

A Quantitative Analysis of Support Towards Climate Change in British Young People

By Jaione Gonzalez Yubero

Introduction

Climate change concerns the global population. The effects of climate change have been felt for a long time and these impact on almost every aspect of our daily lives. The increase in global temperature and the alteration of the weather affects food production, the wellbeing of animals and our existence. The effects of climate change are expected to continue even if humans stop emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Climate change is a problem that affects every individual. It should be every person's concern. In a survey conducted in January 2020 in the United Kingdom, the environment was ranked third on a list of subjects that most preoccupied individuals: 74% of respondents claimed to be concerned about climate change (YouGov).

Corner et al (2015) stated that most of the political actions taken against climate change are projected every ten years. In this way, the current targets for decarbonization are focused on the 2020 - 2050 time period. Changes regarding greenhouse emissions and policies targeting the fight against climate change are fundamental for the wellbeing of nature, animals and consequently, humans. Because of this, it is important to analyse the individual perception of climate change. How individuals see this issue can shed a light on the importance of climate change in politics and in society in general. What is more, examining the attitude of young people towards climate change may offer us a glimpse into this matter's prominence in the future. As Down and Wilson (2013) claimed, as the younger generations replace the older generations, the political values held are altered in society. In this way, if young people show a greater concern for climate change, there could be a stronger response against climate change at an institutional level in the future (Down and Wilson, 2013).

This paper aims to examine whether socioeconomic background influences young people's views of climate change in the United Kingdom. To provide an answer to this question, a series of factors were considered. Educational attainment and social class as part of a self-assessment were considered to provide an accurate picture of the young individuals' socio-economic background. This paper is divided into five parts. First, a literature review was conducted to evaluate the links between age, socio-economic background, educational attainment and the perception of climate change. Then the answers of the people aged 15 to 24 years old using the Special Eurobarometer 490 conducted in April 2019 are considered. The Eurobarometer asked people in EU member states about their opinions and attitude towards climate change. The United Kingdom was included in this survey. In this survey, questions about climate change perception and the individuals' actions against climate change are presented. What is more, the respondents were asked about the social class that they believe they belong to and their

educational attainment level. Therefore, I was able to build a concise picture of the participants of this survey. In the third section, the results of the survey are presented and analysed using graphs. The results are then discussed and related to the literature, and a conclusion is provided.

Literature Review

Numerous papers have analysed young people's attitudes towards climate change. Henn and Sloam (2018) and Ross et al (2019) claim that young people tend to be more conscious of and preoccupied with climate change than older people in the United Kingdom. Ross et al (2019) claimed that ethnic diversity, cosmopolitanism, liberalism and the apathy towards traditional political institutions in young people make them more likely to find the issue of climate change relevant. What is more, since a great proportion of young people are supposed to feel apathy for traditional politics and feel left out of political decisions, they are more likely to support activism for climate change and to take part in demonstrations and protests regarding this issue (Henn and Sloam, 2018). Sanson et al (2018) claimed that the greatest impact of climate change will be felt by the children in low and middle-income countries. It will negatively affect their development by reducing the level of social protection and increasing the exposure to the risk factors (Sanson et al., 2018). It is therefore sensible to expect young people worldwide to be concerned with this problem.

According to a series of surveys conducted by the United Nations, nearly half a million young individuals around the world take action against climate change in their daily lives. Specifically, 84% of young individuals in this survey are aware that they need more information about this issue and 73% of young people already feel the negative consequences of climate change. Also, 89% of young respondents in the survey believed that young people could make a difference. Young people are overall more concerned about climate change than older people according to the UN survey (UNEP, 2008; 2011).

Looking closely at the United Kingdom, the British Social Attitudes 35 survey of 2018 on climate change presents the cohort of 18 - 34-year-olds as the most conscious about climate change in the UK. This cohort is also the one that shows the highest rate of people believing that climate change is caused by human activity (94%). The younger respondents appeared to be the most worried about this issue. However, less than half of the individuals claimed to be worried (32%) or believed that climate change is due to human activity (46%). These percentages increase in the older cohorts. The younger and educated individuals are also the most worried about climate change. Specifically, 35% of graduates are "very" or "extremely" worried about it compared to 20% of individuals with no qualifications (Philips, 2018).

Clemens (2012) believes that the level of education considerably impacts on the attitude of British people towards climate change. In the same way, climate change scepticism is associated with low educational attainment. Ojala and Lakew (2017) stressed the importance of young people's actions on climate change. Young people are the future decision-makers, and they will have to bear the burden of the negative outcomes of climate change. Ojala and Lakew (2017) stated that the young people they interviewed know they are more concerned about climate change than older people and are more committed to fighting it. Climate change is already a part of this generation's identity. Nevertheless, their lifestyle is not particularly more sustainable or more environmentally friendly than that of older individuals. Ojala and Lakew (2017) affirmed that the gap between the attitude and values and the behaviour and actions of this cohort is the largest compared with the other cohorts. The authors blame the low level of knowledge about climate change in this generation as the cause of this phenomenon. Also, the

perception that climate change is something distant adds to the lack of action among some individuals who belong to this cohort. Young people interviewed by Ojala and Lakew (2017) believe that their capacity for mobilisation concerning this issue is limited. Also, Ojala and Lakew (2017) claimed in a social study that British young people do not consider that climate change plays a main role in their daily life and they believe that they do not have the power to change the situation. Ojala and Lakew (2017) also claimed that young people are inclined to distance themselves from the problem. Trusting social actors and participating in different organisations are the preferred ways for young people to fight against climate change (Ojala and Lakew, 2017).

Corner et al. (2015) stated that young people can be the cohort that is the most affected by climate change. However, they do not particularly actively participate in politics, the media or the cultural discourse concerning this issue. Young people's concern about climate change also depends on the economic factors involved (Corner et al., 2015).

According to Corner et al (2015), young people suffering from economic hardship are less likely to consider that climate change is the most important issue facing society today. Young individuals are suffering due to the austerity policies implemented by the latest British governments (Henn and Sloam, 2018; Pickard, 2019). Young individuals are therefore more likely to focus on unemployment and debt. Access to affordable high education is also a widespread concern for young people because of the increase in tuition fees in the UK. Nevertheless, Corner et al. (2015) assumed that in general, young people are more concerned about climate change than older people. Most young people believe that climate change is an urgent issue. However, political inaction and feelings of disengagement are also common for this age range (Corner et al., 2015).

Corner et al. (2015) blames the lack of low-carbon infrastructure, low media coverage and the absence of shared values that encourage a sustainable lifestyle for the lack of political action against climate change. However, most of the young people surveyed by Corner et al (2015) believed that climate change can be solved. Young people appear to be well informed about key concepts and climate change in the UK (Corner et al., 2015). However, Corner et al. (2015) stated that being educated or informed about climate change is not enough to engage young people to take part in climate action. Young people are most likely to respond individually and change their behaviour to fight climate change rather than to engage politically. Corner et al. (2015) proposed that climate literacy programmes and pro-environmental education should be introduced since they are proven to be effective and push young people to include pro-environment routines in their daily lives.

Hibberd and Nguyen (2013) found that young people tend to feel pessimistic and disengaged when it comes to climate change. In their study, the young participants also claimed that they did not participate in the fight against climate change frequently. They discovered that young people were aware of the fact that climate change is real and human-made. Young people were also aware that their generation would face important challenges regarding climate change. However, climate change was not considered to be the most pressing issue for them and only a few respondents had participated in climate change action. As Hibberd and Nguyen (2013) affirmed, this could be because young people believe that climate change can be fixed. Another reason for the political inaction of young people towards climate change was the fact that they feel that it is not present in their everyday lives (Ross et al., 2019). However, Hibberd and Nguyen (2013) found that young people who live in areas that are likely to experience more negative effects due to climate change are more concerned. Young people in this study also

considered that fighting climate change required a considerable amount of money and time. For Hibberd and Nguyen (2013), these attitudes may be linked to the young people's overall feeling of disengagement and frustration with the current social, economic and political developments.

Ross et al. (2019) found that young cohorts, especially millennials, are highly educated and used to interact with the global community. These facts put them in an easier position to understand other cultures, to know more and to be concerned about climate change. Education is an important aspect in the fight against climate change for young people. Striessnig et al. (2013) stated that higher education entails better access to relevant information, stronger cognitive skills that lead to a behavioural change, better health and physical wellbeing and a higher income. Striessnig et al. (2013) believe that education is the single most important factor associated with climate change. Muttarak and Lutz (2014) agree with the fact that education and strengthening human capacity is the best response to climate change. Education increases knowledge, skills and risk perception. Therefore, individuals are better prepared and can adapt easily if a natural disaster takes place. Also, young people are the most educated generation in the United Kingdom despite the augmentation of university fees and the budget cuts in education, accommodation and health systems, which are the services most used by young individuals (Barro and Lee, 2013).

Lee et al (2015) stated that educational attainment is the best predictor of climate change awareness. Additionally, believing that climate change is man-made fuels the climate change risk perception, mostly among individuals in Europe. Increasing the role of climate change in education and encouraging climate literacy is advised to engage individuals. On the other hand, Whitmarsh (2011) assumed that skepticism towards climate change is influenced by the individuals' environmental and political values and that skeptical individuals tend to believe that the issue is exaggerated, and that climate change is not risky. The number of individuals who believe that climate change is exaggerated has doubled between 2003 and 2008 in the United Kingdom (Whitmarsh, 2011).

Educational attainment is closely related to socio-economic background. People belonging to a higher socio-economic background tend to benefit from higher levels of educational attainment (Jackson, 2013). Poortinga et al (2011) found that climate change skepticism was lower among the young generations from higher socio-economic backgrounds. These cohorts are more likely to hold values that defend the environment. Eom et al. (2018) also believed that socioeconomic status impacts on the level of pro-environmental support. In the same way, a pro-environmental attitude is more likely to be held by people belonging to a higher socioeconomic status (Eom et al., 2018).

In 2015, the British Office for the Secretary-General's envoy on Youths stated that 84% of young people have demanded more information to prevent climate change and 89% believed they could make a difference if they learnt more about the issue. In 2013, climate change education in schools was reduced in the UK, which resulted in widespread criticism. Education about climate change in schools and universities is fundamental for taking action against this problem and enhancing young people's involvement (Enson, 2019).

Lanigan (2019) claims that activism concerning climate change is mostly formed by white middle-class individuals in the Western world. Working-class people, who may feel disengaged, can increase the effectiveness of this movement and its importance in society by

getting involved. According to Lanigan (2019), middle-class individuals hold the means to participate in this type of activism and to lead it.

