lot savvier in their understanding of the wider social science base of decision-making, and not assume – as economic theory so often does – that rational economic decision-making of the consumer will lead to a policy outcome of nirvana. Man and woman do not live by economics alone. This was picked up intelligently by the Baroness Neuberger and the House of Lords Science and Technology Sub-Committee (LSTSC) last year, when they examined the coalition government's approach to changing public behaviour.

The LSTSC concluded that a wide range of interventions are needed to ensure effective policies, and that a reliance on 'nudge theory' alone – the coalition government's obsession – was not sufficient. Regardless of whatever behaviour modifying tool is used, the sub-committee found that "a lot more

could, and should, be done to improve the evaluation of interventions. This is not only good practice but would help to build a body of research that could inform effective policies targeting population-level behaviour change.”

The Fabian research reveals that policy should be less about ‘nudging’, more about ‘pushing’ ‘kicking’ and ‘shoving’. This was linked to respondents wanting to do the right thing (the social good) but worrying that others would shirk their responsibilities and free-load. And if you are going to use nudges, at least make those nudges clear: for example, the LSTSC bemoaned the failure to use easily understandable ‘traffic-light’ systems for nutrition on food labels in place of more detailed (and often unread and unreadable) information.

Being a little more forceful than simply nudging people towards change found support amongst the participants, and regulation or legislation was favoured by the majority. One of the focus group participants said: “It’s like the smoking ban. The first year was like ‘Do you mind going outside to smoke?’ and it was like ‘No I’m having a beer’. But then it was, like ‘No you will go outside’. And now they reckon smoking is, like, down 40 per cent...” Ministers need to listen to this: sometimes, to do the right thing, we all need a bit more than a nudge.

### **‘Bashing the bankers’, big shoulders, and personal (PCA) issues**

Early parts of the focus group discussions resembled a ‘bash the bankers’ approach, partly due to the design of the focus group stimuli, with some feeling that those with the highest wealth could use that wealth to escape their social or societal responsibilities. In short, you could buy all the carbon you wanted, fly to the sunspots, drive your Hummer in and out of London, sit out under your dozen turbo-gas-powered garden



heaters in the winter ... and so on. For many respondents, this felt instinctively unfair. The argument strongly reflects the current economic debate, structured around 'those who have the largest shoulders should bear the greatest burden'.

There was a counter-position which policy-makers can't ignore, with an important demographic believing that earned wealth should allow some freedom of expression in carbon and cash expenditure. Whilst the former were in the majority, this may reflect perceptions of wealth, which are equally important for policymakers to understand.

For example, I suppose most people could agree that the obscenely wealthy could afford to – and in fact darn well should – cut down on their extravagant and conspicuous carbon consumption. Getting rid of the odd yacht – or at least the fridge as big as a yacht – makes easy moral sense. But what about asking a middle-income family to go without their annual sun-seeking holiday abroad when they've worked hard for fifty weeks of the year?

This theme of the research – “those with the greatest ability to reduce emissions should bear the greatest burdens, and those with less ability to reduce should bear less” – has a powerful resonance for centre-left politicians. It instinctively feels progressive, and is reassuring to find that same gut-politics reaction reflected in the focus groups. Whilst the devil is in the detailed design of any specific policy, the possibility that a majority of people would support a progressive carbon policy (similar to progressive taxation) is helpful, and merits more research.

Yet, like progressive taxation (or needs-based benefits, to which the research also draws a parallel), there is always a compromise over complexity and cost of administration. Complexity invites cunning avoidance schemes, and loads costs.

This would be especially true of a Personal Carbon Allowance (PCA) approach, where individual or household carbon allowances could be set and perhaps traded. Focus group participants raised concerns over PCAs being complex and costly, and open to fraud and avoidance, which made them inherently unfair. Others felt it could not be enforced, and wrongly placed limitations on personal freedoms. And even those who were attracted to the logic of equality inherent in a PCA saw it as “idealistic and impractical”.

