

# Backsliding politicians put green energy jobs boom at risk

◆ We are behind the curve in terms of driving investment and setting up the infrastructure that's required, says Paul de Leeuw



**A**gainst a backdrop of global challenges, 2024 could be the year where the world's axis shifts. Around 70 countries, comprising half the world's population, will cast their vote in a range of polls – from presidential, parliamentary and legislative to local elections. This will set a new record for the greatest number of people voting in elections in a single year.

The outcomes of these various democratic (and some not-so-democratic) votes could have profound global consequences and will inevitably shape both the near and long-term future for our planet.

The 70 countries voting in 2024 include some of the most populous countries in the world, such as Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, and the United States. They also include six of the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world: the United States, India, Russia, Germany, Iran and Indonesia. These countries alone represent around 60 per cent of global GDP and close to 50 per cent of the world's carbon emissions.

Given the challenges facing countries when it comes to delivering on their net-zero ambitions, there is growing concern that some may use the polls as a legitimate opportunity to deviate from them, as well as the commitments agreed at the recent COP28 climate summit in the United Arab Emirates.

As the first generation to experience the impact of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it, we all have to play our part. But let's also be clear that real change will only come about by the largest emitters demonstrating true climate leadership.

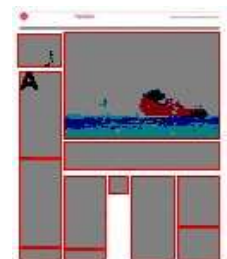
The UK represents about one per cent of the world's population and around one per cent of the global emissions – it is not one of the top ten emitters in the world. However, it does have a key role to play as a G20 country and its words and deeds do matter. Therefore, the actions the UK is taking to change its energy system are important, and particularly, of course, in relation to the transitioning North Sea oil and gas sector.

While the UK has already reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by almost 50 per cent since 1990, there is significantly more to be done. Given the magnitude of change

required, far more transparency and honesty are needed about the likely cost implications, lifestyle changes, economic impacts and job prospects as part of the net-zero journey.

So, with a UK election looming, how important is the wider sustainability and net-zero agenda to the UK electorate? YouGov polling conducted in July 2023 shows that over 70 per cent of people surveyed either strongly or somewhat supported the UK's commitment to cutting carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, with similar percentages across the various age groups and regions across the country. The remaining 30 per cent either somewhat opposed it (8 per cent), strongly opposed it (8 per cent) or didn't know (close to 13 per cent). Other polls conducted over recent years show a similar picture.

As it is often easier for the electorate to be supportive of something that happens in the far future, separate polling by Opinium highlighted that, although most people across the UK want government action and are positive about net zero policies, support starts to waver when people feel it might cost them money and/or negatively impact their lives.



Of course, polls are designed to capture a representative sample of public opinion at a snapshot in time and, as such, can never reflect the full picture. However, they do show the opportunity for the political parties to benefit at the ballot box if they manage to capture the mood of the nation in terms of focusing on the net-zero agenda. Having said that, most of the electorate will see through unsubstantiated enthusiasm and so the political parties need to also propose credible, costed plans with bold actions that can deliver in an accelerated time window.

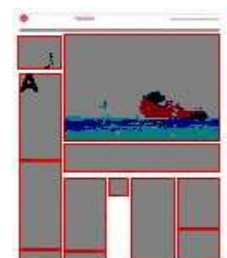
This is where the net-zero agenda is a real challenge for the political establishment and why the climate emergency debate has become so polarised. Striking the difficult balance between affordability, sustainability, do-ability, fairness, jobs and supplying secure, low-carbon energy to the UK will require carefully managed and coordinated transition plans. To successfully deliver these plans, the UK will need to (re)establish its credibility as a world-class offshore energy investment basin, underpinned by a stable fiscal and regulatory regime, and with a supply chain and workforce to match.

The recent Robert Gordon University's Energy Transition Institute report – Powering up the Workforce – highlights that delivering the UK and Scotland's energy ambitions will see the UK's offshore energy workforce numbers increase from around 150,000 today to close to 225,000 by 2030. However, the report reinforces that if the ambitions are missed, it is unlikely that the UK will meet its net-zero targets and that the number of industry jobs could fall to as low as 130,000.

We are currently behind the curve in terms of driving investment and setting up the infrastructure and business models that will be key to the UK hitting all its crucial net-zero targets, while generating new businesses and jobs. As such, it has never been more important for the future of our planet

to exercise our collective voting power to demonstrate and cement the UK's and the world's commitment to deliver net zero by 2050 (2045 in Scotland) or earlier. This is why every single vote in 2024 counts towards the need to help deliver a better, greener planet for tomorrow's world.

*Professor Paul de Leeuw is director of Robert Gordon University's Energy Transition Institute*



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**More must be done to drive investment and set up the necessary infrastructure for a green-energy revolution**