Devine-Wright (2015) claimed that individuals holding a global attachment tend to consider climate change a more urgent issue. These individuals also tend to attribute climate change to human factors and oppose any means of legitimating climate change. They are also more likely to believe that the responses towards climate change may be economically beneficial. Young people are more likely to hold a stronger global attachment according to Devine-Wright (2015). Therefore, they may also hold a stronger stance against climate change and may also consider that the fight against climate change benefits society.

The literature shows us that young individuals tend to hold a strong approach to climate change and the fight against it. Most scholars argue that their activism is not political and that it is instead more centered on social media and other forms of self-expression (Henn and Sloam, 2018). The literature also shows that education and social background play a role in the way that they see climate change and the likeliness of them fighting against it as well as their relationship with nature and climate change's consequences. In the next section, the selection of the data for use in the statistical analysis is carried out.

Data selection

The selected survey that measures my hypotheses is the Special Euro barometer 490 conducted in September 2019 in the United Kingdom by the European Union. The survey selected a wide variety of respondents from different areas in the UK who belonged to a wide variety of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The questions of the survey were interested in measuring young individuals' perceptions towards climate change according to their socio-economic and educational background. The survey asked the respondents about their views on climate change and the environment.

Methodology

To test my research question, the individuals' age range needed to be defined to delimit the object of study, that is, young British individuals. These individuals need to take part in society to some degree and need to benefit from abstract thinking to hold views about the environment and politics in society. The United Nations defines "youth" as a period of dependence that features childhood through adulthood independence. These individuals are usually leaving compulsory education and finding their first job or continuing their education. The United Nations considers a "youth" a person aged between 15 and 24 years old (UNDESA). Therefore, in this study, for analytical purposes, persons aged between 15 and 24 are considered. This cohorts' perception and attitude towards climate change in the United Kingdom has been considered in this paper.

To provide a concise analysis of the attitudes and perceptions that this cohort holds towards climate change, a series of hypotheses were drawn up. This paper aims to examine to what extend socio-economic background influences the attitude of young people towards climate change. However, other variables need to be considered such as educational attainment to provide a concise representation of their attitudes.

A higher level of educational attainment increases the individuals' chances for social mobility (Breen, 2010; Scherger and Savage, 2010, Fox and Miller, 1966). As a result, this factor is also

considered. On the other hand, according to the literature, young people benefiting from higher levels of educational attainment and a higher socio-economic status are more likely to consider climate change to be a great problem in our era and to believe that it is a man-made phenomenon (Clemens, 2012; Corner et al., 2015; Eom et al, 2018). What is more, they are expected to act against climate change (Henn and Sloam, 2018).

In this paper, the analysed hypotheses are:

H1: Young people who consider themselves to belong to a middle social class are more concerned with the environment, know more about this matter and are more eager to take action against it.

H2: Young people achieving higher educational attainment are more concerned with the environment, know more about this matter and are more eager to take action against it.

The object of this analysis is to examine the respondents' answers to the questions that measure the hypotheses to assess whether the literature supports said hypotheses in the sample. I am aware that the focus of this study is the individual's socio-economic background and how it impacts on the young people's attitude towards climate change. However, the self-assessing socio-economic background may be tricky and subject to the individuals' subjectivity and self-perceived bias. Therefore, factors such as educational attainment are taken into consideration to provide a better-suited picture of the respondents in the sample. To measure these factors, I needed to select a variety of questions from the Special Euro barometer 490 survey.

The selected questions used to measure my hypotheses were as follows:

QB1a: Which of the following do you consider to be the single most serious problem facing the world as a whole? Climate change.

QB1b: What else do you consider to be a serious problem? Climate change.

QB2: How much of a serious problem do you think that climate change is now? 1 not at all a serious problem - 10 an extremely serious problem.

QB4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Totally agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree, and totally disagree.

More public financial support should be given to the transition to clean energies even if it means that the subsidising of fossil fuels is reduced.

QB6 Have you personally taken any action to fight climate change over the past six months?
Yes/No/Don't Know

As stated above, these questions were used to measure the young individual's perception of climate change, their actions and their level of knowledge. To be more precise, questions QB1, QB1b and QB2 measure the individuals' perception of the seriousness and urgency of this issue at a national and international level. QB4 assess the individuals' knowledge about climate change and renewable energy since it discusses the technical vocabulary related to climate change. In this question, the individuals that answered "don't know" are specially considered

since answering this question requires a high level of understanding of the challenges of the fight against climate change, alternative energies and clean technology.

To evaluate how young people view climate change, a statistical analysis was conducted using the Euro barometer 490 data. Age is the independent variable, that is, the variable that does not change. The dependent variables are socio-economic background and educational attainment. The dependent variables, drawn from the revised literature, were measured through the presented questions. In these questions, the young individuals' answers have been isolated from those of the older individuals. In other words, only the answers of individuals aged 15 to 24 have been considered. Furthermore, once these individuals were isolated, the respondents were grouped according to their self-assessed socio-economic background and educational attainment. I evaluated the answers of the number of individuals that responded in a determined manner using cross-tables. I also divided the individuals according to their educational attainment to evaluate their answers through cross-tables as well. I used graphs to provide a clear picture of the answers of the respondents.

The main dependent variables are the educational attainment of the respondents and self-assessed socio-economic background. The educational attainment variable is used to provide a more accurate picture of the respondents' real socio-economic background since the respondents' past economic situation or upbringing may provide us with a misleading picture of their real socio-economic background. However, the level of educational attainment is not always useful for assessing young people's socio-economic background. High levels of youth unemployment in the UK (Powell, 2018), years of austerity due to the coalition and conservative governments and budget cuts in the education, health, housing and social services sectors (Horton, 2016) need to be taken into account when evaluating young people in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, Breen (2010), Scherger and Savage (2010) and Ford and Miller (1966) argue that educational attainment is a useful variable with which to assess an individual's socio-economic background. Low educational attainment is often linked with a lower socio-economic background in the United Kingdom (Shucksmith, 2001). This along with the respondents' self-assessed evaluation should provide a good picture of how socio-economic background impacts the young individuals' perception of the fight against climate change. The results for the upper-middle class of society have not been provided since they are not conclusive due to the low number of respondents belonging to this social class.

Results

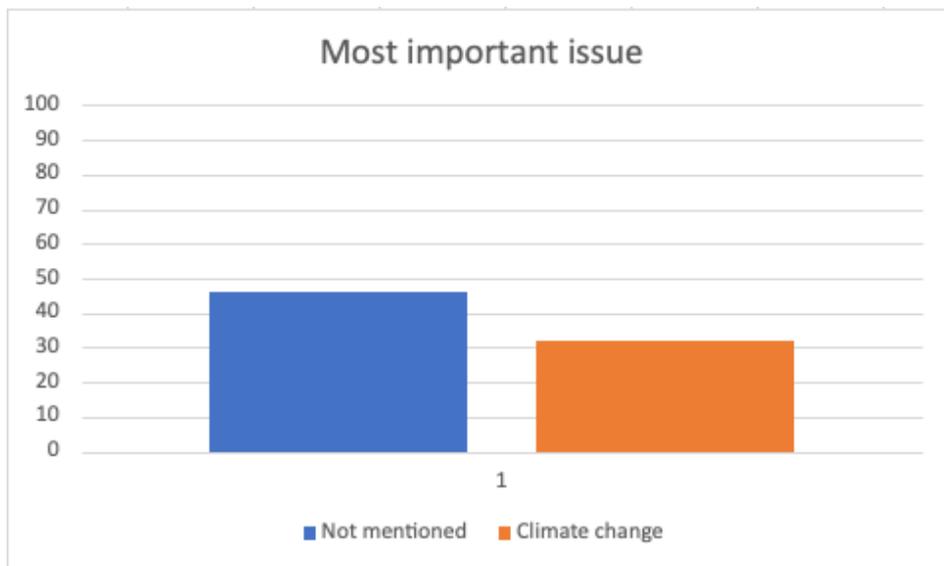
To answer whether young people, especially those from different socio-economic backgrounds, are more active and consider climate change as an essential problem in today's world, a series of questions were asked to young individuals. In this section, I present the answers to these questions to assess the young individuals' perception of climate change and the impact that their socio-economic background may have in terms of their ideas and views towards this issue. This section is divided into three main parts that correspond to the dependent variables examined in this paper. The answers have been divided into the respondents' perception of the urgency and seriousness of this issue, the level of knowledge about climate change-related issues and the individuals' willingness to act against climate change. These sections are then divided into three sub-sections. In the first part, the overall perception of the young people is presented and their answers to the questions are provided. In the second part, the respondents are classified according to their self-placed social class. In the third section, the respondents' answers to the same questions according to their educational attainment are

provided. The goal is to present how the answers to the questions may change according to the respondents' socio-economic background and educational background.

Seriousness and urgency of climate change

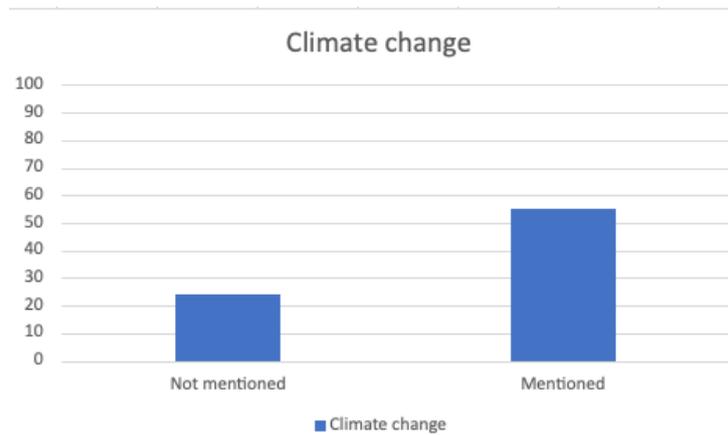
This variable was measured by three questions in the survey. The first two questions, QB1a and QB1b, asked the respondents to choose from a variety of issues that the world is facing nowadays. The respondents needed to choose the most urgent and important one. The survey was conducted in 2019, a year sufficiently removed from other matters such as the Brexit referendum, the 2008 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concerning age, for QB1a, 59% of young respondents did not consider climate change to be the single most important issue facing the world in 2019. On the other hand, 41% of respondents admitted that climate change was the most pressing issue. Climate change ranked second in the list of issues that most worried young British individuals in 2019 (Graph 1 shows the number of respondents who answered this question, it does not show the percentages above presented).



