



Engaging different audiences around COP26: a guide for UK-based climate advocates

Public awareness of the United Nations climate change conference (COP26), due to take place in Glasgow in November 2021, is important for two reasons: as a means of putting pressure on politicians to make ambitious decisions, and as an opportunity to engage more people with the global effort to bring down greenhouse gas emissions.

This briefing explores how to communicate about COP26 in a way that resonates across a broad base of society, rather than appealing to just one political perspective. It concludes that:

- Messaging that speaks to the **need to protect nature**, and that frames climate change as a **shared global crisis** and a **shared global responsibility**, is likely to resonate.
- Language around the benefits from **green investments and jobs** is effective, but not when it seems to undermine the idea of global cooperation.
- Engagement needs to counter the fact that many people do not understand what COP is about, and when they do they are often sceptical about what it could achieve, or believe it should be conducted online rather than in person.

Research underlying this briefing

The in-depth research underlying this briefing focuses on the responses of **Civic Pragmatists** and **Loyal Nationals** (as defined by the **Britain Talks Climate** audience segmentation) to different messages about COP.*

Civic Pragmatists (13% of the British population) hold mostly left-wing views, but vote for a variety of parties. Community-oriented and tolerant, they are concerned about climate change but lack confidence in their ability to make a difference.

Loyal Nationals (17% of the British public) tend to vote Conservative, and support more populist views. Extremely proud to be British, they have a sense of feeling threatened. 60% of Loyal Nationals say they are “very” or “extremely” worried about climate change, the third highest of any of the seven Britain Talks Climate segments.

The research then explores a wider diversity of responses through a survey of British adults across all seven audience segments.



* For more information, see the [full report](#).

Use language around global cooperation to protect nature and people

“Preventing habitats and protecting species from becoming extinct is the most important and most motivating factor for me to lead a sustainable lifestyle.” – Loyal National

“If it's the world coming together, that's what can make a difference.” – Civic Pragmatist

Emphasising the damage done to land and oceans, and the importance of **restoring humanity's balance with nature**, is a powerful way of talking about COP26. In focus groups, this language inspired Civic Pragmatists and Loyal Nationals on a personal level and made them feel like they were a part of something. It also connects to a tendency to see climate change through the prism of **extreme weather events**, like floods and wildfire, and their impact on the natural world.

Messaging that presents climate change as a **shared global crisis and responsibility**, and that talks about the need for **global cooperation and unity**, also resonates. This may be because improved understanding of the causes and effects of climate change, and of humanity's interdependence in the wake of Covid-19, mean that a more **global mindset** is emerging.

Examples of language about nature and global cooperation

Nature: At COP26, political leaders must take decisions that restore our balance with nature, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world. **This means ending deforestation, and protecting and restoring land and ocean that is so vital to the survival of our planet. If we don't protect nature, it can't protect us.****

Global cooperation: **Climate change doesn't respect borders...We all share the same planet, so we must all do what we can to fix climate change.** COP26 is a chance for world leaders to put aside their differences and agree on a plan of action.

** Most effective language highlighted in orange.

A green wall grows on the side of Edgware Road station to help reduce air pollution in a high emissions area. Photo: © [Toby Smith](#)



Use, but with care: language around green investment and jobs

Language about the need to move away from polluting industries and create new, greener jobs resonates with people across the political spectrum, including Loyal Nationals and Civic Pragmatists. However, this language performs better in relation to questions about domestic rather than global concerns and priorities, making it less powerful in the context of COP26. Civic Pragmatists also dislike this language when it seems to have 'nationalistic' overtones, seeing it as not fitting with the need to co-operate.

Examples of effective green investment language

Britain was at the heart of the first industrial revolution. These days, it can be hard to find employment, and young people are having to leave where they grew up to look for work. **As we move away from polluting industries, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, stable jobs in clean industries like electric cars and renewable energy.**

Potential problems to counter: a lack of understanding, scepticism, and concern about an in-person event

"I don't see why they need a meeting, quite honestly. I mean, modern technology, they should be able to communicate all this stuff without people flying in from all over the place."

– Civic Pragmatist

At the time of this research (May 2021) Civic Pragmatists and Loyal Nationals demonstrated a **low level of understanding of COP26**. In focus groups, they recognised its significance and expressed a strong desire to be kept up to date on any developments.

They also found it hard to trust politicians on this issue, believing that they are focused only on money and economic growth. They raised **concerns about the effectiveness of COP negotiations**, given that this is the 26th meeting, and about how leaders and countries are held to account, suggesting that this credibility gap is an important issue to be considered in engagement.

