



Dods Monitoring Energy preferences briefing

A briefing containing exclusive Dods polling of MP perceptions to various energy sources

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Energy preferences briefing



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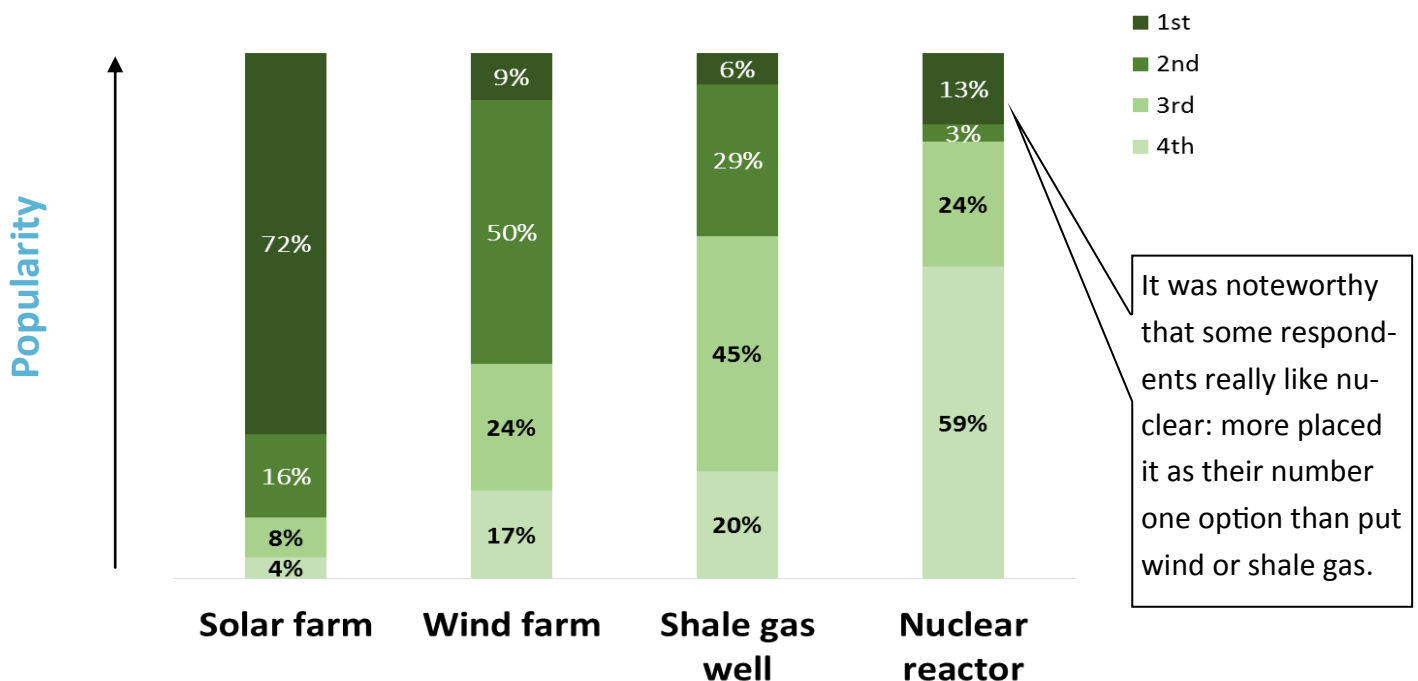
At the close of 2014 Dods polled 100 MPs on a range of issues relevant to the energy sector, namely preferences over energy sources, the degree of certainty amongst experts on climate science, and overall support for nuclear energy.

MPs were asked to rank the following forms of energy generation according to which they felt their constituents would most like located within two miles of their home (from 1-4).



It was clear from the responses that MPs felt **solar farms** would be most preferable for their constituents, with almost three quarters of those asked choosing it as their first choice (72 per cent).