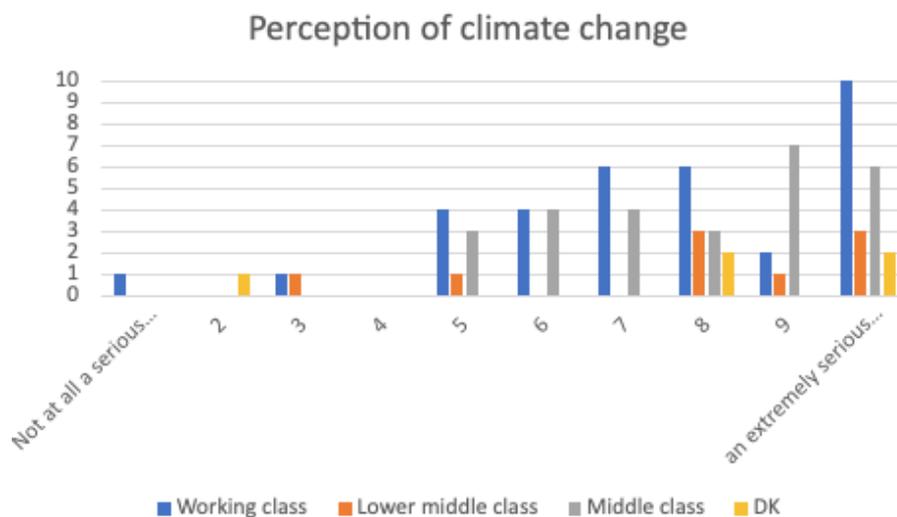
Graph 1: Age and most important issue

Concerning QB1b, individuals could choose three alternative issues that ranked, for them, second regarding the most pressing issues that the world was facing in 2019. Poverty, hunger and a lack of drinking water were mentioned as well as climate change and international terrorism. Therefore, even if climate change is not the matter that most worries young individuals in the UK, it is one of the most important for them. They are well aware of the importance and urgency of this issue (Graph 2 shows the number of respondents and not the percentages). In QB2, 27.8%, that is, the highest percentage, believe that climate change is "an extremely serious problem." Following this, 12.7% of respondents ranked 9 on a scale from 0 to 10 for how serious climate change is to them while 20.3% ranked it 8 and 1.3% thought it was "not at all a serious problem."



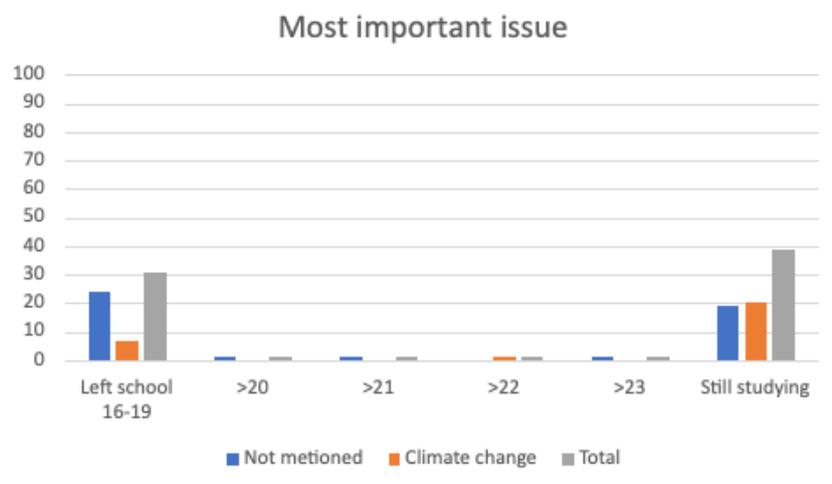
Graph 2: Age and second most important issue

The middle classes displayed a moderate consideration regarding the seriousness of climate change. The percentages were moderate for the lower middle class (44.4%) and the middle class (40.7%). The working class displayed the lowest rate of individuals believing this (39.4%). Regarding the second most important issue facing the world in 2019, the middle class (81.5%), the lower middle class (77.8%) and the working class (52.9%) thought it to be climate change. Concerning the urgency of this issue, the working class considered that climate change is an extremely serious problem. On a scale from 1 to 10, they were the largest to believe that climate change was ranked 10. This class was followed by the lower middle class and the working class. Overall, the working class and the lower and middle classes were at the high end of the scale. Nevertheless, if the lower middle class and the middle class are considered together, the middle classes would show the highest rate of perception of climate change. Most of the respondents were aware of the urgency and seriousness of climate change (see Graph 8, the vertical axe is the degree of seriousness).



Graph 8: Social class and perception of climate change

Regarding educational attainment, individuals still studying at 24 years old displayed higher rates of believing that the most important issue that the world is facing is climate change (41.3% of the individuals still studying). People who had finished studying at 21 years old also showed a high rate of believing that climate change is the most essential issue facing our world in 2019 (6.4% of individuals who left the education system at 21). Individuals who have stopped studying before 19 years old displayed the lowest rates in terms of considering climate change a fundamental issue (Graph 11 shows the number of individuals who responded to the question). The results concerning individuals who stopped studying their 20s are indicative since there was not a high number of respondents. Concerning QB1b, individuals who were still studying also showed higher rates of believing that climate change is the second most pressing issue for society in 2019 at 25%. On the other hand, individuals who had left the educational system were more likely to consider that climate change was the second most pressing issue that the world faced in 2019. Young people who left the educational system before turning 19 claimed that climate change was a pressing issue at a lower rate. Individuals who had stopped their studies at 20 did not show any belief that climate change is a pressing issue nor did individuals who had stopped studying at 22. However, as above stated, these results are indicative.



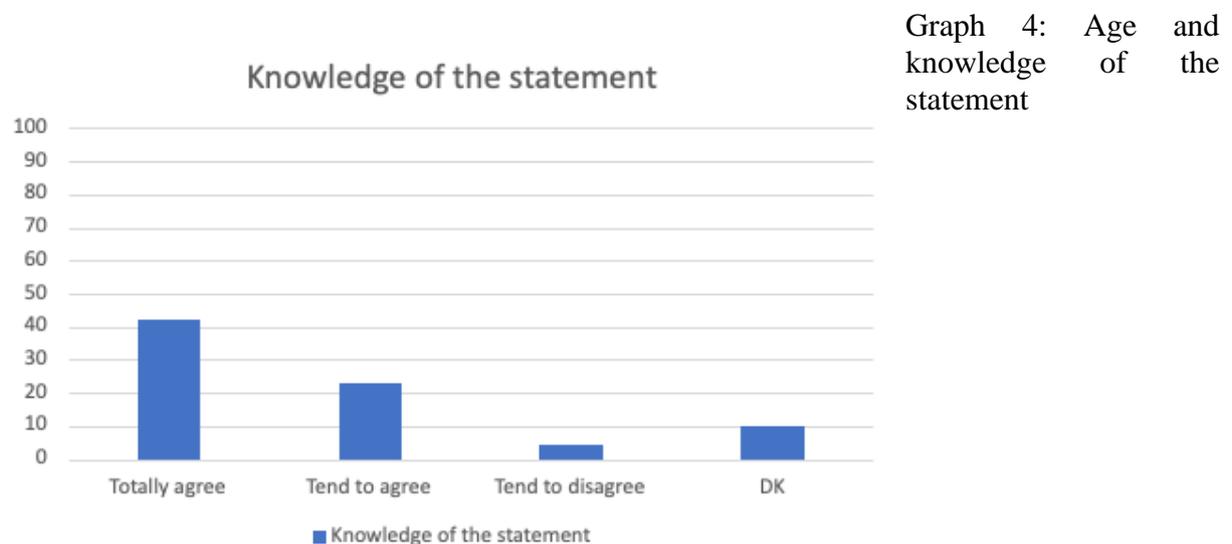
Graph 11: Education and the most important issue

Looking at climate change perception, the percentage of individuals who believed that climate change is "not at all a serious problem" was low. Touching on individuals who left the educational system at an early age, they tend to believe that climate change is a serious problem. Nevertheless, the earlier the age that they had left education at, the least importance they accorded to climate change among those in their early 20s. Fewer people belonging to this group thought that climate change was "an extremely serious problem", as 9.1% and 4.5% felt this way. Among the people who had left the educational system when they were older than 20 years old and the individuals who were still studying, there was a higher perception of the risk of climate change. However, the results concerning this group are indicative. Among those still studying, 34.2% believed that climate change was "an extremely serious problem." People who had left their studies earlier or who were 23 years old did not feel the same. Most of these individuals ranked 7, 8 or 9 for the risk of climate change.

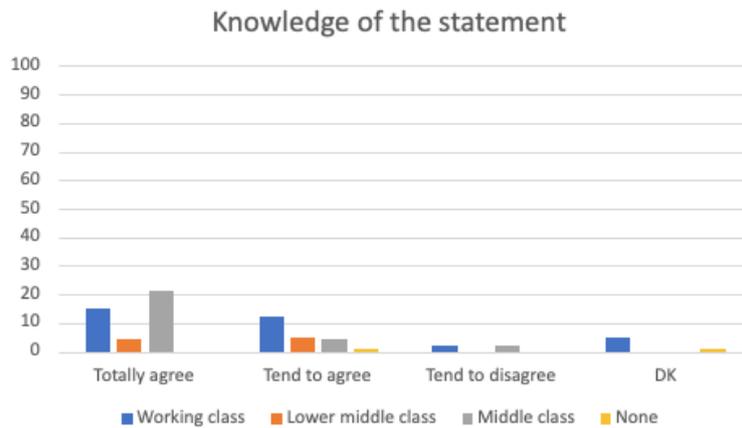
Level of knowledge about climate change issues

QB4 was examined to measure the level of knowledge about climate change issues. QB4 provided the respondents with a variety of statements to assess whether they agreed or disagreed with them. To provide an opinion, the respondents were assumed to possess a certain level of knowledge about climate change and renewable energies. In this paper, the statement "More public financial support should be given to the transition to clean energies even if it means subsidies to fossil fuels should be reduced" was chosen. As stated above, attention was given to the option 'don't know' in the answers.

Concerning age, most respondents agreed with the fact that more public financial support should be given to the transition to clean energies even if it means that the subsidies given to fossil fuels are reduced. More than half of the respondents tended to agree with this statement, 5.1% tended to disagree and 12.7% of respondents claimed that they did not know (see Graph 4).