Nearly half of respondents across all audience segments also thought that **global climate talks should be conducted online**, with only a quarter seeing the value of meeting in person. Many people view the idea of ministers and delegates flying in from all over the world as unnecessary or even hypocritical in light of aviation emissions and the Covid-19 crisis.

Connecting with Civic Pragmatists and Loyal Nationals around COP26

Civic Pragmatists

Narratives centred around global cooperation are particularly compelling for Civic Pragmatists, aligning with a belief that people are stronger when they work together, and in the need to support more vulnerable countries. As mentioned above, language that appears to be nationalistic – for example, around UK leadership on green investment – is off-putting.

Civic Pragmatists express a desire to be more personally involved in COP26, demonstrating its potential power to 'activate' this audience. Overall, Civic Pragmatists are more likely to support the global aims of COP26 – agreeing targets to prevent a global temperature rise above 1.5C, or providing financial aid to developing and vulnerable countries – than other segments.

"...it's the poorer countries that are suffering and will suffer more from climate change than countries like us." – Civic Pragmatist

Examples of compelling language for Civic Pragmatists

“As we move away from polluting industries, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, stable jobs in clean industries like electric cars and renewable energy.”

“This means ending deforestation, and protecting and restoring land and ocean that is so vital to the survival of our planet.”

“If we don’t protect nature, it can’t protect us.”

An engineer works within the Nacelle of a wind turbine, Drumderg, Scotland. Photo: © Toby Smith



Loyal Nationals

Loyal Nationals express a high level of concern about climate change, making them open to language about climate change as a crisis.

Loyal Nationals are distrustful of multilateralism, government and big business, and feel ‘left behind’ themselves. They prioritise forcing businesses to publicly state their impact on climate change and call for greater transparency around COP26.

Loyal Nationals also favour language around green investment and British jobs, but are cynical about whether UK leadership is achievable. They are sceptical that leaders can genuinely cooperate and represent their people.

“I see red, because ... the world has never ever, in all of its history, managed to work together.” – **Loyal National**

Examples of compelling language for Loyal Nationals

“Climate change doesn’t respect borders...”

“We all share the same planet, so we must all do what we can to fix climate change.”

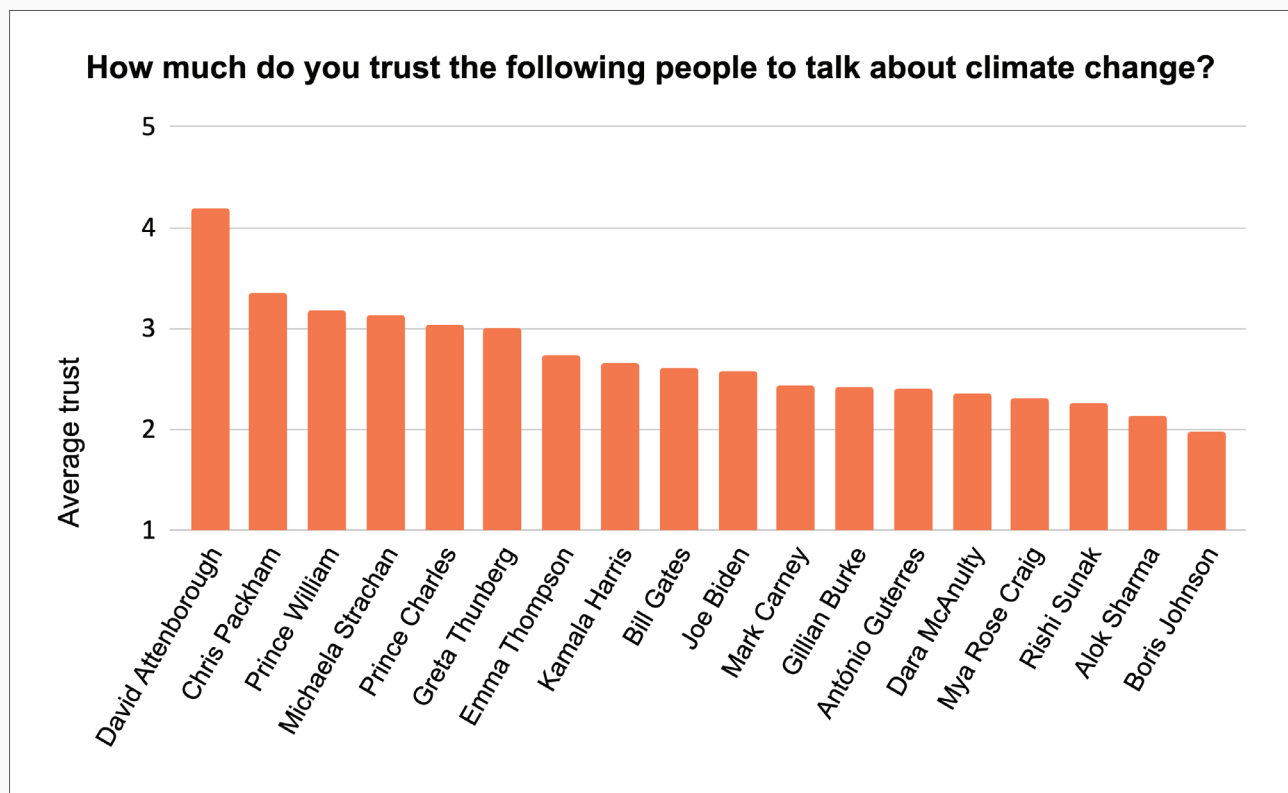
“Britain was at the heart of the first industrial revolution.”