So policymakers – and politicians with one eye on popular opinion – should be cautious over individualised PCAs. One participant put it best: “You can’t equalise [emissions] can you, because you can’t equalise people. We’re all different.” That’s a pretty powerful statement. But if PCAs are an idea ahead of their time, where can we embed progressivity in carbon policy right here, right now?

### **What do we want? Progressivity! When do we want it? Stop asking and get on with it!**

‘Green taxes’. Perhaps the worst conjunction of words since ‘the greenest government ever’. What seemed like a good idea at the time becomes rapidly devalued through overuse and misapplication. Message to ministers: stealth taxes filling the treasury coffers are not green taxes improving the social good, unless you can clearly demonstrate the link.

Yet genuine ‘green taxation’ and financial measures to incentivise good behaviour (or penalise bad) should be part of the mix, but only if the public narrative is crystal clear, the burdens are fair and progressive, and the rationale is repeated until our eardrums hurt. Think of the congestion charge, which – whilst still needing work – has broad public

support. The congestion charge is demonstrably progressive, as the very poorest in London don't have the economic choice of a car even, and must depend on reliable, affordable public transport. It also helps that it's universal – everyone can catch a bus or the tube.

It is a progressive measure. But not optimally so, as the charge does not reflect the number of miles travelled in the congestion zone, the use of the most congested routes or the most congested times of day. Again, the degree of progressivity has to be balanced against cost and complexity of running the system. Whilst this universal (another popular theme of the research) but crude charge continues to have large support from the public, the durability of its appeal will rightly continue to be measured against re-investment in public transport and cycle ways. As the Fabian study shows, we fellow travellers want to see the rewards for going green, as well as the penalties for carbon emissions.

Well-designed and well-explained financial measures should be in the policymaker's armoury. Yet in the Fabian study, legislation and regulation – perhaps surprisingly – came out more favourably. Why?

Study participants understood that legislation can communicate social values and norms, in what can be deemed the 'expressive' function of legislation. Most favoured regulation over taxation, noting that taxation could discriminate against low-income households, and did not necessarily 'push' high-income households to change their behavior. Cynicism about taxation and government using it 'to generate more income for the Treasury' comes across strongly in the research. For the minority who preferred taxation, it allowed the freedom to choose if you were willing to pay the penalty. Part of the rejection of taxation, however, was that "those on higher incomes could simply compensate

by paying more. Participants implied that they saw the demands of environmental citizenship to go further than simply the internalisation of costs". For example one participant said: "If you can buy your way out of it, is it really getting at the cause that it set out to?"

Upstream regulation was preferred, with regulation on manufacturers and energy producers for instance, despite the impact this may have on their choice as consumers or the potential impact on their household bills. These were preferable to "policing household behaviour". It was seen as "less threatening or over-bearing on the part of government", "targeting the activity rather than targeting the person" and taking the pressure of individual decision-making. For policymakers this is instructive, showing a clear demand for progressive policy, but wanting – where appropriate – the decision to apply to be taken out of the consumer-choice arena and into the realm of being a citizen with universal application.

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*We want to do our bit for the planet – and for current and future generations – as responsible citizens, but not if others can't be bothered*

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Policymakers should not however be simplistic about upstream regulation. The current furore over energy prices (a whole other story in itself) shows the constant need for a clear compelling and honest narrative to underpin these decisions, without which the whole edifice crumbles.

### **Back on my bike again...**

What do I take from the research as a politician and policymaker? Firstly, optimism, in the clear desire from respondents

to take responsibility – in an ‘all for one’ way – for carbon emissions. Secondly, a welcome desire for inventive, clever and well-articulated ways to make carbon reduction progressive, making sure everyone shares some burden but that those who can contribute more should do so. Thirdly, in addition to some insights into possible mechanisms, a reaffirmation that you need a variety of tools – soft (from the awareness-raising and nudging) to the hard (tax and regulation).