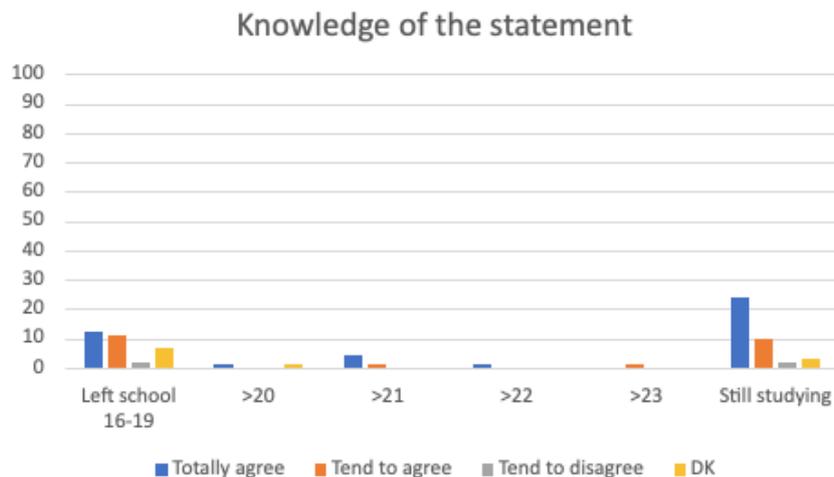


As for their social background regarding QB4, 19% of the working class "totally agreed" with the fact that more public financial support should be given to the transition to clean energies even if it means that the subsidies given to fossil fuels are reduced. Among the lower middle class, 5.1% of individuals agreed with this statement while 21% of young people belonging to the middle class agreed with it. Individuals tended to agree with this statement mostly if they belonged to the working class and lower-middle-class; 2.5% of individuals who belonged to the working class and the middle class of society disagreed while 6.3% of working-class individuals stated that they did not know whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement. Graph 9 shows the number of respondents answering this question. The working-class individuals showed the lowest rates of knowing about climate change.



Graph 9: Social class and knowledge of climate change

As for educational attainment, young people who had left school before they were 19 years old had more than a 10% rate of agreeing with the statement in QB4. Individuals who had left the education system early tended to mostly agree with the statement as well as disagreeing. They also tended to express that they did not know what to think of the statement. Individuals who were still studying displayed the highest rate of totally agreeing with the statement. Equally, they also tended to show higher rates of "tend to agree" than the other age ranges as well as lower rates of disagreeing with the statement (see Graph 14). The group that showed the lowest level of knowledge regarding this statement was the early leavers one, followed by the individuals that left the education system when they were 20 years old and people still studying.



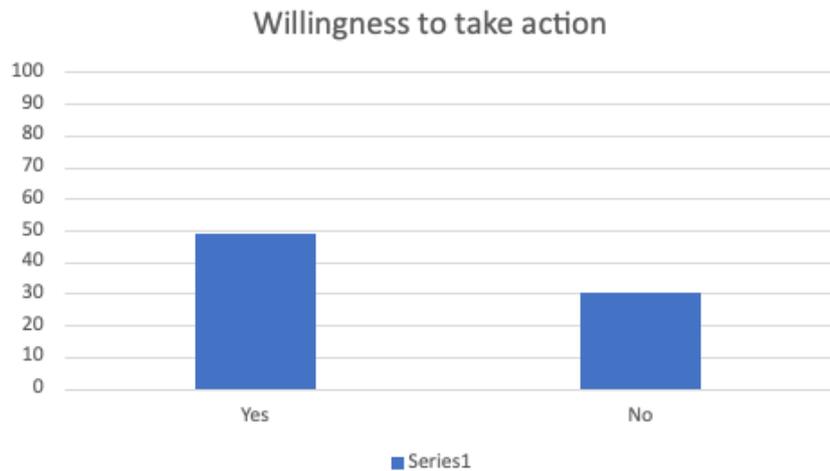
Graph 14: Education and knowledge of the statement

Willingness to act against climate change.

This variable measured young individuals' actions when it comes to taking measures against climate change in the sample. This variable was measured through QB6, which asked young individuals in the sample whether they have personally taken action against climate change in the past six months. The question focuses on personal actions and not the actions taken at a household level against climate change. This is crucial since most of the respondents are presumed to be living with their parents and thus the effectiveness of their actions or the extent of their actions may be limited or left to their parents or family members. The question also

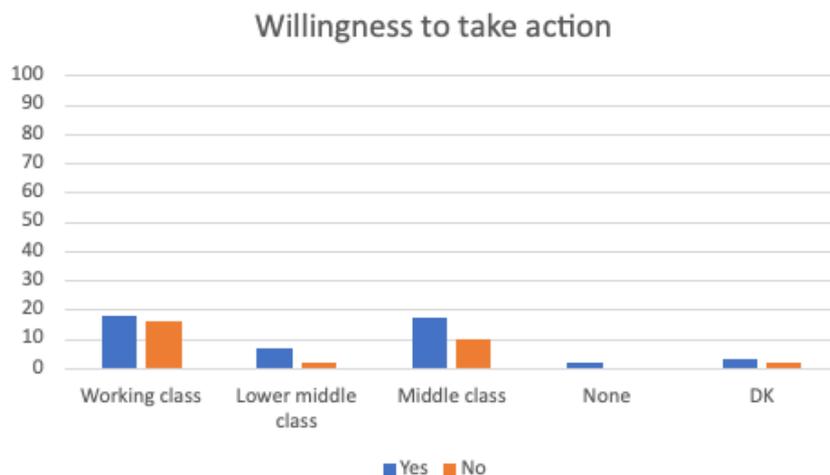
provides a wide time range so that multiple actions can be considered or thought about (from recycling on an everyday basis to the choice of transportation when going on holiday).

Overall, 62% of young respondents aged between 15 and 24 claimed that they had taken personal action against climate change in the last six months while 37,9% of respondents stated that they had not acted against climate change in any way in the past six months (Graph 5 shows the number of respondents).



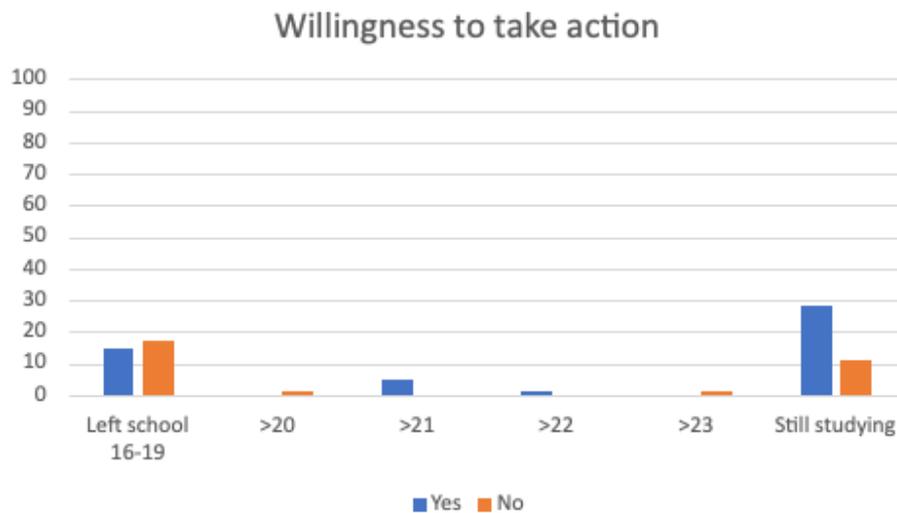
Graph 5: Age and personal action

Looking at the respondents' social background, working-class individuals displayed the highest rates of claiming that they had acted against climate change in the past six months. Almost 20% of respondents claimed this. They were followed by respondents belonging to the middle class and those belonging to the lower middle class. On the other hand, working-class individuals also showed the highest rates of not having acted against climate change. They were followed by respondents belonging to the middle class. Nevertheless, the middle classes, that is, the middle and the lower middle class showed higher rates of individuals having acted against climate change (Graph 10 displays the number of respondents who answered this question).



Graph 10: Social class and willingness to take action

Concerning educational attainment, 71.1% of the respondents who were still studying claimed to have acted against climate change in the last six months. Equally, 57.1% of youths that had left the education system aged 19 said the same thing. Youths that left school at 20 and 21 years old displayed lower rates of not having acted against climate change, however, regarding these groups, the results are indicative due to the low number of participants. Graph 15 shows the number of individuals that answered this question, not the proportion of respondents belonging to each group.



Graph 15: Education and willingness to take action

Limitations

One of the limitations present in this paper is the difficulty in measuring the respondents' knowledge of climate change. Looking at the selected questions, one can assume that respondents who answered them understood them and therefore could position themselves appropriately. Nevertheless, I am aware that the respondents could have answered without knowing the full meaning of the statement or question.

One of the most important limitations was also the number of people who participated in the survey. It would be impossible to question every young person in the United Kingdom. However, the Special Eurobarometer 490 generally, provided me with several individuals that were sufficiently large, so that the results confidently reflect the attitudes in the youth population. Nevertheless, when dividing the sample according to the age at which the respondents had left school or their social class, the number of respondents for each category diminished. As a result, in these cases, the results are indicative. Moreover, as above explained, it is difficult to classify individuals according to their social background since plenty of variables may need to be taken into consideration and the economic and social circumstances are specific to every individual and a particular moment. In other words, period effects are considered in the discussion of the results but not in the statistical analysis. Moreover, life cycle effects are taken into consideration since I examined a specific cohort concerning age. Nevertheless, I do not contemplate the possibility that attitudes towards climate change depend only on the age cohort and that they are altered as one gets older.

Another limitation is the fact that the analysis conducted in this dissertation was limited to a single year due to resource constraints. This means that I cannot generalise my findings since I did not explore attitudes towards climate change in other years. Considering that 2019 was a year in which *Brexit* was frequently cited on the media and that the COVID-19 pandemic had not spread yet nor had the subsequent economic crisis that the pandemic created, I can assume that the results display a general attitude towards climate change among young British individuals. The survey was taken in a year in which events such as the economic recession and *Brexit* were sufficiently remote enough to have a clear picture of attitudes towards climate change without the influence of external events.

Discussion

Concerning the seriousness and urgency of climate change, less than half of the young people interviewed claimed that climate change was the single most pressing issue worldwide. Instead, they named other issues such as the lack of drinkable water, poverty and hunger. Nevertheless, the latter issues are well connected and are consequences of climate change. This could suggest a lack of knowledge of the direct and indirect consequences of climate change such as immigration and a lack of drinkable water. These results do not mean that all young people consider climate change not to be an important issue. Nearly half of the sample thought that it was an important issue and nearly all respondents considered climate change to be the second most pressing issue that the world was facing at the time. As a result, there is a high level of awareness and a sense of urgency regarding this issue. Indeed, most respondents ranked climate change as a serious problem. A clear minority thought that this matter was not serious.

These results match Ross et al (2019) and Henn and Sloam's (2018) expectations regarding young people's perception of and attitude towards climate change in that they understand climate change is a real and urgent problem. They are also unmistakably aware of the seriousness of this issue. However, they believe that there are more pressing matters. Hibberd and Nguyen (2013) had already predicted that while young people know the consequences and magnitude of climate change, it is not urgent for them. We must bear in mind that young people in the United Kingdom have considerably suffered due to budget cuts in education, housing, health and social services and that this has put a strain on their economy and wellbeing. What is more, austerity policies have damaged some young people's mental health and have hurt young people's prospects in the labour market, high education system and housing. The austerity policies implemented by the coalition government need to be considered since there was a reduction in the budgets affecting social services such as health, mental health, education and housing (Krugman, 2016; De Henau and Reed, 2013). These measures led to young people and children experiencing poverty and an increase in the use of food banks. Also, caps were implemented on housing benefits (Krugman, 2016). The rate of suicide and deaths increased as a result of the cuts to the health system according to McVeight (2015). The life expectancy rate also decreased due to these measures according to Langthorne (2019). These austerity policies have not been reversed and their impact on the youth continues. As a result, young people may have other priorities.