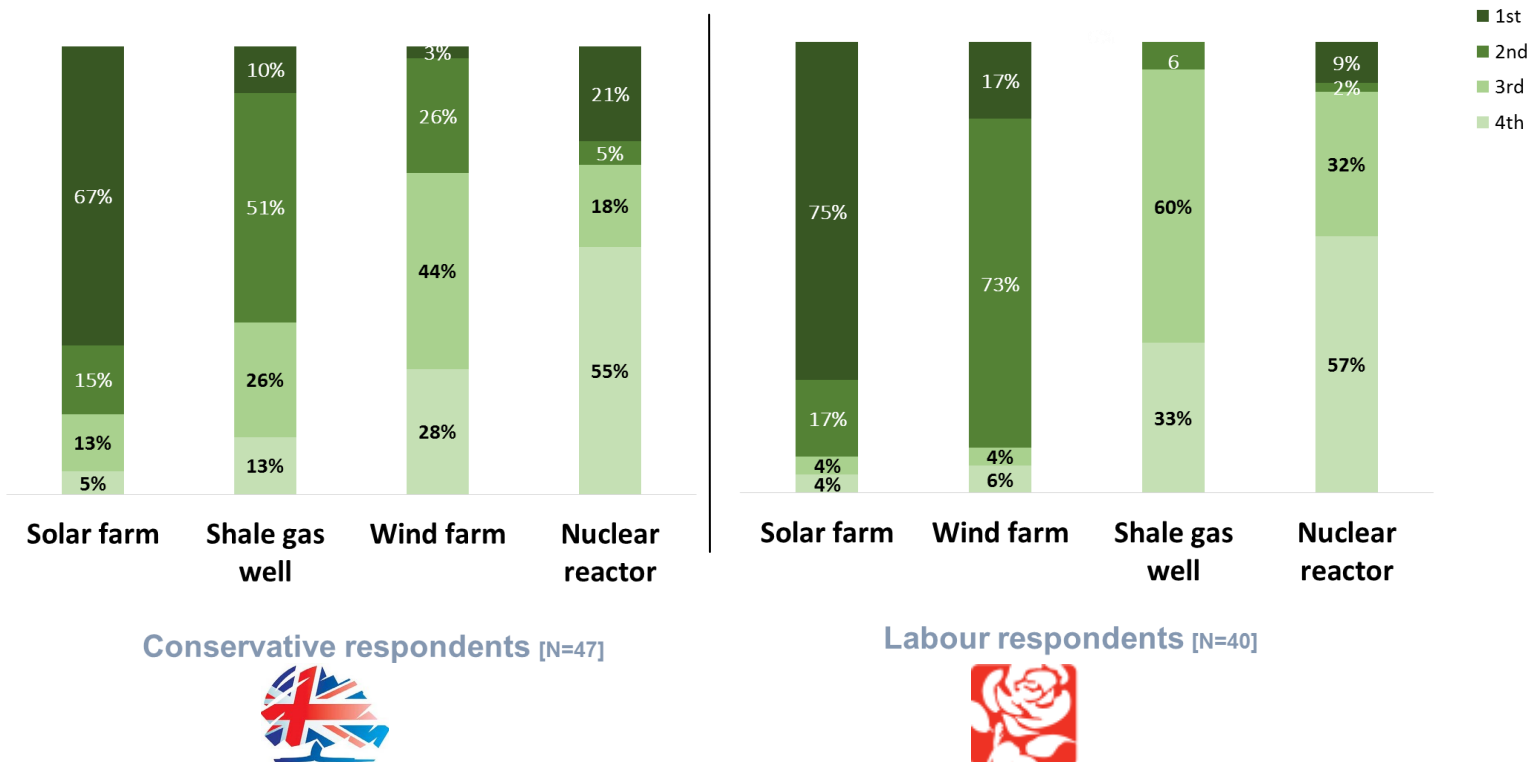
The graph below shows the trend in the responses, with wind farms trailing solar in popularity, followed by shale gas wells, and finally nuclear reactors. In this trend, scale and disruptiveness trumps capacity as an arbiter of public acceptability.