“This means ending deforestation, and protecting and restoring land and ocean that is so vital to the survival of our planet.”

The importance of the right messenger

People make **decisions** about their behaviour partly based on what others they respect and trust are doing and saying. How different narratives affect people depends on who they come from. Some people distrust narratives around green investment if they appear to be a party-political broadcast, and they trust narratives around UK leadership more if they come from David Attenborough rather than the Prime Minister.

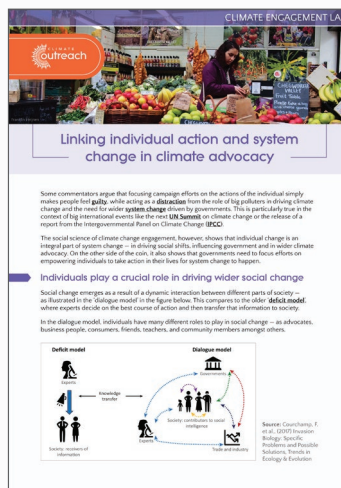
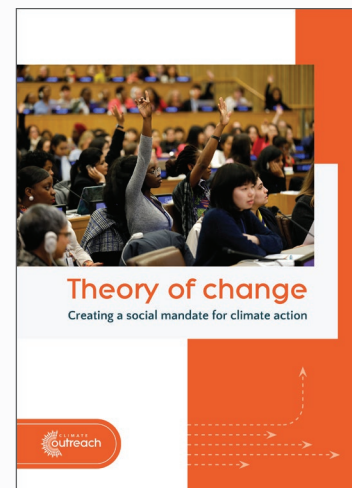
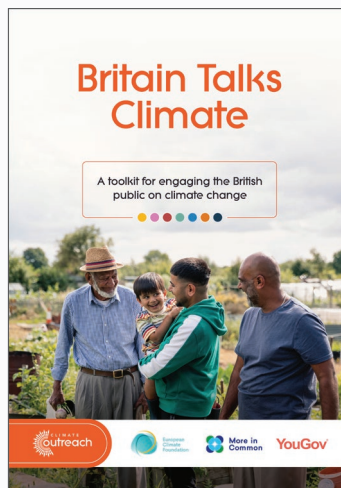
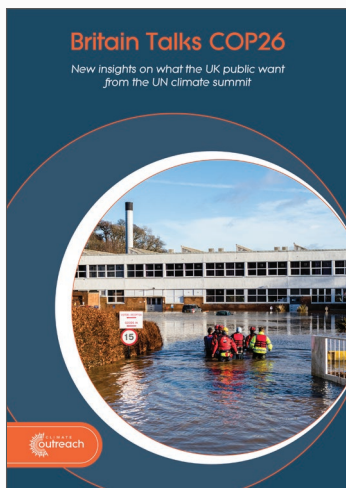
The idea that narratives about global co-operation or nature would come from an environmental charity or the United Nations made sense to the people we talked to in this research, as they are organisations that are seen to be acting more in the global interest.



Level of trust in messengers to talk about climate change. 1 = Do not trust at all, 5 = trust completely.

Source: [Britain Talks COP26](#)

Find out more



This briefing and research was funded and commissioned by the European Climate Foundation.

For further campaigner briefings on Climate Outreach's research, check out Climate Outreach's [Climate Engagement Lab](#), which helps UK climate campaigners engage more people in deeper ways as part of delivering a social mandate for transformative climate action.



About Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is a team of social scientists and communication specialists passionate about building a social mandate for climate action. Through our research, practical guides and consultancy services, we help organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences. We have over 15 years of experience widening and deepening public engagement with climate change, working with a wide range of international partners including government, international bodies, academic institutions, charities, businesses, faith organisations and youth groups.

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