Regarding the respondents' characteristics, I found notable differences between their social backgrounds. The respondents who considered that climate change was the most important issue in 2019 belonged mostly to the working class and middle class. Lower middle-class individuals displayed the lowest rate of responding in this way. Concerning the second most pressing issue, the individuals answered alike. However, if the lower middle class and the middle class are grouped in the same category, they would be the ones displaying a higher

concern even though the difference regarding the working class would not be great. The results do not agree with Inglehart's scarcity hypothesis (Inglehart, 1970; 2008). According to this hypothesis, individuals that have benefited from economic security during their pre-adult years tend to hold post-materialist values such as the respect of human rights and individual freedom as well as a concern for climate change. Taking this theory into consideration, we can suppose that individuals belonging to the middle classes, individuals who are not supposed to have suffered from economic hardships, would have acted against climate change as a core value, thus they would consider that it is a serious issue. On the other hand, working-class individuals, who are expected to have suffered or to suffer from economic scarcity, are supposedly more likely to focus on materialist values such as wealth (Inglehart, 1970). Valdez (2017) stated that young individuals can face challenges that negatively affect their perception of climate change. In other words, middle-class individuals are more likely to have their basic needs covered, therefore they do not need to worry about housing, access to higher education or having enough money to take care of themselves. This would make them more available to take care of other issues such as climate change, which are extremely important worldwide. They can focus on the challenges of climate change daily. However, the results show that in this case, working-class individuals show higher levels of perception regarding this post-materialist value if the middle classes are considered separately. In this case, economic hardships or a lower social class does not imply a lower concern for climate change.

As for educational attainment, in the United Kingdom, it is closely related to the individuals' socioeconomic background because of the increase in university fees when the coalition government was in power in 2015. Individuals who are still studying are more likely to see climate change as the most pressing issue and as the second most pressing issue as well as a serious problem in 2019. Similarly, individuals who stopped studying after 20 or older believe that climate change is the second most pressing issue and a serious matter. The respondents who have left the educational system at an early age showed the highest rate of believing that climate change is not a serious problem. These results agree with those of Ross et al (2019) because education is needed to understand climate change and to be aware of its seriousness and urgency. Clemens (2012) predicted that low-educated individuals are more likely to be sceptical regarding this issue.

Corner et al (2015) stated that young people feel that climate change is not part of their daily lives. Consequently, they may feel that this matter is not as serious or as urgent as it is. Also, social class is often linked with educational attainment and working-class individuals are thought to be less likely to benefit from higher educational attainment (Atherton and Mazhari, 2019; Ross et al., 2019). This contrasts with the above-mentioned results; working-class individuals showed a high rate of urgency towards climate change.

Education reduces the vulnerability towards climate change and through it, this could reduce their chance of polluting (O'Neill et al., 2020). In the United Kingdom, the number of individuals benefiting from a higher university education has increased in recent years among students coming from disadvantaged areas in the United Kingdom (Universities UK, 2018). This should have a positive impact on the perception of the seriousness and urgency of the climate change in working-class individuals since education did impact attitudes towards respondents in this paper. The fact that higher education started to spread in the United Kingdom in the eighties and had tripled by 2010 (Welch, 2020) could be a reason that explains the high knowledge of climate-related issues that appeared to be present in the sample of this age cohort. Despite the high fees that feature in university education, the number of university

students has increased in the last decades even if the number of working-class students benefiting from higher education has slightly decreased (Welch, 2020; Universities UK, 2018).

Individuals who left the educational system at an early age showed lower rates of knowledge regarding matters related to climate change. We can expect the individuals benefitting from a lower level of education to know less information or to be less aware of the factors that affect climate change and the mechanisms of its functioning. We can also expect individuals who benefit from high education or those who are studying who are more than 24 years old to have acquired a deeper knowledge of the mechanisms that impact climate change and of alternative energies. The results, therefore, match my expectations and the literature (Clemens, 2010; Valdez et al., 2017). Working-class individuals also displayed lower rates of knowledge of climate change. As stated above, working-class young individuals are less likely to benefit from higher education and are less likely to attend university (Atherton and Mazhari, 2020). Working-class respondents would be more concerned about climate change, but this would not be related to their high knowledge of this matter. The results match my expectations and the literature's expectations (Lee et al., 2018).

Concerning the willingness to act against climate change, given the fact that the majority of young individuals in the sample were concerned about climate change and hold a certain level of knowledge of this issue, I expect that they had also taken some sort of action against climate change in the past six months. More than half had acted against climate change, which matched my expectations and the literature (Poortinga, 2011; Eom et al., 2018). Overall, this generation displays a greater concern for climate change, therefore they are involved in this issue. Ojala and Lakew's (2017) claims that young people who do not act against climate change because they feel that it is not a big part in their lives is not valid. I consider a form of apathy towards mainstream politics to exist among some young individuals but their actions against climate change can involve different kinds of events such as demonstrations, volunteering or publications on social media. These means may not be linked to politics, but they may help young people to be involved in the fight against climate change (Henn and Sloam, 2018).

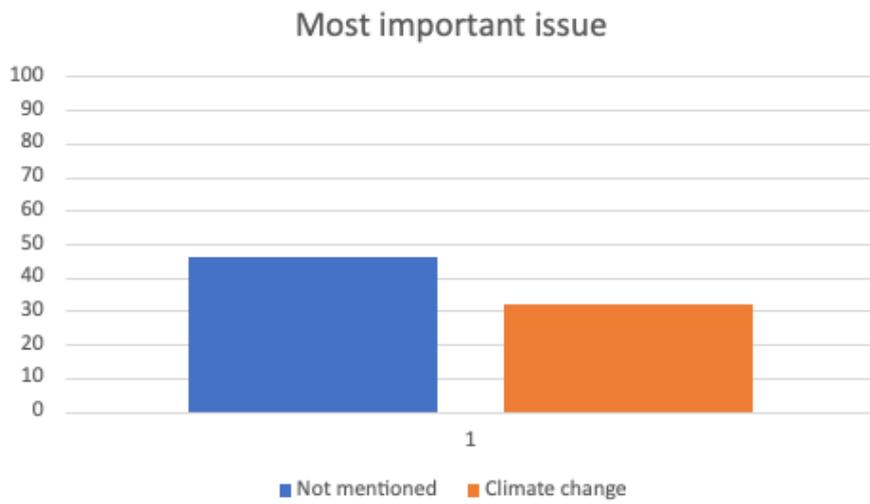
Looking at this analysis' hypotheses, after consulting the literature, I expected middle-class young individuals to be the most concerned about climate change and for them to be the most eager to tackle climate change. However, the working class also showed concern about this issue. The results show that individuals belonging to the middle classes were the ones that displayed higher rates of urgency and a greater willingness to tackle climate change but only if the middle class and the lower middle class were taken together into account, otherwise, it was the working class the one that displayed a higher degree of seriousness regarding this issue. However, the lower middle classes also displayed greater knowledge about this matter and a great willingness to fight climate change. I expected the highly educated young individuals to be more concerned about climate change and to show a great eagerness to fight climate change. In this analysis, they showed the biggest concern for this matter as well as greater knowledge and a willingness to fight against climate change. Educational attainment has indeed an impact on young people's perception towards climate change, social class does not since there is not a great difference between them.

Conclusion

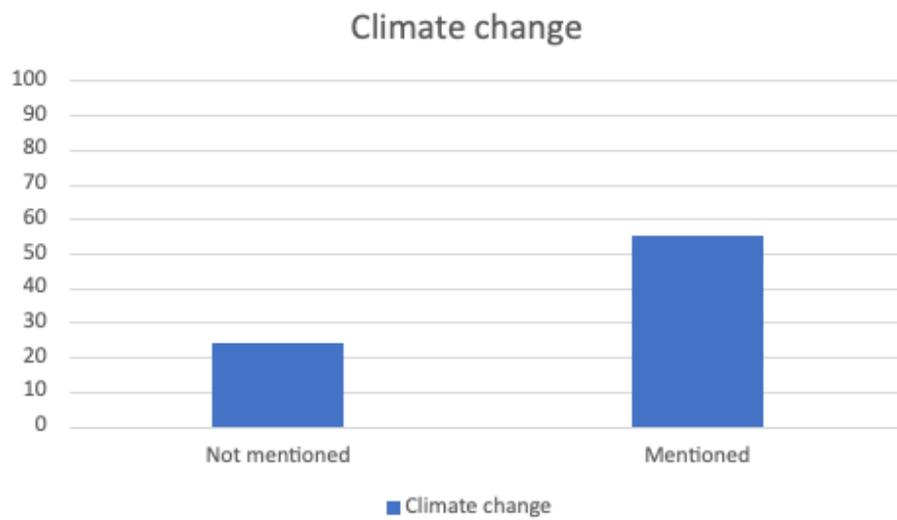
Analysing and evaluating social attitudes is always a difficult task. In this paper, the attitude of young individuals towards climate change was assessed. This cohort is expected to display greater concern for climate change than the older cohorts. What is more, young individuals belonging to a higher socio-economic background and benefiting from higher educational attainment are expected to show a greater concern for climate change. As presented above, a range of authors supports the idea that young individuals who belong to the middle class and who hold a university degree are more likely to worry about climate change and therefore inform themselves about this issue. Moreover, they are expected to take action against climate change. In this paper, statistical analysis was used to evaluate whether young people in the United Kingdom display the attitudes described above.

It was concluded that young people benefiting from a low social class and who are still studying or having studied until adulthood are more likely to be aware of the challenges and urgency of climate change. They were also more willing to act against it. On the other hand, working-class young people were less likely to hold more information on this issue. Nevertheless, having evaluated the results of the survey, I can conclude that individuals belonging to a low socioeconomic status are also likely to feel interested in climate change. I noticed a general interest in climate change, a general feeling of urgency and knowledge of this matter as well as a willingness to fight it in this social group. Despite the existing differences among individuals according to their socio-economic status and educational attainment, since they belong to a young cohort, they display more interest in this issue and are more likely to consider that it is one of the most important matters that the world is facing today. They are also more likely to want to fight climate change because of their young age.