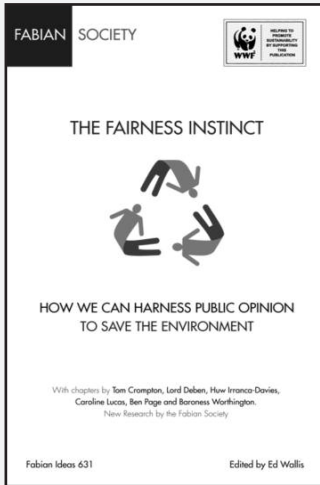
Finally, and most importantly, all of this needs to be underpinned by fairness and a blindingly clear narrative. Hearts and minds, not just pockets and purses.

Just like me on my bike, for most people their motivations to consume products and services more sustainably are myriad. We want to do our bit for the planet – and for current and future generations – as responsible citizens, but not if others can’t be bothered. We want to be rewarded (with better health or wealth or happiness – cycling ticks all three) or at least avoid being penalised (taxes and fines). To use a much-misused current phrase, we want to know that ‘we’re all in it together’, doing our bit. The public appetite for fairness applies to carbon emissions reductions as much as any other facet of modern life.

What the Fabian research on sustainable consumption shows is that to focus on the individual (you and I) as purely consumers, motivated only by money, like some fiscally-stimulated lab-rats or mini Gordon Geckos, is to underestimate the wide range of human motivations. Policymakers need to understand that before they act. The concept of ‘progressivity’ as part of fairness is compelling for centre-left politicians, and the research demonstrates there may indeed be an equally compelling public demand for this as part of tackling carbon emissions.

## Hearts and Minds, Not Just Pockets and Purses

And by the by, if you see me cycling on the London roads  
– or Mr Cameron hotly pursued by his briefcase *en voiture* –  
give us a friendly wave.



## Discussion Guide: The Fairness Instinct

### How to use this Discussion Guide

The guide can be used in various ways by Fabian Local Societies, local political party meetings and trade union branches, student societies, NGOs and other groups.

- You might hold a discussion among local members or invite a guest speaker – for example, an MP, academic or local practitioner to lead a group discussion.
- Some different key themes are suggested. You might choose to spend 15 – 20 minutes on each area, or decide to focus the whole discussion on one of the issues for a more detailed discussion.

A discussion could address some or all of the following questions:

- To what extent should we communicate about climate change using 'citizen' or 'consumer' narratives? Should it be a choice between them or could a mix of approaches be beneficial?
- How does the complexity brought about by international aspects of climate change affect how politicians communicate about the issue? What methods could be used to address this complexity?
- What does current government policy mean for arguments around sustainable consumption? Is there more that could be done?
- What kinds of considerations bring people to support government policy on climate change?
- What is the nature of the type of fairness described in the research? What does this mean for broader debates about fairness amongst the centre-left?

Please let us know what you think

Whatever view you take of the issues, we would very much like to hear about your discussion. Please send us a summary of your debate (perhaps 300 words) to [debate@fabians.org.uk](mailto:debate@fabians.org.uk).



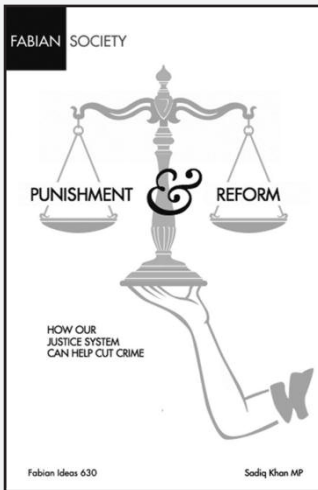
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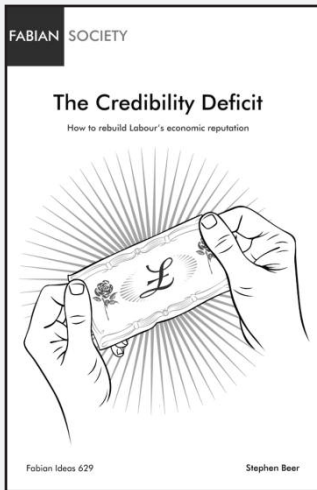


## Punishment and Reform

How our justice system can help cut crime

'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' was more than a clever soundbite, it was a successful approach to criminal justice policy that left crime 43 per cent lower when Labour departed office than when it entered. 'Punishment and Reform: How our justice system can help cut crime' addresses the challenge of how Labour is to build on this legacy and further reduce crime, but within the tough spending constraints imposed by straitened times.