All respondents [N=100]

Energy preferences: Party political differences

The differences between the political parties did not deviate too far from the overall trend. However as the graphs below show, Conservative MPs felt their constituents would prefer a shale gas well over a wind farm; the reverse was true amongst Labour MPs, who had a much more favourable impression of wind energy. This could reflect the strong support amongst Conservative MPs for shale, as shown in [previous Dods Polling](#).



What the public actually think

Asking these questions to MPs immediately begs another: how in tune are MPs with their constituents' preferences in terms of energy sources?

A poll conducted in October 2012 by ICM asked a similar question to the British public as we asked our MP panel. While this is of course not directly comparable it does give a sense of the alignment of MPs and the public's view on such issues.

The [ICM poll](#) showed that more than two thirds of the public would rather have a wind turbine than a shale gas well near their homes. It notes that only nuclear power and coal were less popular than a shale gas well. Overall this ranking largely corresponds to that which we found amongst MPs asked; perhaps what can be deduced is that Conservative MPs asked may be overestimating the support for shale among their constituents, and underestimating support for onshore wind.

....What the public actually think

Such a conclusion was borne out by the latest [DECC public attitudes tracker](#), where support for onshore wind (67 per cent support) trumped support for shale gas exploration (26 per cent).

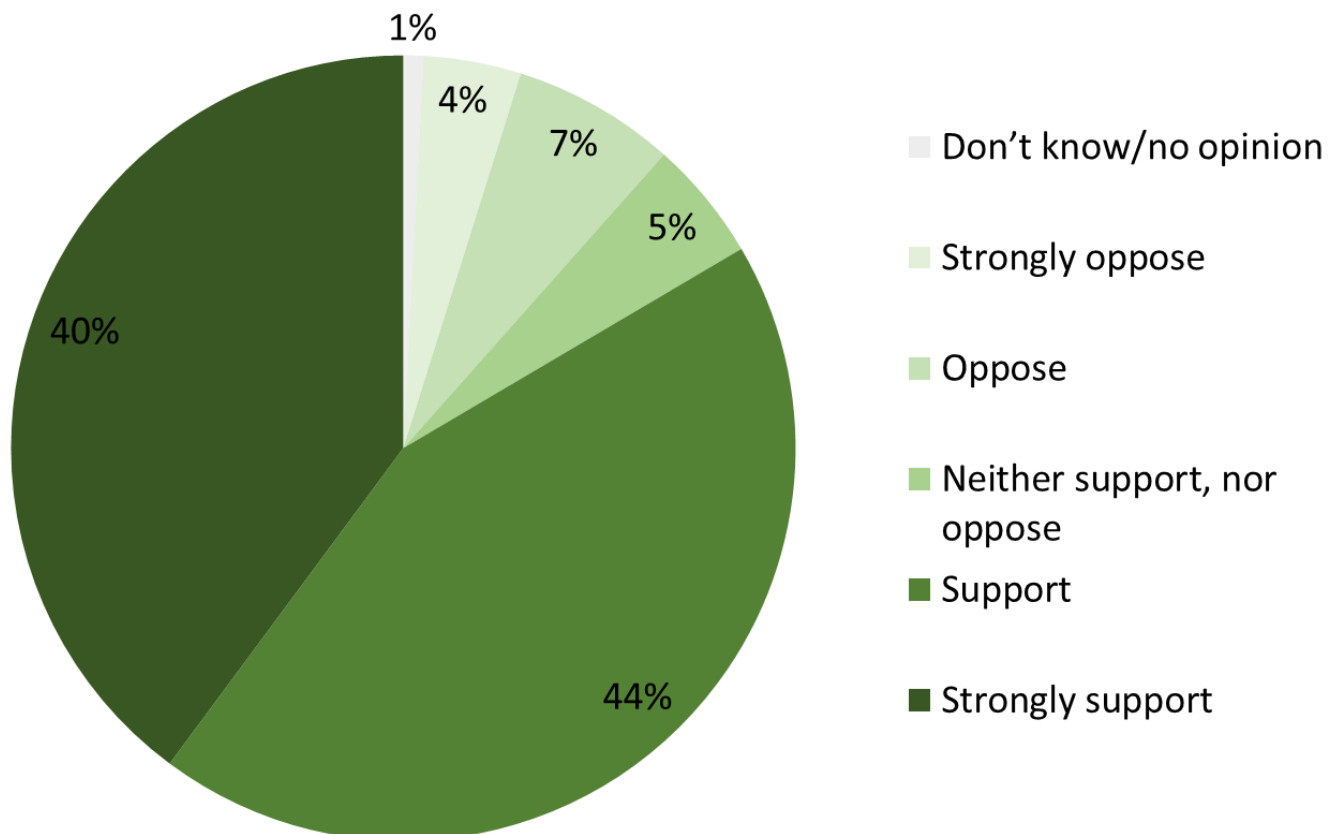
The DECC survey also showed support for solar among the public that corresponded with the views of MPs asked, since this technology consistently garnered the highest level of support when respondents were presented with a range of renewable energy sources. Given this, recent developments on support for [solar](#) and [onshore wind](#), or the restricting thereof, appear more strategic than based on public acceptability.