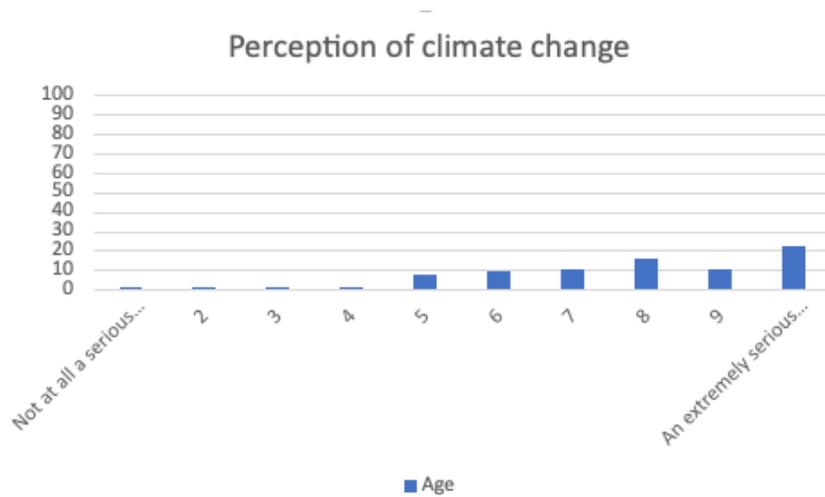
Annex: Graphs



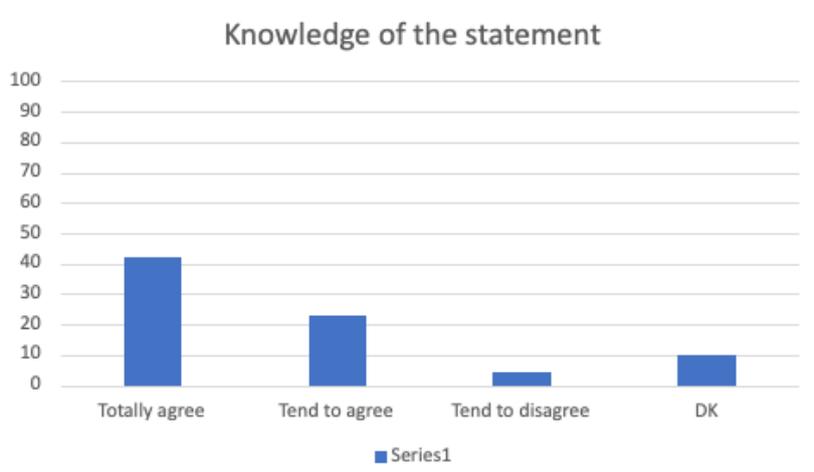
Graph 1: Age and most important issue



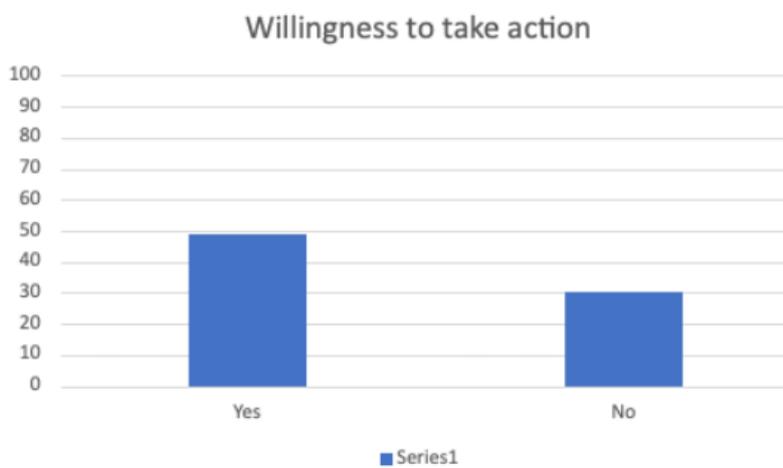
Graph 2: Age and second most important issue



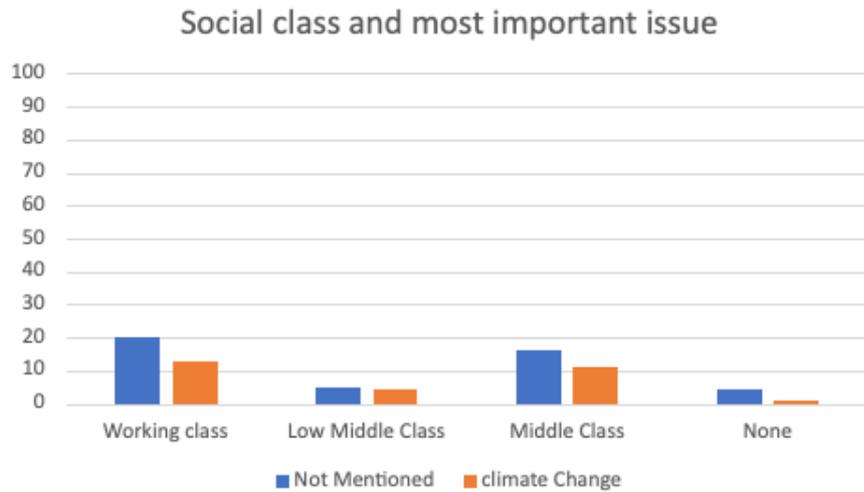
Graph 3: Age and perception of climate change



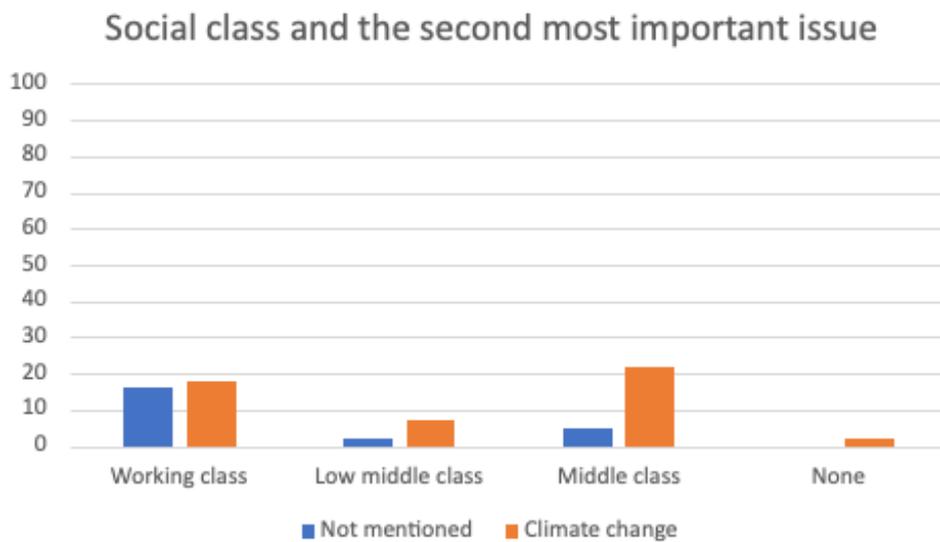
Graph 4: Age and knowledge of the statement



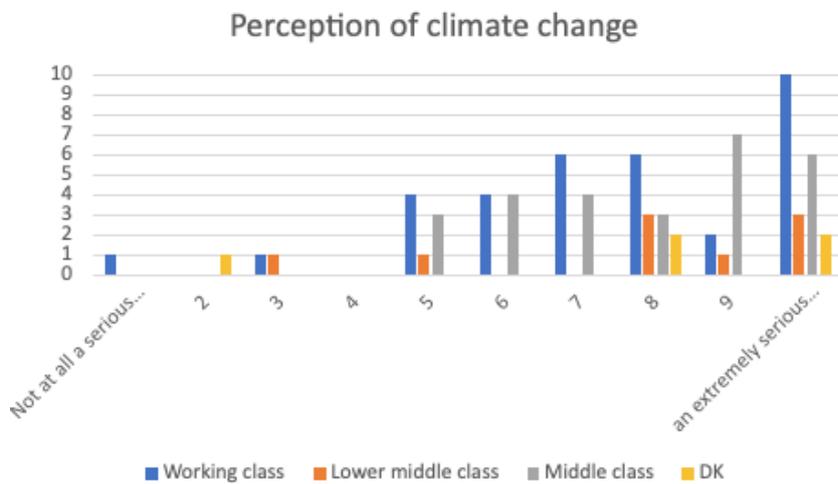
Graph 5: Age and personal action



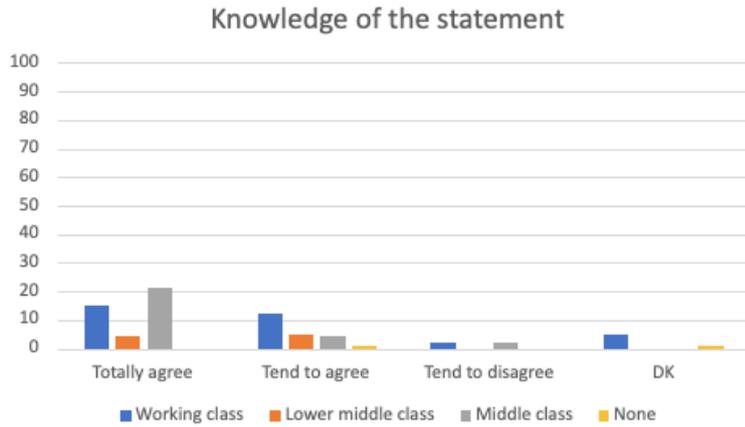
Graph 6: Social class and most important issue



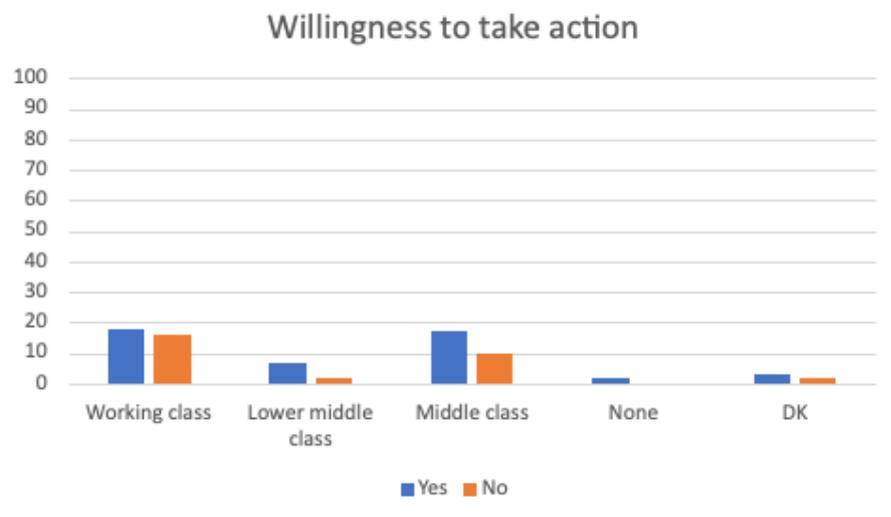
Graph 7: Social class and the second most important issue