Edited by Sadiq Khan MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Justice, the pamphlet is a collection of essays by members of the Justice Policy Working Group and other commissioned experts, brought together to inform the conclusions of the Labour Party's policy review. It includes a chapter by Barry Mizen who, along with his wife Margaret and the rest of their family, set up the Jimmy Mizen Foundation following the murder of their son in May 2008. Other authors include Lord Victor Adebowale, Baroness Jean Corston, Dame Helen Reeves, Professor Julian V Roberts and Matthew Ryder QC.



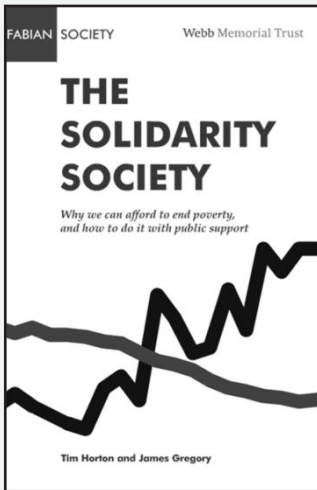
# The Credibility Deficit

How to rebuild  
Labour's economic  
reputation

In this Fabian Ideas pamphlet, Stephen Beer argues that Labour's economic credibility gap is wide but it can be closed.

The party entered the 2010 General Election campaign unable to explain its approach to the economy. It lost credibility on fiscal policy with financial markets and it lost credibility with the electorate because it did not answer the concerns of people faced with declining living standards and little decline in inequality. To restore credibility, Labour should revisit its values: everyone should be able to participate in our economic life and inequality works against this. Applying these values will require Labour to take some tough decisions.

In 'The Credibility Deficit', Beer argues that Labour also needs to understand economic realities, including the power of the bond markets. Stimulus measures should focus on investment to raise the productive potential of the economy and, at the heart of what we are about, on employment. Labour must support – and learn to love – a reformed City with a refreshed reputation and understanding of the common good.



## The Solidarity Society

Why we can afford to end poverty, and how to do it with public support

Tim Horton and James Gregory

This report sets out a strategy for how to reduce, eliminate and prevent poverty in Britain.

'The Solidarity Society' is the final report of a project to commemorate the centenary of Beatrice Webb's 1909 Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law. It addresses how the values and insights of the Minority Report can animate and inspire a radical contemporary vision to fight and prevent poverty in modern Britain.

The report makes immediate proposals to help build momentum for deeper change. It also seeks to learn lessons from the successes and failures of post-war welfare history, as well as from international evidence on poverty prevention.

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# The Fairness Instinct

How we can harness public opinion to save the environment

'Fairness' has become the politician's weapon of choice, with recent political debate dominated by attempts to sustain or refute claims that government policy is 'fair'. The reason that this territory is so contested is clear: fairness as a concept holds a deep public resonance, and policy success often depends on going with the grain of a powerful popular 'fairness instinct'.

Responding to innovative new Fabian Society research conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Tom Crompton, Lord Deben, Huw Irranca-Davies, Caroline Lucas, Ben Page and Baroness Worthington explore how this fairness instinct can be harnessed in order to tackle perhaps the toughest political challenge of our time: climate change.

Politicians need not fear public opinion when it comes to designing policy; they just need to understand it. The research shows people are prepared to act to change their behaviour and consume more sustainably, but this is dependent on the co-operation of others. The public may not like the idea of having to make lifestyle changes, but are prepared to do so once they understand the broader social issues at stake. Politicians need to recognise this and set a credible policy framework that can foster a shared sense of environmental citizenship, rather than attempting to sell policies by appealing to consumer self-interest.

**"This research makes a major intervention and deserves a wide readership."**

ANTHONY GIDDENS, author of *The Politics of Climate Change*

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