The nuclear question

While it was expected that nuclear energy, due to its inherent safety risks, may be less favoured by people in terms of their preferences for the proximity of various energy technologies, that was not to say support for this technology was absent amongst MPs, in fact the opposite was true.

When we asked MPs the following question on overall support for nuclear, the high degree of support was clear.

From what you know, or have heard about using nuclear energy for generating electricity in the UK, do you support or oppose its use?





(left to right) Humphrey Cadoux-Hudson, managing director of nuclear new build at EDF Energy, Nigel Cann site director of Hinkley Point C, Energy Secretary Ed Davey, Prime Minister David Cameron, Vincent de Rivaz, chief executive of EDF and Henri Proglio, former ceo and chairman of EDF as they examine site plans for the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset. © Press Association

...The nuclear question

Eighty three percent, or over four fifths of those asked, said they either strongly supported (40 per cent) or simply supported (44 per cent) such a use. Thirteen per cent were opposed (seven per cent were opposed, and four per cent who were strongly opposed) and six per cent confessed either neutrality (five per cent) or had no opinion (one per cent).

This should give succour to those engaged in planning and developing the next generation of nuclear power stations in the UK, although it should be noted that support across the political parties was markedly different (though still supportive).

In fact 97 per cent of Conservative MPs asked expressed their support, which contrasted with 85 per cent of Labour MPs. While the base size for Liberal Democrat MPs was too small to justify making any conclusions, those MPs asked did tend to split evenly between approval (three MPs) and disapproval (four MPs), perhaps reflecting the party's historical antipathy towards the technology.

Comparing this overall support among MPs with that of the general public, we also see that parliamentarians tend to be twice as favourable towards this technology than the public at large (42 per cent of whom expressed their report in the aforementioned DECC public attitudes survey).

Climate change: MPs get the science, mostly

In December 2015, world leaders will gather in Paris to attempt to secure a legally binding, global climate change agreement with emission reduction commitments from all countries for the first time ever.

Following a period in 2014 which saw the European Union, the US and China make positive noises towards reducing carbon emissions, policy makers - Energy Secretary Ed Davey included - have expressed cautious optimism that the Paris conference will achieve a lasting concord.

Given this, we asked MPs a question which aimed to tease out the extent to which they were aware of the scientific consensus behind climate change, and specifically the correlation with human activity.

What proportion of climate scientists do you think believe that climate change is mainly the result of human activities?

Several recent studies [[Cook et al](#), [Tol](#), [Verheggen et al](#)] show that more than 90 per cent of climate scientists agree that the main cause of climate change is human activity.