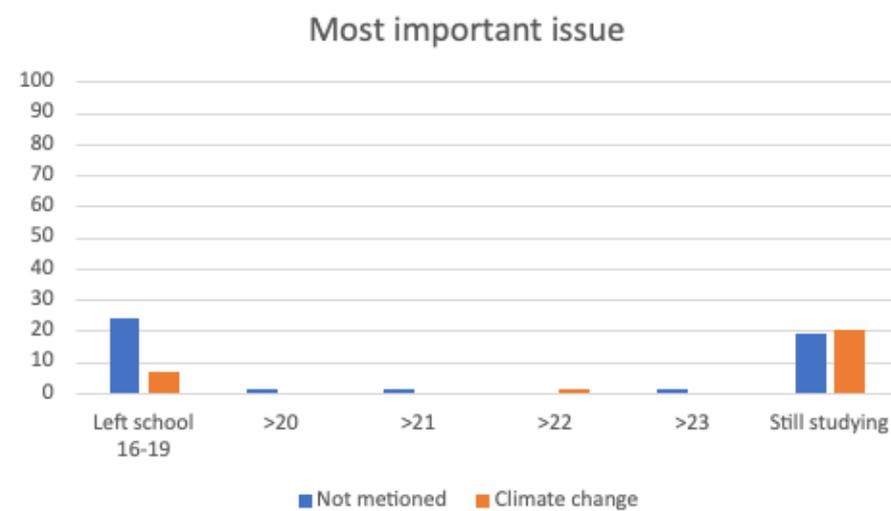
Graph 8: Social class and perception of climate change



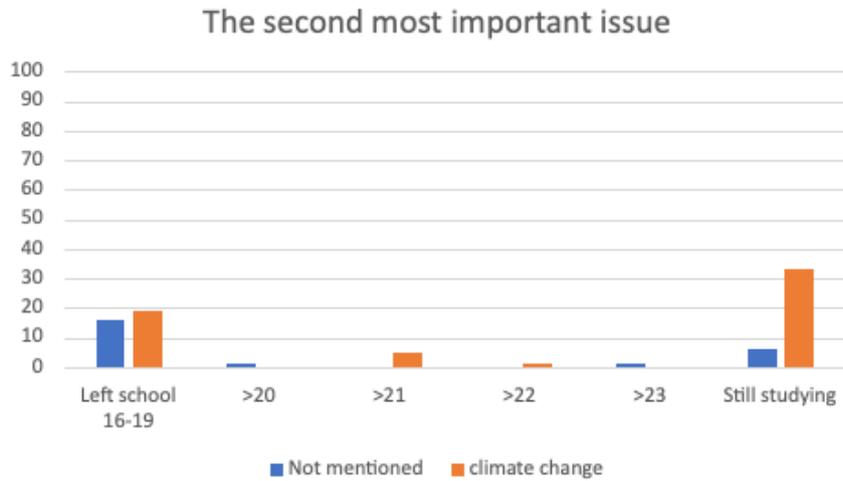
Graph 9: Social class and knowledge of climate change



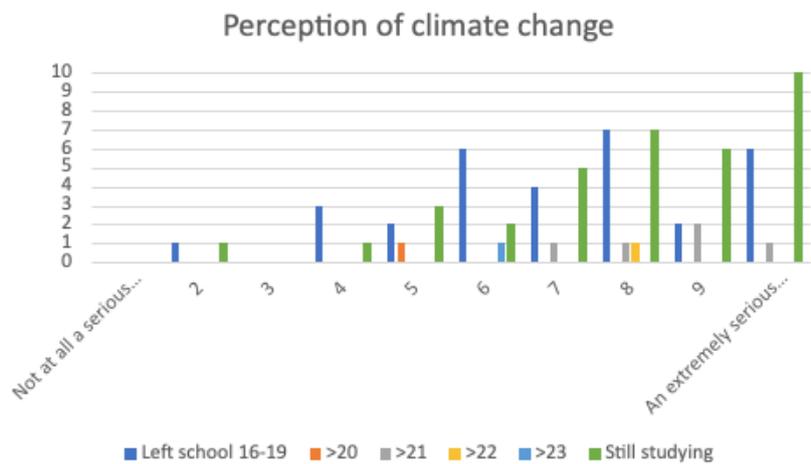
Graph 10: Social class and willingness to take action



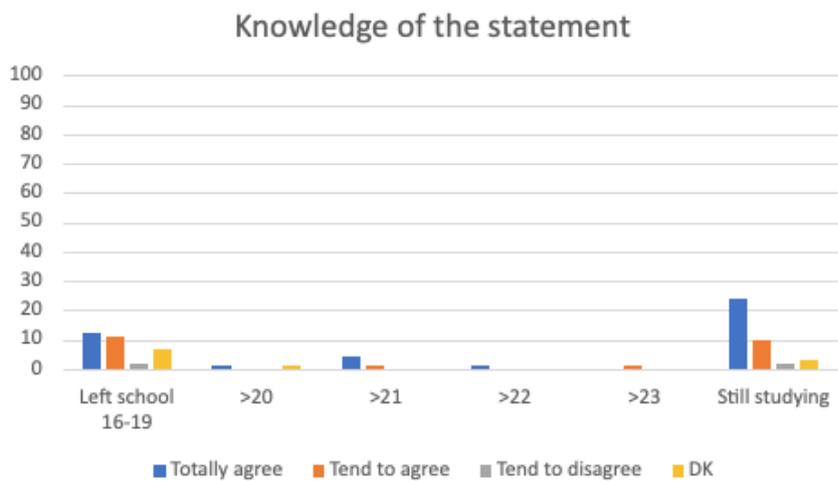
Graph 11: Education and the most important issue



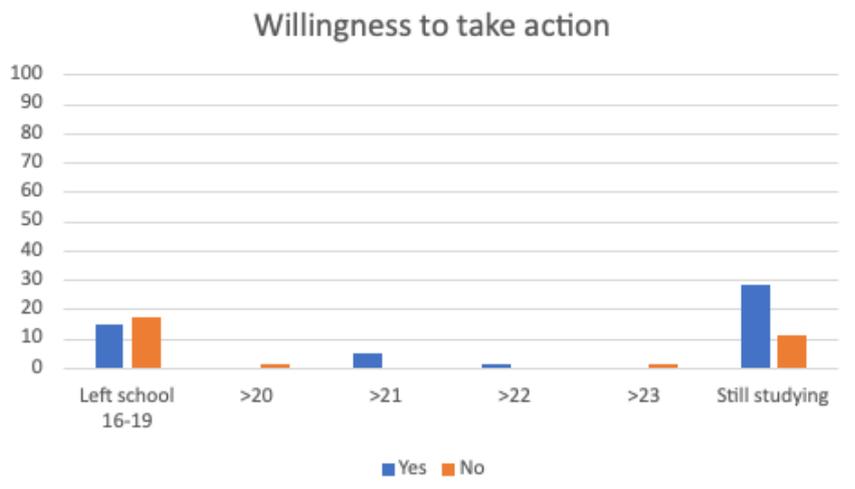
Graph 12: Education and the second most important issue



Graph 13: Education and perception of climate change



Graph 14: Education and knowledge of the statement



Graph 15: Education and willingness to take action

Annex: Tables

Table 1: Age and most important issue

Not mentioned	Climate change	Total
46	32	78

Table 2: Age and second most important issue

Not mentioned	Climate change	Total
24	55	79

Table 3: Age and perception of climate change

Age	0	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15-24	1	1	1	1	8	9	10	16	10	22

Table 4: Age and knowledge of the statement

Columnal	Totally agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	DK	Total
Knowledge of the statement	42	23	4	10	79

Table 5: Age and personal action

Yes	No	Total
49	30	79

Table 6: Social class and most important issue

Columnal	Not Mentioned	climate Change	Total
Working class	20	13	33
Low Middle Class	5	4	9
Middle Class	16	11	27
None	4	1	5

Table 7: Social class and second most important issue

Columnal	Not mentioned	Climate change	Total
Working class	16	18	34
Low middle class	2	7	9
Middle class	5	22	27
None	0	2	2

Table 8: Social class and perception of climate change

Level of perception	0	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Working class	1	0	1	0	4	4	6	6	2	10	34
Lower middle class	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	1	3	9
Middle class	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	3	7	6	27
DK	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	5

Table 9: Social class and knowledge of the statement

Social class	Totally agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	DK	Total
Working class	15	12	2	5	34
Lower middle class	4	5	0	0	9
Middle class	21	4	2	0	27
None	0	1	0	1	2
DK	1	1	0	3	5

Table 10: Social class and personal action

Social class	Yes	No	Total
Working class	18	16	34
Lower middle class	7	2	9
Middle class	17	10	27
None	2	0	2
DK	3	2	5

Table 11: Education and most important issue

Attainment	Not metioned	Climate change	Total
Left school 16-19	24	7	31
>20	1	0	1
>21	1	0	1
>22	0	1	1
>23	1	0	1
Still studying	19	20	39

Table 12: Education and second most important issue

Attainment	Not mentioned	climate change
Left school 16-19	16	19
>20	1	0
>21	0	5
>22	0	1
>23	1	0
Still studying	6	33

Table 13: Education and perception of climate change

Attainment	0	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Left school 16-19	0	1	0	3	2	6	4	7	2	6
>20	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
>21	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1
>22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
>23	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Still studying	0	1	0	1	3	2	5	7	6	14

Table 14: Education and knowledge of the statement

Attainment	Totally agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	DK
Left school 16-19	12	11	2	7
>20	1	0	0	1
>21	4	1	0	0
>22	1	0	0	0
>23	0	1	0	0
Still studying	24	10	2	3

Table 15: Education and personal action

Attainment	Yes	No	Total
Left school 16-19	15	17	32
>20	0	1	1
>21	5	0	5
>22	1	0	1
>23	0	1	1
Still studying	28	11	39

References

- Ballew, Matthew T., et al. "Does socioeconomic status moderate the political divide on climate change? The roles of education, income, and individualism." *Global Environmental Change* 60 (2020): 102024.
- Clements, Ben. "Exploring public opinion on the issue of climate change in Britain." *British Politics* 7.2 (2012): 183-202.
- Eom, Kimin, Heejung S. Kim, and David K. Sherman. "Social class, control, and action: Socioeconomic status differences in antecedents of support for pro-environmental action." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 77 (2018): 60-75.
- Phillips, Daniel, et al., eds. *British Social Attitudes 35*. NatCen Social Research, 2018.
- Ojala, Maria. "Hope and climate change: The importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people." *Environmental Education Research* 18.5 (2012): 625-642.
- Sanson, Ann V., et al. "Young people and climate change: The role of developmental science." *Developmental science and sustainable development goals for children and youth*. Springer, Cham, 2018. 115-137.
- Valdez, Rene X., M. Nils Peterson, and Kathryn T. Stevenson. "How communication with teachers, family and friends contributes to predicting climate change behaviour among adolescents." *Environmental Conservation* 45.2 (2018): 183-191.
- Poortinga, Wouter, et al. "Uncertain climate: An investigation into public scepticism about anthropogenic climate change." *Global environmental change* 21.3 (2011): 1015-1024.
- Lee, Tien Ming, et al. "Predictors of public climate change awareness and risk perception around the world." *Nature climate change* 5.11 (2015): 1014-1020.
- Whitmarsh, Lorraine. "Scepticism and uncertainty about climate change: Dimensions, determinants and change over time." *Global environmental change* 21.2 (2011): 690-700.
- Corner, Adam, et al. "How do young people engage with climate change? The role of knowledge, values, message framing, and trusted communicators." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 6.5 (2015): 523-534.
- Ross, Ashley D., Stella M. Rouse, and William Mobley. "Polarization of Climate Change Beliefs: The Role of the Millennial Generation Identity." *Social Science Quarterly* 100.7 (2019): 2625-2640.
- Striessnig, Erich, Wolfgang Lutz, and Anthony G. Patt. "Effects of educational attainment on climate risk vulnerability." *Ecology and Society* 18.1 (2013).
- Hibberd, Matthew, and A. N. Nguyen. "Climate change communications & young people in the Kingdom: A reception study." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 9.1 (2013): 27-46.
- Jackson, Michelle, ed. *Determined to succeed?: performance versus choice in educational attainment*. Stanford University Press, 2013.

