

# Obs' COP 2023

Climate and Public Opinions  
International Observatory



## Climate change: world opinion confronts its own contradictions

**Paris, November 23, 2023** – As a key international player in the energy sector with a commitment to reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, EDF today presents the findings of an opinion study conducted for the 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in 29 countries<sup>1</sup> across five continents, covering two-thirds of the world's population, and including the biggest CO<sub>2</sub> emitters. Every year, EDF produces an international report on opinions, knowledge, expectations and levels of commitment in relation to climate change to drive reflection on the subject and participate in the constructive search for solutions for the future.

Find all the results at: [www.edf.fr/observatoire](http://www.edf.fr/observatoire)

### 1/ Exposed to the most serious effects of climate change, the emerging countries are more concerned than the Western countries

- **High temperatures and heatwaves have had an impact across the planet**

Perceptions of climate events are very consistent: high temperatures have been experienced by 63% of the world's population (and at least 50% in most countries). The non-differentiation of seasons is the second sign that is quite broadly shared (41%). **The French have been particularly impacted by heatwaves and drought**, which affected the country in 2022 and 2023. With 72% mentioning high temperatures in France, the situation in the country seems similar to the one in Spain (73%), Morocco (73%) and Turkey (78%).

- **These events are indeed the sign of climate change**

80% of respondents think that these phenomena occurring in their country are increasingly being caused or worsened by climate change, with 43% even responding "yes, absolutely". A very high level of certainty in South America (66%).

- **The countries most vulnerable to climate disasters are the most concerned**

43% of the world's population are very concerned about climate change: admittedly not a majority, but this is still a very substantial proportion, one that did not change between 2022 and 2023. This concern is strongly correlated with countries' objective vulnerability to the effects of climate change<sup>2</sup>: concern is high in countries where the population has noticed an increase in climate disasters with lasting effects on infrastructures, human life and the economy (for example: Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia...).

- **30% of the planet's inhabitants even claim to feel anxious**

When respondents were asked to describe their feelings by choosing from 6 words, ranging from calm to anxiety, 30% claimed to feel anxiety, in other words a very high level for an emotion of this kind. This is not correlated with the country's vulnerability: it corresponds more to an individual equation. For comparable levels of vulnerability, anxiety admittedly ranks very high in Indonesia and Japan, but is low in Chile or Brazil. Lastly, and

<sup>1</sup> Methodology: selection of countries based on their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in tons per year, based on their geographic location, their exemplariness in the fight against climate change and their socio-economic model; Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA. Representative samples of the population between 500 and 1000 individuals per country; quota method. Fieldwork conducted online between August 16 and October 2, 2023. Due to the geopolitical context, the results for Russia are not available this year.

<sup>2</sup> Such as the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) calculated by the non-profit GermanWatch. See: <https://www.germanwatch.org/fr/19777>

contrary to common belief, climate anxiety is felt at a much lower level in Europe than elsewhere (19%, and 21% in France), and young people are not the most concerned, although it is true that older people tend to feel it less.

## 2/ In the developed countries, the environment and the climate are viewed as priority issues, while they are in competition with other priorities in the South

When it comes to determining the place that the environment and the climate occupy in relation to other issues according to countries, the situation is the opposite of what we measured in relation to levels of concern and observation of effects.

- **In the countries of Europe, North America, and even Asia**, people continue to rank the environment among their top 5 concerns, despite the inflation crisis and pressure from social, security or migration issues. Likewise, in these countries, fighting climate change is viewed as the absolute priority (compared to the various types of pollution, for example).
- **In the countries of the South**, the environment doubtless has a more negative influence on everyday life than it does in the North, given the infrastructures and the populations' standard of living. Even so, unemployment, crime and corruption are people's main concerns. The environment remains a secondary concern. Likewise with the climate, whose consequences can be dramatic, but which suffers from competition with pollution, which people view, for now, as a more urgent problem needing to be contained.

## 3/ Faced with the current disasters, around one third of the population are still in a state of denial or relativization

- **After progressing for four years, climate skepticism has stabilized**  
Climate skepticism is stagnating more than regressing: 36% (-1 pt vs 2022) of the world's population still dispute the human origins of climate change. Once again, it is holding up just as well in the vulnerable countries as it is in the more resilient ones; residents of countries dependent on fossil fuels often reject human responsibility. It may no longer be such a cause for alarm however, given that it has little influence on people's attitudes in environmental terms. This year it grew quite sharply in Canada and Italy, but dropped back in Saudi Arabia and Scandinavia. In France, it also fell (35%, - 2 pts).
- **Four out of ten of the planet's inhabitants relativize the future effects of climate change**  
While few people in the world imagine that global warming will mainly bring positive consequences (3%), 27% think that they will be just as positive as negative, and 11% did not answer the question. Which still means that 41% believe that we can expect more than just negative outcomes. The scope of these responses is surprising in countries that are very vulnerable like India, Australia, Indonesia or South Africa (> 40%). In France, relativism is at the same time higher than elsewhere in the world (48%) and tending to grow (+3 pts vs 2021).