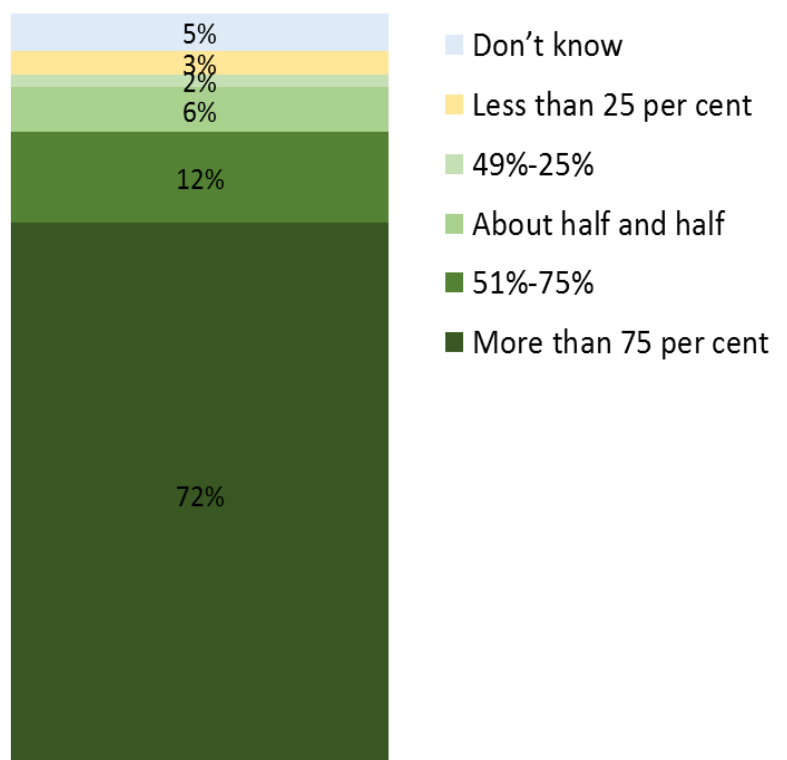
Those MPs asked had a good understanding of the strength of this consensus, with almost three quarters (72 per cent) thinking it was over 75 per cent of climate scientists who held this opinion.

However over quarter responded with the incorrect answer (23 per cent) or did not know the answer.

This finding might concern those with an interest in ensuring parliamentarians had a understanding of the consensus around the cause of climate change, yet when contrasted with similar surveys directed at the public, it is clear MPs have a much higher awareness overall.

For example a [survey](#) conducted by the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit indicated that just 11 per cent of the general public were aware the level of the scientific consensus was “almost all”.

This being said, since the actual figure of consensus among climate scientists was 90 per cent, rather than the ‘more than 75 per cent’ option we provided, the overall finding that 72 per cent had a good understanding of the scientific consensus could mask some wide variations; further research on this point could prove illuminating.



Stakeholder reactions

Richard Black, director of the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit commented:

"The really interesting aspect of this poll is that MPs across the parties broadly understand their constituents' preferences on energy, notably the public endorsement of solar power.

"For Conservatives, the key question is why their policies are moving away from reflecting the public's preferences, with ministers promoting unpopular shale gas and restricting the potential of popular solar. Are the views of a few newspaper editors more important than the views of their constituents?"

"It doesn't seem like a basis for good politics, let alone a good energy and climate policy."

In response to these results Keith Parker, chief executive of the Nuclear Industry Association said:

"The strong support from these MP polling results further emphasises the cross-party support nuclear energy has. This support is crucial for an industry, where our civil nuclear power programmes can span multiple administrations.

With Hinkley Point C waiting for the final investment decision, and Horizon Nuclear Power and NuGeneration Ltd progressing with the early stages of their new build programmes this polling will be welcomed by all involved; bringing investor confidence to the country as well as to our own UK supply chain."

Dods Polling

The fieldwork for the survey of MPs took place between in November to December 2014. Caution about generalizing from the findings is advised considering the low base sizes.

Dods Polling combines up-to-date methods with over a century of experience in surveying political opinions, allowing us to discover the information you need in the manner that suits you best.

We guarantee speedy response times and competitive rates. Our experts can help frame the questions to ensure that the responses are as useful as possible and will provide an analysis of the key findings.

To find out more about Dods Polling and research services contact Stephen.Lamb@dods.co.uk



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For further information about the content of this briefing please contact your political consultant.

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