Devine-Wright, Patrick, Jennifer Price, and Zoe Leviston. "My country or my planet? Exploring the influence of multiple place attachments and ideological beliefs upon climate change attitudes and opinions." *Global Environmental Change* 30 (2015): 68-79.

Krugman, P. (2015). The case for cuts was a lie. Why does Britain still believe it? The austerity delusion. *The Guardian*, 29(04), 2015.

Breen, Richard. "Educational expansion and social mobility in the 20th century." *Social Forces* 89.2 (2010): 365-388.

Scherger, Simone, and Mike Savage. "Cultural transmission, educational attainment and social mobility." *The sociological review* 58.3 (2010): 406-428.

Fox, Thomas G., and Seymour M. Miller. "Economic, political and social determinants of mobility: an international cross-sectional analysis." *Acta Sociologica* 9.1-2 (1966): 76-93.

Powell, Andrew. "Youth unemployment statistics." (2018).

Horton, John. "Anticipating service withdrawal: young people in spaces of neoliberalisation, austerity and economic crisis." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41.4 (2016): 349-362.

O'Neill B, Jiang L, KC S, Fuchs R, Pachauri S, Laidlaw E, Zhang T, Zhou W, & Ren X (2020). The effect of education on determinants of climate change risks. *Nature Sustainability* DOI: [10.1038/s41893-020-0512-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-020-0512-y)

United Nations Environment Programme. Division of Early Warning, & Assessment. (2011). *UNEP Year Book 2011: Emerging issues in our global environment*. UNEP/Earthprint.

United Nations Environmental Programme. *GlobalScan Survey* (2008). UNEP

Lanigan, Roisin (2019). Does the climate change movement have a class problem? I-D. Retrieved from https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/9kxyv3/climate-change-movement-class-intersectionality

Universities UK. (2018). Patterns and trends in UK higher education 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/data-and-analysis/Documents/patterns-and-trends-in-uk-higher-education-2018.pdf>

Enson, S. (2019). Climate change and the impact on young people. *British Journal of School Nursing*, 14(9), 449-454.

UNDESA. (2010). Definition of Youth.

De Henau, J., & Reed, H. (2013). A Cumulative Gender Impact Assessment of Ten Years of Austerity Policies.

McVeigh, T. (2015). Austerity a Factor in Rising Suicide Rate Among Men. *The Guardian*, 12.

Langthorne, M. (2019). Austerity Then and Now. *Health in Hard Times*, 35.

Inglehart, R. F. (2008). Changing values among western publics from 1970 to 2006. *West European politics*, 31(1-2), 130-146.

Inglehart, R. (1970). Public opinion and regional integration. *International Organization*, 24(4), 764-795.

Atherton, G., & Mazhari, T. (2020). University entry and the class of 2021: who is set to miss out.

Down, I., & Wilson, C. J. (2013). A rising generation of Europeans? Life-cycle and cohort effects on support for 'Europe'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(4), 431-456.

Welch, Penny. "Mass Higher Education in England—a Success Story?." *Postdigital Science and Education* (2020): 1-17.

Shucksmith, Mark. "Social Exclusion and Poverty in Rural Areas of Britain." *Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie* 3 (2001): 165-184.

Directorate General for Communication. Special Eurobarometer 490. Climate Change Report April 2019. European Union Open Data Portal (2019). Retrieved from https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2212_91_3_490_ENG

Sloam, J., & Henn, M. (2019). *Youthquake 2017: The rise of young cosmopolitans in Britain* (p. 129). Springer Nature.

Ojala, M., & Lakew, Y. (2017). Young people and climate change communication. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of climate science*.

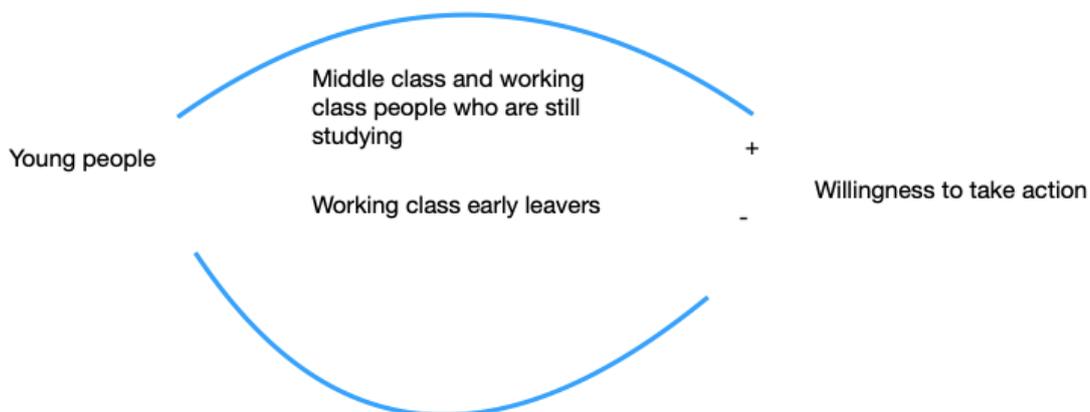
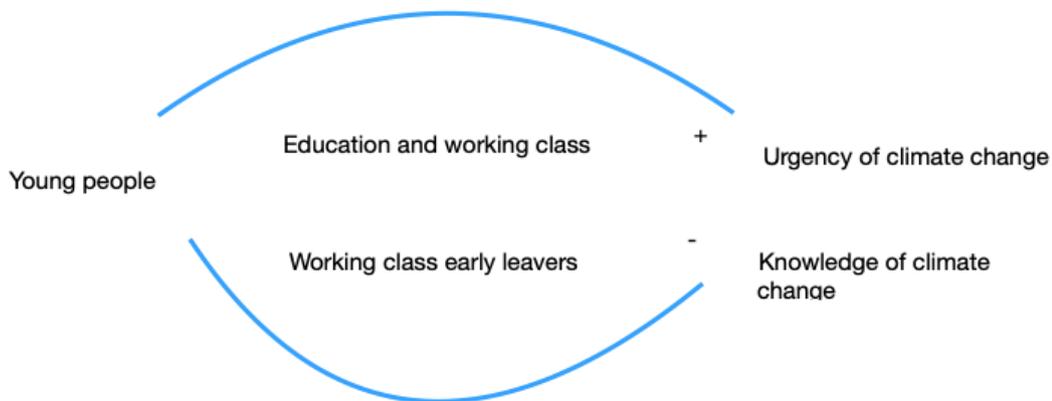
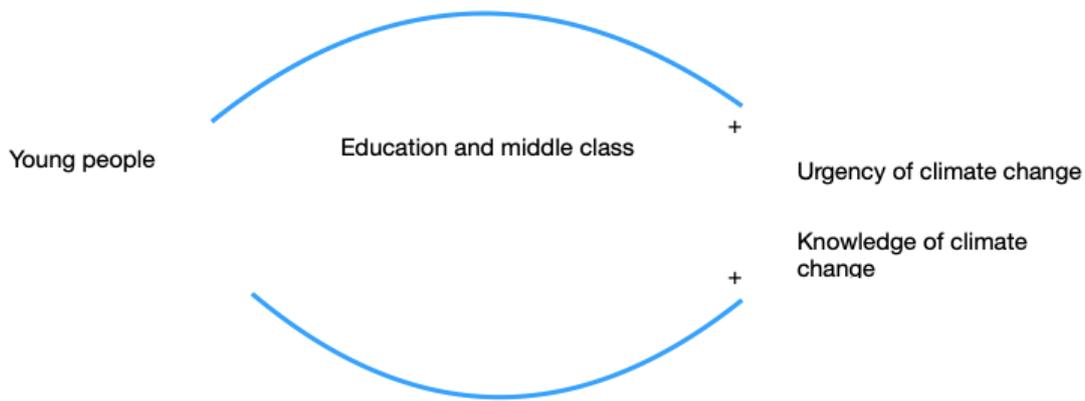
Pickard, S. (2019). *Politics, protest and young people: Political participation and dissent in 21st century Britain*. Springer.

Muttarak, R., & Lutz, W. (2014). Is education a key to reducing vulnerability to natural disasters and hence unavoidable climate change?. *Ecology and society*, 19(1).

Barro, R. J., & Lee, J. W. (2013). A new data set of educational attainment in the world, 1950–2010. *Journal of development economics*, 104, 184-198.

YouGov. YouGov Cambridge Survey Results. YouGov (2020).

To understand better the relationship between young people's social class and educational background and their perception of the urgency of climate change, their knowledge of this matter and their willingness to take action, three loops are presented. The main findings of this paper are provided.



ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse the impact of socio-economic background in young British people's attitudes towards climate change. Numerous pieces of literature state that young people who benefit from high educational attainment and who belong to the middle class are more likely to feel more concerned about climate change and to be more eager to take action against it. In this paper, the Euro barometer 490 was examined to evaluate young people's attitude towards climate change. Respondents' age, self-assessed social class and educational attainment have been taken into account. A series of questions evaluating respondents' perception of the urgency and seriousness of climate change, their knowledge of this issue and their willingness to take action against climate change were selected and their answers displayed. Young people are overall concerned about climate change but it is not their priority. What is more, young people possess great knowledge about this issue although it depends on their social class and most of the respondents claimed to have taken action against it in the last six months. Participants educational attainment had an impact on their answers and matched the discussed literature.