## 4/ Fear of having to leave home and of being confronted with climate migrations

- **In the countries of the South, and especially in the equatorial zone, the fear of being forced to move somewhere else as a result of climate change is very widespread:** it affects more than half of the population. But in certain countries, a very large majority of the population feel concerned: 66% of Indians, 62% of Egyptians, 57% of Indonesians.... In some Northern countries, this fear also exists but at much lower levels: in Italy, Spain, the USA and France, more than 20% envision having to move. Note however that in Metropolitan France 8% are certain that soon they will no longer be able to live where they reside now.
- **But it is the prospect of seeing a large influx of climate migrants** that seems probable for many people, particularly in countries already coping with migration pressure (Turkey, Spain, Italy) or that are expecting many people to be displaced domestically (like India). The French are among the most certain: 32%, in other words much more than the Spanish (26%) or Italians (25%).

- **In the majority of countries questioned, the idea of welcoming refugees comes up against a very clear rejection from populations when these refugees are coming from foreign countries.** This is the case in 20 out of 29 countries where those opposed to taking in refugees outnumber those in favor. France is among the least open countries (26% compared to 57% opposed). In contrast, India and Brazil show proof of more openness.

## 5/ Despite increasing reluctance to abandon their lifestyle, citizen-consumers are trying to change their habits

- **Pressure on populations to change their lifestyle is increasingly reaching its limits**  
The number of those who believe that this solution should be prioritized rather than trusting technological solutions has gone from 53% to 46% in five years. France remains more favorable to changes in individual habits (52%). Another result that concurs with this: populations believe that the key to saving the climate is in the hands of governments, to a much greater extent than in the hands of citizens.
- **Nevertheless, they claim to be making increasing efforts to consume in a more eco-friendly manner, especially by giving up on car use to a greater extent.** Europe has been forced into **energy sobriety**, but this now seems to be entering into habits. France appears to be at the cutting-edge of this trend, and the same applies to car use. However, information provided to consumers needs to be more precise, so they can prioritize their efforts on the real levers of decarbonization in their day-to-day usage.

## 6/ Climate policies: governments' margins for maneuver are shrinking

- **Climate inaction on the part of governments is less criticized than five years ago**  
56% of respondents think that their governments are taking action (as opposed to 48% in 2019). But it is local authorities - in the front line when it comes to dealing with extreme weather events especially - that have really emerged onto the climate scene: +14 points in visibility in the space of five years!

### **The acceptability of climate policies, especially when they limit individual freedoms, is the real black spot in this study**

- In the countries with a high GDP in particular, policies aimed at restricting the cost or freedom of car travel come up against a categoric refusal. The only potential openings concern a ban on short-haul flights and the ecological malus. But the carbon tax on energies, given the current inflationist context that all economies are experiencing, remains out of the question, especially in Europe.
- Certain decisions concerning infrastructures are acceptable in quite a large number of countries, including France: **a halt on building additional airports or highways** is a conceivable decision in Europe, but also in India, China, South Korea, Turkey...
- On the other hand, the idea of needing to **"densifying towns by limiting the number of single-family homes in favor of apartment blocks"** created very contrasting reactions according to countries: well accepted in India, China, Indonesia, Africa and the Middle East, it was rejected in Europe (and therefore in France), along with Japan and South Korea.
- The other aspect of climate policies (policies targeting **adaptation** to change) is not very visible to the world's public, apart from a few countries that seem to be pioneers and are mostly located in Asia.
- In the energy field, the situation has only really changed for nuclear power, which continues its return to favor, especially in Europe.

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A key player in energy transition, the EDF group is an integrated energy company operating in all areas of the sector: production, transport, distribution, trading and sale of energies and energy services. A world leader in low-carbon energies, the Group has developed a diversified production mix based mainly on nuclear and renewable (including hydroelectric) energy, and is investing in new technologies to assist with the energy transition. EDF’s goal is to build a carbon-neutral energy future reconciling protection of the planet, well-being and development, through electricity and innovative solutions and services. The Group provides power and services to around 40.3 million customers (1), 30.3 million of whom are in France (2). In 2022, it announced consolidated sales of 143.5 billion euros.

(1) Clients are tallied by delivery site; one client may have two delivery points: one for electricity and another for gas.

(2) Including ÉS (Électricité de Strasbourg) and SEI.

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